American University *of* Armenia

Հայաստանի Ամերիկյան Համալսարան

A Sudden Pedagogical Shift Amid COVID-19: A Case Study of TEFL Students Experiences Transitioning to Online Learning

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Overview

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Introduction

In 2020, an **unexpected** universal mortal virus, forcibly transformed the conventional educational setting into digital learning mode, which brought about several challenges to educational stakeholders, especially teachers and students (Almazova et al., 2020; Chirikov et al., 2020; Klapproth et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020).

Literature Review

Online Learning/Emergency Remote Learning

- "**Why live?**"

- Requires **teacher preparation** such as **coaching programs**

- E-learning **is a choice**

- ERT is a **temporary shift** due to **crisis circumstances.**

- "Emergency remote teaching is an **obligation**".

(Finkelstein, 2006, p.5; Roddy et al., 2017; Palloff & Pratt, 2013; Wortmann et al., 2008; Watts, 2016; Harris & Martin, 2012; Levitz, 2009; Allen, 2021).

(Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020, p.ii).

COVID-19 and its Impact on Students

- Mental health issues
- Increase in academic demands
- Lack of Motivation
- Technological & internet challenges

- Encouraged & willing
- Gave rise to new learning strategies
- Not inferior to the conventional setting
- Affordability

(Aristovnik et al., 2020; Son et al., 2020; Kapasia et al., 2020, p.4; Husseina et al., 2020; Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Krishnapatria, 2020; Aboagye et al., 2020; Mpungose, 2020)

(Rahiem, 2020; Angelova, 2020; Husseina et al., 2020)

COVID-19 and its Impact on Teachers

Negative Impact:

– Intensive work, health concerns , time struggle, distance teaching & separating career from personal lives

– Concerns about class dynamic & lack of verbal and non-verbal interaction

– Teacher burnout

(MacIntyre et al., 2020; Delcker & Ifenthaler, 2020; Sokal et al., 2020)

Positive Impact:

• Collaboration & pleasant atmosphere

• Support from educational leaders & pedagogical technology practice

• Teaching experience

(Delcker & Ifenthaler, 2020; Kaden, 2020)

What does this Mean to Pre-service / Student-Teachers?

☐ Impacted by the pandemic twice as much as they are both students & teachers.

☐ Gap in the literature especially in the Armenian context.

This thesis aims to study the impact of the forced transition to online learning on this particular community of practice.

Purpose of Study

The current study will:

- Shed light on understanding the impact of COVID-19 from the perspectives of student-teachers/pre-service teachers.

- Potential impact for course design and pedagogical approaches when deciding to offer online learning after COVID-19.

- Relevant pedagogical implications will be recommended.

Methodology

Context and Participants

Private university in Armenia within the department of Teaching English as a Foreign Language.
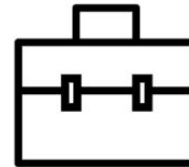
☐ **Three professors**
☐ **43 Survey Respondents**
☐ **18 Student Interviews**

Students' Demographics

Percent Student in Each Demographic Category

MATEFL 1st Year 46.5%	Full-Time Employed 25.6%	Yerevan 69.8%	Married 39.5%	Have Children 27.9%
MATEFL 2nd Year 48.4%	Part-Time Employed 46.5%	Regions 25.6%		
C-TEFL 4.7%		Abroad 4.7%		
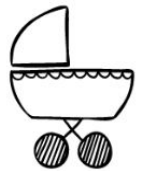
2nd Year Participants	Residence	Background	Taught Online Before COVID-19
Interviewee 1	Yerevan	Parent Employed	✓
Interviewee 2	Region	Single Employed	✗
Interviewee 3	Yerevan	Single Employed	✓
Interviewee 4	Region	Single Employed	✓
Interviewee 5	Yerevan	Single Employed	Language center transitioned online
Interviewee 6	Yerevan	Single Employed	✗
Interviewee 18	Region	Single Unemployed	✗

Research Questions

RQ1 How were TEFL students' attitudes towards the forced transition initially, and how might it have changed throughout the semesters?

RQ2 What possible challenges TEFL students might have experienced during the forced online learning, and how might they have coped with the situation?

RQ3 What are TEFL students' perceptions regarding online practical learning and future career development?

