
Impact of emergency remote teaching on young foreign language learners in Poland

Agnieszka Kaldonek-Crnjaković^{ID}

(a.kaldonek2@uw.edu.pl)

University of Warsaw, Poland

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic posed many challenges to educators and children around the world. Undoubtedly, emergency remote teaching (ERT) affected teaching and learning practices. Following a recent stream of research on the impact of ERT during the pandemic, this study aimed at investigating the experiences with remote teaching of four novice language teachers who taught young learners of English as a foreign language in Poland in two different educational settings. The research questions enquired about the impact of ERT on teacher participants and their students. On the one hand, delivering classes online required the participants to alter teaching materials and approaches, which will have a positive effect on their future practice; on the other hand, teaching online was time-consuming and thus tiring. Whereas their students benefited from the enhanced one-to-one interaction with the teacher, parental involvement, as well as alternative learning activities, and a less distractive learning environment. However, ERT had a detrimental effect on the learning of some students with special educational needs. Conclusively, remote classes for young English language learners should be only a temporary measure.

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Kaldonek-Crnjaković, A. (2022). Impact of emergency remote teaching on young foreign language learners in Poland. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching [e-FLT]*, 19(2), 177–190.
<https://doi.org/10.56040/kacr1925>

1 Introduction

The rapid spread of COVID-19 in the first quarter of 2020 affected the delivery of instruction in schools around the world. Many educational institutions, following the recommendation of the World Health Organization (2020, March), changed from in person to emergency remote teaching (ERT).

In Poland, teaching in preschools, primary, secondary schools, and tertiary educational entities was first suspended for about two weeks, then education was delivered in the remote mode. A month

before the end of the school year, primary school teachers and students of the first three grades returned to schools. In the academic year 2020/21, teaching was in person until mid-November 2020. In the rest of the academic year, instruction was delivered remotely.

The efficiency of remote teaching depends on both teachers' and students' familiarity with information and communication technologies (ICT) as well as access to devices that allow remote communication and a setting that ensures effective learning. The findings of the international surveys conducted before the pandemic revealed that the majority of teachers worldwide felt competent in providing teaching using ICT (The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey [TALIS], 2018) and had access to an effective online learning support platform (the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019); however, the latter was significantly lower for Polish teachers.

The above data were however generated from students aged 15 years, and thus may not be representative for younger learners. Research findings are inconclusive. Data generated on parents showed that ERT might be inappropriate for young students. Young learners did not benefit from remote learning because of their low self-regulation, limited parental support due to lack of time and professional knowledge of online tools, and insufficiently interactive online classes (Dong et al., 2020; Hung Lau & Lee, 2021; Misirli & Ergulec, 2021). In contrast, Cheung (2021) found that synchronous online instruction facilitated verbal and non-verbal interaction of primary school students, which ensured equal opportunities. Yet, reticence was observed among many students, but it was successfully mitigated by the teacher participant by extending the wait time.

Regarding language teachers of young learners, a recent study conducted in Poland showed that teachers felt unprepared for online teaching and wished to come back to in-person teaching. Remote teaching was also stressful and required from them more effort (Marchlik et al., 2021).

In another study (Jaskulska & Jankowiak, 2020), Polish teachers of young learners reported that remote teaching limited the provision of pastoral care, and those working in special schools felt that this type of teaching is inappropriate for students with SEN; teachers could not adequately respond to the diverse needs of these students. On a positive note, teacher participants claimed that online teaching helped them develop their professional competencies and felt overall competent in delivering online lessons. As a result, they reported positive feelings about remote teaching.

