Teachers' Readiness for Online Language Teaching: An Ecological Approach

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ABSTRACT

The current study presents the narrative inquiry results of a survey that explores teachers' lived experiences of transitioning to online teaching amid the COVID-19 outbreak in the Iranian EFL context. The collected data from 28 teachers were analyzed to understand how EFL teachers perceived their readiness for online teaching, what challenges they encountered during the transition, and how they developed their online teaching skills to overcome the obstacles. Data analysis revealed that EFL teachers were not prepared for such a massive transition, a successful shift to online teaching is not achievable only by teachers' self-development but several layers of micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems are involved. Apart from contributing to Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) literature, this study provides valuable insights to CALL teacher educators and professional development course designers, and decision-makers.

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Introduction

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of beliefs, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair".Charles Dickens: A Tale of Two Cities (1859/1991, p. 1)

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019 has brought irreverserible damages to human lives from different perspectives. The health outbreak led to the death of 4,627,540 people worldwide as of September 14, 2021 (WHO, 2021). In addition, the education outbreak had happened when countries struggled to diminish the consequences of the health outbreak by compelling education systems to a sudden closure of face-to-face teaching. Like many other countries worldwide, as an emergency reaction to the pandemic, Iran was made a determination to protect teachers and students by following the lockdown and social distancing regulations and conditionally close down all educational sectors. Thus, deficient and unplanned online education has been inflicted on the traditional education of Iran to maintain the education system.

The application of technology in language education, Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), is not a new phenomenon (e.g., Chapelle & Jamieson, 1986; Olsen, 1980). Many studies all around the world have established its benefits for students in developing and enhancing proficiency level (Lin & Warschauer, 2015), speaking (Sun et al., 2017), writing (Wang, 2015), listening comprehension (Dizon & Thanyawatpokin, 2021), reading comprehension (Tseng et al., 2015), pronunciation (Hsu, 2016a), vocabulary learning (Tai et al., 2021), self-efficacy (Rachels & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2018), self-directed learning (Lai et al., 2016), to name a few.

Regardless of all advantages of technology integration, the plethora of research shows that Iranian language teachers grappled with the use of technology (Alavi et al., 2016; Atai & Dashtestani, 2013; Dashtestani, 2013, 2014b; Eghtesad & Mehrabi, 2021; Fatemi Jahromi & Salimi, 2013; Meihami, 2021; Pourhosein Gilajkani & Rahimy, 2019; Raygan & Moradkhani, 2020). In the Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, the researchers deemed some issues like teachers' negative attitude (Raygan & Moradkhani, 2020), lack of required facilities (e.g., financial support, computers, software, internet connectivity) (Dashtestani, 2013, 2014b; Dashtestani & Hojatpanah, 2020; Pourhosein Gilajkani & Rahimy, 2019), lack of required knowledge, literacy, and skills (e.g., computer/digital literacy, ICT skills) (Alavi et al., 2016; Dashtestani, 2013, 2014a, Dashtestani & Hojatpanah, 2020), lack of support from EFL authorities (Dashtestani, 2014b), lack of appropriate CALL teacher training and professional development (Dashtestani, 2014b; Pourhosein Gilajkani & Rahimy, 2019), lack of time in designing CALL materials (Pourhosein Gilajkani & Rahimy, 2019), cultural resistance to the use of CALL materials (Dashtestani, 2014b), lack of preparedness to accept or use technology (Dashtestani, 2013), among others.

