



# Technology Use in EFL Preservice Teachers' Perceptions and Visions

Eunjeong Park

Sunchon National University, South Korea

## Abstract

*It is increasingly important for teachers to adapt to changes in teaching and learning. Although reimagining teacher education is constantly needed, research on prospective teachers' perceptions of teaching English is lacking. To address this gap, a qualitative study was conducted, drawing on sociocultural perspectives of teachers and teaching. The study aimed to provide insights into how preservice English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers envision ELT in the current era, based on their perceptions, experiences, and reflections. The study involved 35 EFL preservice teachers from South Korea, and data included interviews, observations, and fieldnotes. The data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis, leading to three major findings. Firstly, the participants emphasized the importance of learner-centered teaching, interactions with students, individualization, and the use of technology in their perceptions and envisioning of ELT. Secondly, they highlighted the significant role of teachers in ensuring effective language teaching. Lastly, the participants expressed the need for comprehensive preparation in teacher education for preservice teachers. This study implies that teacher education should address the future prospects of EFL preservice teachers in the 21st century.*

**Keywords:** EFL preservice teachers, teacher education, technology use

## 1. Introduction

It is crucial to envision and re-frame English language teaching (ELT) in the post-pandemic era. Therefore, teacher educators and institutional stakeholders are assured to inform about curriculum decisions to adequately prepare EFL preservice teachers for the post-pandemic period. Nevertheless, only a limited number of studies [1-4] have specifically focused on the perceptions and reflections of preservice teachers regarding their teaching and learning experiences. Preservice teachers in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts have expressed a range of emotions and thoughts about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Kim [1] conducted a study that focused on the redesign of an early childhood education preservice teacher education course in Korea during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results showed that the participants had positive responses about using online tools in light of cognitive and emotional development, and online tools are thought of as effective tools for the interaction with children. Karimi et al. [2] investigated the beliefs and challenges of preservice teachers in Iran. The study identified several challenges, such as a lack of instructional capacities of combining theory and practice, professional identity development and construction, and a smooth connection between teacher education programs and higher institutions. Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison [3] also investigated challenges and opportunities of virtual teaching in Chile. The analysis of 27 Chilean EFL preservice teachers' online surveys and interviews showed that the sudden shift to online teaching and the lack of interaction with students affected the professional development of preservice teachers significantly. Hojeij et al.'s (2023) study delves into the experiences of Emirati female preservice teachers who experienced their internship teaching practice in a virtual setting due to the pandemic. This qualitative investigation specifically focused on the management of virtual classrooms. The study involved 18 preservice teachers pursuing their undergraduate degrees in Early Childhood Education at a university in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Findings highlighted that the preservice teachers perceived virtual learning as an advantageous opportunity. However, they encountered a significant challenge as they lacked prior training in managing online classrooms, requiring them to develop their own strategies. It was evident that providing training on the technology used for virtual learning is crucial for both teachers and students to ensure satisfactory learning experiences.

Although these studies shed light on the challenges and constraints faced by preservice teachers in practice, there is still a lack of research on their envisioning of ELT and limited information available on preservice teachers' prospective expertise, envisioning, and preparedness in ELT. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore the envisioning of English language learning and teaching among EFL



preservice teachers, with the goal of establishing a solid paradigmatic perspective in ELT. In particular, preservice teachers play a vital role in implementing and developing ELT in the current era. This study explored how EFL preservice teachers envision ELT, guided by one major research question: How did EFL preservice teachers perceive and envision ELT in the post-pandemic era?

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Context and participants**

This research took place within the context of the teacher education course at a Korean national university. The study involved a group of thirty-five preservice teachers who were in their junior and senior years and were enrolled in this course. Fifteen participants (seven women and eight men) in age from 21 to 29 years old volunteered to be interviewed for the study. It is worth noting that all participants were pursuing a major in English language education with the goal of becoming English language teachers.

### **2.2 Data collection and analysis**

Data for this study included semi-structured interviews, observations, and fieldnotes. It was designed to be an open-ended interview, in which the participants could express their opinions and thoughts [5]. With a crucial role in gaining insights into the preservice teachers' perspectives, ideas, opinions, and perceptions on the themes, semi-structured interviews were performed with each of the participants, either in person or via phone. The interviews lasted between 20 and 60 minutes (an average duration of 30 minutes). The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim from audio recordings. Interview questions focused on two main themes related to ELT: (1) envisioning of ELT and (2) the functions of English language teachers. The data analysis for this study was conducted through a qualitative and inductive approach. The purpose of the analysis was to discover recurring themes and/or patterns, which then were grouped together and categorized relative to the given topic.

## **3. Findings and Discussion**

The participants held varying opinions regarding the visions of educational development and changes in ELT. Firstly, learner-centered teaching was emphasized. Some participants asserted that tasks served as motivators for learners, helping them focus on instruction and increasing their participation. Specifically, challenging tasks were deemed efficient in activating students' existing knowledge structures and engaging them in learning a language. One participant described her experience developing an online quiz for peers in their language class. This indicates a shift towards developing task-based instruction across various modes, including online, offline, and mobile, as a result of the pandemic. It is vital to ensure the development of effective teaching activities and materials by language teachers as well as collaboration with other educators.

Secondly, they unanimously agreed on the importance of interactions between teachers and students in ELT. They recognized that interaction and communication play a crucial role in language teaching and learning. Several participants emphasized the significance of interactions between students and teachers, teachers with other teachers, and students with their peers.

