

Navigating Online Learning: Insights into Challenges and Self-Regulated Learning Among Ecuadorian Pre-service EFL Educators**Navegando el aprendizaje en línea: perspectivas sobre desafíos y el aprendizaje autorregulado entre futuros docentes de Inglés Ecuatorianos***Amanda Moreira Baquerizo & Solange E. Guerrero***PUNTO CIENCIA.****Julio - diciembre, V°6 - N°2; 2025****Recibido:** 02-11-2025**Aceptado:** 26-11-2025**Publicado:** 30-12-2025**PAIS**

- Ecuador, Milagro
- Ecuador, Milagro

INSTITUCION

- Universidad Estatal de Milagro
- Universidad Estatal de Milagro

CORREO:

- ✉ amoreirab3@unemi.edu.ec
- ✉ sguerreror3@unemi.edu.ec

ORCID:

- 🌐 <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6549-5413>
- 🌐 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5619-3695>

FORMATO DE CITA APA.

Moreira, A. & Guerrero, S. (2025). Navigating Online Learning: Insights into Challenges and Self-Regulated Learning Among Ecuadorian Pre-service EFL Educators. *Revista G-ner@ndo*, V°6 (N°2). Pág. 3171 – 3187.

Abstract

This research explores the obstacles faced by Ecuadorian pre-service EFL instructors in an online education setting and techniques they employ to manage these challenges. A mixed-methods questionnaire was administered to 150 individuals at a university in Ecuador. Results reveal a twofold scenario: although participants show organizational and cognitive Self-Regulated Learning abilities, they encounter considerable difficulties in the emotional aspect. Their main challenges involve meaningful personal engagement, difficulty maintaining motivation and focus, and irregular follow-through on their carefully designed plans. This trend indicates that pre-service teachers understand how to manage themselves but are hindered by the situational seclusion present in the adaptable online setting. This study adds to the literature by highlighting an essential demand for instructional intervention that goes beyond mere technical and language education. Institutions must prioritize integrating explicit Self-Regulated Learning instruction into the curriculum, focusing directly on emotional regulation, motivational maintenance, and fostering a robust sense of community and peer mentoring to fully equip future educators with the self-regulatory competence essential for their professional success.

Keywords: Pre-service EFL teachers; Self-Regulated Learning; Ecuador; Online learning.

Resumen

Esta investigación explora los obstáculos que enfrentan los futuros docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) ecuatorianos en un entorno de educación en línea y las técnicas que emplean para gestionar estos desafíos. Se administró un cuestionario de métodos mixtos a 150 individuos en una universidad de Ecuador. Los resultados revelan un escenario doble: aunque los participantes muestran habilidades organizativas y cognitivas de Aprendizaje Autorregulado (Self-Regulated Learning - SRL), encuentran dificultades considerables en el aspecto emocional. Sus principales desafíos incluyen un compromiso personal significativo, dificultad para mantener la motivación y el enfoque, y un seguimiento irregular de sus planes cuidadosamente diseñados. Esta tendencia indica que los futuros docentes comprenden cómo gestionarse, pero se ven obstaculizados por el aislamiento situacional presente en el entorno en línea adaptable. Este estudio contribuye a la literatura al destacar una demanda esencial de intervención educativa que va más allá de la mera formación técnica y lingüística. Las instituciones deben priorizar la integración de instrucción explícita de Aprendizaje Autorregulado en el currículo, centrándose directamente en la regulación emocional, el mantenimiento motivacional y el fomento de un fuerte sentido de comunidad y mentoría entre pares para equipar completamente a los futuros educadores con la competencia autorreguladora esencial para su éxito profesional.

Palabras clave: Futuros profesores de inglés; Aprendizaje Autorregulado; Ecuador; Aprendizaje en línea.

Introduction

The evolution and integration of technology in higher education have increased over the last decades, in this way, reshaping global pedagogical practices (Heri et al., 2022). As a result, online learning has rapidly become a significant delivery method for various educational programs. An example of that is the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher education majors due to their flexibility and expanded access (Suherman, 2022). For future educators, this digital adoption is an opportunity to access further education. However, it sometimes presents challenges, since this modality expects students to demonstrate linguistic, pedagogical, and digital competence as well as self-directed learning skills to thrive in complex virtual settings (Sadeck et al., 2023). This is especially critical for pre-service EFL teachers, who study to lead future technology-enhanced classrooms (Taghizadeh & Basirat, 2024). Their success in digital learning environments links to the crucial role of Self-Regulated Learning (SRL).