The findings of the Polish studies corroborate the results of the studies conducted worldwide. The overall experience of dealing with ERT was stressful for language teachers, with the workload being the main factor (MacIntyre et al., 2020). More specifically, the French language teachers in the USA felt unprepared for ERT regardless of their previous experience with online teaching and raised concerns about the well-being and academic outcomes of their learners (Moser et al., 2021). Early career teachers in Germany adapted their teaching during the time of school lockdown by introducing new learning content, though, overall they found online teaching and assessment challenging. The researchers' concluding remarks suggested that digital teacher competence and teacher education opportunities to learn digital competence were crucial in adapting to online teaching (König et al., 2020). Similarly, teachers in developing countries reported enhancing their ICT skills and adapted their teaching to be suitable for online learning. However, they found assessing and engaging students particularly challenging in the online teaching setting (Khlaif et al., 2021).

1. Regardless of ample research on technology in second language learning (Plonsky & Ziegler, 2016), studies on young learners in this regard are scarce and have not been critical enough (Whyte & Cutrim Schmid, 2019). Also little is known about the experiences of language educators with ERT in the time of COVID-19 (Moser et al., 2021). Considering that and to contribute to the ongoing discussion on the impact of ERT on educational instruction, teachers and learners, this study investigated the experiences of Polish novice EFL teachers. The following questions guided the study:

- (1) How did ERT affect the teacher participants and their teaching practice?
- (2) How did ERT affect their students and their learning?

2 Teaching foreign languages to young learners in the digital age

The twenty-first-century technology has revolutionised language teaching. It is most probably that English language classrooms around the world have access to devices allowing immediate connection with others (Whyte & Cutrim Schmid, 2019). This allowed for the development of transcultural and translingual practices (Canagarajah, 2013), to meet diverse learning needs (Meyer et al., 2012), and create rich language input which facilitates the implementation of task-based approaches (Whyte, 2014) and enhancing learner autonomy (Whyte & Cutrim Schmid, 2017).

Since the contemporary language classroom is technology-based, the term ‘classroom technology’ has emerged (Whyte & Cutrim Schmid, 2019, p. 338). This includes a wide range of teaching practices and devices in physical classroom settings, for example, Powerpoint, educational software, web-based video, display of images on the interactive whiteboard, web pages, computer-assisted language learning programmes and applications, computer-mediated communication, distance learning, social networks and games (Black, 2013 and Mama & Hennessy, 2013 in Whyte & Cutrim Schmid, 2019, p. 338).

Successful classroom technology requires a four-stage approach, which are teacher control interactivity, learners response, flexible dialogue, and learner power to shape learning activities (Beauchamp & Kennewell 2010). Since young second language learners predominately rely on implicit mechanisms (Murphy, 2014), and learn most efficiently through experience with a high level of frequency and in a meaningful context (Bland, 2015), the first stage, that is interactivity controlled by the teacher, seems paramount in their classroom technology. Thus, synchronous online sessions seem most beneficial for younger learners (Hodges et al., 2020, March). However, interactivity has been found superficial by recent studies. Language tasks were mostly performed on the drill-and-practice basis creating insufficiently cognitive demanding interaction (see the summary of research findings in Whyte & Cutrim Schmid, 2019, pp. 340–343).

The implementation of classroom technology in the context of second language young learners is challenging. Undoubtedly, teachers play an important role and should be supported through adequate teaching training; yet technology-oriented language teacher training is scarcely available worldwide for both pre- and in-service teachers (Whyte & Cutrim Schmid, 2019). The scope of the training should focus on effective support of interaction by scaffolding to avoid the loss of the learner focus due to many sources of competing information channels (Whyte & Cutrim Schmid, 2017), careful planning of tasks and activities to ensure the gradual acquisition of new language material, and enhanced student initiative and choice (Cutrim Schmid & Whyte, 2015).

3 Methodology

3.1 Participants

Following the recommendations in the literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Rose et al., 2020; Yin, 2018), the experiences of only four teachers were investigated in a form of a single case study with multiple participants to understand in depth the impact of remote teaching on teacher participants and their students in two different educational settings. The limited number of participants allows for identifying ‘themes of the cases’ and conducting ‘cross-case theme analysis’ (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 161), whereas the multiple-case design focuses on one event to gauge variability from multiple perspectives (Rose et al., 2020).