Thirdly, the theme of individualization was revealed from the interview data. Korean EFL learners were forced to handle their own learning at home because of the pandemic. Learning online encouraged the students to be more independent and self-regulatory. Consequently, the participants believed that they should provide instruction that allows for self-regulated and individualized learning. Moreover, they predicted that the post-pandemic era would bring more personalized learning to their students and stressed the importance of language teachers being prepared for a learner-centered, individualized curriculum and instruction. To achieve this, a key element of ELT should be the implementation of pair and small group work.

The participants in this study reached a consensus on the significance of acquiring technological expertise and serving as facilitators, learning partners, and mentors. They emphasized the importance of learner-centered teaching, interaction and communication, individualization, and effective use of technology in English language teaching (ELT). Therefore, it is crucial to promote the professional development of preservice teachers to empower them as active contributors in ELT. This ensures an effective response to emergencies and encourages teachers to engage in critical thinking, planning, decision-making, action-taking, and expertise sharing within the classroom environment [6-8]. For the enhancement of pedagogical and instructional skills and knowledge in ELT, preservice teachers can benefit from in-service teachers' coaching and mentoring [9]. The use of practicums or student teaching to train preservice teachers is an effective and empowering method for developing professionalism in them. The practice-based field experience equips preservice teachers to navigate



uncertain circumstances post-pandemic [10]. Moreover, it is essential to provide preservice teachers with simulations of microteaching opportunities in order to prepare them to be competent English language teachers.

Moreover, collaboration and cooperation play a vital role for prospective ELT teachers. Developing a sense of community is extremely important in the post-pandemic era. It was emphasized by the participants in this study that it is essential for preservice teachers to interact and collaborate with students and other teachers, as doing so enhances their sense of autonomy and agency and makes them feel empowered and confident. To foster innovation and expand the field of EFL, preservice and in-service teachers can share instructional resources and ideas [11-12]. Additionally, preservice teachers should strive to develop their communication skills by collaborating and interacting with students using various online and offline modes of communication in the 21st century.

#### **4. Conclusion**

It should be noted that participants in this study provided insight into the way they envision ELT, the function of teachers, and teacher education in the post-pandemic period. The pandemic, despite its challenges to all aspects of ELT, offered preservice teachers the opportunity to reflect on the difficulties present in the curriculum, instruction, and educational system. It allowed them to envision new approaches and re-examine ELT in the 21st century. Moreover, the findings highlighted the importance of preservice teachers assuming active roles as agents in the post-pandemic era.

The implications of this research can be viewed from two perspectives. Firstly, teacher education programs need to be reimagined or reconceptualized in the post-pandemic world. The effective utilization of technology and the enhancement of digital literacy emerged as significant concerns for preservice teachers. As a result, teacher education programs should address these concerns, ensuring a smooth transition and preparing preservice teachers to become efficient and effective educators. Furthermore, teacher education should emphasize the importance of achieving goals.

The implementation of language instruction by preservice teachers should be investigated in future research, and how their reflections and thoughts are applied in the classroom. It is essential to examine the practical aspects of their teaching practices. Researchers, educators, and professionals should consider how preservice teachers envision and perceive their futures in the post-pandemic era, promoting further exploration.

#### **References**

- [1] Karimi, F., Fakhri Alamdari, E., & Ahmadian, M. Giving voice to the voiceless: Probing current issues for student teachers in EFL teacher education program in Iran. *Journal of Language and Education*, 2021, 7(2), 140-154. <https://doi.org/10.17323/jle.2021.11113>
- [2] Kim, J. Learning and teaching online during Covid- 19: Experiences of student teachers in an early childhood education practicum. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 2020, 52, 145-158. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-020-00272-6>
- [3] Sepulveda-Escobar, P., & Morrison, A. Online teaching placement during the COVID-19 pandemic in Chile: Challenges and opportunities. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 2020, 43(4), 587-607. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1820981>
- [4] Hojeij, Z., Baroudi, S., & Meda, L. Preservice teachers' experiences with classroom management in the virtual class: a case study approach. *Frontiers in Education*, 2023, 8, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2023.1135763>
- [5] Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.), 2008, Sage.
- [6] Campbell, P. Rethinking professional collaboration and agency in a post-pandemic era. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 2020, 5(3/4), 337-341. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPC-06-2020-0033>
- [7] Cho, S., & Clark-Gareca, B. Approximating and innovating field experiences of ESOL preservice teachers: The effects of COVID-19 and school closures. *TESOL Journal*, 2020, 11(3), 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.548>
- [8] Christensen, R., & Alexander, C. Preparing K-12 schools for a pandemic before it occurs. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 2020, 28(2), 261-272.
- [9] Trikoilis, D., & Papanastasiou, E.C. (2020). The potential of research for professional development in isolated settings during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 28(2), 295-300.



- [10] Bacevich, A. Revising “field experience” in the pandemic period and beyond. *Mid-Western Educational Researcher*, 2021, 33(1), 59-70.
- [11] Christensen, R., & Alexander, C. Preparing K-12 schools for a pandemic before it occurs. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 2020, 28(2), 261-272.
- [12] Gudmundsdottir, G. B., & Hathaway, D. M. “We always make it work” : Teachers’ agency in the time of crisis. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 2020, 28(2), 239-250.