Design & Sampling

Design

- Instrumental case study within a specific educational department
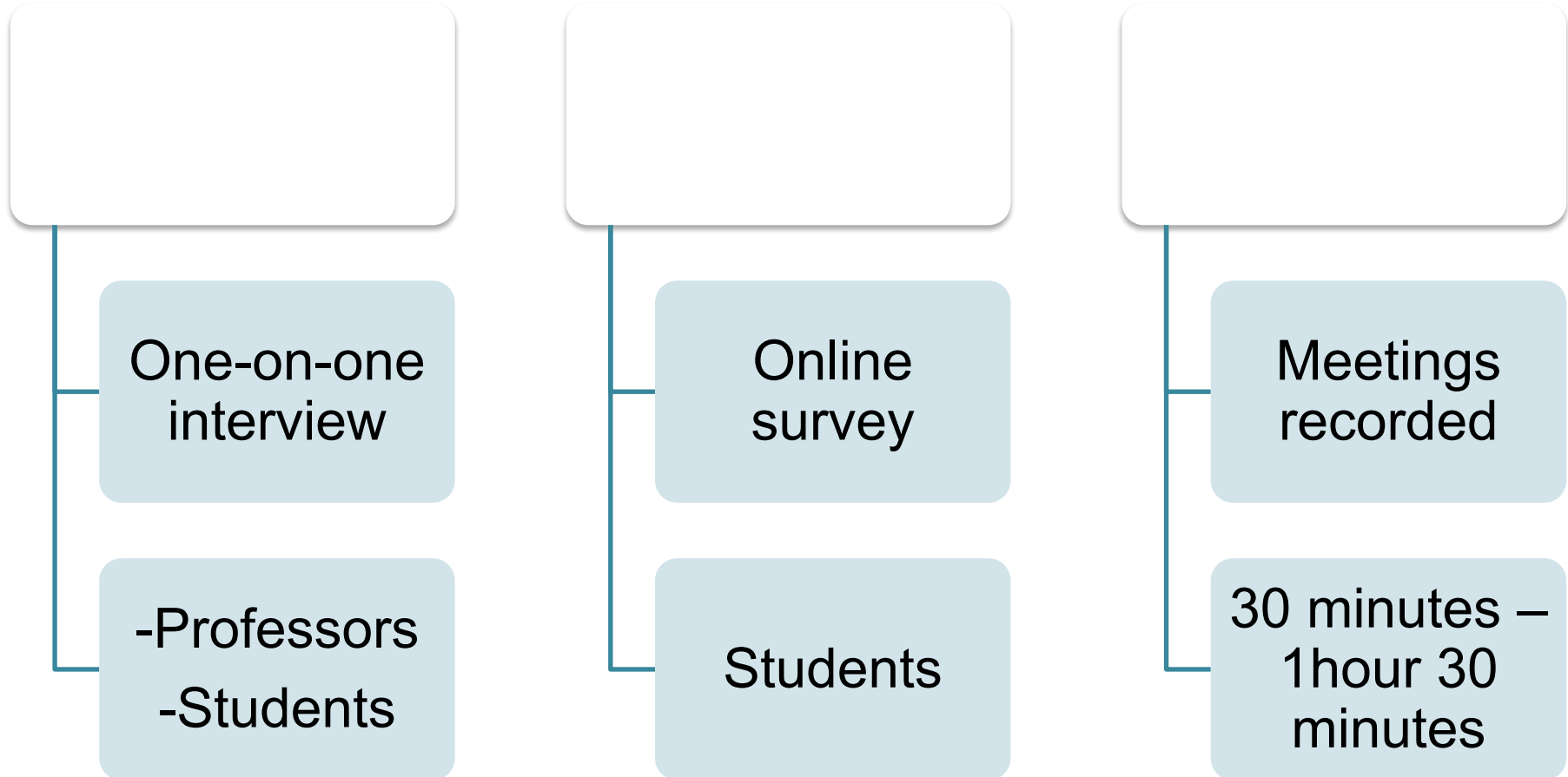- Incorporating qualitative & quantitative data

Sampling

- Non-probability purposive & snowball

Data collection

One-on-one interview

-Professors
-Students

Online survey

Students

Meetings recorded

30 minutes – 1hour 30 minutes

Data Analysis

Quantitative

- *Microsoft Excel and SPSS Software*

Qualitative

- *Inductive approach*
- *Interviews*
  - ❖ *Transcribed*
  - ❖ *Coded*
  - ❖ *Categorized*

Reliability

- o *External researcher reviewed the results section.*
- o *Expert opinion in all phases*

Major Findings
Results

RQ1 How were TEFL students' attitudes towards the forced transition initially, and how might it have changed throughout the semesters?

