

Identifying Training Needs of Novice Online English Language Tutors¹

Identificación de las Necesidades de Capacitación de
Tutores Novatos de Inglés en Línea

Carolina Rodríguez Buitrago^{2*}

Universidad de la Sabana, Colombia

Abstract

Online and blended learning are of growing interest in the English language learning community. In Colombia, national initiatives and policies promote online educational programs and online English courses specifically. As a result, new online tutors are constantly needed for new programs and courses offered by institutions as well as by private companies and public agencies. This article focuses on training as a way to prepare teachers to become online tutors who can support online and blended language learning processes. The study presents a needs analysis strategy, using a questionnaire to collect data on teachers' perceived needs regarding training to become online English tutors. The results of the study suggest that novice e-tutor trainees need to become familiar with the specifics of online language learning platforms, and also require training on the necessary tutor competencies and skills. The findings argue for continued training on e-moderating.

Key words: online learning, e-moderating, teacher training, e-tutors, needs analysis, English language teaching

Resumen

El aprendizaje en línea y mixto son de creciente interés en la comunidad de aprendizaje del idioma inglés. En Colombia, se han lanzado iniciativas y políticas nacionales que promueven programas educativos y cursos de inglés en línea. Como resultado, la demanda de tutores virtuales para este tipo de programas se hace mayor cada día. Este artículo se centra en la capacitación

¹ Received: August 6, 2013 / Accepted: October 1, 2013

² Email: crbuitrago@gmail.com

como una manera de preparar a los profesores de aula de clase para que se conviertan en tutores en línea capaces de apoyar los procesos de aprendizaje de idiomas virtuales y mezclados (virtuales y presenciales). El estudio fue realizado utilizando el método de análisis de necesidades para la recolección de la información. Durante el estudio, se usó un cuestionario para recoger datos sobre las necesidades que los docentes percibían en materia de formación para convertirse en tutores de inglés en línea. Los resultados del estudio sugieren que los tutores virtuales novatos tienen que familiarizarse con las características específicas de las plataformas de aprendizaje de idiomas en línea y, además, requieren capacitación en las competencias y habilidades necesarias para convertirse en tutores. Los hallazgos sugieren la capacitación continua en e-moderación para los tutores del mañana.

Palabras claves: aprendizaje en línea, e-moderación, capacitación docente, análisis de necesidades, enseñanza del inglés

Resumo

A aprendizagem em linha e mista é de crescente interesse na comunidade de aprendizagem do idioma inglês. Na Colômbia, se tem lançado iniciativas e políticas nacionais que promovem programas educativos e cursos de inglês em linha. Como resultado, a demanda de tutores virtuais para este tipo de programas se faz maior cada dia. Este artigo centra-se na capacitação como uma maneira de preparar os professores de sala de aula para que se convertam em tutores em linha, capazes de apoiar os processos de aprendizagem de idiomas virtuais e misturados (virtuais e presenciais). O estudo foi realizado utilizando o método de análise de necessidades para a coleta da informação. Durante o estudo, usou-se um questionário para coletar dados sobre as necessidades que os docentes percebiam em matéria de formação para converter-se em tutores de inglês em linha. Os resultados do estudo sugerem que os tutores virtuais novatos têm que familiarizar com as características específicas das plataformas de aprendizagem de idiomas em linha e, além do mais, requer capacitação nas competências e habilidades necessárias para converter-se em tutores. As descobertas sugerem a capacitação contínua em e-moderação para os tutores do amanhã.

Palavras chaves: aprendizagem em linha, aprendizagem mista, tutores de inglês em linha, capacitação, plataformas de aprendizagem de idiomas em linha

Introduction

Recent educational and economic policies in Colombia point squarely to the need for citizens to “develop the communicative abilities to read, understand, write, listen, talk and express themselves correctly in a foreign language”³ (Presidencia de la República, 2013, p. 1.) This need has led to the growth of available online courses for English language learning, and specific initiatives are underway to support mass online instruction in English. The National Bilingualism Project of the National Ministry of Education aims at “promoting the development and operation of massive foreign language teaching projects which incorporate different educational approaches to develop students’ capabilities to learn and consider the usage of new technologies”⁴ (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2011, p. 94). In addition, national policy calls for the promotion of “distance education along with e-moderation for students in secondary to widen the educational coverage in a foreign language”⁵ (DNP, 2011, p. 94).

