



Evaluating University Instructors' attitudes and challenges towards online English language teaching before and after Corona crisis.



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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate Iranian EFL instructors' attitude toward e-learning before and after Corona crisis, how they conducted their online EFL teaching, and the challenges they faced during this crisis by employing a mixed methods design. Forty-one university ELT instructors from across the country participated in the quantitative phase of the study by filling out an online questionnaire about their attitude toward e-learning before and after the crisis. For the qualitative phase of this study, 16 instructors who volunteered to participate in this research were invited to participate in the study. The instructors were requested to report in writing their practices in conducting online EFL classes and the challenges they encountered since Corona broke out. Five of them also consented to participate in a semi-structured interview. Analysis of the quantitative data showed a significant increase in positive attitude toward e-learning from before to after the crisis. Analysis of the qualitative data also showed that the instructors conducted online teaching through a series of activities, ranging from checking student presence to evaluating student work synchronously or asynchronously, depending on university policies. However, many problems arose with the students and the instructors. It can be concluded that online teaching did not go well because it was not prepared and the necessary infrastructure did not exist. Research implications for better online learning are also discussed.

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1. Introduction

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) became a major pandemic worldwide and affected many countries. A global health emergency was announced by the WHO Emergency Committee in late January 2020, as the number of cases increased internationally (McAleer, 2020; Velavan & Meyer, 2020). COVID-19 spread to all continents, and the latest news about COVID-19 overloaded the global mass media every day in 2020 (McAleer, 2020). On April 1, 2020, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Iran reached more than 1,500 cases (WHO, 2020). The global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic led to an interruption of the classes, leading in turn to the requirements of online teaching (Moorhouse, 2020). To maintain the health of students, teachers, and all educational staff, the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT) supervising all universities in the country and the Ministry of Education (ME) supervising schools instructed educational institutions to conduct online learning for the entire country since March 17, 2020 (Amini, Asgari, & Asgari, 2020).

These guidelines resulted in students' taking part in online classes from home and instructors working from home. The personal classroom environment was completely replaced by an online environment lasting until the end of the academic year. Carrying out online learning turned into a new challenge for both students and their instructors. According to Cao et al. (2020), these measures undoubtedly had a profound impact on education, particularly on

students' learning. Previous Online learning research typically examined standalone online learning tools, teaching methods or techniques, unique environments within a blended learning program, and the comparison between classroom-based and fully online learning. The focus was usually on students' attitudes, perceptions, assessments, satisfactions, and performances (Gonzalez & Louis, 2018; Sun, 2014).

Although a large number of studies were carried out both quantitatively and qualitatively to measure the effectiveness of online learning (Gonzalez & Louis, 2018), there was rarely a study of online language learning during a pandemic, particularly in English as a foreign language (EFL) context in the university environment, since most online research on language learning was carried out in pre-university environments (Chin-Hsi Lin & Warschauer, 2015). This pandemic led to a full online language learning taking place in a sudden and completely unprepared situation. A special study examining full online language learning was very rare (Sun, 2014), especially during a pandemic.

English is the most famous foreign language in Iran and remains the first foreign language. It has been officially taught in Iran a long time ago (Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020; Hosseini & Shokrpour, 2020; Kam, 2002; Mirhosseini & Badri, 2020; Namaziandost, Imani, & Ziafar, 2020). As a foreign language, English attained a special status among many foreign languages existing in Iran especially French for many reasons (Amirbakzadeh & Vakil, 2020).

Students must take this subject as a three-credit course at their bachelor level. Students must also take this subject in the university entrance exam (Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020; Hoominian, Fazilatfar, & Yazdanmoghaddam, 2020; Hosseini & Shokrpour, 2020; Namaziandost, Imani, & Ziafar, 2020).

English is taught as a course in Iranian high schools (Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020). In a global context, English has become a major factor to find a good job. It also shows people the economic benefits of mastering the English language (Namaziandost & Imani, 2020; Namaziandost, Imani, & Ziafar, 2020). Not surprisingly, current topics and trends in ELT are mainly affected by education experts, educators, language policymakers, and linguists (Namaziandost, Imani, & Ziafar, 2020).

Online learning continues to expand internationally as students and educators see the opportunity to set up and access alternative learning opportunities (White, 2008). Online learning means a series of learning activities in a subject provided via a network. This terminology particularly points to a teaching and learning approach that includes Internet technology. The online learning environment is useful not only for students to access knowledge and materials, but also to connect and collaborate with other students (Krish, 2008).

