

Perceptions of Preservice and In-Service English Language Teachers on the Effectiveness of Online Teacher Education Courses in Uruguay

Percepciones de docentes de inglés en formación y en servicio sobre la eficacia de cursos virtuales de formación docente en Uruguay

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This study investigates preservice and in-service English language teachers' perceptions of online teacher education courses in Uruguay, using a mixed-methods design with 65 participants from both groups. It analyzes patterns in resource use, course organization, assessment transparency, instructor presence, and perceived professional learning outcomes within the specific contexts of English language teaching. Findings indicate that both groups highly value clear instructional design, transparent assessment resources, expert instructor support, and constructive feedback aligned with language teaching standards. Notable differences emerge in resource consultation (reactive vs. systematic), collaboration preferences (a stronger emphasis on peer learning among in-service teachers), and workload management challenges, reflecting distinct professional stages and career trajectories in English language teaching.

Keywords: community of inquiry, preservice and in-service, online English language teacher education, professional development, teachers' perceptions

Este estudio investiga las percepciones de docentes de inglés en formación y en servicio sobre los cursos virtuales de formación docente en Uruguay, mediante un diseño mixto con 65 participantes, tanto en formación como en servicio. Se analizan patrones de uso de recursos, organización del curso, transparencia de la evaluación, presencia docente y resultados de aprendizaje profesional en contextos específicos de la enseñanza del inglés. Los hallazgos indican que ambos grupos valoran el diseño instruccional claro, los recursos de evaluación transparentes, el apoyo experto del docente y la retroalimentación constructiva alineada con los estándares de enseñanza del idioma. Surgen diferencias en la consulta de recursos, en las preferencias de colaboración y en la gestión de la carga de trabajo, que reflejan etapas profesionales distintas.

Palabras clave: comunidad de indagación, desarrollo profesional, en formación y en servicio, formación virtual de docentes de inglés, percepciones docentes

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Introduction

The rapid expansion of online education has radically transformed the landscape of teacher learning worldwide, fostering greater flexibility and accessibility for educators at different stages of their professional careers (Means et al., 2010; Quality Matters, 2020). This trend has been particularly significant in Latin America, where access to advanced professional development has historically been limited by geographical, economic, and institutional constraints (Rivoir & Morales, 2021; Vaillant, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this shift, with Latin America experiencing the longest duration of school closures globally and a reported 60% increase in the use of virtual education (Alonso et al., 2022). These developments create an urgent need to understand how teachers at different stages of their careers experience and perceive online learning environments.

However, the challenge lies not only in expanding access but also in ensuring that virtual learning environments provide high-quality, relevant, and pedagogically effective content for teachers, particularly those who teach English as a foreign language (EFL). Research emphasizes that perceptions of online course effectiveness may vary significantly with professional stage and work context, affecting motivation, the appropriation of new strategies, and classroom impact (Akpen et al., 2024; Jones & Blankenship, 2017).

Although there is a growing body of literature on online and blended learning in teacher education, systematic searches conducted in Latindex, Dialnet, Google Scholar, and Scopus for this study revealed that empirical research specifically focusing on English language teachers' perceptions of their own online learning in Latin American contexts remains scarce. Most studies either examine students in general education programs or focus on emergency remote teaching of the language, with limited attention to the specific demands of teacher education, such as developing communicative competence, the need

for authentic language use, and the integration of technology for teaching and learning. This relative scarcity of perception studies specific to English language teaching (ELT) in the databases consulted reinforces the relevance of the present research and its contribution to the field of online English language teacher education in the region.

Within the framework of predominantly online university programs in Uruguay, supplemented by occasional synchronous sessions via platforms such as Zoom, curriculum design for the courses analyzed in this study was grounded in international standards and best practices recommended by reference frameworks such as Quality Matters (2020) and recent systematic reviews (Akpen et al., 2024; Massachusetts Institute of Technology, n.d.). Priority was given to clarity in learning outcomes, integration of authentic activities, use of multimedia resources, ongoing formative assessment, and promotion of learning communities (Clark, 2014; Swan et al., 2000; Vaughan et al., 2013).