Self-Regulated Learning in Digital Contexts

SRL is defined as an active and constructive process (Kirby & Merchant, 2020) to monitor cognition, motivation, and behavior to accomplish educational goals (Zimmerman, 2000, as cited in Khalil, 2021). It is widely considered a critical predictor of success in online learning due to the relative lack of external structure in virtual environments (Kurt & Tomak, 2022; Özdemir & Önal, 2021).

Successful online EFL learners engage in a variety of SRL strategies. These are time management, environmental structuring, self-evaluation, and peer-to-peer communication to adapt to the flexible virtual classrooms (Ganieva et al., 2020; Mahmud & German, 2021). Furthermore, SRL is intrinsically linked to motivational factors such as self-efficacy. It is the belief in one's capacity to successfully execute the required learning actions (Kaptanoğlu & Kavanoz, 2024). Students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to set challenging goals, persist through difficulties, and engage more actively in the

learning process (Uçar & Bozkaya, 2016). The need for learners to actively maintain and restore their working attitudes further emphasizes the importance of emotional and motivational self-regulation (Dettori et al., 2006). For the teaching profession, SRL is an academic skill. Likewise, it is essential for the realities of the 21st-century classroom, leading to the argument that pre-service teacher training must intentionally integrate and explicitly teach these self-regulatory skills (Sadeck et al., 2023).

Challenges Faced by Pre-service EFL Teachers in Online Learning Environments

Nonetheless the opportunities, pre-service teachers encounter hurdles in online modalities. These difficulties tend to be more pronounced in the pedagogical and psychological domains than in purely technical ones (Heri et al., 2022; Taghizadeh & Basirat, 2024). The most common difficulties focus on a lack of meaningful interpersonal interaction (Suherman, 2022). Many pre-service teachers report struggling to maintain motivation, feeling isolated, and reduced collaborative practice, reflecting a systemic issue in fostering community in virtual spaces (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Taghizadeh & Basirat, 2024).

Truong Hong Ngoc (2023) and Saleh & Meccawy (2022) highlight that instructors also report difficulty in adapting traditional teaching methods and in promoting metacognitive practices, such as self-evaluation and peer feedback, among students in online courses. This emphasizes a critical deficit in preparation for the specialized pedagogical skills required to manage and support SRL in digital learning environments (Özdemir & Önal, 2021). The mandatory shift to online learning also emphasized the widespread need for greater institutional support to mitigate psychological stress and technical barriers (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020).

Addressing the Gap

While the literature establishes the importance of SRL (Khalil, 2021) and documents the prevalent challenges of online EFL education globally (Saleh & Meccawy, 2022; Heri et al., 2022), a crucial gap persists in research connecting these two constructs within specific educational contexts. Existing investigations often generalize findings across diverse contexts, overlooking the unique structural and cultural factors that shape student behavior in specific settings.

Specifically, there is insufficient evidence detailing the actual, practical SRL strategies that pre-service EFL teachers in Ecuadorian public universities employ to overcome their self-identified challenges. It is important to understand these strategic responses. The capacity for reflection, autonomy, and professional identity formation is influenced by the ability to manage learning in their specific digital space successfully (Sadeck et al., 2023).

Objective and Research Questions

The principal goal of this study is to identify and characterize the primary challenges encountered by future EFL educators in an online teacher preparation program, as well as the specific self-regulated learning strategies they utilize to manage and overcome these difficulties. To accomplish that purpose, the following research questions guided the research:

- What are the most common online learning challenges perceived by pre-service EFL teachers?
 - What self-regulated learning and study strategies do they utilize to address these challenges?
-

Methods and Materials

Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional research design supported by a survey-based mixed-methods approach. This provided a broad view of the challenges students commonly encountered and the strategies they reported using.

Sampling Approach

Participants were pre-service EFL teachers enrolled in an online teacher education program at a public university in Ecuador. A convenience, non-probabilistic sampling strategy was selected because the participants were readily accessible and voluntarily agreed to participate.

A total of 150 pre-service teachers completed the survey. They self-identified as follows: Female: 71.3% ($n = 107$), Male: 27.3% ($n = 41$), Prefer not to say: 0.7% ($n = 1$), Nonbinary: 0.7% ($n = 1$). Although not representative of the broader population, participants offered diverse perspectives about online learning.