Online learning is also perceived as using the Internet to access materials, interact with content, teachers and other students, and get support in the learning process to gain knowledge and make progress through learning experience (Ally, 2008). Online learning is defined as remote learning supported by

electronic devices such as tablets, smartphones, laptops, and computers requiring an Internet connection (Gonzalez & Louis, 2018). The widespread use of online learning inevitably brings students to alternative locations for online language learning (Plaisance, 2018). Online Language Learning (OLL) can indicate various learning forms, namely web-based learning, hybrid or mixed learning, and completely virtual or online learning.

Although teachers' attitude toward technology is a decisive factor in adopting technology (Kadel, 2005), there are few studies investigating the attitudes of university professors toward e-learning. For example, Jamlan (2004) assessed the attitude of 30 faculty members toward e-learning. He found that faculty members had relatively a positive attitude toward e-learning although there were concerns about the unavailability of baseline prerequisites such as technological resources. In another study, Jegede et al. (2007) selected 476 university and college teachers and examined the relationship between their technological competence and attitudes. They found that attitude can predict technological competence and noted that the participants found technology such as computers a useful tool for pedagogical purposes. Alshammari et al. (2016) investigated the attitudes of 40 faculty members toward mobile technologies. The results revealed a positive correlation between the participants' skills in using mobile technologies and their attitudes toward using them.

Although university professors may have a positive attitude toward e-learning technologies, there are some barriers deterring them from using technologies in their classes (Naidu 2004;

Vodanovich & Piotrowski, 2005). For instance, using a semi-structured interview, Hedayati and Marandi (2014) found that many EFL teachers, including university professors, were reluctant to integrate technology into their classes due to some barriers. They classified the barriers into three categories, namely, teacher, facility, and learner constraints. Further issues preventing university professors from adopting technologies in their classes can be highlighted as faculty workload (Schifter, 2000), lack of knowledge and unwillingness to work with technology (Pajo & Wallace, 2001), lack of extrinsic rewards (Newton, 2003), and lack of time (Naidu, 2004; Vodanovich & Piotrowski, 2004).

Given the COVID-19 pandemic and the government policy to conduct online learning, this study looked at how EFL university instructors perceived e-learning before and after the COVID-19 crisis. Few studies so far have examined university professors' attitudes toward e-learning (reference). Moreover, few studies have been carried out investigating the challenges in implementing e-learning, particularly in higher educational contexts (references). This study is based on written reflection data from university professors from different cities in Iran and contributes to the field of online language learning research. It enriches the knowledge of how EFL university teachers in Iran conducted online EFL learning in a sudden and completely unprepared situation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It also sheds light on the challenges they encountered during their online teaching. Therefore, questions that guided the present research were as follows:

(1) Was there any difference in attitude toward e-learning before and after the COVID-19

pandemic among Iranian EFL university teachers?

(2) How did the EFL university teachers conduct online EFL learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

(3) What were the challenges EFL professors faced in implementing online EFL learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. Method

Research context and Participants

This research was carried out in Iran, where English is the first foreign language and a compulsory subject in public schools and universities (Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020; Hoominian, Fazilatfar & Yazdanmoghaddam, 2020; Hosseini & Shokrpour, 2020; Namaziandost, Imani, & Ziafar, 2020). However, English is not spoken in Iranian social life and is mainly used for academic, professional, and business purposes (Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020; Hosseini & Shokrpour, 2020). Iranian EFL teachers typically use Persian for both written and oral communication in academic forums (Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020) and classrooms (Khodamoradi, Talebi & Maghsoudi, 2020). They do not retain their English skills after receiving formal teacher training. Their knowledge will likely decrease over time (Nasr, Bagheri, & Sadighi, 2020). Not surprisingly, many Iranian EFL university teachers do not speak the language they teach (Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020).

The study was conducted in two phases. In the quantitative phase, 12 university teachers who were colleagues to the researchers filled out the online questionnaire. Next, the questionnaire

was sent to another group consisting of 120 EFL university teachers. More than 60 people filled out the questionnaire; however, only 41 returned responses were completely filled out to be used for the purposes of the current research. The participants in the qualitative phase were 16 EFL university teachers, consisting of 12 women and 4 men from different cities. All instructors had a Ph.D. to teach English as a foreign language. They had experience teaching English as a foreign language in the range of 1 to 18 years. The mother tongue for all participants was Persian.