Despite these theoretical and normative advances, questions remain about how English language teachers, both preservice and in-service, perceive their educational journey in virtual environments and how these perceptions relate to the specific pedagogical demands of language teaching. Understanding these perceptions is key to identifying significant learning instances and, in turn, optimizing future instructional designs and support strategies (Li et al., 2022; Shea & Bidjerano, 2010). This study seeks to address this gap by examining the perceptions of both preservice and in-service English language teachers regarding their experiences in online teacher education in Uruguay.

In addition, the nature of the study and its methodological design explicitly respond to the needs of English language teachers: the audience, purpose, instruments, and analysis were conceived for ELT professionals rather than for a general teacher population.

Theoretical Framework

As indicated above, the rapid expansion of online education has fundamentally transformed teacher education globally, creating opportunities for flexibility and accessibility while demanding close attention to quality, pedagogical effectiveness, and learner experience (Means et al., 2010; Salas-Pilco et al., 2022). In Latin America, where structural inequalities limit access to advanced teacher professional development (Rivoir & Morales, 2021; Vaillant, 2024), understanding preservice and in-service teachers' perceptions of online learning is critical, as these educators will work in increasingly technology-enhanced classrooms. Thus, their experiences as online learners shape their future pedagogical approaches, and their perceptions influence engagement, persistence, and learning outcomes (Foulger et al., 2021; Li et al., 2022; Spencer & Temple, 2021; Wang, 2022).

This theoretical framework synthesizes three complementary perspectives that inform the study of English language teacher perceptions in online learning environments: the community of inquiry framework, quality instructional design principles, and the Latin American/Uruguayan context of teacher education.

Community of Inquiry Framework for English Language Teacher Education

The community of inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison et al., 1999) posits that meaningful online learning emerges at the intersection of social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence. "*Teaching presence* consists of three main areas of responsibility for the instructor: design and organization, facilitation of discourse, and direct instruction" (Anderson et al., 2001, p. 5). Research consistently identifies teaching presence as a significant determinant of satisfaction and learning success in online courses (Li et al., 2022; Muir et al., 2022). In English language teacher education, teaching presence involves not only clear learning

outcomes, structured activities, and transparent assessment criteria but also the modeling of effective language teaching practices, such as communicative task design, scaffolding of language production, and the integration of technology-mediated language-learning tools. In the Latin American context, where only 27–40% of teachers reach basic levels of digital competency in key dimensions (Gambi et al., 2025), explicit and visible teaching presence becomes particularly critical.

Social presence refers to learners' ability to project themselves socially and emotionally in online environments (Garrison et al., 1999, p. 94), creating authentic interpersonal relationships despite physical distance (Garrison et al., 1999; Swan et al., 2000). Social presence is associated with satisfaction and perceived learning outcomes (Muir et al., 2022; Slijepcevic & Huang, 2025). For English language teachers, social presence is intertwined with opportunities to use the target language meaningfully with peers, build professional identity as ELT practitioners, and participate in communities of practice focused on language pedagogy rather than on generic teaching concerns. Yet empirical studies show that reduced social presence remains one of the primary concerns preservice teachers report about online learning (Almendingen et al., 2021; Ganji et al., 2024; Kaya, 2023).

Cognitive presence is defined as the extent to which learners are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse in a critical community of inquiry (Garrison et al., 2001, p. 11). Online environments can support cognitive presence through asynchronous discussions, which allow for deeper reflection than spontaneous classroom contributions (Ng & Cheung, 2007). In English language teacher education, cognitive presence involves integrating linguistic knowledge, second-language acquisition theory, and pedagogical content knowledge of English language teaching, as well as the ability to critically evaluate digital tools and tasks for language learning.

Quality Instructional Design Principles for Language Teacher Education

International frameworks such as Quality Matters (2020) summarize research-derived criteria for online course quality, highlighting organization, clarity of learning outcomes, appropriate materials, participation strategies, and effective use of technology. In the case of English-language teacher education, these design principles must also ensure alignment with language-teaching standards, provide opportunities for authentic language use, integrate multimodal input, and include tasks that mirror the communicative and intercultural aims of language classrooms.