Instruments

Data were gathered using a self-administered questionnaire developed in Google Forms. The instrument was composed of multiple sections addressing the core research objective and was administered entirely in English. The instrument consisted of dichotomous, multiple-choice, and open-ended items, as well as Likert-scale questions. The questions addressed participants' perceived challenges in online learning, the strategies they used to manage them, and their self-regulated learning practices.

Data collection and analysis procedures

The survey link was distributed to all participants via institutional email. Participation was voluntary, and responses were collected anonymously. Google Forms automatically compiled the submitted data. After that, all closed-ended items were exported to Microsoft Excel for analysis. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were calculated and used to generate bar and pie charts.

Responses to the open-ended items were subjected to thematic content analysis. Initial codes were developed from recurring ideas and then consolidated into broader themes. The frequency of each theme was incorporated into the quantitative results. This quantizing process ensured that the qualitative insights expressed in students' own words were represented within the overall descriptive findings.

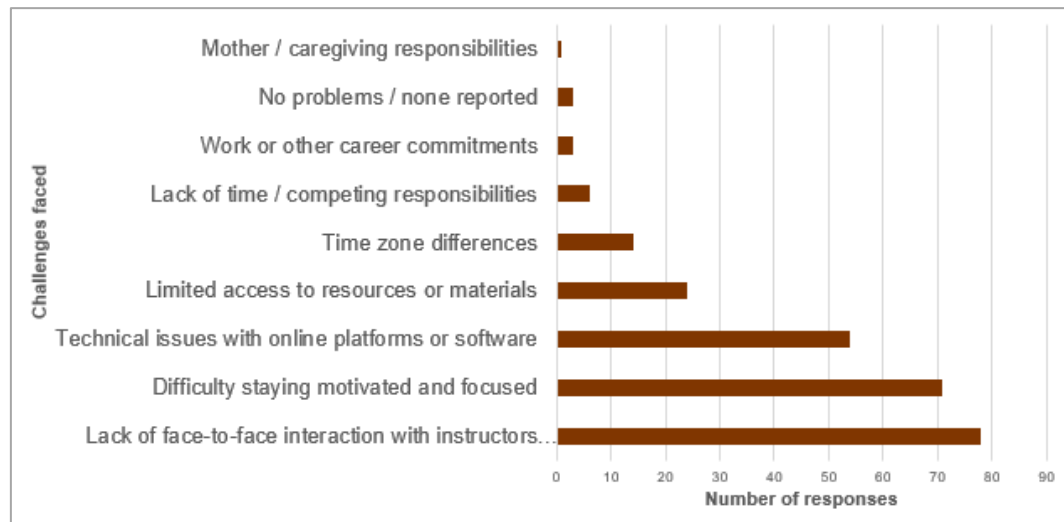
Results analysis

This study analyzed the responses of 150 pre-service EFL teachers regarding their experiences in an online learning environment at a public university in Ecuador. The findings are organized into five distinct sections that collectively provide a comprehensive view of the data. It is important to note that the presented results are interpreted solely within the context of the participant group. Besides, they do not allow for the generalization of experiences across the entire student population. However, these insights are significant for informing future research and educational practices.

Section 1: Identifying the Challenges

Pre-service teachers overwhelmingly identified the absence of meaningful interpersonal interaction as their principal difficulty (See Figure 1) in online learning. Nearly as notable was the struggle to sustain motivation and concentration in a learning context characterized by physical distance and limited social presence.