The selection criteria for participation were the teaching experience, students’ age, and the place of teaching. The participants in this study were four novice EFL teachers, who were students of the MA programme at the Institute of English Studies at the University of Warsaw. All the participants had less than two years of teaching experience. Two participants (Piotr and Katarzyna) taught lower primary school students up to the age of 12 in a private foreign language school in Warsaw, where English lessons were delivered in the afternoons. Marta and Paulina taught EFL to students of the

first three grades (ages 7–10) in a public primary school in Warsaw according to the national curriculum. The names of the participants are pseudonyms.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

The participants were interviewed twice: in July 2020 after the first lockdown and in December 2020 during the second lockdown and school closure. The first interview was conducted in person, whereas the second one using the Zoom platform. English was agreed to be the main language of conversation. Occasionally, the participants also used Polish. The July 2020 interviews lasted approximately between one hour and 15 and one hour and 25 minutes. The December interviews were shorter and lasted between approximately 20 and 27 minutes. All the participants gave their consent for recording the interview.

The interviews were semi-structured and started with a general question on how the participants found ERT. Guided by the content of the response and the literature review, and to ensure the consistency of the enquiry (Guest et al., 2014), further questions to the teacher participants concerned students' digital competencies and their online learning environment, adaptive teaching approaches, SEN students, and parental involvement.

The transcribed interviews were uploaded to the NVivo 12 program, which was used to code the data using thematic analysis, where codes are 'developed to represent the identified themes and applied or linked to raw data as summary markers for later analysis' (Guest et al., 2014, p. 9).

The first line of analysis was open coding of each transcript respecting the chronology of the interviews. The subsequent axial coding revealed the following themes: attitudes toward ERT, resources and approaches used when teaching online, parental involvement, students' needs. Further analysis resulted in two additional themes – skills development and interaction with students – which stemmed from the resources and approaches used and students' needs categories. Subsequently, the headings of the themes were interpreted as shown in the Findings section of this paper.

4 Findings

4.1 Mixed feelings toward ERT

The participants expressed mixed feelings towards ERT. Paulina, who taught in a state primary school, unenthusiastically and briefly commented that, *'it [ERT]'s OK. I don't really know what to say. It's not so bad.'* In contrast, Marta, also a state school teacher, expressed her worries about teaching her students online in the coming school year after the first lockdown. She believed teaching EFL to young children required interaction and teaching techniques based on movement, visual aids, and the use of gestures, and these are limited when the lesson is delivered remotely because of the tools available and working space.

'Well, I'm afraid that we are not going to school because of Corona. You know, it's really hard to teach kids online, especially the young ones. I think that you really need interaction, the social aspect. Right. I was taught that when you teach young children, you basically use your face, hands, right.'

'It's better to show them something in a picture or screen or, approach them and whisper and make them repeat. And they need movement, interaction, gestures to learn better and even via Zoom or Skype, it is really difficult.'

'I used face and hands, but I didn't really move because I didn't have the space. I don't have space in my room.'

Marta also felt sorry for her students to be stuck in front of the computer without enough physical activities:

'Imagine you're a very active kid, you want to run but you have to just sit in front of your computer and at your desk.'

In the same vein, Paulina said,

'my students now look kind of disappointed, not really motivated, tired. They need to spend a lot of time in front of a computer and it is not good for learning English, I mean at their age. They need to move, and I can't really make them move, like move a lot, when we work using Teams.'

Katarzyna, who teaches young EFL learners in a private language school, said after the first lockdown that teaching online left her *'kind of exhausted'*. She explained that delivering lessons was demanding *'because of the methodology of our school. Because we have a lot of like relationship, movement, playing together, touching each other.'* However, she viewed the teaching online during the first lockdown successful: *'I think, as it comes to lessons and the things that I did with my children this semester, I am really happy.'*

Similarly, Piotr, who also works for a private language school said,

'we had a very difficult task because moving our lessons to online lessons was at the beginning challenging. There was a lot of things I was afraid of, but in the end, it really paid off to spend so much time preparing those slides. I'm tired but satisfied what I did this semester.'