Instrument

In order to measure Iranian faculty members' attitude toward e-learning, the questionnaire constructed by Panda and Mishra (2007) was adopted. The instrument had three main components, including attitude towards e-learning, possible barriers, and motivators, from which the first component (i.e., attitude toward e-learning) was employed in this survey study. In their general review of related literature, Panda and Mishra (2007) claimed to have found only one standard scale (i.e., Watkins, Leigh, & Triner, 2004) which assessed readiness for e-learning. Therefore, by surveying through literature, they identified and included possible statements in the scale to measure faculty attitude toward e-learning. The developed instrument was shown to nine experts for content validity, and based on the feedback obtained from them, they prepared a five-point Likert-type scale (ranging from '5' (strongly agree) to '1' (strongly disagree), with '3' as 'undecided') with 22 items that included seven negatively worded statements. They also calculated the reliability of the questionnaire

using Cronbach's alpha which turned out to be .81 which indicated a high internal consistency of the items. However, to make sure the instrument was reliable for the purpose of the study, it was given to 20 Iranian professors, and the obtained Cronbach's alpha turned out to be .81. The final version of the questionnaire was converted into a digital format using Google Drive as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The online questionnaire generated using Google Form.

Data Analysis

With regard to the first research question, to compare the university professors' attitude toward e-learning before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, the researchers tabulated the descriptive statistics of data and checked the normality of them (See Tables 1 & 2).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Attitudes toward E-Learning before and after the COVID-19 Pandemic

	N	M	SD	Std. Error Mean
Before the COVID-19 Pandemic	41			
	1.95	0.22	.03	
After the COVID-19 Pandemic	41			2.30
	0.15	.02		

Table 2

Normality Test for the Differences of Attitudes toward E-Learning before and after the COVID-19 Pandemic

Shapiro-Wilk

	Statistic	df	p	Skewness	Kurtosis
	Std. Error of				
	Skewness				
	Std. Error of				
	Kurtosis				
Differences	.97	41		.53	-0.14
	.36		-0.27	.72	

Based on Table 2, the distribution of the differences between the two sets of data is normal since the p value for the Shapiro-Wilk normality test is above .05. Moreover, there were no significant outliers in this distribution. Therefore, the dependent samples t-test was conducted for comparing university professors' attitudes toward e-learning before and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 3

Dependent Samples t-test for Attitude toward E-Learning before and after the COVID-19 Pandemic

M	t(40)	p	95% CI	η^2
-0.34	-11.34	.00	[-0.41, -0.28]	.75

Based on Tables 1 and 3, the difference for attitude toward e-learning before ($M = 1.951.85$, $SD = 0.22$) and after ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 0.15$) the COVID-19 pandemic was statistically significant, $t(40) = -11.34$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size, $\eta^2 = .75$, 95% CI [-0.41, -0.28].

With regard to the second and third questions, 16 university teachers (Table 4) volunteered to participate in this research upon invitation. According to a list of questions, EFL teachers were asked to consider in writing their practices

in implementing online EFL learning and the challenges they encountered. In addition, five of them were individually involved in a follow-up interview because they provided attractive narratives and topics in the written considerations and were found to be willing to cooperate further. Semi-structured interviews were carried out and took about 30 minutes for each respondent.

Table 4. List of participants in the study

No	Surname	Gender	age
1	Susan	F.	40
2nd	Khadijeh	F.	35
3rd	Fahimeh	F.	33
4th	Leila	F.	40
5	Zohreh	F.	48
6	Nahid	F.	47
7	Mona	F.	43
8th	Najmeh	F.	50
9	Neda	F.	47
10th	Nc	F.	42
11	Nayer	F.	45
12	Elahe	F.	38
13	Bagher	M.	40
14	Vahid	M.	52
15	Mohsen	M.	38
16	Hamid	M.	40

Participants were asked to provide detailed explanations of teaching procedures, online teaching materials used, as well as material examples, quizzes, assignments, and projects, given to students to demonstrate the practices of online EFL teaching that they conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, as stated in the instructions. All interviews were recorded in audio format and transcribed for further analysis.

