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Ecuadorian university English teachers’ reflections on emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
COVID-19
Teacher’s reflections
English as a foreign language
Ecuador
ERT

ABSTRACT

COVID-19 appeared at the beginning of 2020, affecting, among others, the education industry. As a result, a lockdown quarantine was declared, and on-campus classes were suspended. Accordingly, emergency remote teaching (ERT) was set into motion to solve the education issue. This investigation surveyed 20 Ecuadorian polytechnic university English teachers and obtained their reflections on their experience with ERT. This paper bases on mixed-methods research that used a Likert-scale survey and interviews to respond to the established research questions. The results show that, in a general sense, teachers were not ready for the sudden shift to ERT, which generated feelings of anxiety. The most significant disadvantage reported was the extra workload caused by adapting materials and giving feedback to students.

COVID-19 struck at the beginning of 2020, affecting, among others, the education industry. As a result, a lockdown quarantine was declared, and on-campus classes were suspended. Accordingly, emergency remote teaching (ERT) was set into motion to solve the education issue. This research aimed to obtain the reflections of 20 Ecuadorian polytechnic university English teachers on their experiences using ERT during two semesters. This paper is based on an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design that used a Likert-scale survey and interviews to respond to the established research questions. In a general sense, the findings show that teachers were not ready for the sudden shift to ERT at the beginning of the pandemic, which generated feelings of anxiety. The most significant disadvantage reported was the extra workload caused by adapting materials and giving feedback to students. The study suggests that changing classes from on-campus to emergency remote teaching was not easy to carry out at the beginning of the pandemic. There are practical implications for language department managers as it gives them light to prepare for the continuing pandemic and any other crisis that might require ERT to be in practice again.

1. Introduction

The first case of COVID-19 in Ecuador was identified on February 29, 2020, on a seventy-one-year-old woman who had traveled to the country from Spain. More than nine thousand confirmed cases and four hundred seventy-four deaths had been reported by April 2020 (Ortiz-Prado et al., 2021). Given the difficult situation, the Ecuadorian President declared a state of emergency to avoid spreading the disease. One of the dispositions was the closure of all schools, high schools, and universities in the country (Santillan Haro, 2020), as it had been declared worldwide (Stahndaz, Hassan, Aremu, Hussain & Lodhi, 2020).

The Minister of Education presented on March 16 the Educational Plan COVID-19 containing regulations for the educational community to continue with the pedagogical activities (Bonilla-Guachamín, 2020). However, the plan did not consider the socioeconomic level of Ecuadorian families. Neither did it consider the low Internet coverage and access levels or the lack of technological resources (Almazán Gómez, 2020). According to Vivanco-Saraguro (2020), closing the Ecuadorian educational system affected more than four million students registered in the Ecuadorian educational system.

Institutions faced the challenge of providing instruction with the unexpected shift to online learning, which became necessary (Thurab-Nkosi, Maharaj & Ramadhah, 2021). Emergency remote teaching (ERT) became the primary tool used to continue education (Valero-Cedeño, Castillo-Matute, Rodríguez-Pincay, Padilla-Hidalgo & Cabrera-Hernández, 2020). The main aim of ERT is to keep the learning processes sustainable. It is based on the use of videoconference platforms. Several studies reported in the literature look at how teachers feel about introducing ERT during the COVID-19 crisis (Tomczyk and Walker, 2021). performed research in Poland, while Juárez-Díaz and Perales (2021) researched 26 English teachers and 32 pre-service English teachers in Mexico Salayo, Fesalbon, Valerio and Litao (2020). investigated 147 high
school teachers in the Philippines Rahayu and Wirza (2020), employed a descriptive design with a qualitative approach in Indonesia. Finally, Lapada, Miguel, Robledo and Alam (2020) performed a quantitative investigation in the Philippines.

Research carried out in Ecuador, or other Latin American countries is still scarce despite the above. Thus, this research was set into motion to bridge this gap in the literature. It aimed to identify the feelings of an Ecuadorian polytechnic university English teachers about their use of ERT during two semesters. The following research questions were devised to attain this goal.

RQ1: How ready do English teachers think they were to make the shift from on-campus teaching to ERT?
RQ2: What has been the teachers’ experience of teaching online during the COVID-19 pandemic?
RQ3 states: What are teachers’ perceptions over the positive and negative effects of using ERT to teach their English classes?

2. Literature review

2.1. Media literacy

“The ability to access, analyze, and produce information for specific outcomes” is the definition of media literacy as agreed upon by the attendees of the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy (Schwarz, 2005). For Fantin (2010), media literacy is related to knowledge, skills, and competencies required to use and interpret media. It involves deciphering, criticizing, and composing the historical, economic, and social context where texts are produced. For Aufderheide (1993) and Christ and Potter (1998), media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create messages in different forms. Those four components support each other as a dynamic learning process to create content (Livingstone, 2004).

Some factors can help develop media literacy. First, the treatment of media literacy in the educational curriculum of each country. Second, the existing policies for training teachers on media literacy. Third, establishing policies for assessing media literacy. Fourth the existence of teaching materials for the subject. Finally, participation in international co-operation networks (Cervi, Paredes & Tornero, 2010).

For Mukhtar and Putri (2021), media in education positively affects students. In higher education, media literacy is combined with communicative competence, which is the ability to question media coverage critically. According to Zhu, Hao Yang, Xu and MacLeod (2018), literacy media education provides higher education students the platform to develop their personalities by giving them space to experience and test several life processes Romero Walker (2020), explained that students need media literacy competencies to successfully use media to learn by using content and skills to support their knowledge and awareness of social media.