Crosstabulation			Where do you live?			Total
			Abroad	Regions	Yerevan	
How do you feel overall about online education?	Very dissatisfied	Count	0	0	2	2
		%	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%	4.7%
	Dissatisfied	Count	0	1	4	5
		%	0.0%	9.1%	13.3%	11.6%
	Neutral	Count	0	6	9	15
		%	0.0%	54.5%	30.0%	34.9%
	Satisfied	Count	2	2	12	16
		%	100.0%	18.2%	40.0%	37.2%
	Very satisfied	Count	0	2	3	5
		%	0.0%	18.2%	10.0'%	11.6%
Total		Count	2	11	30	43
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Students' Responses

Response – Interviewee 1

"This was not what I wanted my studies to be like; I really wanted to feel like I'm a student again".

"I am really content and pleased with the quality that we do, I know with some professors, it wouldn't even change if we were on campus".

Persistence

Interviewee 8

"If I drop out, I am sure I will regret it, but if I continue, I will never regret it; I am not carefree, so I think that's what's helping me stay dedicated, but it's like torture".

Interviewee 16

"I try to keep myself motivated by trying to think that it will be over very soon".

Benefits & Drawbacks

Online presentations

Interviewee 6

"When I was doing presentations during offline classes, I was shaking almost. Online, I feel so comfortable".

Interviewee 8

"I am a worse communicator…I was shocked when somebody told me that you have good presentation skills, no it's just that I am alone in the room".

Lectures via device

Interviewee 5

"I saw everything very clear [on the screen]. During offline, sometimes you don't see the slide".

Interviewee 4

"I can just tune off and not even pay attention, it's very difficult for me".

Success of Online Classes

Interviewee 2

"You go to the breakout room and you call this person and there is nobody".

Interviewee 7

"It doesn't matter if I go to classes [offline] listen to the same thing or attending online"

Interviewee 4

"They [professors] allocate too much time for the group. Sometimes, we just finish early and it's just a waste of time".

Interviewee 17

"It can't be completely done, especially practical things, you're doing online, how can you achieve some good results?".

Student choice

Interviewee 3

"For this university, offline is a better option, because the classes, the atmosphere, everything was perfect in-person".

Interviewee 7

"Online completely, it's comfortable for me, because I have kids, if I go offline now, it will mix up all my schedule and plans".

Interviewee 9

"Online takes everything that education is for and what does it leave? Some lectures? Some materials?

Interviewee 15

"I would prefer the online version; I live in the region, so it's more convenient now to take it online".

Recommendation to take online classes

Interviewee 4

"During offline, I was more concentrated [when watching videos], so it's because of the concentration, the overall quality of the lessons".

Interviewee 11

"If they want to, of course. It would be nice for them to have the option to choose not the way it was for us".
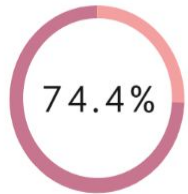
Interviewee 8

"It's working for some, but it's just not working for others, so it depends".

Interviewee 16

"If their choice would be either half-half or all the classes online, I would recommend half-half".

CHALLENGES FACED DURING ONLINE LEARNING

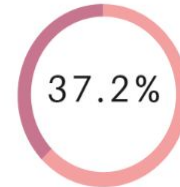*Percent Students Faced with Challenges*

74.4% INTERNET

51.2% DISTRACTIONS

48.8% STRESS/ANXIETY
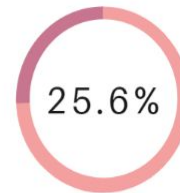
37.2% MOTIVATION

32.6% PRACTICUM / INTERNSHIP

30.2% DEVICE

25.6% PARTICIPATION

25.6% UNCOMFORTABLE ENVIRONMENT

Challenges, Impact, & Coping Strategies

Time Management:

"Sometimes, you don't manage to understand what's happening, when is day, when is night"

(Interviewee 1).