All participants' agreement was obtained before the research was carried out. In light of research questions and recent online learning theories (Ally, 2008; Gonzalez & Louis, 2018; Krish, 2008), the data was carefully reviewed and important codes were used to describe the practices of online EFL learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The transcripts of the interviews were checked several times in order to obtain initial information on the practices of online EFL learning and its challenges. Data coding was done to show classification and emerging trends. Redundancies were deleted. In the end, suitable extracts from the practices of online EFL learning and its challenges were provided in the results area. Some grammatical changes were made to ensure the linguistic effectiveness of the excerpts without changing their intent and meaning. To validate the data, data coding was done independently by the researchers and continued through several discussion cycles to reach an agreement on the results.

3. Results

Quantitative data analysis showed an increase in attitude to e-learning among Iranian university professors from pre-Corona to post-Corona

period. Other similar studies investigating the attitudes of university professors toward the use of technology and e-learning also found that faculty members had relatively a positive attitude (Alshammari et al., 2016; Jamlan, 2004; Jegede et al., 2007). What follows elaborates on the qualitative findings in three key issues related to the practices of online EFL learning and the challenges that arose. It contains information about what applications and platforms instructors were using, how they performed their online teaching, and what challenges they faced. For each of the three topics, the most representative excerpts were selected from the answers of the participants.

Applications and platforms used by teachers

The instructors used several applications and platforms, which could be divided into eight types. They could be grouped under these titles: learning management systems; chatting and messaging; video conferencing; content production; assessment; video streaming and sharing; online learning providers; and finally miscellaneous resources. The instructors did not use games, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and augmented reality. They used Google Classroom and Moodle to manage their online learning in general.

I chose Google Classroom because it didn't need to be installed on their smartphones, so the students didn't complain that they were spending their internet quota and they did not need a stable internet connection. All the students had to do was log in with their Gmail account and enter the class code. So, it was easier and more accessible than other applications (Mohsen, Written Reflection).

The first application I used was Moodle. I use it to publish materials related to proverbs and puzzles (Nahid, Written Reflection).

The instructors also used WhatsApp to perform many activities similar to learning management systems.

I used WhatsApp to exchange materials, to give information about tasks or projects, to hold discussions, to give questions and answers, and to give personal feedback to the students (Mona, Interview).

Adobe Connect was chosen to perform possible activities in a conference call environment.

I used Adobe Connect to explain materials orally as in face-to-face meetings, to have oral discussions with students, and to provide question and answer sessions (Leila, written reflection).

The instructors also used several content maker applications. These were Autodesk SketchBook, TEDEd, and FastStone Capture.

The second application I used was Autodesk SketchBook. It was used to replace the function of a whiteboard for presenting materials. We could create materials in written and graphic form (Fahimeh, Written Reflection).

TEDEd and FastStone Capture are both video maker applications.

I used FastStone Capture to create a screencasting video. In short, I explained the materials orally by showing PowerPoint slides. In the meantime, TEDEd was used to create a teaching video by editing available online videos (Najmeh, Interview).

Google Forms, Quizizz, and Kahoot were assessment applications used by the instructors. They were used to create online tests for students in the form of multiple choices, essays, and true or false alternatives.

I used Kahoot to create multiple-choice quizzes with four options and true or false alternatives. I also used Google Form to create quiz questions in four different options and essay formats. Kahoot needed a more stable internet connection, while Google Forms was more accessible when the internet connection was unstable. Google Forms also enabled the processing of scores (Vahid, Written Reflection).

I used Quizizz to create quizzes in a multiple-choice form (Nahid, Written Reflection).

YouTube was mainly used by teachers as a visual material resource in the form of videos and animations.

I attached YouTube video links in my Google Classroom classes to provide visual material to my students. (Khadijeh, Written Reflection)

Ruangguru was one of the applications for online learning providers. The instructor participated in some quiz items provided by this application.

I selected some quiz questions provided by Ruangguru that were relevant to the materials I taught. I took some screenshots with my smartphones to take some quiz items. Then I shared the selected quiz elements via WhatsApp and asked my students to answer them (Fahimeh, interview).

The instructors also provided several websites as additional resources for their students. These websites were: <http://en.childrenslibrary.org/>, <https://belajar.kemdikbud.go.id>, and <https://kelaspingtar.id>.

I asked my students to visit <http://en.childrenslibrary.org/> and select a book that was available on the website. I gave them a week to read the selected book. They then had to write a review of the book they had read. It was typically a reading task, especially an extensive reading task (Najmeh, interview).

The activities of the instructors in carrying out online EFL learning

The online teaching of some instructors was in synchronous and asynchronous mode.