2.2. E-learning

Castro and Tumibay (2019) explained that distance learning is not new in education. It has existed for more than a century, beginning in European correspondence courses. However, it has evolved through the years and turned to e-learning. According to Simon, Haghiriyan and Schlegelmilch (2003), e-learning is an environment where students and teachers use IT to overcome distance. Meanwhile, for Potts (2018), e-learning is also known as virtual learning environments or learning management systems. They synthesize computer-mediated communications software and forms of delivering a course online. Finally, E-learning is an interactive process involving teachers and students, aided by electronic media focused on the teaching process. At the same time, the media are the tools used to complete the process (Perić, 2019).

Common features of e-learning are announcement boards, in-system e-mail service, conferencing tools, calendars, a navigable interface, and multimedia resources (Martin, Ritzhaupt, Kumar & Budhrani, 2019; Potts, 2018; Shahzad et al., 2020). E-learning depends on asynchronous technology. That way, students can look at their preferred content and learn at their pace. Other characteristics of e-learning include two or more geographically dispersed bodies of learners and teachers (Behera, 2013).

The delivery of e-learning is usually conducted through videoconferences or virtual learning environments (Ahmad, Adnan, Yusof, Kamal & Kamal, 2019; Simon et al., 2003). Cisco Webex or Zoom provide simultaneous communications and live interactions. In addition, they supply auxiliary functions that facilitate learning in e-learning environments (Rojhani-Shirazi, Bordbar & Baleshzar, 2018).

Moving to e-learning requires making changes in the presentational organization. Furthermore, with the presence of COVID-19, such changes have been accelerated but challenging, especially considering the maturity of digital transformation at which the educational institutions and their faculty are (García-Peñalvo, 2021). The author maintains that e-learning should follow the technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPCK) model. According to this model, teachers must know technical, pedagogical, and information and communication technologies (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Finally, Castro and Tumibay (2019) explain that the objective of instructional design in e-learning aids teachers to create their online courses better, ease students’ focus on their instruction, and promote an active teaching-learning process.

2.3. ERT

Educational institutions worldwide shut down their classes in an attempt to stop the rapid spread of the COVID-19 and to protect their students, faculty, and staff (Dong, Cao & Li, 2020). This closure meant unprecedented difficulties for the Ecuadorian educational system. Course contents were moved into digital platforms to regain some normalcy and minimize the effects of the pandemic in the education system (Equipo Técnico de la Dirección Nacional de Currículo, 2020).

Hodges, Moore, Locke, Trust and Bond (2020) defined ERT as the temporary access to online teaching with the intention of returning to the original teaching mode once the crisis is over. The scholars explain that during these times of pandemic, teachers must play a critical role in providing quality learning to students (Choi, Chung & Ko, 2021). Therefore, the primary goal of emergency remote teaching is not to recreate a robust educational environment but to provide temporary access to education online in a quick and reliable form during a time of crisis (Barbour et al., 2020). Furthermore, the authors assert that teachers must work in a highly stressful environment as there is no indication when the pandemic crisis will be over. Finally, Hodges et al. (2020) distinguish that ERT should be in place until everything goes back to normal.

2.4. Teachers’ reflections on the use of ERT

Tomczyk and Walker (2021) utilized a closed Facebook group devoted to Polish education topics in a qualitative study. Teachers exchanged their experiences, tips, and cases related to handling the COVID-19 crisis in their educational institutions. The researchers identified seven different categories of challenges and problems Polish teachers faced during their ERT experience. They explained that teachers were not prepared for the shift to cyber-education. Teachers also confirmed in their statements on Facebook that the crisis highlighted the importance of digital competencies, knowledge, and skills required to deal with ERT.

In another qualitative study in Mexico, Juárez-Díaz and Perales (2021) researched 26 English teachers and 32 pre-service English teachers and obtained their experiences and emotions regarding ERT. The gathered data through an online opened-ended questionnaire which was later analyzed using semi-directed content analysis. Their results reported that most teachers and student teachers expressed negative feelings associated with delivering the course
content without good interaction and a lot of poor Internet access. However, the researchers explained that those teachers who had experience teaching online had better experiences in the overall course.

Salayo et al. (2020) investigated 147 high school teachers in the Philippines utilizing quantitative methods to evaluate their readiness, attitude, and competence in their engagement with ERT. The scholars applied a survey that used a Likert scale to identify the level of agreement to the statements. The results of this investigation proved that participants could address the challenges that ERT presented them. Their readiness was supported by their positive approach towards online teaching during the pandemic. Results also established that teachers were flexible, resilient, and prepared for the challenges of ERT, which included technological constraints, poor Internet connection, and lack of access to electronic devices.

In another investigation, Rahayu and Wirza (2020) employed a descriptive design with a qualitative approach. They used questionnaires and interviews to elicit responses from 102 junior high school English teachers in Indonesia. All the participating teachers had used a platform like Zoom or Google Classroom for online teaching from March to July 2020. The researchers concluded that teachers had a positive perception of the usefulness of the online platforms they had used. However, participants also disclosed that they believed ERT was ineffective because of the lack of communication and the quality of interactions achieved.

Lapada et al. (2020) performed a quantitative investigation in the Philippines. The researchers probed teachers’ awareness of the pandemic, their thoughts on the school’s readiness, and their challenges while teaching online. Data were collected using the “Questionnaires on Teachers Awareness, Readiness and Online Learning Experience During COVID-19 ECQ,” developed by the researchers. The survey was sent to teachers by e-mail, and 2300 responses were received. As a result, the scholars concluded that teachers were ready to move to ERT. However, they lacked facilities, equipment, and capacity to shift their courses from on-campus to online.

On a closer-to-home view, Tejedor, Cervi, Tusa and Parola (2021) used a descriptive, exploratory, and explanatory design to analyze teachers’ reflections on remote teaching during the lockdown at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Surveys were used to reach 196 teachers from Spain, Italy, and Ecuador. The scholars concluded that there is a negative stance in front of the shift to virtuality in higher education. Also, they explain that the teaching body had a strong indifference to the change and relate it to an increase in the workload.