Even though, like Stockwell (2008), Dashtestani (2013) counted the necessity of stakeholders'

readiness as one of the major barriers in technology use, this readiness was assumed as the partial use of CALL and not as a colossal transition to unplanned and unexpected online education. Brooks and Grajek (2020) conjecture that the pandemic would be a favorable time to gauge the extent to which teachers have practically discerned their readiness for online teaching. Language teachers, as one of the stakeholders, have to cope with many newly emerged challenges of a) upskilling themselves with obligatory literacies, b) changing their old-fashioned mindset, c) reconsidering their teaching practices, d) empowering themselves with online evaluation, lesson planning, classroom management (Tafazoli, 2021a), e) dealing with individual and contextual factors (Hong, 2010), to name a few. Thus, due to the compulsion of teachers' readiness (Badiozaman, 2021; Bruggeman et al., 2020; Hung, 2016) which "can serve as the foundation upon which equitable experiences with online teaching could be built" (Curti & Mena, 2020, p. 362), I aim to investigate and understand better:

a) How did English language teachers perceive their readiness for shifting to online education?

b) What challenges did they have to encounter during the transition?

c) How did they develop their online teaching skills to overcome the challenges?

Many factors such as individual, organizational, societal, economic, cultural, and political might be involved and influenced the transition to online teaching at a national level. Thus, I decided to employ Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993) ecosystems model as a lens to find out the questions under investigation.

395

Theoretical Framework: Bronfenbrenner's Nested Ecosystems Model

Teachers thinking about technology has been probed through various theoretical frameworks, such as Conceptions of Teaching (COTs) (Marton & Säljö, 1976), Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis et al., 1989) and its various extensions, and Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). COTs concentrate on teachers' beliefs, TAM on teachers' attitudes, and TPACK on teachers' knowledge. The focus of these frameworks, like many other theories, is on the individual and self. However, research shows a contrast between teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and actions (Shelton, 2018). Based on the purpose of this research and to move beyond the 'self' (i.e., the teacher in this study) and have an in-depth and better understanding of the broader influencing contexts on teachers, Bronfenbrenner's ecosystems model (1979, 1993) is designated as a theoretical framework.

The concept of the ecological environment has been first introduced in psychology, aiming to investigate human development and behavior. In Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993, 2005) nested ecosystems model, the 'self' is situated within a complex system of relationships among five independent ecosystems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Kamstra, 2021) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Bronfenbrenner's Ecosystems Model
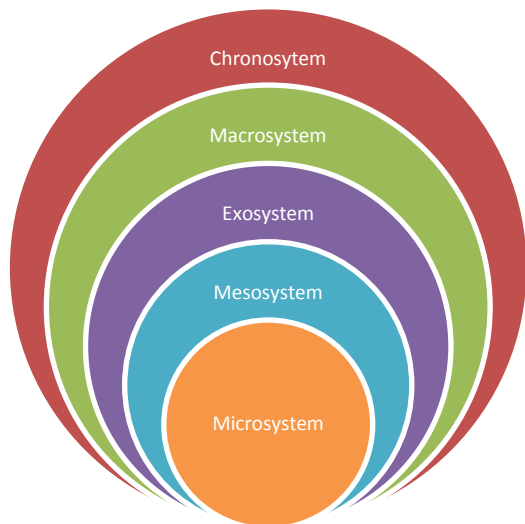
The microsystem is the teacher's immediate context and the innermost tier of the ecosystems in which the teacher can establish activities and rules, interpersonal relations with students, friends, and relatives, and/or control the context. Secondly, the mesosystem incorporates the links and interactions between two or more contexts in which the teacher is involved, and "a mesosystem is a system of microsystems" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 40). The mesosystem embodies interfaces between teachers and the innermost context and teachers with colleagues and administrators. Thirdly, as an extension of the mesosystem, the exosystem encompasses the associations and procedures between two or more contexts. In the exosystem, the teacher is not directly involved but is circuitously touched by the procedures and vicissitudes in the context, for example, changes in their working conditions. Fourthly, the macrosystem consists of the main overarching institutions at the societal level in which the individual is influenced by ideologies, values, beliefs, norms, lifestyle, regulations, and customs of a particular culture or society. This system is beyond the teachers' control. Finally, the chronosystem represents the factor of time which nested "the relationship between individuals, and between

the individual and environment" (Chen, 2017, p. 21). However, due to the study's objective through which the 'time context' is not my focus, I have employed the earlier version of the framework to scrutinize the research findings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Method

Research Design: Narrative Inquiry

To meet the aim of the study and because of the unquantifiable nature of teachers' complex experiences, I applied a qualitative research design. My rationale was built on discovering how people "construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 14), and to inspire and learn from participants' voices and stories (Creswell, 2013). In other words, I wanted to understand, describe, discover, and explain meaning based on teachers' experiences.