Figure 1. *Common Challenges Faced by Students in Online Learning*

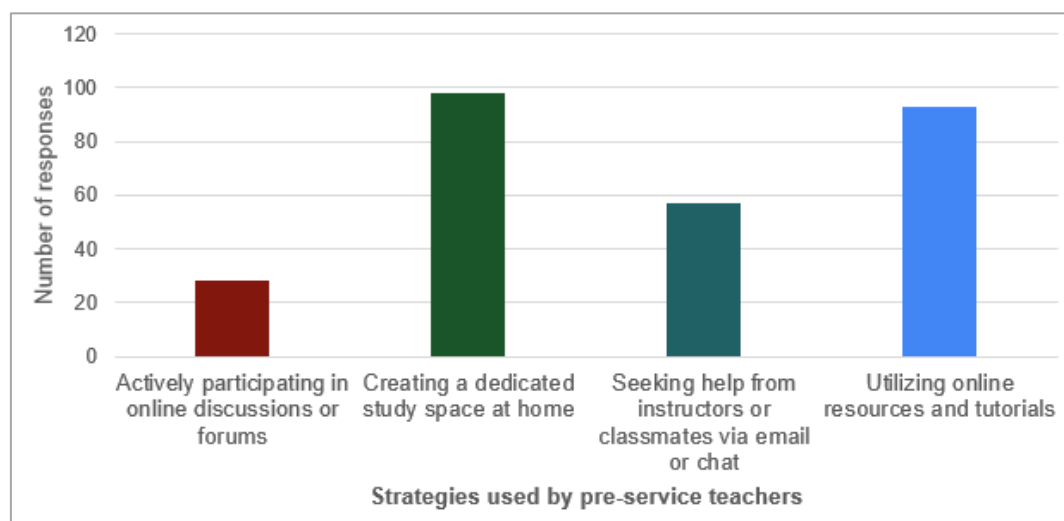


These findings suggest that strengthening engagement, community, and socio-emotional support mechanisms may offer more impactful benefits for this population than interventions that focus solely on technological infrastructure.

Section 2: Solutions and Response to the Challenges

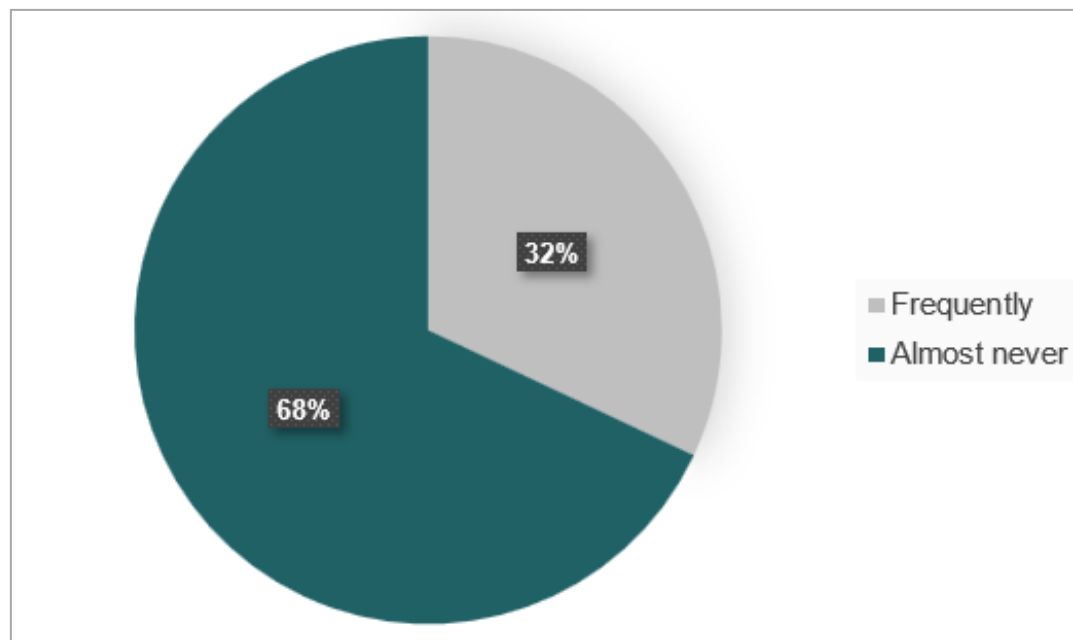
Pre-service teachers actively prioritize solutions that foster independent learning and resource utilization (See Figure 2). The high reported use of creating a dedicated study space and utilizing online resources/tutorials suggests that students recognize and manage the need for self-discipline and external instructional support.

Figure 2. *Strategies Students Use to Overcome Online Learning Challenges*



However, a key contrast emerges when examining interactions with instructors (See Figure 3). While a moderate number seek help via email or chat, a significantly larger percentage reports almost never seeking one-on-one tutoring or clarification sessions.

Figure 3. *Seeking Instructor Support: Frequency of Tutoring or Clarification Sessions*

