

## A Resilience Path for English Teachers during Emergency Remote Teaching

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### ABSTRACT

Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) take over education in many places of the world during the 2020 health crisis. However, ERT raised new concerns about teachers' professional development and the personal resources they have used to solve challenges for the benefit of their students. This article attempts to explore how ELT college teachers developed resilience during Emergency Remote Teaching in 2020. This qualitative survey research analyzed the answers to a questionnaire to enhance the participants' insights and reflections regarding the changes they have been required to make during the pandemic. The participants were two groups of ELT teachers; one was formed by fifteen Mexican college teachers and the second was a group of twelve international college teachers. Their paths during ERT were framed in a common pattern of Realization, Reflection, Reinvention, and Resilience which illustrated how teachers coped with a change of perspective towards education, the interaction with students, and the appropriacy of materials but also with their own emotions and their wellbeing. The article concludes with some insights to raise awareness of the Resilience path that teachers around the world have followed as a way to overcome the challenges imposed by COVID-19.

**Keywords:** *Continuous Professional Development; Emergency Remote Teaching; Realization; Reinvention; Reflection; Resilience*

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## INTRODUCTION

Change is inevitable, 2020 has proved that the popular saying is true. In March 2020, the coronavirus crisis led most institutions around the world to shift education from face-to-face environments to online instruction without prior planning. The result was Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) which provided a temporary solution to an immediate problem as (Golden, 2020) says, ERT has been defined as “a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery model due to crisis circumstances” by Hodges et al., (2021). However, following (Zimmerman, 2020), ERT has been an online experiment for a critical moment in education, but also an opportunity to test pedagogical approaches and to pay attention to emotional factors in order to create environments of care and empathy with the hope of going back to the original state, that is, face to face instruction.

During ERT, teachers had to develop the digital skills necessary to cope with the changing situation. (Hodges et al., 2021) affirmed that education has surpassed the limitations of the classroom as online education has become the norm due to Covid-19 pandemic and the requirements it has brought. At the same time, teachers have had to develop emotional skills in order to help themselves get through the situation. However, the emotional aspect of teachers has not been explored in depth, especially in the critical situation of a pandemic. The way teachers feel about their lives and their profession may have

profound implications on their daily practices, their decisions and the learning and achievements of their learners (Pyhältö et al., 2021).

Therefore, paying attention to how teachers emotionally cope with difficult or critical situations is relevant for them, first and then, for their students at different dimensions: affective, academic, personal, professional, social, and emotional Beltman, (2015) affirms. Emotions are an important element in the studies on teacher resilience as Mansfield et al., (2012) and Steward (2014) have claimed. Emotions reflect how well teachers adapt to their changing environments. Therefore, emotions may affect all the aspects of teachers’ and their students’ lives.

Compared to other professions, teaching has been considered as one with the highest levels of stress (Coombe et al., 2020). During ERT the levels of stress increased as these professionals had to go from face-to-face teaching to teaching online and at home from one day to the other. Among the different skills teachers have had to develop during ERT are technology and distant teaching. Additionally, concerns about students’ engagement and learning as well as their teaching effectiveness during the pandemic have made teachers and students feel anxious and stressed (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Farrell & Brunton, 2020). Due to these feelings, the issue of well-being has also emerged as an important topic for teachers given the circumstances around the health crisis and the concept of resilience has been

widely used in relation to teachers' well-being.

Díaz Maggioli (2004) defines Continuous Professional Development (CPD) as a "career-long process during which teachers hone their teaching knowledge, skills and dispositions so as to be able to reach more students and help them succeed at learning". This definition involves some of the most relevant implications teachers have had to face during the length of their careers including challenging situations. By honing their knowledge, skills and dispositions teachers could reach their students during the pandemic and as a result, they might develop new skills for the situation. Leroux and. In the same way, (Richardson & Díaz Maggioli, 2018) affirm that teachers' knowledge and transformative growth involve their engagement in reflection processes and CPD; during ERT teachers may have also developed their online teaching skills and their teacher autonomy as they were working from home.

In consequence, the article has the purpose to explore the experiences of ELT teachers during the pandemic and to identify the way teachers could overcome the challenges and difficulties during ERT. In order to guide the research, the following research question was created: How did ELT college teachers develop resilience during Emergency Remote Teaching in 2020?