A narrative inquiry was selected in the current qualitative study to divulge unique perspectives and a deeper understanding of a situation. Researchers believe that personal narratives can depict distinct beliefs, values, and attitudes toward themselves as individuals (Baxen, 2008) and how they shape their own roles through social experiences (Bertaux, 1981). Moreover, narratives are vital as they are the instruments through which people understand and live their lives in a specific culture (Gergen, 1985).

The Quality of a Qualitative Study

To judge the quality of qualitative research, several criteria and guidelines have been

proposed. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) proposed four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability for judging the trustworthiness of qualitative studies. To meet the credibility criterion, I used brackets for participants' opinions, beliefs, and values to maintain ethical and quality professionalism. Also, I avoided bias interpretation when concluding the phenomenon. To double-check the credibility, I have asked two experienced researchers in the field and in the target context, as a third party, to decrease the influence of my opinions and values. Also, I have provided a 'thick' description that enables others to transfer the conclusions of a qualitative inquiry to others or other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The most challenging issue was the criterion of dependability due to the possible changes because of the COVID-19 outbreak. Thus, I have tried to describe all the changes that occur within the research context and report how these changes might affect the study results. Moreover, I was aware of the difficulty of replicating this study as it depends on teachers' lived experiences, and their perceptions depend on their situations that I had no control over. Finally, to meet the confirmability, I have checked and rechecked the collected data, took the devil's advocate role, reviewed the literature regularly, and asked two experts in education to audit the data collection and analysis. The narratives used in this study were collected through a survey which will be explained in the next section.

Instrument: A Qualitative Survey

Along with many other instruments (e.g., interviews, recordings of oral history, and focus groups), a qualitative survey is advised as a data

collection tool for narrative inquiries (Liamputtong, 2009). As the purpose of my research was to examine the detailed, meticulous, and thorough descriptions of English language teachers' experiences, I had to touch their perceptions and feelings through open questions – a tool for hearing the participants' voices. As such, I have designed an online qualitative survey focusing on collecting information about language teachers' perceptions and experiences with online teaching amid the COVID-19 outbreak. The host platform of the survey was https://docs.google.com/forms, and the included questions centered on what and how factors caused the perceptions and experiences (Bevan, 2014), including four demographic information and seven open-ended questions. The questions were general (recommended by Moustakas, 1994) to guarantee enough flexibility for the participants, motivating them to share their experiences fully.

I have respected several ethical considerations in this research. As privacy is the primary concern in conducting research, I did protect and respect the privacy and rights of the research participants. I have kept their identity anonymous and not disclose their identity to anyone. Each participant's real name has been substituted with a pseudonym that did not correlate with their real name. Before completing the survey, all the participants have electronically signed off the Informed Consent form. Without signing the Informed Consent form, the participant could not proceed with the survey.

Participants

The number of participants in qualitative studies has always been considered challenging. Creswell (2013) argues that at least ten participants with relevant knowledge would be sufficient for qualitative studies. However, in this study, I recruited 28 participants. It is essential to acknowledge the teachers' experiences working within a similar context; therefore, all the study participants were recruited from Iranian EFL teachers through purposeful sampling.

In purposeful sampling, "the researcher selects the participants and the sites because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 300), and the collected data from such participants were rich, detailed, and varied enough to provide the researcher with a complete delineation of what is occurring (Maxwell, 2013). The study participants were required to be English language teachers who had teaching experience before and amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the selected participants were interested in depicting their perceptions and experiences with their one-of-a-kind voices. These similar and different voices allowed me to answer the specified research questions and achieve further understanding of the issue.