Assessment and feedback are central to quality online learning. Transparent criteria and well-designed rubrics reduce uncertainty and support self-regulated learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Gikandi et al., 2011). Research shows that preservice teachers strategically consult rubrics at key moments to understand expectations (Geesa et al., 2025). For English language teachers, assessment in online courses often serves as a model for assessing language learning: the way instructors provide feedback on written and forum tasks can influence how participants later design rubrics and feedback practices in their own ELT classrooms.

Interaction and engagement strategies directly influence the quality of online learning. Anderson's (2003) interaction framework stresses student–teacher, student–student, and student–content interaction. All three types are associated with learning satisfaction, with student–content interaction often showing particularly strong effects (Li et al., 2022). Meta-analytic evidence suggests that blended approaches, in which online components account for roughly 30–69% of learning activities, yield optimal outcomes (Schmid et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2025).

Teacher Education in the Latin American and Uruguayan Contexts

Latin America has seen substantial growth in distance and blended teacher education, with high proportions of pedagogy graduates receiving their degrees via distance programs in countries such as Brazil and Chile (Vaillant, 2024). At the same time, large-scale studies reveal persistent digital competency gaps among teachers and emphasize that pedagogical skills are a top instructional priority (Gambi et al., 2025; Villegas-Reimers et al., 2023). Emotional and relational aspects, including student apathy, anxiety, and demotivation, were particularly salient during the pandemic (Machado do Nascimento et al., 2021), underscoring the need for online programs that offer both academic and emotional support (Muñoz del Carpio Toia et al., 2021).

Within this broader regional landscape, Uruguay stands out for its longstanding national digital inclusion policy (Plan Ceibal), which has facilitated relatively broad access to devices and connectivity compared to many neighboring countries (Villegas-Reimers et al., 2023). The present study is thus situated in a national context with relatively favorable infrastructure, which must be taken into account when considering the transferability of its findings to other Latin American settings.

Comparative Perspectives: Preservice vs. In-Service English Language Teachers

Differences between preservice and in-service teachers are central to understanding perceptions of online learning. Preservice teachers often show strong motivation and self-directed learning tendencies but report difficulties with learning control, such as pacing and goal setting (Geesa et al., 2025). They tend to use resources reactively and seek support to understand expectations (Almendingen et al., 2021). In-service

teachers bring extensive professional experience, demonstrate more systematic and preventive use of resources, and emphasize the quality of evaluation, workload, and peer learning opportunities (Geesa et al., 2025; Kaya, 2023). They also face challenges balancing professional, academic, and personal responsibilities (Almendingen et al., 2021).

For English language teachers at both stages, these patterns intersect with ongoing development of language proficiency, awareness of language pedagogy, and the need to adapt ELT practices to technology-rich environments—factors that may shape perceptions of online teacher education differently from those of teachers in other subject areas.

Research Objectives

Recent literature underscores that perceptions of online course effectiveness vary across stages of the teaching career, influencing motivation, adoption of new strategies, and classroom practice (Akpen et al., 2024; Jones & Blankenship, 2017). Throughout the planning, development, and implementation of this project, the specific needs of the two groups of English language teachers—preservice and in-service—were taken into account in the design of the instruments and analytical procedures.

Based on the theoretical framework, the following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the perceptions of preservice and in-service English language teachers regarding course design, interaction, assessment, and teacher presence in online teacher education programs in Uruguay?
2. What learning instances (“growth points”) do preservice and in-service English language teachers identify as most significant for their professional development in virtual environments?
3. Are there relevant differences between preservice and in-service English language teachers in their perceptions and evaluations regarding modality,

support strategies, and challenges encountered in online courses?

4. What recommendations do English language teachers propose to optimize the design and implementation of future online teacher education courses in their context?