My school had set the schedule for this online learning, so I had to follow my institution's rules (Nahid, written reflection).

My school did not set a specific schedule for doing online learning. The most important thing was that each instructor had to perform teaching activities every week, such as providing materials or assigning tasks or projects to students (Bagher, written reflection).

First, the instructors checked the students' presence. Next, they used materials in the form of PowerPoint slides, YouTube videos, and Word documents or created their own materials in the form of videos, images, PowerPoint slides, Word documents, and PDF documents. The materials were uploaded by the teachers to learning management systems such as Google Classroom and Moodle or shared via messaging applications such as WhatsApp. Then the instructors explained the materials with zoom,

for example. The instructor's explanation could also be included in the materials, e.g. B. in videos, Word documents, and PDF documents. The course leaders then created online tests in the form of multiple selections, essays, and true or false alternatives to assess students' mastery of the subject.

The instructors also commissioned the students with some tasks and projects, as some instructors used project-based learning in their online learning. In order to gain a deeper understanding and to refine the students' lack of knowledge, the trainers held discussions with the students. The trainers also provided question and answer sessions to involve the students and solve their learning problems. The instructors then gave personal feedback on the students' work. The feedback should help the students to personally advance their learning. In the end, the instructors gave points for the assessment of each student.

I asked my students to state whether they were taking the online learning as planned and to say that they were present in the comment on my contribution to the Google Classroom (Hamid, Written Reflection) exam.

I downloaded some ready-to-use materials on my teaching topics in the form of PowerPoint slides. I also downloaded some relevant videos from YouTube to improve student understanding of the topics. I then shared these materials via WhatsApp (Mona, Interview).

I have created some modules in PDF document format. I uploaded these modules to Google Drive. Then I gave my students the Google Drive links so they could access the modules and read them as study materials. I created these

modules because I thought that the materials available in the students' textbooks are difficult to learn independently of one another (Neda, interview).

I uploaded my materials to Moodle as a learning management system. I uploaded the materials in many classes because I taught two different courses, General English and ESP (Nahid, Written Reflection).

I explained the materials through a conference call made possible by the Zoom application. Here I explained the materials orally by seeing the faces of my students on my laptop screen (Bagher, Written Reflection).

I have created materials in Word documents. I have included my statement, which was usually made directly and orally, in the materials. So I wrote the important points and briefs of the materials and my explanation in the same Word document (Hamid, Written Reflection).

I created online quizzes in the form of multiple selections, essays, and true or false alternatives (Vahid, Written Reflection).

I commissioned my students with a project to write a hortatory exhibition text and an analytical exhibition text on topics related to COVID-19 (Elahe, Written Reflection).

I conducted a discussion about the generic structure of the narrative text by first asking a few questions to stimulate the discussion. The questions I asked led students to understand the materials critically and to initiate their ability to ask and think. The students answered my questions and asked other questions. In this lively discussion, there was an exchange of knowledge (Najmeh, interview).

I enabled a question-and-answer session via WhatsApp. This question and answer session took place in the WhatsApp group of every class that I taught. The pupils were allowed to ask questions about their learning difficulties and lack of knowledge about the subjects taught (Nahid, interview).

I have always personally rated my students' work through the private comments feature in Google Classroom and personal WhatsApp chat. I wanted my students to know what should be improved and how it can be improved to get better results. This resulted in the students making good progress (Susan, Written Reflection).

I always gave points for my students' work, as they had to be reported in the report books at the end of the semester. It also gave the students insights and considerations about how well they mastered the topic (Khadijeh, Written Reflection).

Some activities carried out by the trainers were generally similar to teaching face-to-face activities. The chronological order of the activities was similar to that of classroom activities. The instructors have just moved the face-to-face course into an online learning environment. You still haven't thought much about the differences between classroom learning and online learning. The instructors have also not maximized the use of technology in online learning. They used no game, no artificial intelligence, no augmented reality, and no virtual reality. It seemed that educators' knowledge and skills in using technology in online learning needed to be improved.

The instructors were also creative and innovative in providing activities for students in online learning environments. In short, it was not enough to simply shift the classroom to an online learning environment. Instructors had to be knowledgeable and skillful to teach online learning. They had to master the content (the language they teach), the technology of online language learning, and the pedagogy of foreign language learning.

The challenges and valid reasons

There were many problems with instructor online EFL learning. The problems came from the students, the teachers, and the parents of the students. The valid reasons for these problems have been identified. The first problem was that some students didn't have their own smartphones. It was usually caused by her family's financial situation.