On a mixed-methods study conducted in Ecuador, Hidalgo-Andrade, Hermosa-Bosano and Paz (2021) surveyed 394 teachers through a web-based cross-sectional questionnaire. The researchers aimed to assess Ecuadorian teachers’ anxiety, life satisfaction, and perceived stress who changed their classes to remote teaching because of the COVID-19 pandemic. They also looked at strategies used to maintain the teachers’ well-being. The majority of participants were higher education teachers whose main concern was taking care of children under 11 or adults over 65 years of age. Age was significantly correlated to the psychological variables used, and females presented higher levels of perceived stress. Teachers who had previously taught online reported lower anxiety levels and perceived stress.

On quantitative investigation performed in Quito, Patiño (2021) investigated 112 middle-school teachers. The researcher aimed to identify if the lockdown produced by the COVID-19 pandemic influenced teachers’ anxiety levels and depression in their teaching practice. The researcher gathered data using the Hamilton rating scale for depression to assess the symptoms and value changes on the participants quantitatively. The study showed that younger teachers manifest higher levels of anxiety and depression. In addition, 95% of the participants claimed to be exhausted due to all the additional work they had to do to teach remotely.

3. Methods

3.1. Theoretical assumptions

The researcher’s theoretical assumptions are the set of beliefs that will guide a study (Doyle, Brady & Byrne, 2009; Guba, Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). They encompass the paradigm that is central to the investigation. Under which lie the ontological and epistemological positioning and the methodology used in the inquiry.

The constructivist paradigm will guide this study as in it, the participants talk about their experiences built from social interaction and their own stories (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). For Doyle et al. (2009), constructivism argues the existence of multiple realities. Thus, the results of this research will vary depending on the constructions of the realities experienced by the participants of the study and the researcher’s attempt to explain the reality described by such experiences.

Once the paradigm has been established, it departs the researcher’s ontological and epistemological positioning. Ontology concerns reality and how things are and work (Scotland, 2012). Reality exists only through the experiences lived by humans (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The constructivist ontology looks at how the person is constructed in a social context concerning recognition, motivating the search for identity (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). Learning involves the construction of identities. Thus, the researcher’s ontological positioning is to identify such realities as experienced by the teachers at the languages department of the university.

Then there is the epistemological stance, which deals with the nature of knowledge, its creation, and communication (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). For Denzin and Lincoln (2018), epistemology looks at the relationship existing between knowledge and the person who knows it and tries to explain the world through that knowledge. With these definitions in mind, it is safe to say that the knowledge will be created by analyzing the data obtained using the collection tools selected.

Finally, an explanatory sequential design (See Fig. 1) mixed methods research design has been chosen for this investigation. Thus, the researcher will start with the quantitative stage of the research. This stage will use the survey adapted from Salayo et al. (2020). Then, the qualitative stage will be implemented in a subsequent phase using a seven open-ended question protocol. Finally, this stage will explain the initial results in more depth (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018).

The data integration will be done during the interpretation stage collected after the analysis of the quantitative and the qualitative sections has been done in this paper’s results and discussion sections.Fetters, Curry and Creswell (2013). explain that there are three levels of integration at the interpretation and reporting level where researchers integrate through: i) narrative, ii) data transformation and iii) joint displays. This form of integration is also known as the triangulation protocol (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018; O’Cathain, Murphy & Nicholl, 2010). Using triangulation, researchers try to secure an in-depth understanding of the issue at hand. It is an alternative to validity (Denzin, 2012). By combining data at this level using triangulation, the interpretation of data acquires rigor, breadth complexity, richness, and depth (Flick, 2007).

3.2. Participants

The participants of this study were twenty English teachers of the languages department at a polytechnic university in Guayaquil, Ecuador Table 1. contains the participants’ demographic information. This group comprises 85% female teachers and 15% male teachers. Most teachers (40%) are aged in the range of over 45, while 35% are aged between 36 and 45 years of age. The last 25% of the teachers are aged in the range of 31 to 35 years. The highest professional degree obtained by 85% of the participants is a Masters’ in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. The other 15% of the teachers hold a Ph.D. Most participants (55%) have been teaching English in different institutions for more than
20 years. Meanwhile, 20% of the teachers surveyed said they have 11 to 15 years experience working for educational institutions in Ecuador. Regarding their English language qualifications, 50% of them disclosed a B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference, and 35% hold a C1 qualification.

3.3. Sampling strategy

Since this is a mixed-methods research design, the researcher has followed Creswell and Plano-Clark (2018). They suggest choosing the study participants using the purposeful sampling approach. In this non-probability sampling technique, the researcher confines his judgment to select the study participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants ought to supply in-depth information about the phenomenon under investigation. That is why the researcher considered using colleagues from the languages department for this study, but only those who teach English, as this is the scope of the investigation. The criteria to include participants for this study comprises teachers of English, male or female, working at the university during the second semester of the 2020 academic year, who have used ERT since the beginning of the pandemic. The criteria led to the twenty participants that were depicted above.

3.4. Data collection tools

This study used two main data collection tools. One to obtain information for the quantitative stage of the investigation and another to attain data for the qualitative section of the research. The qualitative stage will serve to triangulate data and assist in making better conclusions.

3.4.1. Survey

The first tool used was a survey adapted from Salayo et al. (2020). The survey was divided into four different sections. Section one deals with demographics questions; the answers from this section were used for the discussion on the participants heading. The second section is the readiness section which included three propositions with a 4-point Likert scale where 1 was completely disagree, and 4 was completely agree. This section looks at how ready teachers were to make the abrupt shift to ERT. The third section used a 4-point Likert scale where 1 was completely disagree, and 4 was completely agree. These propositions aimed to identify how easy it was for the teachers to use digital platforms for teaching their English subjects. The last section of the survey was the overall experience section. Again, participants had four propositions to rate on a 4-point Likert scale where 1 was completely disagree, and 4 was completely agree.