In terms of tutor competencies, Salmon affirms that “successful online learning depends on teachers and trainers acquiring new competencies, on their becoming aware of its potential, and on their inspiring the learners, rather than on mastering the technology” (Salmon, 2002, p.viii). As the traditional role of the teacher is changing, some also argue that online training courses need to change in order to cater to this new generation of teachers (Klimova & Poulouva, 2011).

The purpose of this study was to conduct a needs analysis of potential online tutors to determine which contents they felt were needed in training for online English language learning. The research questions were the following:

- *What do teachers think about different competencies and skills regarding online teaching and learning?*
- *How do teachers see themselves as online tutors?*

³ Translated from the original Spanish: “Desarrollar las habilidades comunicativas para leer, comprender, escribir, escuchar, hablar y expresarse correctamente en una lengua extranjera.”

⁴ “Impulsar el desarrollo y la operación de proyectos masivos de enseñanza de un segundo idioma, que tenga por objeto incorporar enfoques educativos que desarrollen la capacidad de los estudiantes de aprender a lo largo de sus estudios y consideren la utilización de nuevas tecnologías.”

⁵ “Promover la utilización de enseñanza a distancia tutoriada, para alumnos de bachillerato que permita ampliar la apertura educativa de un segundo idioma.”

- *How can a needs analysis questionnaire inform the creation of additional content for training for online English tutors?*

Findings from the study demonstrate that trainees' needs are varied yet specific. Novice e-tutors need support and training in technical matters of managing online learning platforms. They also need general e-moderating skills and strategies in order to be effective facilitators and guides in their role as online tutors.

Literature Review

Online teaching is a relatively new practice that has emerged in response to the appearance of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and their applications in education. More and more students around the world are looking for training and learning opportunities which do not necessarily involve physical attendance. Therefore, a system of online teaching has grown to provide support and meaningful learning experiences to learners all around the world and with all learning needs (Bonk & Cummings, 1998; Goodyear, Salmon, Spector, Steeples, & Tickner, 2001; Guichon, 2009; Hubbard, 1998).

As new opportunities for learning emerge, the competencies of teachers have had to evolve in response to learners' needs and expectations. Klimova & Poulouva (2011) suggest that e-learning courses, however attractive and inexpensive they may seem, require a new approach to teaching. In these new learning and teaching environments, the role of the teacher changes dramatically and new competencies are required. The effective instructor evolves from being a teacher in the traditional sense to being a facilitator (Bailey & Card, 2009).

Roles of Online Tutors

Teachers in online environments have been called *online teachers* (Bailey & Card, 2009; Bangert, 2004), *instructors* (Bangert, 2004; Beffa-Negrini, Cohen & Miller, 2002; Ke, 2010; Li & Pitts, 2009; and Uça-Günes & Gümüş, 2010), *teacher/tutors* (Matteucci et al, 2010), *e-tutors* (Berge, as cited in Klimova & Poulouva, 2011), *online tutors* (Sulcic & Sulcic, 2007), as well as *e-moderators* (Salmon, 2002). However, for the purposes of this study, the term *online tutors* will be adopted to refer to teachers teaching in online and blended contexts.

Berge (1995) identified four major roles that online tutors face in Computer Mediated Communication (CMC): pedagogical, social,

managerial and technical (p. 3). These roles have prevailed through time and have been widely recognized as a useful taxonomy given the complexity of successful online learning.

Pedagogical role. Berge's pedagogical role refers to the online tutors' duties as "educational facilitators." For Carr-Chellman and Ducaltel (as cited in Bailey & Card, 2009), "effective online teachers make learning resources available to students instead of just providing instruction" (p. 153). In addition, there appear to be effective online teaching practices and actions that make pedagogical practice more meaningful. Bailey and Card (2009) point out seven successful practices of online tutors:

1. Encourage contacts between students and faculty in and out of classes.
2. Learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race.
3. Active learning is encouraged in classes that use structured exercises, challenging discussions, team projects, and peer critiques.
4. Students need appropriate and timely feedback on their performance to benefit from courses.
5. Learning to use one's time well is critical for students and professionals alike.
6. Communicate higher expectations.
7. Provide a diverse delivery system (pp. 152-53).