There were some students in my classes who didn't have a smartphone. Due to their financial situation, their parents could not afford a smartphone for their children (Fahimeh, Written Reflection).

The second was about an unstable internet connection. Cellular and internet coverage still became a problem in remote and rural areas. In fact, some students lived in remote, rural, and mountainous areas.

Some of my students complained about the unstable internet connection because they lived in remote and mountainous areas (Zohreh, Written Reflection).

The financial situation of the students and their families also led to another problem, namely the inability to afford an adequate Internet quota for

online learning. They could only afford a small internet quota, which was not enough to comfortably take part in online learning. Sometimes my students didn't have an internet quota so they couldn't access the internet and participate in online learning. This problem occurred because income was not evenly distributed across all residents.

Not all students came from a high- or middle-income family who could afford a decent living (Mona, Interview).

Many students had little digital literacy. They found difficulties in running the applications and platforms used for online learning. A logical reason for this was that students did not use it to learn through online learning and to interact with these applications and platforms.

At first, my students didn't know how to copy, paste, and edit the text in WhatsApp groups to fill out the attendance list. Many of my students also had difficulty using Google Classroom because they had never tried this application before. I created some tutorial videos on using Google Classroom to help them understand how it works and how to copy, paste, and edit the text in the WhatsApp group (Neda, Interview).

Some students had not only little digital knowledge, but also little general knowledge. They could not understand Teacher's instruction well, even though it was clearly written. It was usually because they hadn't read the instructor's instructions carefully and were too lazy to read the instructor's instructions. Sometimes they skipped the instruction if the words were too many for them.

I had to repeatedly give the same information to my students just because they were not careful enough to read the information. Their literacy was not good (Neda, Written Reflection).

Some students did not attend online learning on time as scheduled by schools at certain times in a week. They were absent during the hours when online learning was scheduled and asked the instructors what had been taught and assigned in the afternoon. It happened because the students had the wrong ideas.

In my students' eyes, learning from home was like a vacation. They went to bed from morning until almost the afternoon. They did not participate in online learning from morning to noon as planned. They contacted me in the afternoon and asked if they had been given a task or a project. I didn't serve them when it wasn't working (Nayer, Written Reflection).

Some students submitted their work after the deadline. This can have various reasons. Some students were too lazy to complete the teacher's task or project. It could be that your internet quota has expired. They also had an unstable internet connection when they submitted their works in the last few minutes. This could happen to students who didn't have their own smartphones, so they had to borrow their parents 'or siblings' smartphones, which were also used for online learning. It was also caused by their misperception that their works were not rated by the instructor.

Several students were able to meet the deadline for assignments. They recently submitted their work because they didn't have smartphones. They had to borrow smartphones from their parents or siblings. While her siblings also

needed the smartphone to participate in online learning (Najmeh, Written Reflection).

Another problem that arose was the students' different mastery of the subject, which resulted from the knowledge and learning style of the students. It was common for students to master the subject differently in one class, even in the classroom. It became a new challenge to teach students with little knowledge and different learning styles in an online learning environment.

I found difficulties in providing the materials to the students who needed additional guidance on learning. It was because of their little knowledge. It was quite difficult for me to teach them through online learning (Mona, Written Reflection).

It was difficult to provide a learning experience based on each student's learning style. Therefore, my students could not master the subject optimally, because they did not get a learning experience that corresponded to their learning style. It was difficult and took a long time to prepare different learning experiences based on each student's learning style in an online learning environment (Nahid, Interview).

Some students complained about the workload of online learning. They suffered from many tasks and projects that were assigned to them with deadlines. Students felt more stressed through online learning. This was due to the fact that students learned about 14 subjects through online learning and all of these subjects had tasks that the students had to complete with deadlines (Nahid, interview).

Some students had little awareness of online learning. They realized that online learning was not important. This problem occurred because the students had misconceptions about online learning. They assumed that learning online was informal and just like a vacation, so they were too relaxed. Sometimes several students forgot to take part in online learning. They had little awareness of online learning. They found it informal. It seemed like a cliché to them, as they had never before experienced online learning (Mona, Interview).

Since the problems came from the students, the trainers also encountered challenges that came from them. Initially, instructors had difficulty creating materials that were easy to learn in an online learning environment, as some instructors only used low-technology applications due to the lack of facilities their students suffered from. This was also due to the lack of experience and knowledge of the trainers in carrying out online learning.