The general objective is to analyze the perceptions of preservice and in-service English language teachers regarding their experience in online teacher education programs in Uruguay, identifying significant learning instances, challenges, and recommendations for ongoing improvement of instructional design. The following are the specific objectives:

- To describe participants’ perceptions regarding course design, interaction, assessment, and teacher presence in online English language teacher education.
- To identify and compare “growth points” highlighted by preservice and in-service English language teachers, as well as the factors that promote them.
- To analyze similarities and differences in the evaluations of both groups according to their professional stage and work context in English language teaching.

Participants and Context

Participation in the study was voluntary and included two groups of students in foreign language teacher education programs in Uruguay: preservice teachers in initial education and in-service teachers enrolled in a master’s program. Both groups were enrolled in university programs that offer predominantly online education pathways, supplemented by occasional synchronous meetings via digital platforms.

Preservice teachers were advanced students in English language teaching programs, mostly with limited or initial formal teaching experience. They were concurrently completing a supervised practicum and

theoretical courses focused on didactic, pedagogical, and disciplinary competencies, many of which were delivered through virtual learning environments. These future teachers represent a generation entering the educational system amid high demand for technology integration and innovative practices in ELT (Means et al., 2010; Quality Matters, 2020).

In-service teachers (master's students) were qualified English-language teachers with several years of professional experience at the primary, secondary, or tertiary levels. Through the master's program, participants sought to update their practices, deepen pedagogical analysis, and acquire tools to investigate and reflect on their own ELT practice (Akpen et al., 2024; Shea & Bidjerano, 2010). Their primary employment was in public and private institutions in urban and semi-urban contexts where professional development and methodological innovation are increasingly required. Demographic characteristics are summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Demographics of Preservice Teachers ($n = 37$)

Variable	f (%)
Gender	
Female	27 (73%)
Male	9 (24%)
Other/Prefer not to say	1 (3%)
Age mean (range)	24 (21–29)
Educational level	
In training (EFL teaching degree)	37 (100%)
Previous teaching experience	
Yes	8 (22%)
No	29 (78%)

Table 2. Demographics of In-Service Teachers (Master's Students, $n = 28$)

Variable	f (%)
Gender	
Female	19 (68%)
Male	8 (29%)
Other/Prefer not to say	1 (3%)
Age mean (range)	38 (29–54)
Years of teaching experience	
1–5 years	6 (21%)
6–10 years	10 (36%)
More than 10 years	12 (43%)
Main employment context	
Primary	6 (21%)
Secondary	12 (43%)
Tertiary	7 (25%)
Mixed	3 (11%)

Method

This study adopts a descriptive-comparative, mixed-methods design to explore in depth the perceptions of preservice and in-service English language teachers regarding their experiences in online and blended teacher education courses. This design aligns with international recommendations for studying perceptions and trajectories in distance education (Jones & Blankenship, 2017; Means et al., 2010).

Sampling and Recruitment

The final sample consisted of 65 English-language teachers, divided into two subgroups: 37 preservice teachers and 28 in-service teachers enrolled in a master's program. Participants were recruited via institutional mailing lists and course announcements at the end of the academic period. All students enrolled in the focal courses who met the inclusion criteria (advanced standing in the program, completion of at least one online course, and willingness to participate) received an invitation to complete the online questionnaire;

participation was entirely voluntary, with no incentive or academic benefit. Of the 89 eligible individuals invited, 65 completed the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of approximately 73%. Students who had withdrawn from the courses, had not completed the online components, or had declined consent were excluded from the study. Hence, participants were selected through voluntary response sampling within well-defined course cohorts; this limitation is acknowledged in the discussion of the study's limitations.

Instruments: Development, Validation, and Reliability

Differentiated questionnaires were used for each group to capture the specificities of their educational and professional contexts, following recommendations to adapt instruments to participants' trajectories (Swan et al., 2000; Vaughan et al., 2013). Each questionnaire included:

- Closed items on a 5-point Likert scale to measure perceptions of course design, interaction, assessment, teacher presence, and professional utility of the course
- Open-ended questions to elicit testimonies about significant learning instances, perceived challenges, and suggestions for improvement

Instrument development was guided by the dimensions proposed by Quality Matters (2020), the CoI framework (Garrison et al., 1999), and recent literature on perceptions of online courses (Akpen et al., 2024; Jones & Blankenship, 2017). An initial pool of items was drafted and then reviewed independently by three experts in online teacher education, who evaluated the items' relevance, clarity, and alignment with the constructs of interest. Based on their feedback, items were reworded, merged, or eliminated to improve clarity and content validity.