These attitudes changed after the second lockdown. Paulina seemed more positive about ERT when she said, *'It was difficult, but I think I'm now much happier. It doesn't mean that I believe it is a good way to teach young children, but it can be done.'*

Piotr, at first, favoured remote teaching because he could manage his timetable better and it seemed optimal for children and school staff from the health and safety perspective. He said that,

'I was happy that we were going online for a moment. I was honestly happy because this year I have a different timetable and I have to wait for my classes. I have one group and then an hour break and then another class. So it's not really comfortable. Also, the situation was getting more and more serious. There was a lot of chaos in our school when it came to children. Some teachers had Corona. Some of the students who had contact with them came to the classes anyway. It was really uncomfortable. It was a mess. I didn't like it.'

Piotr also added that online classes were more dynamic and better organised, which was advantageous for his students:

'In my online lessons, there are a lot more activities; activities that you can do quickly. Because in the classroom it takes time to gather the students, make them sit in a circle, explain and answer their questions. And there were no questions online! For example, I'm sending a link to a game, I ask students to open it and do it. When they finish, we check the answers.'

Piotr added that working from home also worked for him:

'I have access to the kitchen, and when I just want to relax for a second, I can lay down just for five minutes when kids have a break. It's awesome because in the classroom it's not possible. I'm all the time with the kids. They come to me and want to talk to me. They have some stories to tell me. Fine. It's great. I love it when they do that, but sometimes I just need a break between the classes.'

Nevertheless, he favoured in-person teaching when he said, *'I'm missing normal lessons because I'm just tired of sitting in front of the computer all the time.'*

Marta also expressed more positive feelings towards ERT during the second lockdown. In her opinion, during the second lockdown, *'The things got more organised.'* She explained that the school she worked for organised teacher training so that all teachers were familiar with remote teaching

platforms and effective ways of organising an online lesson. She also added that she spent less time on preparing lessons, and thus she felt less tired and could focus more on teaching because the publisher of the coursebook used in her school had provided online resources that facilitated remote teaching:

'We had access to a multibook. It's an online book; the book we use in the classroom. I could share my screen and show the kids what we were doing. And I could also write on it! So I wrote all the answers.'

Teaching online seemed more preferable for her than teaching in person because of its logistics.

'I really liked the online teaching. It was easy for me because I had everything in one place and I didn't have to move between the classes, take all these materials with me because usually with younger kids there are so many things you have to carry with you. I have a lot of teaching resources.'

However, she concluded that overall she would be happy to return to teaching in person because she missed her students (*'Online teaching is ok but I miss my kids.'*).

In contrast, Karolina still held negative feelings toward ERT mainly because of the workload, which partly was due to her personality. She also believed that remote teaching affected her students' motivation for learning:

'I hate them [online lessons] even more! I mean, there's so much stuff going on. Like you have to do presentations and I'm too ambitious for that because for me, everything must be perfect. And it's kind of difficult too, especially with older students to make them interested and make them actually participate in online lessons because they prefer to switch off their camera and play Minecraft.'

She also added that the ERT blurred the separation between work and private life. She said,

'I always felt like at work. There was no border between the work and home.' She concluded that, *'In general, the online lessons were more stressful for me. I wouldn't like to repeat that experience. There was a lot of work. Many things didn't depend on me, for example, the internet could stop working. And I just prefer being with kids. It's a different kind of relationship, for example, talking more as a group, so the relationship was closer. I miss games, building blocks, throwing things. You couldn't do it online.'*

4.2 Teaching and learning approaches and resources needed to be altered during the ERT

The participants agreed that remote teaching required different teaching materials and approaches to facilitate learning and make it more interesting for their students. Marta, for example, said that the resources she had used when teaching in person, such as flashcards, *'didn't work. Right. So I have to come up with different ideas.'* These included *'short presentations with new words and many different exercises.'* She also added that developing some language skills were difficult in the online mode:

'Listening was especially difficult to do via Zoom. You can share your computer sound and song, but well, developing listening skills, not really.'