The survey was first piloted with teachers of other languages to check that the questions were written straightforwardly. There would be no chance of misunderstanding any of the questions. As a result of the pilot test, three of the questions were deemed difficult to understand and reworded. Then, to measure the internal consistency of the survey, Cronbach’s alpha was calculated. The result of the alpha came to be 0.85, which according to the literature, reflects a good internal consistency (George & Mallery, 2012; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011; Vaske, Beaman & Sponsarski, 2016).

A second measure was to test the survey for content validity by assessing the degree to which the survey measures the construct targeted (Almanasreh, Moles & Chen, 2019; Creswell & Miller, 2000). Then, Lawshe’s content validity ratio with an augmentation proposed by Ayre and Scally (2014) was used. For these ends, the researcher counted with the help of five experts from the university’s writing center who read the questionnaire and made a dichotomous decision of “essential” or “not essential” for each query Ayre and Scally (2014), proposed that a level of 50% agreement assures a degree of content validity. In the end, the content validity ratio came to 0.854, which according to Almanasreh et al. (2019), can be considered a good ratio, making the survey valid.

3.4.2. Interviews

This study used an interview protocol to obtain teachers’ feelings on several emergency remote teaching modality issues. The interview protocol included seven open-ended questions, allowing deeper probing when necessary. Before the interviews were carried out, a series of measures were taken to assure for validity and reliability of the tool to be used.

Two colleagues at the university’s Academic Writing Center helped read and check the protocol to account for face validity. According to Kennedy, Kichler, Seabrook, Matthews and Dworatzek (2019), face validity tests if the questionnaire’s content is relevant to the participants. It evaluates the feasibility, readability, consistency of style, and clarity of the language of the questionnaire (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

The researcher then performed the Cohen’s Kappa Index (CKI) test on the questions after the professors had assessed them. This test results in a statistical coefficient representing the questionnaire’s degree of accuracy and reliability. The agreement index reached was 85.714%, and the kappa was 0.58823, which is a moderate agreement according to Landis and Koch (1977). Thus, the questionnaire used accounts for face validity.

Finally, the researcher aimed to assess the content validity of the protocol used in the interviews. Gunning’s Fog Index was used to evaluate the readability of the questions following the recommendations from Bolarinwa (2015). The calculation result was 7.18, which accounts for good content validity of the questionnaire.

Because of the virtuality experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews could not be conducted face-to-face but were done using individual Zoom meetings. It is necessary to note that the researcher told respondents what the study was about and their role in it. Next,
the researcher stressed that they signed the informed consent form, but they were free not to participate in the interview. Finally, the researcher made sure that every participant understood that their names would not be displayed in any manner when reporting their comments but that a number would identify them.

4. Analysis

The data obtained through the survey were analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistics Package V.20. The first test carried out was a one-way right-tailed ANOVA using an F distribution df 10.132, a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, and an effect size value of 0.25. This test was used as the researcher wanted to identify any statistically significant differences between the means of the populations in the test Table 3, contains the data obtained from the ANOVA test.

The first thing that caught the researcher’s attention was that the p-value equals 0.0101801. It can be said that some of the group’s averages are considered to be not equal. Meaning the difference between the averages of some groups is big enough to be statistically significant. Next, the researcher ran Cohen’s $F$ statistics to identify whether the means between the populations were significantly different. The test statistic $F$ equals 2.452023, which is not in the 95% critical value accepted range: [1.9031]. The observed effect size $f$ is large, 0.43. The $\eta^2 = 0.16$ means that the group explains 15.7% of the variance.

Several tests were carried out to validate the results of ANOVA. First, the test power is 0.4544, so the $H_0$ is rejected, thus, confirming the results as valid. Then Levene’s test was used to assess the equality of variances; this test resulted in 0.45, which is regarded as a weak result. However, the group’s size is similar since the ratio between the bigger and smaller groups is 1.00. Therefore, the ANOVA test is considered robust. Also, the normality assumption was checked based on the Shapiro-Wilk test, which resulted in $a = 0.05$. Finally, the Kruskal-Wallis’ test using Chi-square (df=1) and a right-tailed distribution was used to validate ANOVA. Since the p-value < $\alpha$, then the $H_0$ is rejected. Some of the groups’ mean ranks are considered to be not equal. When selecting a value from each group, some groups have a probability of containing higher values than others. The p-value equals 0.04473, $p(x \leq 4.0287) = 0.9553$. The chance of type I error rejecting a correct $H_0$ is small: 0.04473. The test statistic $H$ equals 4.0287, which is not in the 95% acceptance region [0: 3.8415]. The observed effect size $\eta^2$ is small, standing at 0.021. This result shows that the magnitude of the difference between the averages is small.

As expressed before, the qualitative data served as supplementary for the information from the quantitative stage of the research. Data were obtained using a semi-structured interview, analyzed following a general inductive approach as suggested by Creswell (2012), Creswell and Poth (2018), Fontana and Frey (2011), Thomas (2006). The scholars explain that qualitative data requires coding, categorizing, and interpreting to respond to the research questions.

The researcher started reading the transcribed data to get familiar with it. First, preliminary codes were assigned to the data to describe the content and organize it into meaningful groups. Then looked at the list of codes and their associated extracted, trying to collate the codes into the themes that say something interesting about the data. Next, a new reading round was done through all the codes to confirm they support the theme or overlap to merge themes. After a few reading rounds, ten themes were identified and organized. Some could be combined to reduce the overlap and redundancy among the initial categories identified, reaching the final four themes presented in the following subheadings.