Both instruments were piloted with 12 English-language teachers (six preservice and six graduate) who

were not part of the final sample. Pilot participants rated item clarity on a 5-point scale (1 = *very unclear*, 5 = *very clear*); the average clarity rating across items was 4.2, and further minor wording adjustments were made as a result. Internal reliability was estimated using Cronbach's alpha, yielding values of .82 for the preservice questionnaire and .79 for the in-service questionnaire, indicating acceptable internal consistency for research purposes. Illustrative items for each scale are presented in the Appendix.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical principles for research with human participants, in accordance with international guidelines for qualitative and educational research (American Educational Research Association, 2011; British Educational Research Association, 2018). Participants received detailed information about the study's purposes, the voluntary nature of participation, and the exclusive use of their data for research and course improvement. Questionnaires were anonymous and did not collect personally identifiable information, ensuring confidentiality and privacy protection. It was clearly stated that participation would entail no academic benefit or detriment, and that participants could withdraw at any time without consequences. Data were stored on secure institutional servers accessible only to the research team.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis. Closed-ended responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated for all Likert-scale items for each group. Between-group comparisons (preservice vs. in-service) were conducted using independent samples *t*-tests. Where statistically significant differences were detected, effect sizes were computed using Cohen's *d* to indicate the magnitude of the differences; a significance threshold of $p < .05$ (two-tailed) was adopted.

Qualitative Analysis. Responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006), yielding a consolidated codebook. In total, 47 initial codes were grouped into 12 categories, which were subsequently refined into five major themes representing perceptions of organization, resources, assessment and feedback, instructor presence, and collaboration/growth points. Comparative analyses examined similarities and differences in themes between preservice and in-service teachers. Triangulation was achieved by comparing qualitative themes with patterns identified in the quantitative data; member checking was not conducted, which is noted as a limitation.

Results

Preservice English Language Teachers

Frequency and Utility of Course Resources

One initial focus was the frequency with which preservice English language teachers consulted various resources in the online environment. Table 3 shows that the most frequently consulted elements were the rubrics for assessing forum posts and the CARE rubric¹ for peer feedback, followed by time management guides and academic writing resources. Over 80% of participants reported consulting rubrics and guides “before completing a task or forum” or “on specific occasions,” reflecting strategic use of resources at critical points in the learning process.

¹ The CARE rubric (Díaz Maggioli, 2023) is a tool used for providing feedback and feedforward in a structured manner. C stands for Clarify, asking questions about points in the performance where things are not clear; A stands for Appreciate, which implies highlighting all the positive aspects of the performance; R stands for Reflect, where the teacher is guided into reflecting about all areas in the performance that need change or attention to; and finally, E stands for Empower, where the teacher is provided with one to three actionable changes to implement in future performance.

Table 3. Most Frequently Consulted Course Elements (Preservice Teachers)

Course resource	Frequency of consultation (%)
Rubric for assessing forum posts	85
CARE rubric for peer feedback	82
Time management guide	70
Academic writing resources	68
Course syllabus	62
Instructor CV/Q&A forum	<20

These patterns suggest that preservice English language teachers rely heavily on normative and task-specific resources—such as rubrics specifying expectations for content, language, and interaction—to guide their performance in assessed activities. Rubrics and guides thus function not only as assessment tools but also as models for providing structured feedback and criteria in future ELT classrooms.

Resources such as the instructor’s curriculum vitae and the Q&A forum were rarely consulted, reflecting a preference for elements directly linked to academic tasks. This pattern indicates that preservice teachers prioritize access to practical and normative resources that support their performance on evaluative and collaborative activities, consistent with literature emphasizing the importance of clear expectations and feedback in online environments (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Li et al., 2022; Quality Matters, 2020).