Katarzyna, Paulina and Piotr also prepared presentations for their students. Paulina, for example, said,

'It was easier to teach, to present the things I wanted them to learn. In class, I would just show them my resources, the paper resources, but when teaching online you need to use online resources, you know, like electronic, not paper.'

Marta also prepared short videos for her students to introduce new vocabulary. When teaching vocabulary, she also used associations and made references to students' first language:

'I recorded some very short videos for them. So we had these three verbs: to ride, to read and to write. I recorded a video showing, you know, I'm riding my bike, or I was reading.'

'I also made, like, for example, the verb to ride, and it's riding a bike and then I used Polish – rajd rowerowy [a cycling rally], for example.'

Marta believed that online teaching offers more learning opportunities and allowed her to do *'luźniejsze lekcje'* [more casual lessons], focus more on cultural aspects, and do projects with her students. She talked about the online interview with a New York guide and how this impacted her students' learning:

'So we had a meeting with a New York guide. Well, she spoke Polish but still, you know, cultural aspects were included in the lesson. It is really interesting. They [students] loved the lesson. They could ask questions. We got some books from this guide. So I came up with a contest about New York. And the kids did presentations, videos, something in Lego. Some kids did it in English. Excellent. Some kids did it in Polish, but whatever, but it was very interesting for them.'

Piotr was happy that the quality of his lessons improved with time, and this had a positive impact on his students' involvement in learning. He said,

'I think the activities are more interesting now. I wanted to make them more interesting. I felt kind of motivated because if they [students] bored then it is done, they won't learn.'

But all participants reported that preparing lessons in the remote mode was time-consuming. Marta said that recording videos *'takes time and it's not that easy.'* Piotr said that

'my mom, she is also a teacher, I showed her my presentations and she was surprised that I prepared that every day! She says that I wouldn't even think about preparing them for every lesson. It would take her too much time.'

Katarzyna said that remote teaching, unlike in-person teaching, required pre-lesson preparation:

'In the classroom, it is easy, you just open a book and you teach. Or you can think of a game. And when you teach online you have to prepare thousands of slides to do one thing! Right. So even when you have the coursebook you have to do all from the beginning.'

4.3 New skills development and teaching online beneficial for future teaching practice

All participants expressed that they had developed their skills during ERT. Katarzyna and Katarzyna agreed that their lesson are now structured better.

'It's true that the lessons were thought through. Before you just went into the classroom and did things. You knew in general what you wanted to do, for example, writing or grammar. With online lessons, you had to think about the whole process. What should be at the beginning of the lesson, what should be next.' (Katarzyna)

'In a regular class, I just planned on the way. And in online lessons, you would think about whether something else would be beneficial for the kids. You need to think ahead and yes, the online lessons were better structured.' (Piotr)

Paulina said,

'I realised with online there are so many other options, like you can do more things with children, and I think when we are back to school and will try that in the classroom, the things I did with them when lessons were online.'

Piotr agreed that

'the experience with online teaching will be beneficial for us in the future. I think we'll be able, more able, to plan lessons and don't think about every detail, but already know it; what the structure should be. So I will know the stages of the lesson, the details, but I don't have to really plan it anymore because I know all that. Right. I think my practice is now more aware.'

In the same vein, Marta described teaching online as 'creative'. During ERT, she found out about 'so many new things, like apps, websites, like this e-spelling or some vocabulary apps. I don't know. Even new techniques to teach.', and she concluded, 'I want to find out whether the things we did online will work in the classroom. And check other possibilities, other types of exercises.'

4.4 Greater parental involvement

All the participants agreed that the parents of their students were more involved during ERT. Piotr gave an example of parents playing games with their children during the English lesson:

'For example, I say "go to the kitchen and bring something yellow". And it was funny that the parents were sometimes involved. For example, one student said, "Mum, bring me something red!"'