Suitable Device:

"I couldn't even manage to do presentations, or take part in activities, & it was making me very nervous & angry"

(Interviewee 6).

Unsuitable Environment:

"There are always background noises, so I always mute myself"

(Interviewee 13).

Poor Internet:

"I don't get satisfied with the answer because of the internet; I don't get enough information as I am supposed to"
(Interviewee 5).

Distractions:

"Sometimes, knowing that my family is hanging out in the room next to me, I want to be there more than sitting here and taking my class" *(Interviewee 9).*

Participation and Motivation

Crosstabulation			Which program are you in?			Total
			C-TEFL	MATEFL 1st year	MATEFL 2nd year	
How often do you participate during online classes?	Rarely	Count	0	1	3	4
		%	0.0%	5.0%	14.3%	9.3%
	Sometimes	Count	0	8	9	17
		%	0.0%	40.0%	42.9%	39.5%
	Often	Count	1	2	6	9
		%	50.0%	10.0%	28.6%	20.9%
	Always	Count	1	9	3	13
		%	50.0%	45.0%	14.3%	30.2%
Total		Count	2	20	21	43
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Motivation

"I know sometimes I have this feeling that I don't understand why I am doing this and whether it is worth it or not" (Interviewee 11).

"I know why I need this education and diploma, so I just do what I have to do" (Interviewee 10).

Participation

"The moment I turn it off [camera] and I mute myself, I just lose it, I'm no longer there" (Interviewee 9).

"I think offline classes in general will give me a better chance to speak because at least I am heard when I speak" (Interviewee 17).

Workload

Cross-tabulation			Which program are you in?			Total
			C-TEFL	MATEFL 1st year	MATEFL 2nd year	
How has university workload been?	Average	Count	1	7	10	18
		%	50.0%	35.0%	47.6%	41.9%
	Above average	Count	1	12	7	20
		%	50.0%	60.0%	33.3%	46.5%
	Far above average	Count	0	1	4	5
		%	0.0%	5.0%	19.0%	11.6%
Total		Count	2	20	21	43
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Workload & Fulfilling Responsibilities

Summary of Coping Strategies	
2nd year students	**1st year students**
Terrible sleep schedule Feeling responsible Approaching deadline Satisfying instructors Desire to learn Planning	Staying up all night Pushing oneself Working with a friend Feeling of responsibility Planning

"When you're at home, time flies so fast, it appears as if you're overloaded" (*Interviewee 6*).

"Sometimes we have almost 200 pages to read.
We just mix the material" (*Interviewee 12*).

Classmates

"I phase out a lot when I have to hear other people [online]. Offline, I would've paid more attention" (Interviewee 4).

"I like to see people, I like to be with people" (Interviewee 10).

Professors

"Offline office hours is stressful, I wait for that time to ask and run from the office" (Interviewee 3).

"That's not the meaning of communication [asynchronous]; sometimes, you have a question and you need the answer" (Interviewee 8).

Mental Health

Cross-tabulation			D1 Which program are you in?			Total
			C-TEFL	MATEFL 1st year	MATEFL 2nd year	
How has your mental health been during this time of crisis?	Very poor	Count	0	3	4	7
		%	0.0%	15.0%	19.0%	**16.3%**
	Poor	Count	1	3	4	8
		%	50.0%	15.0%	19.0%	**18.6%**
	Fair	Count	1	10	7	18
		%	50.0%	50.0%	33.3%	**41.9%**
	Good	Count	0	4	5	9
		%	0.0%	20.0%	23.8%	**20.9%**
	Very good	Count	0	0	1	1
		%	0.0%	0.0%	4.8%	**2.3%**
Total		Count	2	20	21	43
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

"I wish this whole experience was more convenient for people who may have any mental health issues" (Interviewee 11).

"I always have this public speaking fear, anxiety, but right now I feel less stressed [online]" (Interviewee 5).

"It's not a good feeling to be stressed and have a headache 24/7" (Interviewee 13).

"Learning helped me overcome those mental issues that I had; it helped me fulfil my time" (Interviewee 12).

"You cannot force everybody to participate unless the activities are interesting for them" *(Interviewee 6).*

"No one comes & judges your body language, because they can only see like half of you" (Interviewee 11).

"In real classroom, you have different approaches" *(Interviewee 9).*

"I had my own group & I felt really comfortable; I didn't feel the challenges" (Interviewee 14).