Most Frequently Discussed Course Areas

When invited to comment on aspects of the course they found especially relevant, preservice participants most often referred to course content and materials, course organization and structure, and the instructor’s role. Forty-two percent of comments addressed contents and materials, highlighting their up-to-date nature, usefulness, and clear presentation; 33% focused on organization, praising the sequencing of activities

and modular structure; and 23% explicitly mentioned the instructor’s support and guidance.

These emphases reflect the importance of teaching presence—course design, organization, and instructor facilitation—as anticipated by the CoI framework (Garrison et al., 1999; Vaughan et al., 2013). For preservice English language teachers, an organized course structure and clearly curated materials appear particularly important as they navigate both disciplinary content and language pedagogy in virtual spaces.

Qualitative Analysis of Comments

Thematic analysis revealed several recurring topics. Regarding organization and sequencing, participants commented:

I appreciate the meticulous and friendly organization of the course; it really helped me follow the sequence of activities. The clear structure made it easy to manage my time and know what was expected.

On the usefulness of materials, preservice teachers noted:

The course contents and materials were well-structured and up to date. Everything was always available on the platform.
Having all resources in one place was very helpful, especially the rubrics that guided my work.

Regarding feedback and assessment, many valued rubrics and feedback but expressed concern about response time (“Sometimes it took a while to receive comments”), pointing to the need for more timely feedback in high-enrollment online courses. Perceptions of the instructor’s role were strongly positive:

Without a doubt, an experienced instructor with a great deal of knowledge who provided continuous support. The teacher has been very supportive with [sic] us.

These statements underscore the importance of visible teaching presence and specialist expertise in

ELT: participants not only appreciated general support but also implicitly valued the instructor’s ability to connect course content to ELT realities.

Finally, suggestions for improvement included calls for more synchronous meetings, more group work, and a greater variety of practical activities, consistent with findings that preservice teachers desire more opportunities for social presence and real-time interaction (Almendingen et al., 2021; Kaya, 2023).

In-Service English Language Teachers

Frequency and Utility of Course Resources

Among in-service English language teachers, rubrics for forum assessment and peer feedback, together with the syllabus and time management guides, were also the most regularly consulted resources. Consultation rates were higher than those among preservice teachers (94% for forum rubrics, 88% for the CARE rubric; see Table 4), indicating more systematic and preventive use of resources (Geesa et al., 2025).

Table 4. Most Frequently Consulted Course Elements (In-Service Teachers)

Course resource	Frequency of consultation (%)
Rubric for assessing forum posts	94
CARE rubric for peer feedback	88
Time management guide	76
Academic writing resources	71
Course syllabus	65
Instructor CV/Q&A forum	<15

This intensive, planned consultation suggests that in-service English language teachers draw on rubrics and guides not only to fulfill course requirements but also to reflect on their own assessment practices in ELT, potentially transferring the course’s assessment model to their classrooms.

Resources not directly tied to academic activities (e.g., the instructor's CV or Q&A forum) were used even less frequently than preservice teachers did, likely reflecting their greater professional autonomy and more focused attention on task-related resources.

Most Frequently Discussed Course Areas

In-service teachers' comments similarly concentrated on contents and materials, course design and organization, and instructor performance. Forty-eight percent of comments discussed materials and activities, emphasizing their variety, currency, and classroom applicability; 27% addressed organization and modular design, appreciating logical sequencing and the integration of interactive technologies; and 19% highlighted instructor performance and support. A smaller proportion (13%) referred specifically to evaluation and monitoring systems.

These emphases suggest that in-service English language teachers evaluate course elements with an eye to transfer: they focus on how materials, activities, and assessment strategies can be adapted to their own ELT contexts and learners.

Qualitative Analysis of Comments

Themes echoed those observed among preservice teachers but with a more critical and reflective tone. In-service teachers reported that:

The modular design and the sequence of tasks made it easy to manage workload and expectations throughout the semester.

The structure helped me balance my teaching work and academic studies.

Regarding materials and activities, they stated:

The course provided a good mix of theory and practical tools; resources were always available, and the activities were meaningful for my teaching practice.