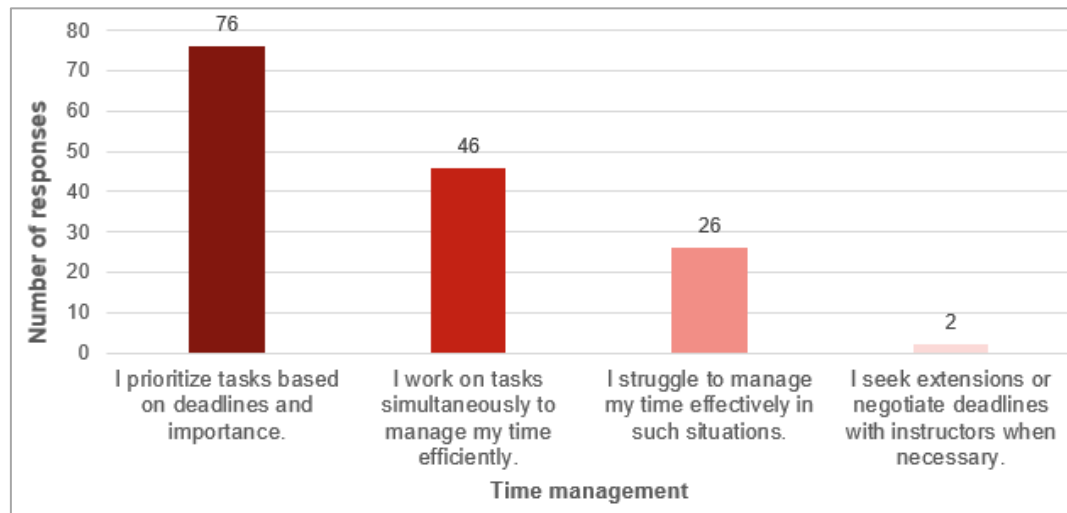


This discrepancy indicates a potential barrier to direct instructor support, suggesting students prefer asynchronous, self-guided solutions over direct, scheduled academic intervention.

Section 3: Self-Regulation (Personal Academic Management)

The majority of participants demonstrate a generally mature approach to time management (See Figure 4). They prioritize tasks based on deadlines and importance. This indicates a baseline level of self-awareness and task management ability necessary for online success.

Figure 4. *Time Management Approaches for Managing Multiple Online Deadlines*



Correspondingly, students' planning habits are highly structured (See Figure), with the most popular responses involving tangible, planning methods like 'to-do lists' and 'allocating dedicated study time'.

Figure 5. *How Students Plan and Organize Their Study Schedules*

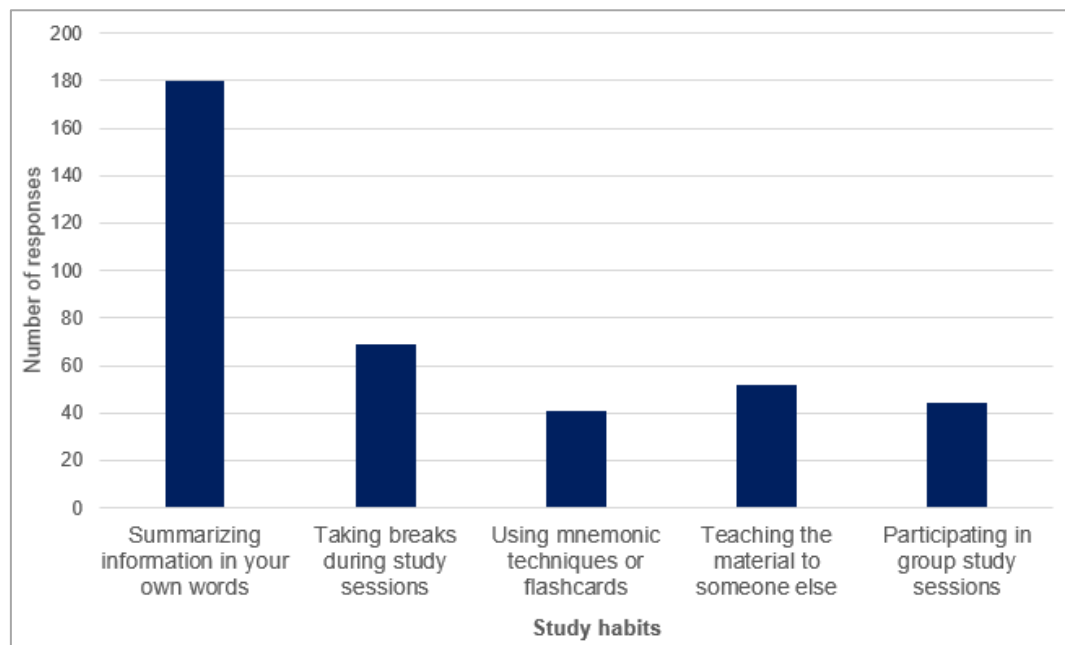


This strong tendency toward formalized scheduling and prioritization suggests participants understand the requirement for proactive academic management to succeed in a flexible online format.

Section 4: Study Behavior

Pre-service teachers favor high-engagement and deeper-processing techniques over passive learning (See Figure 6). The overwhelming dominance of summarizing information in their own words suggests a cognitive strategy focused on synthesis and understanding.