Career development

"During offline classes, you really need to have classroom management skills. You don't get that experience online" (*Interviewee 2*).

"If I didn't have offline work, it would have been very bad" (*Interviewee 10*).

"For face-to-face, I'm not ready, maybe if I have some training I will be, but for now not yet" (*Interviewee 3*).

"My teaching quality will suffer [offline], because it's mainly focused on online teaching" (*Interviewee 16*).

Choice as a Teacher	Number of Participants
Offline	6
Online	3
Both	8
Unsure	1

Interviewee 14: *"I'd definitely choose blended teaching myself. Currently I have both offline and online classes, and I think that gives a choice to my students".*

Interviewee 5: *"I started loving teaching online, it's become my passion".*
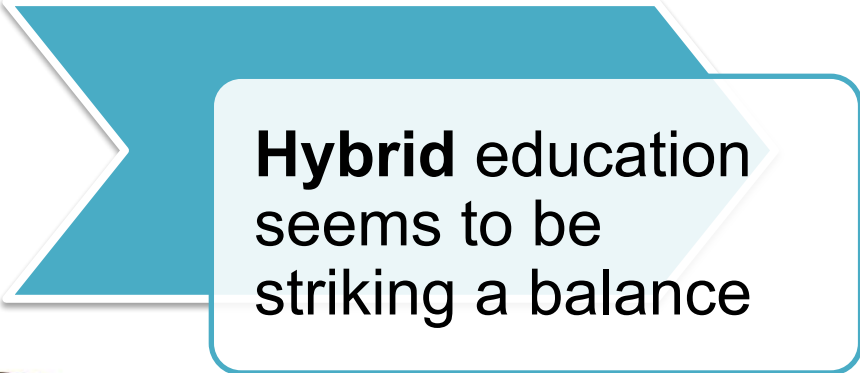
Discussion – RQ1

Education remained of high-quality

Satisfaction & preference varied significantly

❑ A significant number of graduates **regarded** online education and the possibilities it imparted **highly**.

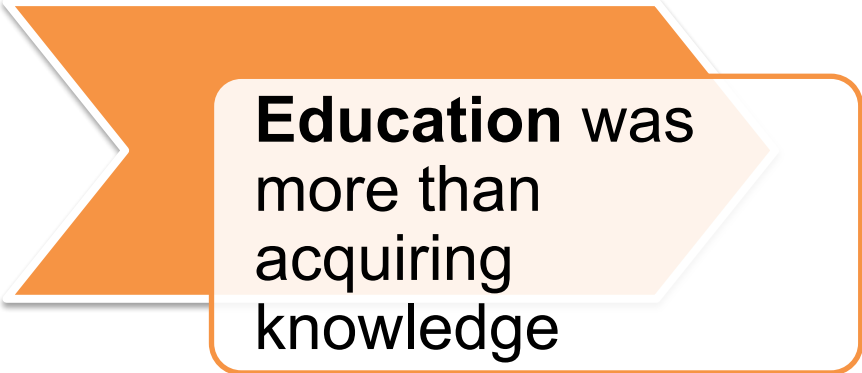❑ Others were **frustrated**, for the transition should have been **temporary**.

Discussion – RQ1

❑ **Success did not depend on the** type of **setting**, but on the courses & quality of the presented content.

–Virtual classroom **decreased** public speaking and language skills.

Hybrid education seems to be striking a balance

Education was more than acquiring knowledge

Discussion – RQ1

Determination Reasons

- **Wanting to graduate;**
- **Receiving financial aid;**
- **University admission;**
- **Unexpected future;**
- **Avoiding feelings of regret;**
- **Acceptance of the status quo;**
- **Hope to return to campus.**

- **Professors were mindful** established a warm atmosphere.

- Some students might need further means or support in order **to feel comfortable approaching professors**.

Discussion – RQ2

Technical issues:

- Frustration & disappointment
- Digital divide

Workload varied between semesters & courses/ professors

**Students' lifestyles may have become more demanding**

Discussion – RQ2

- Online setting in general limited **participation.**

- While some students were constantly involved, others were not, due to diverse physical and emotional factors.

- **Camera's** function was significantly interconnected to willingness for participation and concentration level.

- **Distraction** was an inseparable part of the online setting.