I had difficulty creating materials that were still core and basic and easily understood by students of independent learning, as many students did not have enough facilities to participate in online interactive learning, such as their own Smartphones with adequate specifications, stable internet connection, and adequate internet quota (Neda, interview).

The instructors also found a problem in giving students personal feedback. It happened because the allotted time was still insufficient and several students had recently submitted their work.

I could give personal feedback on each student's work in real-time. The time set by the school for

online learning was insufficient. Some students have also recently submitted their work so that I can give personal feedback on their work as soon as possible. The students also responded to my feedback at different times. It was better if we could give personal feedback on the students' work in real-time (Susan, Written Reflection).

The lack of adequate facilities for the integration of high technology has become another problem in online learning. It was known that many students had problems with an unstable internet connection, the inability to afford adequate internet quota, and the lack of smartphones. Without proper facilities, trainers would not be able to do interactive online learning. They could only give materials for independent home learning, assignments or projects, and quizzes. However, the instructors still had to choose the applications that didn't require a lot of internet quota and that could still run on a slow internet connection like Google Classroom, Google Forms, and WhatsApp.

I was unable to do interactive and engaging online learning because the opportunities for online learning were still very limited and far away to do interactive and engaging online learning. In addition, the financial situation of the students was still unable to afford the necessary facilities (Fahimeh, interview).

In addition, the instructors had difficulty in engaging less motivated and passive students in online learning environments. This was suggested by some students who took part in the discussion. Some students did not concentrate and even went to sleep when they were on a conference call. This was due to the laziness of the students, the unstable internet connection,

and the poor knowledge of English that demotivated them to attend discussion and question and answer sessions that were conducted in English. Students' English skills were another problem with this online learning. This was because students inside and outside the classroom did not use English for everyday communication.

My students were rather passive and didn't say a lot of words when I gave classes or had discussions in English. They then asked about my Persian classes. They usually actively participated in discussions when we used Persian. They did not use English in discussions and other daily activities. They were confused to express their ideas and questions in English. They had little knowledge of English (Elahe, Written Reflection).

The trainers also complained about their lack of preparation and willingness to conduct online learning. This was because online learning was not previously planned and prepared. There was a sudden response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I felt that I was not ready to switch from face-to-face classes to online learning because online learning was suddenly carried out in an emergency and not prepared in advance (Nahid, interview).

In addition, the instructors had difficulty conveying moral value to their students. It was difficult for them to educate their students' morals through online learning because the trainers and the students were far apart.

Because of the distance, it was difficult to convey moral values to my students through online learning, so that I could not directly and

intensively convey an exemplary attitude to my students (Nahid, interview).

Learning online was also difficult to strengthen the emotional bond between the instructor and the students. This was due to the lack of physical touch and interaction when learning online.

The emotional bond between the instructor and the students was not relieved very well because it was limited by long distances, which did not result in personal meetings and physical touches such as smiles and handshakes, which usually strengthened the emotional bond between the instructor and the student Students (Nahid, interview).

Communication and interaction between the trainer and the students were very important in the learning process. However, online learning still could not facilitate communication and interaction, as well as classroom instruction. It happened because the instructor and students were distant. Therefore, the communication and interaction between them have not been optimized.

My students couldn't reach me directly if they didn't understand the materials or had problems learning. They had difficulty communicating and interacting with me in an online learning environment. I also thought that online communication and interaction cannot replace face-to-face meetings in a learning context (Zohreh, Written Reflection).

Many parents have not monitored and supervised their children's learning through online learning. It was because they were busy at work and their work could not be done at home. They did not work from home because

they worked in the informal sector (NC, Written Reflection).

The last problem was that excessive use of smartphones and laptops can cause eye pain because the emitted radiation of the screens of the smartphone and laptop was not good for our eyes and our health.

I and my students were tired and burnout when they stared at our smartphone or laptop screens for a long time. This was due to the radiation effect from smartphones or laptops, which was not good for our eyes when we used them for a long time (Mona, Interview).

4. DISCUSSION

The results showed that the instructors conducted online EFL classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The instructors used many applicable applications and platforms based on their knowledge and the ability of their students to access these applications and platforms because the students' facilities were not available. These applications and platforms ranged from learning management systems to additional resources. There were two ways to do online learning, synchronous and asynchronous mode. The majority of the trainers performed online teaching synchronously because their schools or institutions had specified the rule and the precise schedule for carrying out online learning. In addition, the instructors carried out a number of activities to teach students through online learning. These ranged from checking the presence of the students to evaluating the students' work.