4.1. Readiness

Two questions addressed the issue of readiness for the shift from on-campus to online teaching. The majority of teachers explained that they were not ready at the beginning of the pandemic. Respondent seventeen asserted that ‘even though I manage computers very well, the change to online education was not something I was prepared for when everything happened. Being faced with a curriculum designed to be taught in a class and suddenly shifting it to an online course was challenging. Mainly because of the investment in a reliable Internet provider, which is not cheap, and dealing with students’ issues was also a big challenge.’ Respondent five said that making the shift was not as difficult as she thought. She had to get used to the new environments quickly and adapt the materials accordingly. Teacher nine explained, ‘I was not ready for the change initially. However, I was getting used to all the changes implemented with the pass of time, and my classes were getting along fine.’ On the other hand, respondent thirteen expressed she had no trouble whatsoever with changing the course to online. She says that using the platform was straightforward, and no problem arose.

4.2. Teaching strategies used

Teachers used several strategies throughout their experiences with the new teaching form; however, there were many similarities. For example, using games is one of the common strategies among the answers teachers gave.

Respondent eight explained that she had used Kahoot a lot. She confirmed that she turns any discussion, quiz, or survey into an engaging and fun game for the class. For example, she continues to practice the grammar point explained in the previous lesson. Doing these kinds of activities online challenges her students. One of the activities she continues does is having her students put words or phrases in a particular order, which requires more focus.

Meanwhile, respondent sixteen asserted that he is a fan of collaborative work. Therefore, he has made the change to online collaborative work using Flipgrid. He explained that he creates the tasks in the platform, and the students record themselves responding to them. Then their peers are required to give feedback to each other using a short video on the same website. In the end, they have to evaluate each other in the university LMS based on the criteria given in the rubric.

In the same vein, teacher eleven explains that she has her students work online creating puzzles with the vocabulary words from the textbook. They share the links with the puzzles they made so the whole class practices the vocabulary. She also said she created groups using the separate sessions tool in Zoom. Learners create posters or mind maps with key information about the grammar they reviewed in class. She also said that she has her students anonymously express their feelings or provide suggestions about teachers’ strategies.

4.3. Advantages and disadvantages of ERT

A few of the questions posed related to the issue of the advantages, disadvantages, and challenges they had identified during their experiences with ERT. The following are the most common answers.

Respondent one explained that the biggest advantage he perceived was that he had to stay at home. Not having to commute to the university has meant economic savings, both from the point of view of car use, including gas and maintenance expenses which have lowered considerably, to spending money on clothes, as he confided. He also asserted that there is no need to print worksheets for students during class, which is a big help for the environment.

Also, respondent thirteen put herself in the students’ shoes. She said learners had many advantages with ERT because they do not have to spend time on the bus going to and from the university to use that time for other activities. She also said that having the class recordings is a great advantage for her students as they can access them throughout the entire semester. Finally, she assures that ERT has helped students greatly because it has brought down location walls. Now students anywhere in the country can attend classes in the university without having to move from their homes.

When asked about the disadvantages that ERT presents, respondent twenty identified several drawbacks. First of all, she said, there is a de-
pendency on a good Internet connection and having suitable devices to carry out a good session on Zoom or Teams. Even though the teacher counted with the above, there is always the problem created by the number of connected people simultaneously. She considers that it is not only she who has to be connected to the Internet all morning to teach her class but also her children. This overcrowding of the connection creates problems, and sometimes they get a slow connection or get disconnected. Or maybe the Internet provider is having internal issues, and the connection is lost, which means a class needs to be recovered at another moment.

Respondent eighteen added to the above by saying that one of the main issues with ERT is that distractors stop students from paying attention to the class. For example, their relatives walk by the location they use to connect to the style and start talking to them, so they lose track of what the teacher says. There is also a feeling of loneliness which students have commented. Since they are not sharing a classroom with the teacher or their peers, they do not have the opportunity to socialize with them; hence, they report such feelings.

4.4. Feelings about ERT

Of such feelings reported by the participants, the most common is that making the sudden change and keep teaching online has made them feel anxious. Respondent eight explains that she was not ready for making the drastic shift to the digital realm. She believes that she made her best effort, but she is conscious that the classes at the very beginning did not go smoothly. Not knowing, explained respondent six, how classes would function and the new meeting platform they had to use were just some issues that added to the stressful pandemic scenario. In addition, all the technological tools that needed to be implemented were novel. There was no training other than click here and then, and all of that made her feel anxious, at least the first few weeks, she added.

On the other hand, respondent two said that everything was weird and hectic at the beginning. However, after getting to know the platforms, settings, and other web-based applications, she explains that the experience has been enriching. Nonetheless, she feels that teaching a language involves face-to-face teamwork, feedback, and support. Therefore, doing ERT is fine and hybrid classes seem like the future of teaching.

Respondent five says that he had a hard time teaching online initially, mainly because of not knowing what he had to do to deliver a good class. Although, with the pass of time, it is getting easier to use and administer the platform. It is not bad; he admits to feeling great now that a year has gone by. However, he wishes classes were smaller to ensure all students had the necessary resources and the chance to practice the language.

5. Results

Table 3 shows the descriptive results from the analysis ran on the SPSS for the readiness section of the survey. As it can be observed, the highest mean, 3.8, corresponds to the proposition "I easily designed online assessments to measure learning." The second highest mean obtained was 3.6 and corresponded to the proposition "I showed comfort in communicating online through speaking and writing." Meanwhile, the lowest two means, 2.0 and 2.2, corresponding to "I showed familiarity with meeting/video conferencing platforms like Zoom/Teams" and "I could integrate technology in executing the suggested competencies and skills to manage successful learning."