Discussion – RQ2

Motivation / Multiple factors besides offline/ online
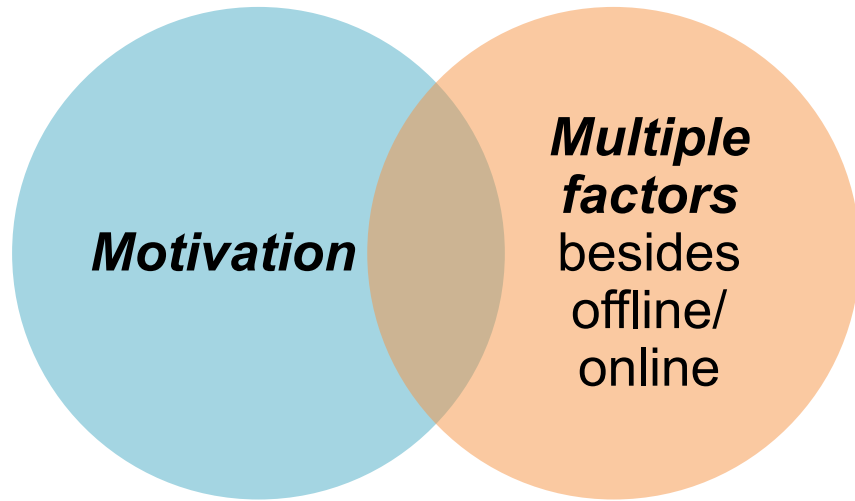
- Online setting was **reviving** & **exciting** for some students.

❖ In many instances, it **dropped motivation** & forced high-achieving students to accomplish tasks out of their feeling of responsibility.

Discussion – RQ2

Provided:

-Safety & freedom for many

-Escape for some

Caused:

Unhealthy amount of antisocial behavior & psychological distress

•Many gradually **recovered** after starting to teach in the conventional setting once again.

Some require psychological attention

- **Anxiety, stress, depression**
- **Panic attacks**
- **Breakdowns**
- **Overthinking**
- **Reconsideration of educational choices**

Discussion – RQ3

The comfort & technological opportunities boosted many student-teachers' confidence.
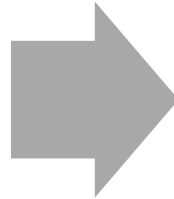
Others experienced **self-doubt, stress, demotivation, & anger**.

Discussion – RQ3

limited

post-graduation
face-to-face
classrooms.

inability to teach offline

Limitations

and

Delimitations

Delimitations

Limitations

- TEFL Master's and Certificate programs.

- Confined educational setting to the selected private University.

Implications & Recommendations

Pedagogical Implications

Ensure that **all learners have equitable access to online learning** as well as adequate learning resources.

Arranging seminars for the **development of self-regulation skills** in parallel with online classes is necessary.

It is advised that each professor holds **monthly in-person meetings with students individually** to establish rapport.

Conduct **mental health workshops for TEFL groups** before returning to campus to reduce social anxiety induced by the implications of COVID-19.

Provide **prior training and/or simultaneous assistance** to inexperienced preservice teachers.

Recommendation for Future Research

❖ Quantitative case studies **include all TEFL students**

❖ **Periodic mental health assessment studies should be conducted** as students try to cope with life's continuously changing circumstances, for its substantial impact on learning.

❖ **Study the feasibility of the emerging non-traditional learning methodologies** in teaching English in Armenian universities and schools.

❖ Investigate **learners' expectations versus the long-term reality** in terms of learning objectives, online internship success and career-readiness.

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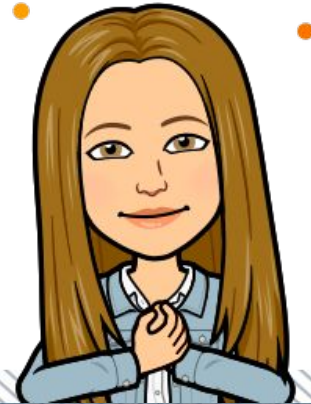# References

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Acknowledgements

o Dr. Lori Fredricks *(Adviser)*

o Dr. Irshat Madyarov

o TEFL Professors

o Research Participants *(Professors & Students)*

o Family, Partner, & Friends

Questions & Comments

Thank
you!