Teachers and online tutors who take the time to provide these conditions may be perceived as more successful.

Another important part of the pedagogical role is the timely and accurate provision of feedback to students. Learners expect tutors to intervene in their interactions to provide them with feedback on their language production, their learning and also on their participation in the online environment. Teaching with feedback is more effective than teaching without feedback (Matteucci et al., 2010). Feedback is especially important to students in online environments since it is the only indicator they have of their performance. Besides, it aids in achieving learner inclusion and motivation in the course. According to Ke (2010), students in his study expected online support and also quick feedback to make sure they were working well, which gave them a clear sense of achievement.

Social role. Berge's social role refers to creating a friendly environment that facilitates learning and which is also safe, supportive and motivating. Others have pointed out the importance of tutors' scaffolding actions in the online environment (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 1999; Salmon, 2002), as well as accompanying learning experiences by achieving a teaching presence online (Ge & Land, 2003). Hubbard (1998) argues that online tutors "establish rapport and build trust with students; create a 'safe' environment, one free of public humiliation; inspire students to learn; facilitate free owing ideas among students; and provide continual and timely feedback" (p. 714).

Reinforcing the concept of tutor support, Mullen and Runnels (2006) argue that affective and academic support are associated with students' motivation and learning. Therefore, in online environments the tutor's role goes beyond knowledge sharing and extends to relationship creation and nurturing. Online tutors have a lot to do with students' motivation and willingness to work and stay online.

Another expectation of students is the emotional support they will find from their tutors during the learning path. Ke (2010) describes how adult learners especially expect quick feedback from online tutors in addition to emotional rapport. Students expect to find a human being on the other side of the computer, especially older students who are used to face to face learning experiences.

Managerial role. The managerial role refers to tutors' ability to set up conferences, announce events, and suggest the course of action in the work (Berge, 1995). This is where the online tutor's creativity and understanding of students' learning needs is revealed. Tutors also need to use the tools that are available to them (websites, platforms, e-mail messages, chat rooms, etc.) to guarantee students have timely and accurate information to proceed with their work. They also need to help learners set objectives, schedule and organize their own learning (Paulsen, 1995.)

Technical role. The technical role refers to "making the technology transparent" (Berg, 1995, p. 3). Even though novice online tutors may expect this role to be performed by others, such as information technology support staff within their institution, students expect their tutor to be able to give them timely responses on technical as well as pedagogical issues. This particular role poses a challenge to novice online tutors and to institutions. Research suggests that institutions need to put training programs in place to guarantee tutors' acquisition of the necessary skills and competencies to provide basic technical support. Uça-Günes & Gümüş (2010) argue, "Distance education field and

online learning environments should be introduced to faculty members. Training and orientation should be more comprehensive” (p. 844).

E-moderating

Salmon (2002) argues that “successful online learning depends on teachers and trainers acquiring new competencies, on their becoming aware of its potential and on their inspiring the learners, rather than on mastering the technology” (p. vii). Salmon’s five-stage model for e-moderation describes how the online tutor is involved in different activities that shape the learning experience. The model suggests that people “learn about the use of the computer networking along with learning about the topic, and with and through other people” (p. 28).



Figure 1. Salmon’s five-stage e-moderating model (2002, p. 29)

According to the five-stage model, the role of the e-moderator or online tutor is crucial in creating successful learning environments and ensuring success. The goal of e-moderators is to provide significant scaffolding for online learners, especially at the beginning. Online tutors gradually remove that scaffolding as students assume ever increasing responsibility in the online environment, including social learning and independent construction of knowledge. E-moderators or online tutors also need to develop certain roles and competencies, detailed by Salmon (2002), including understanding of online process, technical skills, online communication skills, content expertise and personal characteristics (p. 54-55).

Needs Analysis in Curriculum Development

Needs analysis (NA) refers to the collecting of information about students' learning needs, wants and desires. It may also include expectations and requirements from other involved parties in the process such as administrators, teachers and students (West, 2001.) The term needs analysis was first used in 1920 in India when a teacher asked what kind of English Indian children needed to learn and why. After this, NA was largely neglected. Many institutions stopped inquiring formally about their students' needs for curriculum creation and decisions were made on the basis of what the institution considered important (West, 2001).