Table 4 depicts the descriptive results obtained from the analysis performed on the SPSS to obtain the overall experience of teachers while on remote teaching. As it can be observed, the highest mean in this conglomerate is 3.6, which corresponds to the "I could interact enough with my students" proposition. The following highest mean reported was 3.3, which two of the proposed statements shared. "Teaching online made me anxious," and, "I think students get easily distracted during my class." The subsequent two propositions obtain a mean result of 3.2 and 3.0, which correspond to "I could organize exercises just as well as I would on campus" and "I could teach just as well as I would on campus." The last statement, "The online teaching tools used in courses were easy to operate," obtained a mean of 2.9.

Finally, Table 5 presents the results for the descriptive analysis conducted on SPSS. As shown, the statement "I think the workload is higher in these online courses than in on-campus" obtained the highest mean, 3.55. The next highest mean score was 3.5, which belongs to the proposition "I think one of the biggest challenges with teaching remotely is students get distracted easily." Followed by "I think I can avoid contamination if I am at teaching at home" and "I think the Internet gets really busy when I have to teach," standing at 3.45 and 3.4, respectively. Finally, the last mean score was 2.5, which was attained by the statement, "I think I can provide feedback to all my students as I did when on-campus."

RQ1: How ready do English teachers think they were to make the shift from on-campus teaching to ERT?

RQ2: What has been the teachers' experience of teaching online during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ3 states: What are teachers' perceptions over the positive and negative effects of using ERT to teach their English classes?

6. Discussion

The discussion that follows has been done considering the research question proposed at the beginning of this paper to answer them.

RQ1 enquired about teachers' readiness to shift from on-campus classes to teaching remotely. Table 3, shows that the lowest mean, 2.0, which can be interpreted as "Disagree," was obtained from the statement "I showed familiarity with meeting/video conferencing platforms like Zoom/Teams." This result is logical as nobody was familiar with using the meeting platforms used to teach. This result could also be confirmed by the responses obtained from the interviews. For example, respondent seventeen said, "I handle myself well in a computer. However, changing the classes to online was something I was not ready to do in such a rush as we had to. Moreover, I had no idea what Zoom was, how to use it, or what tools I could use in class."

On the other hand, the highest mean, 3.80, was obtained by the statement, "I easily designed online assessments to measure learning." This result can be interpreted as "totally agree," which is also logical as all the language department teachers are using to design their unit progress tests, so it was not an issue they could not deal with. The next highest mean, standing at 3.66, corresponds to the statement "I showed comfort in communicating online through speaking and writing." This proposition shows the confidence expressed by the teaching body on their communication skills with their students. This result can also be interpreted as "totally agree."

The last issue dealt with the statement, "I used online discussion forums on Canvas as part of the lessons." This proposition obtained a mean of 3.40 that can be interpreted as "totally agree." During the interviews, teachers were asked about the tools they used in their English classes. One of the most mentioned was using forums in the Canvas environment. For example, teacher three said, "I always use the forum tool on Canvas. I think it allows students to give their opinions on different issues. I usually do class, and the reading or listening topics allow me to post a discussion on the forum so they can be engaged with the topic of the lesson even after class."

It can be said that teachers at the polytechnic university in Ecuador were not 100% ready to take on ERT at the beginning of the crisis, as it has happened globally (König, Jäger-Biela & Glutsch, 2020; Mukhtar, Javed, Arooj & Sethi, 2020; Salayo et al., 2020). However, they felt more skillful with the tools with the pass of time. The meeting platforms became easier to use, similar to what was identified by Tomczyk and Walker (2021). Additionally, they were trained to assess students on the Canvas platform effectively. In summary, they became ready with the pass of time, and they could integrate technology in the
teaching-learning process during ERT. These findings have also been recorded by König et al. (2020).

RQ2’s objective was to identify teachers’ experiences with teaching online during the COVID-19 pandemic. The fourth section of the quantitative survey, which looked at teachers’ overall experience during ERT, sheds some light on this query. There are both positive and negative experiences that teachers have related during the interviews and by answering the survey.

As shown in Table 4, the highest mean obtained was 3.65, which can be interpreted as totally agree and was attained by statement three, ‘I could interact enough with my students.’ This proposition can be cataloged as an advantage. This information was corroborated with the answers respondents gave during the interviews. Respondent nineteen explained that he had an excellent rapport with the students assigned during ERT. Furthermore, he asserts, ‘The classes assigned to me, have been great, and I was able to work with them nicely. Of course, I had two small classes, so I gave very personalized feedback to them on the essay, especially. I met on individual sessions with each of them, and we reviewed their work one by one, and I explained their errors to them and how to correct them. Then, they applied what we talked about and handed in really good essays.’ This result concurs with what has been reported by König et al. (2020).

The second highest mean is 3.30, which propositions five and six share. Statement five was “teaching online makes me anxious.” This statement can be cataloged as a disadvantage. This issue was confirmed during the interviews where respondent eight said she felt anxious the first time she had to do her classes online, ‘I didn’t really know what I was doing, most of the times, I had to go by trial and error, that’s how I learned. Now, I manage the tools rather well, but the first two weeks of class, it was a nightmare, and that made me feel very anxious.’ This type of result has also been reported by Erlam et al. (2021), Patiño (2021) and Salayo et al. (2020).

The lowest mean was 2.90, which is statement four, ‘the online teaching tools used in courses were easy to operate.’ This result can be cataloged as a disadvantage. Some teachers mentioned it as an issue they had to deal with during the first few weeks after classes had started during the interviews. Take respondent two’s answer, ‘It is not that I am not very computer savvy. I can use it, and I can access the Internet, but there are some tools that my colleagues use that are a little higher than my level of expertise, so I tend to avoid them.’ Respondent sixteen said, ‘I try not to deviate much from the program and use the tools that are included in the language management system we use in the university. It is there, so I use it; I don’t see why I have to use other tools from the Internet. Besides, I don’t understand how to use some of them. So, I rather use what I know how to use.” These results are aligned with what Lapada et al. (2020) and Salayo et al. (2020) reported on this issue (Table 4).