The primary means of contact with parents was via email. Both Paulina and Marta felt that creating personal email addresses using their school domain made it easier to communicate with the parents; the interactions became more frequent and informal. They compared this with the times when they taught in person at schools. Back then, parents of their students would either phone them or request one-on-one meetings. Paulina added that,

'I was happy to see that parents, especially those I'd seen before, made contact with me. Before I believe they were very busy with their work and didn't have time to meet with me. But now, we can use the school email address and exchange information, or I can tell very quickly how their children are doing in English lessons, and I could send them additional materials.'

Similarly, Katarzyna and Piotr reported receiving a high volume of emails from parents on various topics. The nature of this communication was overwhelmingly positive. Katarzyna was especially delighted to receive emails that praised her dedication and work with the children, underscoring the effectiveness of online language instruction for younger learners.

'I also got a lot of emails comparing our job with the jobs of the teachers in the public school. The parents said that in public school teachers said that it was not impossible to do it. I mean teach online. And we showed that it's possible. You just have to want to do it.'

She also mentioned that parents could observe the structure of the lessons and gauge the level of involvement teachers have with their children: 'They could see that we really care and that we are trying our best.'

4.5 Deeper interaction with students

Teaching online enabled the participants to interact more easily with their students, particularly on a one-to-one basis, in a more informal manner, as evidenced by the following narrative accounts:

'The good thing was that it was easier to meet with kids after lessons, for example, if they wanted to ask them something, for example about the lesson. I could eat my dinner and we could have a ten-minute conversation.' (Marta)

'It was a more relaxed atmosphere, I think. And I could hear better individual students. I mean when they wanted to ask me they could say that. In the classroom, at school, it is usually very loud and I think some students wouldn't approach me, I don't know, because they would feel embarrassed to ask questions. But in the online lesson, they could stay after the lesson and not being seen by other kids.' (Paulina)

Similarly, Katarzyna, Marta, and Paulina emphasized that the online program they utilized facilitated their interactions with shy students as well as those with special educational needs:

'For example [student's name], the one with Asperger, when we were doing some teamwork, he could write to me on the chat who he wants to work with. Or when there was something wrong, then he could write to me. We had a kind of agreement that I would check this chat regularly.' (Katarzyna)

'There's also a girl who is really shy and doesn't want to talk when working in groups, but when I ask her, "What they think about that, [the student's name]?", then she says really brilliant things. And I could do it when we were online. It was easier online' (Katarzyna)

'The interaction was better online because all the kids could speak or communicate, and even these shy students, it's easier for them because they can write a private comment.' (Marta)

'The chat helped. Those shy students don't really want to talk in the classroom. I don't really know if they are OK. But with online, it was easier. I got a lot of messages via chat. For example such as "Teacher, I don't understand." or just "Hello"' (Paulina)

4.6 Students' needs were met only to some extent

Paulina said that some of her 'very active children' benefited from online lessons:

'The fact that they were at home probably they were less distracted. There are no other kids and they just need to focus on the computer. Sometimes they disappeared from the screen [laughter] but it was OK. They were back quickly.'

Marta also admitted that her students 'with a lot of energy' found the online environment less distracting and more manageable, mainly because the online lessons were shorter, lasting 30 minutes instead of the usual 45. These students also had the freedom to move around without disturbing their classmates. She explained that,

'their behaviour was a little bit better but they were still sometimes running around their room and showed me like different stuff. And they knew that they needed to sit for only 30 minutes.'

'When they finished, they could go away. During the test, when they finish the test in a classroom, they can't really walk away. They do it very quickly and then have to just sit and do nothing. Right. Whereas here [in the online lesson] they could walk around.' (Marta)

Katarzyna discussed her student with Asperger's syndrome. She felt that the online environment allowed her to address his specific needs more effectively. The chat option enabled the student to communicate with her without reservation, and as a result, it appeared that the student was more at ease:

'The student with Asperger, in the classroom, he would raise his hand every five minutes and other kids would notice that. When online, he was anonymous. He could write whenever he wanted and whatever he wanted.'