According to Fay (2006), NA is a distinct and necessary phase in planning educational programs. This idea emerged in the 1960s as part of the systems approach to curriculum development and was part of the prevalent philosophy of educational accountability. If providers of training programs wanted public or other sources of funding in order to provide different kinds of training programs, they were required to demonstrate that a proposed program was a response to a genuine need (Pratt, as cited in Richards, 2001). Brindley (1984) suggests that by the 1980s in many parts of the world, a needs-based philosophy emerged in language teaching, particularly in relation to ESP and vocationally oriented program design.

Needs analysis can be approached in different ways depending on the kind of result expected. For example, there can be an analysis of students' attitudes or feelings towards the subject matter or methods. It may also include demographic analysis, language level at the beginning of the course, or materials and curriculum. Each of these analysis types would yield different results useful to the teacher or instructional designer in the creation of course materials (West, 2001).

Needs analysis in training programs is an ongoing process of gathering data to determine what training needs exist in order to inform program development (Brown, 2002). The purpose of training is to support the achievement of organizational goals by increasing the necessary skills of employees. However, not all training programs are structured taking into consideration the needs of employees (Brown, 2002). Brown describes four main reasons for needs analysis before training programs are developed: (a) to identify specific problem areas in the organization; (b) to obtain management support; (c) to develop data for evaluation; and (d) to determine the costs and benefits of training (p. 569-570).

Methodology

Research Design

Jordan (1997) describes fourteen possible methods for collecting data for needs analyses, including advanced documentation, self-assessment, observation and monitoring, surveys, structured interviews, learner diaries and case studies (p. 23). It is important to mention that “although [Jordan’s] concern was with needs analysis in EAP (English for Academic Purposes) all of his methods may be applied in other types of TESOL course design” (Fay, 2006, p. 3). In this study, a questionnaire was chosen because of its practicality as well as the possibility of building a complete learner profile based on the information collected.

The questionnaire was available to teachers for a three-month period. The questionnaire was anonymous. Respondents were also asked about their availability to participate in additional interviews. Coordinators in the various institutions received an authorization form for their teachers to participate in the study and signed it institutionally. Later, coordinators sent teachers an e-mail message with the link to the survey. Even though the needs analysis questionnaire was given to 50 teachers, only 21 responses were collected.

The questionnaire was available in English only, under the assumption that participants possessed a high-intermediate to advanced level of English and would be able to respond adequately. The questionnaire was available via the Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com) online survey tool because teachers surveyed were located in different cities in the country and this tool would allow for the information to be collected remotely. Responses were collected and analyzed using the tabulation function offered by Survey Monkey for premium accounts.

Context and Participants

The participants of this study were coordinators and teachers at language institutes and in university language programs in several cities in Colombia who were responsible for coordinating training for on-line English tutors in their respective institutions. All of the institutions had recently adopted an on-line English language program for their institution. The standard product training course consisted of 10 modules designed to familiarize tutors with the features of the platform. All of the participants can be classified as novice on-line tutors. This is because although they had some prior experience with online learning, they had not yet been tutors in online environments.

Data Collection Instruments

The needs analysis questionnaire contained six parts:

1. General Background Information
2. Online Learning and Teaching Background
3. Pedagogical Activities
4. Attitudes and Behaviors towards Online Teaching
5. The Teacher Training Course
6. Additional Information

The General Background section had the purpose of profiling the participants, including age and educational background. The section on Online Learning and Teaching Background asked participants about their online or blended learning training. This section also asked about the possible roles of online e-tutors and how participants saw themselves. The purpose was to find out about teachers' training conditions and their beliefs regarding their roles as online instructors.

The Pedagogical Activities section aimed at finding out what activities teachers thought were most important for online tutors. This section can be considered the core of the questionnaire because of the importance of the activities described in Salmon's (2002) provisions for a successful online learning experience. The two questions in this section were both Likert scales for teachers to rate the level of importance of certain online activities.

The section on Attitudes and Behaviors explored teachers' beliefs about the necessary attitudes, behaviors, competencies and skills required by online tutors. Teachers were also asked about the importance of aspects such as curiosity, open-mindedness, and enthusiasm. These questions were also Likert scales for teachers to rate the level of importance of behaviors and attitudes.