Therefore, teachers have had a good experience with ERT in a general sense. They could interact with their students mainly because of the tools offered by the meeting platforms available for them to use, confirmed by Juárez-Díaz and Perales (2021). Also, they believe that after getting used to this new modality, they have been able to adapt their teaching strategies leading them to teach as well as they were on-campus. These findings have also been reported by Rahayu and Wirza (2020) and Juárez-Díaz and Perales (2021). On the other hand, not every experience has been positive. Teachers also have feelings of anxiety, especially at the beginning of ERT (Salayo et al., 2020). Finally, most respondents complained that students get distracted easily during the class and the problems they have experienced with learners not keeping their cameras on. This issue has also been reported before (Mukhtar et al., 2020; Tomczyk & Walker, 2021).

Finally, RQ3 enquired the teachers’ perceptions of the positive and negative effects of using ERT to teach their English classes. The answers to this question lie in section two of the survey, and the interviews carried out.

The highest mean, 3.55, which can be interpreted as “Totally Agree,” goes to the statement, ‘I think the workload is higher in these online courses than on-campus.’ This statement can be construed as a disadvantage of ERT. The accounts from the interviews support it. Take respondent three’s response ‘One of the things I don’t like is that there is so much more work to do. Preparing for the class takes me longer because now I have to look for online activities that are engaging for my students and are at the same level as my classes.’ These statements agree with what Erlam et al. (2021) and Juárez-Díaz and Perales (2021) reported.

The next item is the statement, ‘I think one of the biggest challenges with teaching remotely is students get distracted easily.’ This statement was ranked with a mean score of 3.50, which can be deemed as ‘strongly agree.’ Therefore, this statement can be considered as a disadvantage of ERT. This issue has been corroborated by Estrella (2021). Respondent ten said, ‘The thing that I consider the biggest disadvantage of using this type of teaching is that I cannot be certain enough whether or not my students are really involved in the class.’ Supporting this view, respondent one explained, ‘One of the worst things with the virtuality is that we cannot tell students to turn their cameras on during class, it is the university’s policy, so they do not feel invaded.’ So, that way, they get distracted easily. For example, we are doing an exercise, and when I call on the answers, students sometimes take time to answer, you know, like they are just then looking for an answer. Or they say, please teacher, repeat what question?’ These results are supported by what Juárez-Díaz and Perales (2021) and Tomczyk and Walker (2021) have reported.

Then item “I think I can avoid contagion if I am teaching at home” obtained a mean score of 3.45, and it is considered as an advantage Erlam et al. (2021) corroborate this issue. Additionally, the support from respondent seven, who concluded, ‘The very best thing of doing classes remotely is that we have got to stay at home throughout the whole pandemic. I even get nervous every time I hear people talking about going to face-to-class again. So if I can stay at home, I can be certain that I will not get the virus.” On this issue, participant twelve said, ‘I really think that virtual classes have helped us very much. I mean, we are not in contact with our students. Physical contact, I mean. And, considering the pandemic, that is a great advantage for us teachers as in the end, it means that we are less likely to get the virus. So, the longer we can stay teaching remotely, the better for our health.”

There are both advantages and disadvantages to ERT. The most significant advantage identified is that teachers feel safer doing their classes remotely than being on-campus as the possibility for contagion is drastically reduced. This result has also been reported by Hidalgo-Andrade et al. (2021). In addition, they think it might be easier to catch the virus because of the high number of students there in a live classroom. However, the quantitative analysis determined that ERT has more disadvantages than advantages. One of the challenges mentioned by teachers was the technological problems faced. Poor internet connections or overcrowded moments with intermittent Internet service were
challenges mentioned by teachers. This issue has also been discussed before (Thurab-Nikosi et al., 2021).

7. Conclusion

The advent of COVID-19 and all the effects it brought along, such as the closing of educational institutions to care for the health of students, teachers, and staff, has required education to move to the digital realm. Teaching is now done remotely using different meeting platforms, such as Zoom, MS Teams, Google Meets, or WebEx. This investigation aimed to obtain English teachers’ reflections over their experiences during the first two semesters of the year 2020. Three research questions guided this investigation. They were answered using the mean scores from a survey and the answers from individual interviews.

Changing classes from on-campus to emergency remote teaching was not easy to carry out at the pandemic’s beginning. Teachers were not ready, and most of them required training to use the meeting platforms to take advantage of all the features they offer. This issue brought teachers’ feelings of anxiety, mainly because of not having enough information about what was going on and how to solve conflicts within this new type of class. However, after the first semester doing ERT, teachers feel more confident about their experience with the platforms and the different web applications they are using as extra tools to make their classes more engaging.

This research has identified that, in general, teachers’ experience with ERT has been a good one. They have expressed that they have had good interactions with their students thanks to the platform’s tools and the strategies they have adapted from their experience teaching on-campus. Nonetheless, teachers also reported having trouble with students not maintaining their cameras on during class, so they cannot be sure of their involvement in the class. Also, they disclosed problems with the Internet connection, both their own and their students. Finally, respondents complained that students get distracted easily during the class.

There is a gap in the literature that this investigation is trying to bridge: data coming from South America, especially Ecuador, which looks at the experience teachers have had during the first six months of the pandemic and the instauration of ERT to continue with the teaching-learning process.