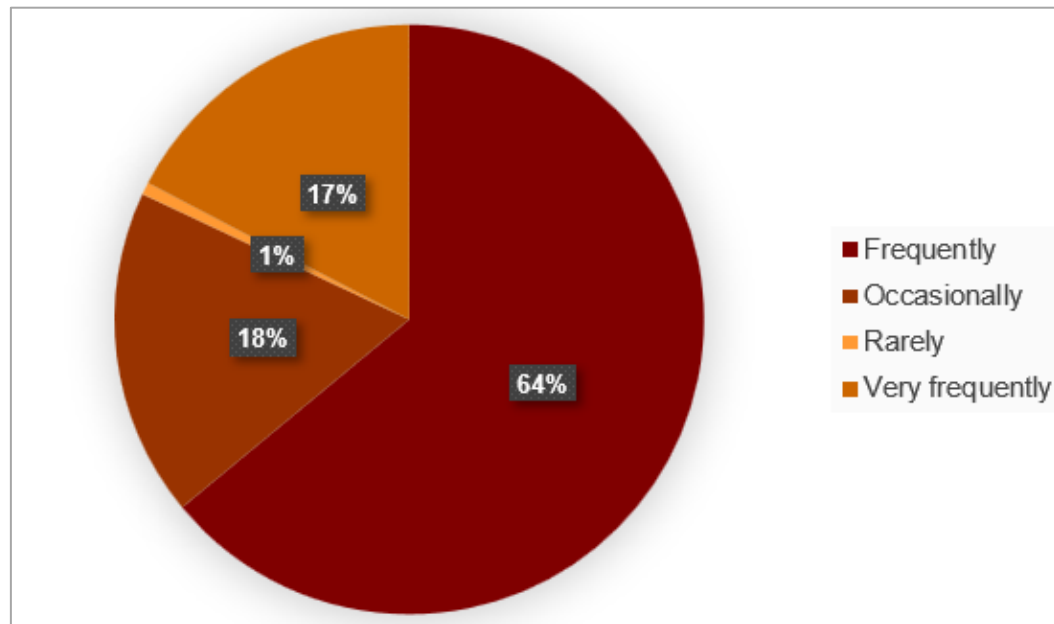
Figure 6. *Study Habits Commonly Applied in Online Learning*



The results in this section demonstrate that participants are applying effective learning strategies that require active construction of meaning.

Furthermore, the high frequency with which pre-service teachers report reviewing course materials reinforces a learning pattern centered on active retrieval and knowledge reinforcement rather than passive, surface-level engagement (See Figure 7).

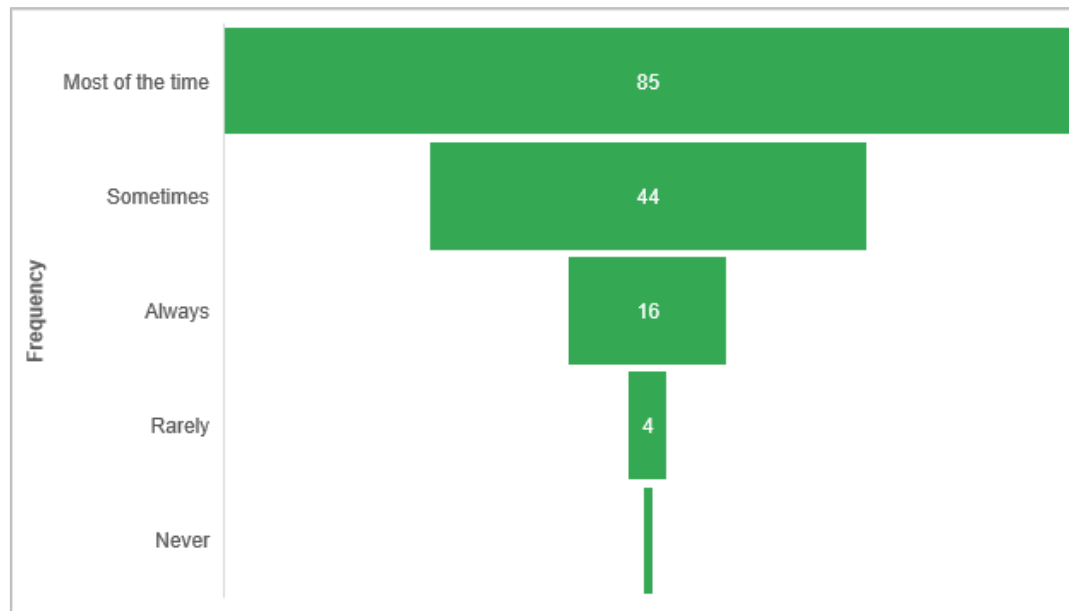
Figure 7. *Reviewing Course Materials to Reinforce Learning*



The consistent use of these active techniques, such as summarizing, taking breaks, and teaching material to others, suggests that participants generally possess and utilize sophisticated study habits necessary for academic success in a self-directed online format.