The Teacher Training Course section asked respondents what they thought they needed to learn in an on-line training course designed to prepare them to teach English online using a learning platform. This section also included a space for additional comments. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked whether they would be willing to share additional information (e.g. in a follow-up interview). A space was added for names, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses. Other than this, the questionnaire was anonymous at first, and only if teachers were willing to expand on the information given would they need to

provide their names. Unfortunately, none of the respondents provided their information for follow up.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The results from the questionnaire were downloaded from the Survey Monkey online survey tool. Results are presented using pie and bar charts to show the similarities and differences between teachers' responses in regards to competencies required to become e-tutors. Results were then tabulated in Microsoft Excel and percentages of responses per category were calculated. When examining the data, some concerns arose since the questions were too general and made the analysis of the most important competences more difficult.

Results

Results of the questionnaire indicate that although respondents were for the most part novice online tutors, they did appear to have definite and specific ideas about what kind of training they think is useful.

Online Learning and Teaching Background

In response to Question, 2.1., *Have you had any sort of online or blended learning specific training?*, 94% of the respondents answered affirmatively. When examining the kinds of training they reported, it is possible to categorize the responses into four kinds of training which emerged from the researcher's experience with teacher training: informal, formal, tangential and product specific training. When referring to informal training, respondents mentioned self-study or autonomous learning practices such as downloading or watching video tutorials from the Internet, and self-guided reading of manuals. By formal training, teachers referred to courses offered by universities or other institutions. In general, about 20% of the respondents reported having taken a formal online training course to become a virtual tutor.

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By tangential training, teachers referred to learning from and through online experiences. A few of them (18%) mentioned that they had learned how to teach online by being students in online Master's degree programs. Finally, respondents mentioned various product trainings they had received from publishers for online or blended products. Fifty-three percent mentioned training courses for learning platforms, such as Moodle, Blackboard, D2l and E-college as well.

This information can lead us to conclude that although teachers' institutions did not provide them with training, most of the participants had an informed approach to teaching and learning online. Only 6% of the respondents reported that they had not had any kind of online learning or teaching training. However, another conclusion that can be drawn from this question is that teachers' learning in this area has been mostly empirical.

Question 2.2 asked participants to choose the words to describe their roles as blended tutors: *Choose the option (s) that best describe (s) your role as a blended e-teacher, or a teacher providing both instruction in the classroom face-to-face and in the platform online. Choose all options that apply.* The options to choose from were the following: facilitator, guide, provider, manager, support, enabler, instructor, tutor, teacher, friend, authority, motivator, controller, and other. These categories were constructed for the purpose of the questionnaire, and informed by the many terms found in the literature.

Responses were varied. The roles selected most included facilitator, support, tutor and motivator. Respondents also mentioned in additional comments that they believed that motivation was crucial in online learning environments through feedback, the design of additional activities, and constant contact with students to ask about their needs. Some of them also mentioned that they felt the urge to scaffold interaction with and through the platform, provide technical support and in general “facilitate” the learning process for students.

Fewer respondents selected the roles of provider, friend, authority or controller although one teacher did comment:

Tutor and teacher just because you are the one students need when the content and explanations in the platform are not enough for them to understand any specific language presented.

Another teacher referred to his role using the offered word controller and adding one more:

For example, with those no so responsible students I had to become some sort of controller and dictator.

Pedagogical Activities

This section asked teachers to rate the importance of specific tutor activities in blended and online learning environments to guarantee success: *How important are these activities to you in your online tutor*

role? Please tick the appropriate response. Also, participants were asked about the amount of time spent on these activities. The activities included the following: (a) checking and responding to e-mail messages; (b) correcting language errors in writing or speaking exercises; (c) giving feedback to students on content issues; (d) providing additional explanations on grammar and vocabulary; (e) creating announcements and broadcast messages to all students; (f) checking students' progress; (g) verifying students' access to the platform; (h) creating video or text tutorials to explain technicalities to students; (i) contacting students directly to give them assistance on technical issues, and other. These activities reflect frequent tasks of online tutors presented in the literature (Berge, 1995; Salmon, 2002). Figure 2 illustrates those activities teachers deemed "quite important."