Among the recruited participants (N=28), 23 were female, and five were male. They all have experienced teaching EFL before and amid the pandemic in higher education and/or public and private schools. Five teachers have had less than three years, six had four to six years, five had seven to nine years, and twelve teachers had more than ten years experience in English language teaching.EFL.

Data Analysis

In this research, I have put aside any personal preference, tendency, and prejudice to discover the essence of each teacher's lived experiences. During the data analysis, my focus was on patterns in the collected data that helped me better understand and discover the reasons behind the patterns' existence (Bernard & Ryan, 2010) and find general statements about relationships and underlying themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). As expected in qualitative studies, this research has collected many data, and it was necessary to combine the collected data into an organized structure for better in-depth and breadth understanding. Data in the form of statements have been classified into several clustered meaningful units and common themes. After thematizing, textural descriptions of the experience have been explained, and the essence of the phenomenon discovered by combining the meanings, textures, and structures (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2010; Moustakas, 1994).

Findings

Before the Pandemic

Analysis of the narratives indicated that most participants had limited experience using technology in teaching practices. Technology usage was confined to some software such as PowerPoint for content presentation, online dictionaries for looking up new words, websites (e.g., Grammarly and WebQuest), video projector, and laptops for playing multimedia files. Interestingly, seventeen teachers expressed that they had no idea about online teaching.

… honestly before the COVID-19 pandemic, I didn't use any online apps for teaching, and I just used WhatsApp to check my students' homework and listen to their voices that I wanted to listen to the audio file and sent there. I didn't know what online teaching is (Kim).

Three teachers also highlighted that they were applied a partially flipped teaching by sending the digital-based materials to students through social networking applications like Telegram. However, none of them were totally aware of the terminology, rationale, and process of flipped teaching *in a systematic and professional way* (Emma). Remarkably, two teachers used to use Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), such as FutureLearn and Edmodo, along with their face-to-face teaching. Also, two teachers used to make use of interactive boards which were connected to the internet. Two teachers employed social media (e.g., Skype and WhatsApp) to make video calls as a delivery method. Among the teachers, only one participant acknowledged that she worked with Google Forms for designing quizzes. Moreover, three teachers utilized video games and email exchange for teaching purposes.

Amid the Pandemic

Teachers' Readiness for Transformation: Most teachers contended that they were not prepared for such a massive transition. Moving from traditional face-to-face teaching to online teaching had many consequences for teachers.

399

Some of them mentioned that they had to cancel all of their classes and did not know what they should do. Eve expressed her unpreparedness by stating that: *it was unbelievably difficult at the beginning, boring classes where I was even thinking of quitting teaching*. Teachers used "*an unknown world*", "*prompt and shocking*", and "*terrifying*" to express their perceptions about the immense changes. Nineteen teachers argued about the psychological hindrances such as panic and stress in online teaching as they have no experience in utilizing technology in online teaching. Even they were not aware of what kind of tools will be helpful for moving to online teaching. Emma described that although she had some experiences in technology integration, she found herself *frustrated, overwhelmed, and anxious when [online teaching] turned into the only option available to keep the industry running*. Emma added:

> For the first two terms, it took me an obscene amount of work to re-invent myself and reorient my teaching. It was very challenging to prepare my lesson plans and learn how to work with the platforms, and understand and properly make use of the affordances of the online platforms.

Claire also stressed the students' affective issues: *most students have lost their passion in pandemic to learn and continue their studies*. Students' required knowledge and literacy are also accentuated: *some students barely know about using computers and technology* (Beth). Among the teachers, only Abe found himself

surviving in this dramatic transformation by saying that *I am a digital native and always want to implement recent technology gadgets in my language classroom. Thus, it is not difficult for me to shift from face-to-face education to remote ones*.