I appreciated the variety of resources and the connection to real classroom situations.

These observations align with research emphasizing authentic activities and diverse resources that support professional relevance and transfer (Chickering & Ehrmann, 1996; Clark, 2014). Assessment and feedback comments reflected both appreciation and workload concerns:

The rubrics and feedback were always clear, but sometimes the amount of work was overwhelming. However, I feel it helped me grow as a teacher.

Feedback was constructive and timely, which helped me improve my contributions.

The instructor's role was again highlighted:

The instructor was always available, supportive, and provided useful insights during synchronous sessions.

The teacher's experience and practical approach made a big difference in my motivation.

Regarding improvement, many in-service teachers requested more collaborative projects and peer-learning opportunities:

I would appreciate even more collaborative projects and opportunities to learn from other colleagues.

More group work where we could share experiences and learn from each other.

These comments reveal a strong interest in building communities of practice among English language teachers, where peer exchange about specific ELT challenges and strategies can flourish alongside instructor-led learning.

Discussion of Findings

Similarities Across Professional Stages

The comparative analysis reveals several convergences. Both preservice and in-service English language teachers valued normative and organizational resources—particularly rubrics, guides, and reference

materials—as essential for orienting participation and performance. This supports prior research on the importance of transparent assessment criteria and structured guidance in online learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Geesa et al., 2025). Both groups also highlighted the role of course organization, modular structure, and continuous access to materials as enablers of effective time management and progression, resonating with the emphasis on teaching presence in the CoI framework (Garrison et al., 1999).

In both cohorts, the instructor’s role was central: availability, support, expertise, and constructive feedback were frequently cited as decisive factors in a positive learning experience. This aligns with studies linking teaching presence and feedback quality to satisfaction and perceived learning (Li et al., 2022; Muir et al., 2022; Shea & Bidjerano, 2010).

Importantly, in the ELT context, these convergences mean that both novice and experienced English language teachers look for online courses that not only “work” structurally but also model high-quality language pedagogy through their organization, materials, and feedback practices.

Differences Between Preservice and In-Service English Language Teachers

Differences reflect distinct professional stages. Preservice teachers tended to use resources reactively, consulting guidance as needed, and focused on obtaining support, understanding expectations, and managing time. In-service teachers reported more systematic and preventive use of resources, emphasized the quality of evaluation, workload management, and peer learning opportunities, and voiced specific concerns about balancing professional responsibilities with academic demands.

For English language teachers, these differences may also mirror shifts from primarily internalizing ELT concepts (preservice) to critically analyzing and

reshaping their own ELT practices (in-service). In-service participants, for example, appeared particularly attuned to how assessment approaches, feedback styles, and collaborative tasks in the course could inform their own work with language learners.

Key Variables for Effective Online English Language Teacher Education

Across both groups, several variables emerged as central to meaningful learning:

- structured organization and clear instructions that scaffold task completion
- accessibility and utility of normative resources (rubrics, guides, samples)
- active instructor presence and constructive, timely feedback
- opportunities for practical and collaborative activities, with in-service teachers expressing a stronger emphasis on peer learning

From an ELT perspective, these features support not only general academic success but also the development of language-specific pedagogical content knowledge, as participants encounter multiple examples of how to design and evaluate language-focused tasks in online environments.

Areas for improvement common to both groups include the need for more synchronous interaction, diversified interaction formats (e.g., small-group sessions, optional tutorials), and optimized feedback turnaround time, especially in large cohorts—concerns that echo broader research on online teacher education (Almendingen et al., 2021; Geesa et al., 2025; Kaya, 2023).

Taken together, the findings affirm the relevance of the CoI framework while showing that, in English language teacher education, each presence acquires discipline-specific nuances: teaching presence must model ELT practices, social presence must support professional communities of language teachers, and

cognitive presence must integrate language content, pedagogy, and technology.