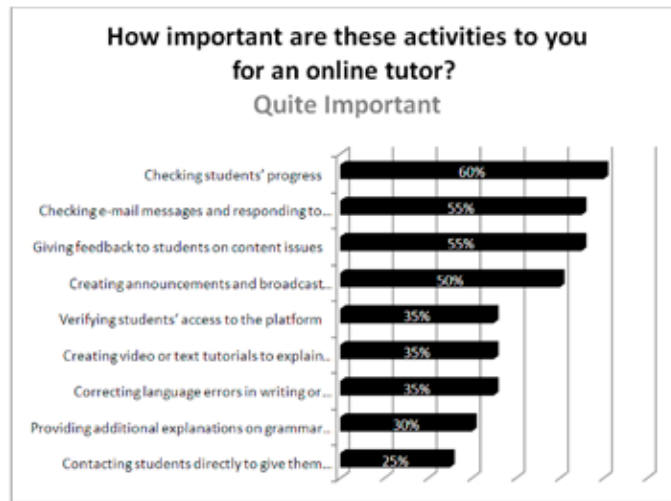


Figure 2. Quite important activities for online tutors

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Most teachers rated one activity as quite important: checking students' progress (60%). In second and third order of importance, respondents ranked managerial activities such as giving feedback to students on content issues, checking e-mail messages and responding them within 24 hours and creating announcements and broadcast messages to all students. Language-focused activities such as correcting errors or providing additional explanations (35% and 30% respectively) were considered quite important but to a lesser extent.

In terms of time spent carrying out these activities, most teachers reported that they spent between four to six hours a week providing

online assistance to students. According to the responses, the most time consuming activity is checking e-mail messages and responding to them. Forty-four percent of the respondents mentioned that giving feedback also took them between four to six hours a week. For 32% of the respondents, the least time consuming activity (less than an hour a week) is to contact students directly to provide them with assistance on technical issues. A comment in regards to this question helps us confirm Salmon's idea of "Access and Motivation" being the first stage of the e-moderating process (2002). The teacher says:

Once students are familiar with the platform, technical issues practically disappear and we can concentrate on the learning.

Attitudes and Behaviors towards Online Teaching

This section of the questionnaire asked teachers about their beliefs regarding the necessary attitudes and behaviors towards online learning: *Please tick the appropriate response. How important are the following to you in your role as an online tutor?* The items were drawn from the researcher's previous experience as an online trainer and from Salmon's list of e-moderator competencies (2002, p. 55-56), and included a range of behaviors and attitudes.

For most teachers (70%), learning about online learning and teaching and (65%) learning about technicalities in the platform were the most important facets to online learning. Respondents acknowledged that these competencies need to be learned and that they were willing to devote time to them.

Regarding other important competencies and skills, participants considered the following as "very important:" finding out about students' learning processes (60%), analyzing students' needs (45%), and solving students' learning problems (53%). In terms of attitudes, 63% thought that open-mindedness was the most important attitude to have. In turn, enthusiasm and time in the platform were also considered important. Curiosity was voted important by 55% of the respondents, being also considered an important competence or skill to have when being an online tutor.

The Teacher Training Course

This section of the questionnaire referred to the competencies and skills teachers thought they needed to learn to be able to provide students with a more enjoyable and meaningful learning experience in an online environment: If you were to take an online course to improve your competencies and skills as a virtual tutor, which of the following would be useful to you? Rate the importance of each (please tick the option). The specific competencies, skills to be ranked included the following: learning about technical aspects of platform, the content, pedagogical rationale of online teaching and the content of the platform, and learner motivation and support. Respondents were invited to choose all that applied.

Most teachers (90%) considered learning about how to teach online a useful skill. Eighty percent of the respondents reported that learning how to teach the material was a very important competence to acquire. Teachers also reported that it was important to learn how to facilitate students learning process, with 75% of respondents choosing the “very important” option. Seventy percent thought learning to facilitate tasks, the pedagogical rationale of the content and the tools offered were also very important. In the comments area, a teacher said:

Sometimes I feel I don't use the platform to its fullest, there are so many tools but I don't know what to do with all of them.

Participants rated most of the skills and competencies presented either as important or very important. Teachers also acknowledged the importance of all aspects (not only content or methodology) and recognized learning about technical and managerial skills as also important in online and blended modes. Sixty-five percent of the respondents reported that helping students gain access to the platform and welcoming and encouraging students (55%) were important.