Piotr's experiences were largely negative, and he was disappointed to see that some of his students struggled with online language instruction. He discussed one student with dyslexia, in particular, who found the online learning environment extremely challenging.

'I knew it was harder for him. He had to be more focused on what I say or when I was giving instructions to complete the task. So in the classroom, I could come to him and say what we were doing, and what I wanted him to do. I could help him, he could just raise his hand and ask for help. And on Zoom, he had to write in the chat, and it's writing, so difficult for him.'

This experience deeply affected Piotr, and he felt a weight of responsibility, believing he couldn't offer adequate support to his student with dyslexia. Piotr mentioned that this particular student

'is a very good student. He has amazing grades and his speaking is great. I think that he got lazy because of the online lessons or he got overwhelmed because of sitting at the computer all the time. I thought that was my fault because I didn't do something that would help him at some point. I talked with his mom and she said that probably he was very tired, because he had a lot to do in school. Probably there was a lot of reading and writing that are most difficult for him.'

Marta admitted that given her relatively short teaching experience, addressing her students' specific needs was challenging in both conventional and online classrooms. However, online teaching did make it easier to cater to her students' requirements with the assistance of their parents. As an example, she cited a student who was keen on enhancing his speaking skills.

'This student talked to his mom, and his mom wrote an email to me and asked for advice. I wrote her like a page about it! And she started doing some things at home but we also met once a week for like 15, 20 minutes online just to talk about it. I mean with the student.'

Katarzyna noticed that online instruction tended to tire her students. To counter this, she encouraged them to be more physically active during sessions. While helpful, it was not always effective.

'They are tired. I mean children, because even if we did crazy things, started flying, running around, it's still sitting at the computer. One girl told me she's going to miss me, but to miss me and not the computer. They got overwhelmed.'

She also noted that some students had difficulty joining the classes due to unsuitable learning conditions at home.

'Not that they didn't want to be in the class but because of the computer. Because they didn't manage to organize the time at home. Because they have siblings and all of that and they have only one computer, for example.'

Participants noted that the conditions at home prevented some students from truly 'being themselves due to the presence of their parents,' in Paulina's words. She elaborated that certain children felt under scrutiny and were hesitant to express their thoughts as freely as they would in a traditional classroom. Similarly, Piotr shared his observations about his students' reactions when discussing topics related to adolescence and growing up. He concluded this by saying, *'They [his students] feel that they are at home and not at school. There are moms, sisters, brothers, and they are listening. You don't have that privacy.'*

5 Discussion

The present study delved into the experiences of novice Polish EFL practitioners teaching young learners through Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The initial inquiry explored the impact of ERT on these teachers and their instructional practices. Previous research indicated a sense of unpreparedness for online instruction among teachers, and they found the shift to online pedagogy both challenging and demanding (Marchlik et al., 2021; Moser et al., 2021). Echoing these findings, this study's thematic analysis revealed that our participants initially found online teaching taxing. This was largely due to the increased time needed to prepare teaching

materials and the necessity for a more detailed lesson structure. However, over time, these teachers adapted their resources and instructional methods. They particularly valued the support from course-book publishers who provided online resources. This transition brought about positive outcomes: teachers reported more organized and structured lessons, skill development, and an inclination to explore and incorporate novel teaching resources they plan to use in future endeavors. These observations align with the findings of König et al., (2020) and Jaskulska and Jankowiak (2020). Their research participants highlighted the enhancement of their professional competencies during ERT. Building on König et al. (2020), it's evident that ERT presents opportunities for educators to hone their digital skills, which can significantly influence their subsequent teaching experiences. For instance, narratives from this study's participants regarding student motivation and engagement suggest that the methodologies and resources cultivated during ERT might make EFL instruction more appealing to learners, potentially boosting their motivation and academic achievement.