Section 5: Consistency

While the previous sections indicated that most students employ robust planning and study habits, a large majority reports following their planned schedules "most of the time" rather than "always" (See Figure 8). This suggests that although the intent and skill for self-regulation exist, external or internal factors frequently disrupt the consistent execution of their plans.

Figure 8. *Consistency in Following Planned Study Schedules*

The core challenge, therefore, may not be knowing how to organize and study, but maintaining the necessary discipline and momentum to execute the plan consistently amid the competing demands of life. This is a factor that may be linked to the motivational challenges identified in Section 1.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to identify and examine the basic difficulties facing future EFL instructors within the framework of an online teacher-training course and the strategies for SRL they employ. The results emphasize the critical role of SRL in learners' success in the online environment.

As discussed in the introduction, SRL involves setting goals, monitoring, and managing behavior to achieve academic success (Kirby & Merchant, 2020; Zimmerman, 2000, cited in Khalil, 2021). The participants in the present investigation demonstrated a good understanding of this, as evidenced by their planning and use of the 'to-do list.' This aligns with earlier findings by Kurt & Tomak (2022) and Mahmud & German (2021), who found that structuring and monitoring their own training directly affects the performance and engagement levels of EFL learners in the virtual environment.

However, while participants exhibited strong organizational skills and proactive study behaviors, a recurrent theme was difficulty maintaining consistency and motivation. This observation corresponds with previous findings by Suherman (2022) and Taghizadeh and Basirat (2024), who identified fluctuating motivation and feelings of isolation as primary barriers to effective online learning among pre-service teachers. The Ecuadorian participants' limited engagement in one-on-one tutoring or instructor consultations reinforces this interpretation. Rather than a lack of ability, the challenge appears to stem from affective and contextual factors that impede sustained effort. Dettori et al. (2006) emphasize that emotional regulation and motivational maintenance are integral to SRL, underscoring that the cognitive dimension alone is insufficient to ensure learning success.

The predominance of asynchronous and self-guided strategies reported by participants—such as consulting tutorials and online resources—suggests an adaptive response to limited social presence. Similar patterns have been observed internationally. For instance, Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) and Saleh and Meccawy (2022) reported that pre-service EFL teachers often compensate for the absence of real-time interaction by seeking independent digital resources. This adaptive behavior demonstrates autonomy but may inadvertently perpetuate isolation and reduce opportunities for collaborative reflection, an essential element in developing teaching identity and professional communication skills.

The consistent use of higher-order learning techniques, such as summarizing and teaching material to others, indicates a mature approach to cognitive engagement. These strategies align with the metacognitive elements of SRL described by Ganieva et al. (2020) and Mahmud and German (2021), suggesting that even in resource-constrained contexts, pre-service teachers can internalize effective learning habits. Nonetheless, the finding that students “mostly” adhere to their planned study schedules implies that self-regulation is present but not fully sustained—an issue echoed in Khalil's

(2021) study, which found that EFL learners frequently struggle with maintaining regulation over extended academic periods.

The interplay between motivation, discipline, and contextual challenges points toward a broader pedagogical implication. It is the need for explicit SRL instruction in teacher education curricula. As Sadeck et al. (2023) argue, self-regulatory competence is not only an academic necessity but also a professional one, essential for modeling lifelong learning in future classrooms. In the Ecuadorian context, where digital learning remains unevenly supported, integrating structured SRL training modules could empower pre-service teachers to bridge the gap between knowledge and consistent practice.

Finally, this study helps fill a contextual gap in the literature. While much prior research has explored SRL in Asian and European EFL programs (e.g., Özdemir & Önal, 2021; Kaptanoğlu & Kavanoz, 2024), few have focused on Ecuadorian EFL teacher education contexts. The results here suggest that Ecuadorian pre-service teachers exhibit similar self-regulatory patterns but operate in environments with limited support. Therefore, initiatives fostering community, peer mentoring, and psychological well-being may be as crucial as training in technical or linguistic competencies.