This research has dealt with some implications. The results provided by this paper will come in handy for language department managers as it gives them light to be prepared for the continuing pandemic and for

### Table 3
Descriptive results for readiness section.

|                                | Mean | Std. deviation | Variance | Interpretation  |
|--------------------------------|------|----------------|----------|-----------------|
| I showed familiarity with      | 2.00 | 0.973          | 0.947    | Disagree        |
| meeting/video conferencing     |      |                |          |                 |
| platforms like Zoom/Teams.     |      |                |          |                 |
| I could integrate technology   | 2.25 | 0.910          | 0.829    | Agree           |
| in executing the suggested    |      |                |          |                 |
| competencies and skills to     |      |                |          |                 |
| manage successful learning.    |      |                |          |                 |
| I managed my time using       | 3.15 | 0.745          | 0.555    | Totally agree   |
| technology-driven instruction  |      |                |          |                 |
| with ease.                     |      |                |          |                 |
| I easily designed online       | 3.80 | 0.410          | 0.168    | Totally agree   |
| assessments to measure learning.|    |                |          |                 |
| I used online discussion forums| 3.40 | 0.821          | 0.674    | Totally agree   |
| on Canvas as part of the lessons. |    |                |          |                 |
| I showed comfort in            | 3.66 | 0.489          | 0.239    | Totally agree   |
| communicating online through   |      |                |          |                 |
| speaking and writing.          |      |                |          |                 |
| Cronbach’s alpha = 0.84        |      |                |          |                 |

### Table 4
Descriptive results for the overall experience section.

|                                | Mean | Std. deviation | Variance | Interpretation |
|--------------------------------|------|----------------|----------|----------------|
| I could teach just as well as I| 3.00 | 0.649          | 0.421    | Agree          |
| would on campus.               |      |                |          |                 |
| I could organize exercises just| 3.25 | 0.786          | 0.618    | Totally agree  |
| as I would on campus.          |      |                |          |                 |
| I could interact enough with my| 3.65 | 0.489          | 0.239    | Totally agree  |
| students.                      |      |                |          |                 |
| The online teaching tools used  | 2.90 | 0.788          | 0.621    | Agree          |
| in courses were easy to operate.| | | | |
| Teaching online made me anxious.| 3.30 | 0.733          | 0.537    | Totally agree  |
| I think students get easily    | 3.30 | 0.923          | 0.853    | Totally agree  |
| distracted during my class.    |      |                |          |                 |
| Cronbach’s alpha = 0.76        |      |                |          |                 |

### Table 5
Descriptive results for advantages & disadvantages section.

|                                | Mean | Std. deviation | Variance | Interpretation |
|--------------------------------|------|----------------|----------|----------------|
| I think that teaching remotely | 3.25 | 0.716          | 0.513    | Totally agree  |
| has saved me time and money.   |      |                |          |                 |
| I think the workload is higher | 3.55 | 0.510          | 0.261    | Totally agree  |
| in these online courses than in |      |                |          |                 |
| on-campus.                     |      |                |          |                 |
| I think I can provide feedback | 2.50 | 0.688          | 0.474    | Disagree       |
| to all my students as I did    |      |                |          |                 |
| when on-campus.                |      |                |          |                 |
| I think the Internet gets really| 3.40 | 0.681          | 0.463    | Totally agree  |
| busy when I have to teach.     |      |                |          |                 |
| I think I can avoid contagion   | 3.45 | 0.686          | 0.471    | Totally agree  |
| if I am at teaching at home.   |      |                |          |                 |
| I think one of the biggest      | 3.50 | 0.657          | 0.432    | Totally agree  |
| challenges with teaching       |      |                |          |                 |
| remotely is students get       |      |                |          |                 |
| distracted easily.             |      |                |          |                 |
| Cronbach’s alpha = 0.56        |      |                |          |                 |
any other crisis that might require ERT to be in practice again. The recommendation is to have ready support for teachers, not only in the IT department but also in emotional support, to deal with anxiety issues. Consequently, stress management should be considered an issue to be treated with teachers as institutional support while ERT is in place. Also, managers can use the information gathered on this paper to develop training sessions for teachers so that the shift to ERT becomes smoother and less stressful. This paper also presents information that can be helpful for English teachers who will be immersed in ERT. They can use it as a guide to know and understand what ERT implies in terms of teaching and the challenges, advantages, and disadvantages it means. That way, they can be prepared to manage the situations that come with the abrupt establishment of remote teaching.

The results provided in this paper also have societal implications. First, it adds qualitative and quantitative data on how teachers feel about using emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research has clearly defined teachers who think they were not ready to jump into remote teaching without training on how to make their courses from face-to-face to remote, and neither did students. Also, it was identified that entering the electronic domain has resulted in feelings of anxiety in many teachers. Finally, the main advantages and disadvantages teachers perceive from ERT were highlighted, as teaching remote assures for their health, or students getting distracted by different issues around them, which means they do not pay the proper attention to their classes. Thus, it is clear that with the results presented in this paper, society can benefit from the knowledge described, which can be used for any future crisis in which ERT has to be put again into practice.

There are also limitations to report. First and foremost is the sample taken for this research. It was only twenty English teachers at a public polytechnic university in Guayaquil. Thus, the findings reported here apply only to similar contexts. So, for further research, another study should be conducted utilizing teachers from the whole university or even from different universities so that generalization of results can be achieved. Another significant limitation is that this paper presents the teaching-learning process from the teachers’ perspectives; thus, only their experiences, concerns, and feelings are reflected here. Students’ problems and issues are only dealt with from the teachers’ point of view. Consequently, it is suggested that future research considers students also as informants.

**Funding**

This research received no external funding

**Data availability**

The author declares that data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

**Ethical statement**

I, Félix Estrella, consciously assure that the following is fulfilled for this manuscript. This material is the authors’ original work, which has not been previously published elsewhere. The paper is not currently being considered for publication elsewhere. The article reflects the authors’ research and analysis wholly and truthfully. The results are appropriately placed in the context of prior and existing research. All sources used are adequately disclosed.

**Declaration of Competing Interest**

The author declares no conflict of interest in the study’s design, in the collection, analysis, or interpretation of data, in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

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