## **METHOD**

### **The study**

This survey research followed the qualitative paradigm as it aims to explore the experiences of a group of ELT teachers in relation to the pandemic in 2020. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) affirm that a qualitative approach is used when a "phenomenon needs to be explored and understood" which was the case in this research as more information is needed to understand the experiences of ELT teachers during the pandemic.

### **Context**

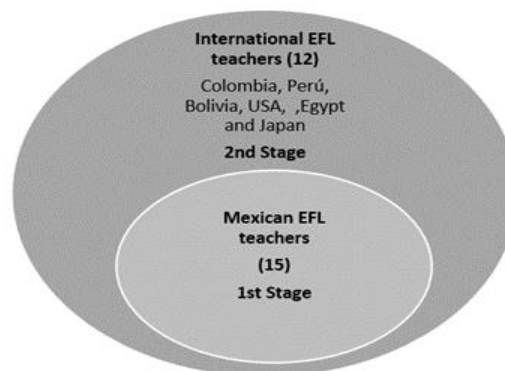
The study was carried out during the term May-June 2020 in the middle of the pandemic. English teachers, as most educators around the world, were sent to teach from home. Therefore, teachers lived the transition far from their classrooms. This way, the effect of COVID-19 on tertiary education teachers should be explored along with the effects of ERT on teachers' performance at the beginning of the pandemic and the resources and solutions they found when the lockdown was extended. ERT demanded an increase use of technology. As a result, the pandemic raised several issues as not all teachers had had the same tech expertise before going online teaching, especially in emerging countries such as Mexico. Therefore, I considered it was relevant to collect their experiences at the end of the first semester during the sanitary crisis and explore the ways they faced and solved the challenges

the pandemic posed on their different higher-education contexts.

### **Participants**

For the first stage of the study, the participants were a group of teachers who taught English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Mexico in the *Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla* (BUAP) in southeast Mexico. Their ages ranged from 25 to 52 years old and they all spoke Spanish as their native language. They all had a B.A. and an M.A. in a field related to language or education as that is one of the requirements to become a teacher in BUAP. The criteria to be included as participants of the study were that a) they had transitioned from face-to-face instruction to ERT and b) they were teachers of English as a Foreign Language.

The participants of the second stage were a group of twelve language teachers who were invited to participate in the study. They were from seven different countries (see Fig. 1). The international group of teachers worked in public universities in their countries or abroad and had at least a B.A. in ELT or in related fields. All the participants had been teaching from home since March, 2020. Therefore, all participants were in similar conditions at the moment of the study.



**Fig. 1. The participants of the two stages of the study**

### **The instrument**

Survey research can use several research strategies, the one chosen to collect the information from participants was a questionnaire with seven open-ended questions. The questions were developed in order to cover the participants' perspectives regarding their previous, present and post-pandemic teaching experiences. At the same time, the questions were designed in order to enhance teachers' insights and reflection (See Appendix). Before the instrument was applied to participants it was revised by peers who verified that the questions were clear, authentic, reliable and ethical.

### **Data collection and analysis**

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Stage- Mexican participants**

In the beginning, the instrument was sent to a group of EFL teachers during the months of May and June, 2020 in Mexico by mail. In average, the participants took two weeks to send their answers. Once the answers were organized and a pattern in the participants'

responses was identified, it was decided to triangulate the information by sending the instrument to a second group of international ELT teachers in order to validate the study and corroborate the information obtained.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Stage- International participants**

Then, in July 2020, the instrument was sent to the second group of EFL teachers in seven different countries in order to triangulate the data received from the Mexican participants. Fifteen invitations were sent so that an equal number of national and international teachers participated in the research, however, twelve answers were received. The answers of the international participants were also organized, and the same pattern found through the Mexican teachers' responses was also identified through the process of coding. As the answers from all participants seemed to follow the same pattern, I decided to focus the results on the answers provided, and not to give a name to each one of the participants. Creswell and Creswell (2018, pp.193-195) suggest four steps to code the data: 1) organize and prepare the data for analysis, 2) read or look at all the data, 3) start coding or finding categories, 4) generate a description and themes and 5) represent the description and themes. Following the steps mentioned, the answers were organized around four different categories representing the stages that teachers followed once they were sent home to continue ERT from home. The

categories (stages) are explained in the following section.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

Once the participants' answers were received, the information collected was organized according to the situations the participants had gone through during the pandemic and the experiences they had had with their teaching performance under these circumstances. Four categories were identified in the teachers' development of resilience. These categories were named as: realization, reinvention, reflection and resilience which will be presented and explained below.