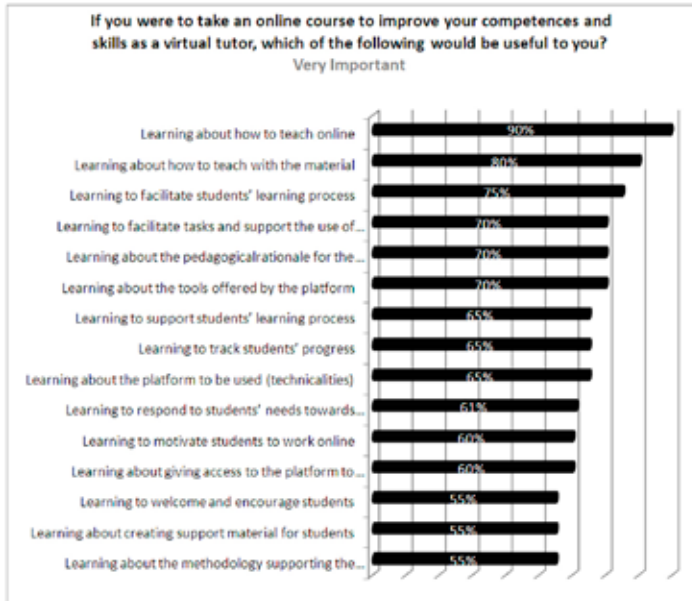


Figure 3. "Very Important" competencies to learn in an online training course

The questionnaire and results presented yielded interesting information to inform the needs analysis. Respondents considered a variety of tutor roles as important including tutor, facilitator, support, motivator. Consequently, teacher-training courses should include some awareness on the variety of roles and way they shift in the online learning environment. Based on the results, pedagogical activities not related to language learning, such as giving feedback, creating video tutorials and checking progress, can also be included as support materials for novice online tutors. Finally, managerial activities, such as learning about creating support material (e.g. screen casts) for students, creating announcements and learning to motivate students to work online will also need to be included in teacher training courses. Other important competencies to include are learning to facilitate students' learning processes and learning to facilitate tasks and the use of learning materials. Finally, the responses confirmed the need for accompanying teachers not only in the pedagogical roles online tutors exert, but also on the managerial, technical and social ones suggested by Berge (1995.)

Conclusion

This study helped the researcher confirm her hypothesis of the need to include additional materials in online teacher training courses. The content of the online platform or course software is important to be mastered by teachers. However, there are other competencies that also need to be approached and taught to novice online tutors in order to facilitate their work in blended and online learning environments.

Some weaknesses of the study may include the way questions were designed, as there was some ambiguity in the answers which led to difficulties in the analysis of the results. These ambiguities could have been addressed in follow up interviews with respondents; however, none of the participants volunteered for such follow up.

The field of needs analysis in teacher training programs is understudied. Therefore, more research is needed in order to aid teacher training program creators in the design of relevant course materials for novice online instructors.

Online and blended learning are very attractive nowadays because of their flexibility and ease. Institutions are increasingly interested in implementing these modes of learning in their curriculums. However, these new modes of learning bring challenges along with them for students and teachers. Teachers need to transform into online tutors and this is not an easy task. Even though there is still a lot to be done in terms of analyzing the needs of novice online tutors, this study yielded interesting conclusions as to the competencies, skills and attitudes needed to become a successful online tutor and to make a smooth transition between classroom teaching and e-moderation. It also helped confirm the need to work on more than pedagogical aspects with online tutors since other competencies are also needed. Classroom teachers might be experienced, but they also need support in transitioning to new modes of learning.

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Author

***Carolina Rodriguez Buitrago** holds a Bachelor of Arts in Language Teaching from the *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional-Bogotá*, an English Certificate from Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts and an MA in Educational Technology and TESOL from the University of Manchester. Currently, she works as a professor at *Universidad de la Sabana* and *Universidad El Bosque*. She is also a certified e-tutor for E-college. She was the Academic Manager and Digital Specialist for Cambridge University Press Colombia for over two years. She also serves as a “*Par Amiga*” of the National Ministry of Education in the “*Proyecto de Fortalecimiento del componente de inglés en Instituciones Técnicas y Tecnológicas*”. She has more than 10 years of experience teaching English at all levels and presenting at national and international conferences. She has also been part of curricular and supervision teams. She has been working as a teacher trainer since 2009.