Conclusions

Ecuadorian pre-service EFL teachers demonstrated academic self-regulation abilities (cognitive and planning skills) but are significantly hindered by socio-emotional and contextual factors in the online environment. It is primarily affective isolation, lack of sustained motivation, and inconsistent plan execution.

Therefore, this study emphasizes the crucial need for pedagogical intervention that moves beyond technical and linguistic instruction. To fully equip future educators in Ecuador, teacher education programs must prioritize integrating explicit SRL instruction

focused on emotional regulation, motivational maintenance, and fostering a strong sense of community and peer mentoring. This comprehensive approach will enable pre-service teachers to bridge the gap between knowing how to plan and consistently executing that plan. Thus, it is important to ensure they develop the complete self-regulatory competence essential to their careers and their role as models of lifelong learning.

Referencias bibliográficas

- Atmojo, A. E. P., & Nugroho, A. (2020). EFL Classes Must Go Online! Teaching Activities and Challenges during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia. *Register Journal*, 13(1), 49–76. DOI: 10.18326/rgt.v13i1.49-76
- Dettori, G., Giannetti, T., & Persico, D. (2006). SRL in Online Cooperative Learning: implications for pre-service teacher training. *European Journal of Education*, 41(3-4), 397–414. DOI: 10.1111/j.1465-3435.2006.00273.x
- Ganieva, M., Khorokhorina, G., Pletneva, N., & Fomina, S. (2020). EFL Students' Use of Self-Regulated Learning Strategies in an Online Educational Setting. In 2020, The 4th International Conference on Education and Multimedia Technology (ICEMT 2020), 156–160. <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3416797.3416834>
- Heri Kuswoyo, Rido, A., & Mandasari, B. (2022). A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON EFL ONLINE LEARNING: EFFECTIVENESS, CHALLENGES, LEARNING TOOLS, AND SUGGESTIONS. In the 19th International Conference on Cognition and Exploratory Learning in the Digital Age (CELDA 2022). <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED626869>
- Kaptanoğlu, M. Y., & Kavanoz, S. (2024). Self-regulation and self-efficacy of EFL learners in hybrid educational settings in Türkiye. *Psychology in the Schools*, 61(12), 4517–4537. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.23293>
- Khalil, S. M. (2021). Investigating Nonnative TEFL Students' Self-Regulation in an Online Learning Environment. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 11(1), 125–136. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v11n1p125>
- Kirby, J. R., & Merchant, S. (2020). Assessment for learning and self-regulation. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.933>
- Kurt, G., & Tomak, B. (2022). Exploring university students' self-regulation in online foreign language education. *Research in Pedagogy*, 12(2), 433–446. <https://doi.org/10.5937/istrped2202433k>
- Mahmud, Y. S., & German, E. (2021). Online self-regulated learning strategies amid a global pandemic: Insights from Indonesian university students. *Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction*, 18(2), 45–68. <https://doi.org/10.32890/mjli2021.18.2.2>
- Özdemir, A., & Önal, A. (2021). An investigation into pre-service teachers' perceptions of self-regulated online learning. *International Journal of Contemporary Educational Research*, 8(2), 143–159. <https://doi.org/10.33200/ijcer.865189>
- Sadeck, O., Moyo, M., Tunjera, N., & Chigona, A. (2023). Self-Regulated e-Learning in Pre-Service Teacher Training for Realities of 21st Century Classrooms.
- Saleh, A. M., & Meccawy, Z. (2022). Teaching in Tough Times: Examining EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Online Learning Challenges in the Context of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 11(3), 47–57. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v11n3p47>
-

- Suherman, N. H. (2022). Opportunities and challenges of EFL pre-service teachers in online teaching. *JPGI (Jurnal Penelitian Guru Indonesia)*, 7(2), 191–199. DOI: 10.29210/021128jpgi0005
- Taghizadeh, M., & Basirat, M. (2024). Investigating pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes and challenges of online teaching. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 37(7), 1937–1974. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2022.2136201>
- Truong Hong Ngoc. (2023). Fostering self-regulated learning in an online writing course: Challenges and solutions. *International Journal of TESOL & Education*, 3(2), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.54855/ijte.23321>
- Uçar, H., & Bozkaya, M. Y. (2016). PRE-SERVICE EFL TEACHERS' SELF-EFFICACY BELIEFS, GOAL ORIENTATIONS, AND PARTICIPATIONS IN AN ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education-TOJDE*, 17(2), 1–19.
-