However, many challenges arose from the students, the trainers, and the students' parents.

The cause of each problem was examined and presented in the results area. Many online learning applications appeared quickly every day. The instructors were allowed to deliver materials to their students' smartphones. Instructors could use some educational applications, references, and games to facilitate classroom activities (Sun, 2018). Synchronous-based applications were useful for creating contexts and enabling teachers and students to interact in real-time. In addition, asynchronous applications could be used for low-technology use through discussions and written responses.

A thorough and balanced mix of activities could encourage students to learn online (Plaisance, 2018). The instructors had to provide simple, obvious, and proper instructions on what to do, how to do it, and where to submit their work. The activities had to be set with the goals in mind and sequentially arranged in tasks that reflect real situations in order to arouse and motivate the students (Gonzalez & Louis, 2018). Trainers had to be able to recognize engagement, present meaningful activities, offer question and answer sessions, and offer icebreaking activities to maintain student engagement.

Sufficient challenges, resources, and feedback had to be made available to the students (Green, 2016). Challenges included pedagogy with technology, designing interactive activities, improving formal learning, gaining student support, and dealing with problems when using technology (Sun, 2018). Other difficulties with complete online learning were meeting planned participation and regular learning, maintaining sustained engagement, becoming a self-directed

learner with high motivation, and making contacts (Sun, 2014).

Problems also arose from the inability to afford a smartphone and internet quota for students and from the unstable internet connection. Good pedagogy would be nonsense if there were problems with access to technology (Burston, 2014; Cakrawati, 2017). Preparing online learning took more time than preparing face-to-face classes (Krish, 2008). Online learning required a larger investment than face-to-face classes to properly design and implement it (Green, 2016). It had to be done skillfully to avoid friction and detachment because online students could feel isolated and disconnected (Plaisance, 2018). It also required more responsible and more autonomous students. They had to be self-directed learners with high motivation to spend time effectively to prepare, maintain, manage, and reflect on their learning and participation (Gonzalez & Louis, 2018).

In addition, student-teacher and student-material interactions had a significant and positive impact on student satisfaction. Therefore, the instructors had to build interactions between student-instructor and student material to improve student learning (Soleiman & Rahmanian, 2019). The challenges had to inspire the trainers to be reflective, open, creative, and adaptable to dynamic changes. It reminded trainers to continue exploring technology to improve language learning. Trainers had to identify applications and use them based on goals.

In order to select and use appropriate applications in a timely manner, instructors had to prepare and learn in practice to recognize applications, organize activities, maintain

student engagement, and evaluate student learning. The instructors were encouraged to actively participate in career development opportunities to develop their technology integration skills in language teaching (Sun, 2018). Training had to be carried out to prepare them well for online learning in emergencies (Moorhouse, 2020).

5. Conclusion

The present study provided contributions to the literature on online language learning in the EFL context from the trainers' point of view. All in all, it was found that Iranian EFL instructors' attitudes to e-learning improved significantly from the pre-Corona to the Post-Corona period. The EFL instructors conducted online learning through a series of activities ranging from checking student presence to synchronously or asynchronously evaluating student work, depending on the university policy due to the COVID 19 pandemic. Various applications and platforms were used for online learning, ranging from learning management systems to additional resources. However, many problems arose with the students and teachers. As a result, online learning did not go well because it was unprepared and planned.

Planning and preparation should inevitably be done for a better online learning in the future since online learning takes more time than face-to-face classes to be well prepared and ready. Trainers must be trained and prepared with sufficient knowledge and skills to maximize their practices in carrying out online learning. Students need to be familiar with online learning to improve their digital literacy and refine their misconceptions about online learning. However,

the lack of facilities for students on smartphones, the Internet quota, and the stable Internet connection remains crucial due to the financial situation of the families of the students.

The future education and training of trainers must include the integration of technology into language learning, technology-based language learning, information and communication technology in language learning, and online language learning courses in their curriculum, as the requirements of technology integration in language learning are inevitable. More research needs to be encouraged to examine the practices of online EFL learning in the context of low technology and the needs of professional development for trainers in technology integration in language learning. As suggested by Moorhouse (2020), it is also worthwhile to carry out extensive studies on converting face-to-face teaching to online learning.

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