The first question required the participants to mention the feelings (adjectives) they were experiencing at the moment of the study. Their feelings served to establish the mood and the state of mind of the participants during the pandemic. The participants reported that their feelings during the pandemic ranged from exhausted to happy. The participants' answers are organized in Fig. 3 according to the times the feelings were mentioned. As it can be seen in Fig. 3, the participants' stressful feelings were more evident than their positive feelings, some participants mentioned being worried or thoughtful, however, the positive side of the participants emerged by saying they felt challenged, motivated, inspired and even happy as Chart 1 shows.



Chart 1. The participants' feelings in May-June, 2020

Exhausted (5)		challenged (2)
Tired (5)		
Overwhelmed (4)	worried (5)	inspired (2)
Stressed (4)		
Anxious (2)	thoughtful (2)	motivated (2)
Sad (2)		
Insecure (2)		happy (2)
Frustrated (2)		

Following (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) coding process, the information was organized, and a word was chosen to represent the categories under which the obtained data were labeled: realization, reinvention, reflection and resilience as the participants seemed to have walked a path toward resilience. Going from a realization of the real situation in March 2020 to more confident performance in May, 2020. The categories identified are represented by some of the participants' answers to illustrate the participants' journey below:

### Realization

*"I wish I had had some training for teaching online before"*  
*"How can we get all the resources we need to teach online?"*  
*"I am worried that students will cheat as nobody checks on them"*  
*"I found that I had to learn so much in so little time!"*  
*"I am afraid that students cannot read directions well"*  
*"I asked myself how I was going to teach if I had never used zoom before!"*

*"I realized that I didn't have a place to work at home"*

*"It was really difficult for the first two months because I felt I was spending all day in front of the computer. I was at home but I wasn't, because I had too much work to do."*

During this stage, participants expressed that emotions were part of their experience at the beginning of the pandemic. However, they found the way to make changes and a new stage followed.

### Reinvention

*"I turned my room into a working place!"*  
*"I had to adapt the material from a f2f setting to an online setting"*  
*"I did my best, I took courses for platforms use and planned as much as I could"*  
*"I needed a better organization of my time because at the beginning I was working too many hours, which was exhausting and not efficient"*  
*"I had to redesign activities with very detailed info and more student-centered assessment"*  
*"I changed my internet plan to better suit my needs and purchased a new laptop"*

In the second stage in this journey, teachers had to face the need to make changes at the individual, but also at a collaborative level, looking for help as (Laukkonen et al., 2019) and (Chatterjee & Duraiappah, 2020) affirmed and develop new abilities and skills.

## **Reflection**

*"Shifting instruction online with little or no preparation required a great deal of flexibility. I have also learned valuable technical skills such as using different and new educational technologies and tools."*

*"I have learned that if we don't work together and create safe and supportive teacher and student learning communities, it will be very hard for all of us to cope with the massive world changes we are living."*

*"Not everybody has the same opportunities and facilities so we must be tolerant and empathic."*

*"We must not take anything for granted."*

*"Now, I am more patient, plan more carefully and think of ways to make my students participate and learn more, and especially, I think in the best way and with the best attitude. However, it has not been easy."*

After the initial shock and the changes made, the participants mentioned that they tried to find the right balance between work and their personal lives for their own wellbeing.