Limitations and Areas for Further Research

Several limitations must be acknowledged when interpreting these results. The study is based on voluntary participation from a single institution in Uruguay, relying on self-selection within cohorts rather than probability sampling, which limits the generalizability of the findings to similar contexts. Data are drawn exclusively from self-report questionnaires, with no objective performance indicators or direct observations of online interactions, limiting the capacity to relate perceived experiences to actual learning outcomes or classroom practice. Moreover, the cross-sectional design captures perceptions at only one point in time and therefore cannot illuminate how views may change over teachers' professional trajectories or as online programs mature. Lastly, the limited number of comparable studies on English language teachers' perceptions of online learning—particularly in Latin America—limits the ability to benchmark these results against broader norms.

Finally, Uruguay's relatively advanced digital infrastructure (e.g., Plan Ceibal) means that the conditions under which participants learned online may differ from those in countries with more fragile connectivity and access, further constraining the generalizability of the findings.

Future research could address these limitations by employing multi-site and cross-national designs, combining perception data with performance indicators and classroom observations, and conducting longitudinal studies that track how English language teachers' online learning experiences relate to their subsequent teaching practices.

Comparative studies across disciplines could also clarify which findings are specific to ELT and which reflect more general patterns in teacher education. In

addition, design-based research could test specific instructional and assessment strategies in online ELT programs, contributing practical knowledge about how to optimize teaching, social, and cognitive presence for language teacher development.

Conclusions

This study confirms the central role of careful instructional design, accessible normative resources, constructive feedback, and active instructor presence as pillars of meaningful learning in online teacher education for both preservice and in-service English language teachers. The similarities observed between groups point to the universality of certain principles in ELT-oriented online courses, while the differences highlight the need to tailor support, task design, and workload expectations to the professional stage and working conditions of English language teachers.

The findings underscore that online ELT programs are most effective when they simultaneously strengthen teaching presence (through clear structure, modeling of good ELT practice, and responsive feedback), social presence (through communities of practice among English language teachers), and cognitive presence (through challenging, language-specific tasks that foster reflection and application), in line with the CoI framework.

In the Uruguayan and broader Latin American context, where digital divides, competency gaps, and emotional dimensions of learning continue to shape educational experiences, programs that combine robust instructional design with attention to relationships and context-responsive pedagogy are particularly necessary.

By centering the voices of both preservice and in-service English language teachers, this study contributes empirical evidence to a relatively underexplored area of the ELT literature and offers concrete recommendations for designing online teacher education that is structurally sound, pedagogically meaningful, and closely aligned with the realities of ELT professionals.

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Appendix: Sample Questions From the Preservice Teachers' Questionnaires

Question 1: How useful did you find each of these course elements?

	Not very useful	Somewhat useful	Useful	Very useful	Not applicable
The course syllabus					
The direct link to Zoom sessions on Schoology					
Tips for managing your time in the course					
Tools for academic writing					
Rubric for assessing synchronous class participation					
Rubric for assessing forum posts					
Rubric to respond to your peers' work (CARE)					
Your instructor's Curriculum Vitae					
The question-and-answer forum to contact your instructor					
Learning Guide (Module 2)					

Question 2: Which of the following course elements did you consult and how frequently?

	Almost never	Very rarely	Only on a few specific occasions	Before working on a task, forum, or assignment	Almost every time I worked on the course	Not applicable
The course syllabus						
The direct link to Zoom sessions on Schoology						
Tips for managing your time in the course						
Tools for academic writing						
Rubric for assessing synchronous class participation						
Rubric for assessing forum posts						

Rubric to respond to your peers' work (CARE)
Your instructor's Curriculum Vitae
The question-and- answer forum to contact your instructor
Learning Guide (Module 2)

Question 3: How much did each of the following course elements help you learn?

	Almost never	Very rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost always	Not applicable
The course syllabus						
The direct link to Zoom sessions on Schoolology						
Tips for managing your time in the course						
Tools for academic writing						
Rubric for assessing synchronous class participation						
Rubric for assessing forum posts						
Rubric to respond to your peers' work (CARE)						
Your instructor's Curriculum Vitae						
The question-and- answer forum to contact your instructor						
Learning Guide (Module 2)						

Question 4: Write here any comments you consider relevant about the various course elements.