Furthermore, the coping mechanisms employed by the educators in this study seem to mirror those in MacIntyre et al.'s research (2020). Those teachers addressed the pandemic-induced stress and increased workload by accepting their circumstances and proactively adapting, which included meticulous planning and perspective shifts. Yet, planning amidst unpredictable circumstances was observed to elevate stress and anxiety levels. In a contrasting revelation, narratives from our study's second round of interviews suggested that such planning concerns may not persist in future ERT scenarios.

A notable advantage of online teaching identified in this study was the depth of teacher-student interaction. Teachers experienced enhanced one-to-one interactions with students and increased collaboration with parents. This facilitated a more responsive approach to student needs and more effective pastoral care during ERT. Such findings align with studies suggesting the online environment can offer individualized attention and flexibility (Brady et al., 2012; Tembo & Chen, 2020). However, this contrasts with previous research indicating limited parental involvement and pastoral care (Dong et al., 2020; Hung Lau & Lee, 2021; Jaskulska & Jankowiak, 2020).

Regarding the impact of ERT on students, narratives suggest that remote learning could be exhausting due to prolonged screen exposure, potentially leading to 'screen fatigue' (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2020). Inadequate home learning environments, impacted by family presence or other factors, further complicated matters. Some students, especially those with dyslexia, faced challenges. Mezzanotte (2020, May) posited that students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) especially thrive with the physical presence of teachers, arguing they faced amplified challenges during school closures.

Conversely, certain students, such as those on the autism spectrum or introverted learners, benefited from online instruction. These students embraced the closer interaction with their teacher, which in turn heightened their lesson engagement (Cheung, 2021). Additionally, students with ADHD or similar tendencies found online environments less distracting, positively impacting their learning behavior. This counters views that these students struggle online (Mezzanotte, 2020, May; Cheung, 2021), suggesting that synchronous online lessons, as outlined by Hodges et al. (2020, March), can be advantageous. Such findings are bolstered by studies highlighting the minimal impact of lockdown restrictions on younger ADHD students (Behrmann et al., 2021) and improvements seen in those with moderate to severe ADHD symptoms in restrictive settings (Melegari et al., 2021). Overall, the ERT experience was largely positive for both teachers and most students. Citing Beauchamp and Kennewell (2010), the success of ERT hinged on teacher control interactivity, student responses, flexible dialogue, and the empowerment of learners to shape activities. The online setting also proved logistically manageable regarding teaching resources and inter-lesson intervals. However, the consensus among teachers was clear: remote teaching to young learners should be viewed as a temporary solution, primarily because of the irreplaceable value of physical interaction.

6 Conclusion

This study revealed that Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) influenced both teacher participants and their learners in diverse ways. The shift to the digital classroom demanded modifications in teaching materials and methods, which was exhaustive due to its time-consuming nature. Nonetheless, the skills acquired from ERT bolstered the digital capabilities of the participants, promising to enhance their future teaching endeavors. A majority of the primary school students benefited from online learning due to increased individual teacher interaction, the involvement of parents, and a less distracting learning environment. However, the presence of family members and confined spaces hindered some classroom activities. Notably, online learning exacerbated challenges for certain students with specific learning difficulties, suggesting that this mode should either be temporary or integrated into a blended learning approach.

The design of this study restricts the generalization of its results, primarily because of its specific sample. A pertinent question arises: Would experienced in-service teachers report similar experiences? Additionally, a comprehensive understanding of ERT's impact might emerge from a study that simultaneously explores both teachers' and students' experiences.

The findings resonate with the perspective that technology has revolutionized language education, offering young learners abundant opportunities (Cheung, 2021). Given concerns about reduced online interaction negatively affecting young learners (Ali & Smith, 2015) and the potential for regular learning environments to be disrupted by future ERT instances (Whittle et al., 2020), it's crucial to incorporate remote teaching into young language learners' methodologies.

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