## **Resilience**

*"I am able to do more than what I thought!"*

*"It works! Teaching language can be done remotely and my students responded well to it."*

*"I am able to change and evolve."*

*"It was not as difficult as I expected."*

*"Finding balance between work and online teaching."*

*"I have worked more than ever, but I have seen how learning and teaching effectiveness have more to do with the strategies instructors use, rather than the technology."*

*"I think ERT has enabled us to not limit ourselves to just teaching within a classroom and with a board, but it has given us the tools to empower our teaching."*

## **Discussion**

When schools closed in March 2020 and teachers found themselves in front of the computer, they had to face and assess what their skills, tools and resources were at the moment. The participants became aware of their needs and challenges in order to cope with the demands of ERT. The participants mentioned that they realized they were not fully prepared to get involved in online teaching from one day to the other. However, the participants looked for solutions as they knew that their actions would have an impact on their performance as a teacher and on their students' learning while exercising their autonomy in making decisions. That way, these actions led them to develop resilience through "a set of behaviors over time that reflect the interactions between individuals and their environments, in particular the opportunities for personal growth that are available and accessible" (Ungar, 2012) Likewise, the participants took advantage of the resources and tools around them when the pandemic sent them to work from home.

Dealing with ERT and at the same time keeping themselves and their loved ones safe in the middle of a pandemic made them feel overwhelmed as their answers reported. Emotions have played a relevant role in how the participants learned how to cope with an additional concern given that teaching is considered a stressful profession *per se* as (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016) have affirmed. Therefore, looking for the management of their emotions and pursue a work-life balance looking for their well-being following (Johnson et al., 2014).

Teachers have been considered natural leaders, and they proved they were during ERT. They made the necessary changes to overcome technical and emotional problems in order to lead their students to keep learning. The changes the participants reported were very varied and went from upgrading the internet service they had to organizing themselves in a better way to maximize their teaching performance. This was evident in the participant's responses when they said: "I had to upgrade my internet service" or "I took courses for platform use" or at a more personal level: "I turned my room into a working place" for more comfort.

Once participants became self-aware of their surroundings and their own reality and assessed the situation, they made decisions in order to cope with the challenge, making use of their self-agency. (Keogh et al., 2012) affirmed that a sense of agency in times of challenge can help in understanding the process of resilience.

The participants have proved that resilience lies in a balance between being, feeling and doing. The participants expressed the results of the changing journey into success claims such as: "I am able to do more than what I thought!" or "It works! Teaching language can be done remotely and my students responded well to it." They also evidence their insights and reflections after the initial adjustments: "I am able to change and evolve." Or "It was not as difficult as I expected."

Derived from the interpretation of the participants' answers, a framework for the development of resilience through a common path for English teachers during ERT is proposed as shown in Fig. 2:

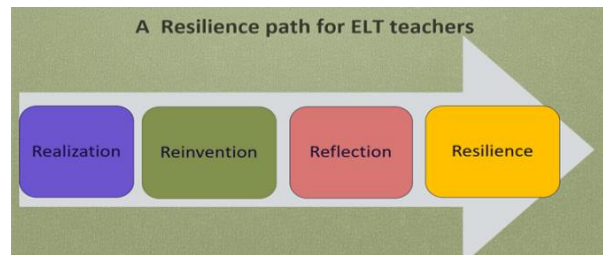


Fig. 2. A Resilience path for English teachers during Emergency Remote Teaching

This figure attempts to visually explain the path language teachers went through during the pandemic. From a realization stage where they could see what changes were needed to make, then a stage where they could reinvent their teaching. After that, teachers could reflect on their actions and changes and finally, they could reach a stage of resilience when they felt more confident and safer as they had developed new abilities and skills.



## CONCLUSION

ERT raised new concerns about teachers at the personal level and professional development, and their search for wellbeing by balancing both aspects of their lives. Critical times can also become a time of personal and professional growth as the participants' answers proved. The shared pattern of the path of resilience evidenced that the participants went from facing the situation, reinventing their role as teachers in front of a screen, assessing the changes, becoming more autonomous, reflecting on the lessons learned and growing in the end. The Mexican and global participants of this study agreed that they all walked through a common path in order to develop resilience during changing and challenging times. In consequence, the chapter proposes a framework of developing resilience in four stages: realization, reinvention, reflection and resilience. By understanding resilience, the actions of teachers can be understood under the lens of their pursuit of wellbeing and professional development. Therefore, it is important to record and do research into teachers' experiences, struggles, achievements and feelings in and outside the classroom in order to inform society and support teachers, and those who are in charge. After all, the language teachers of the study have proved that they are willing to thrive and move forward as humans and professionals, even during a pandemic.

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