Prohibitive Factors in Online Teaching*:* All the 28 teachers criticized the difficulties they faced when trying to have a kind of online teaching. Notably, the lack of infrastructures such as poor internet connection, low internet speed, high cost (acknowledged by 25 teachers), and widespread power outages highlighted by twenty-one teachers are among the most mentioned barriers. Kim argued that:

> There were many problems and there are now as well, and some of these problems are out of teachers' and learners' control. Two of these difficulties are electricity power and internet connection. If we don't have them actually, the online classes won't be too.

Teachers' and students' lack of required literacy (i.e., digital and computer literacy) and generic knowledge (e.g., turning on microphones and cameras) were emphasized by ten teachers. Finally, a teacher grumbled about the lack of proper local platforms. In this vein, Emma clearly illustrated: … *lack of proper local platforms which forces most freelancers to use web-conferencing software made for business meetings rather than a tool made specifically for tutoring online*.

From a pedagogical perspective, among all the participants, five of them shared their experiences with problems concerning online assessment, testing, evaluation, and how to prevent cheating by the students. Three teachers proclaimed the lack of interaction in online teaching, especially with young learners, and the same number referred to the issue of time management. In addition, teachers complained about the difficulty of engaging students, attracting students' attention, and reducing their stress in online teaching. Parsa described that:

> … First, it is difficult for me to create an interaction with all of the students. This is not of course all my fault, but it is due to the low technological tools and platforms we go through. Second, this is so difficult to motivate students concerning the topics when teaching the topics through online platforms. Third, the assessment of the learning and assessment for learning is very difficult to be done through online teaching.

Appropriate content and materials are other prominent factors for teachers. Teachers declared the lack of high-quality- and context-appropriate materials: *There is the issue of creating quality age-appropriate and context-appropriate content and design, running productive classes, and conducting a proper assessment of students' progress* (Emma).

Fifteen teachers reported parents' and students' family disputation. Teachers mentioned that parents also require technical support to solve the issue of students. Arya who teaches to young learners: *one of the challenges I met, I can say before teaching kids how to work with online platforms we should teach parents how to use these platforms*. Also, two teachers pointed out that parents did not trust online teaching, and it is teachers' responsibility to persuade them to let their students attend online courses. Shosha explained that: *at the beginning very few parents joined us without question, but it took a long time to convince the rest to join online classes*. Fionna added: *It was not difficult just persuading others that is a very effective new way of learning was difficult*. The lack of students' trust, motivation, encouragement, and preference in online teaching is also emphasized by two teachers: *helping [the students] to reduce the stress they might have for getting connected to online classes and encouraging them to be more autonomous and problem-solvers* (Star).

Teachers (Un)Professional Development: The participating teachers in the current study also narrate their experiences on how they tried to develop their online teaching skills. Twenty-three teachers mentioned that self-education and asking experienced CALL teachers about selecting and utilizing proper online tools were the only ways to develop their skills and survive their professions. Parsa shared an experience about how peers have assisted in maturing his online teaching practices:

> I have some friends who are teachers. Sometimes, we share our ideas about how to

develop our online teaching. I call it 'Critical CALL Friends' since we discuss our online teaching methods, strategies, and techniques and we receive our friends' critical feedback. The feedback I provide on my friends' online teaching procedure or the one they provide on my online teaching is based on some academic papers, books, and chapters on CALL.

Eleven teachers disclosed that they have developed their skills through social media (e.g., Instagram live sessions and YouTube), through which knowledgeable and experienced teachers share their online teaching strategies and techniques with other teachers. Five of them have participated in webinars on online teaching. One of the teachers insisted on self-education and learning by doing and avoided asking for help from the professional body of the community: *I have never asked others for help! I prefer to learn about new things on my own* (Ruth).

Three of the participants acknowledged the role of the institute in supporting them to improve their skills. Kim, a teacher and a supervisor, spelled out how teamwork at the managerial level aided their institute to experience enjoyable days:

> I was a supervisor, so I tried to attend several online courses and workshops to gain more knowledge about online classes, techniques to

control class better and the most interesting online teaching ways. My manager and colleagues were studying many essays and we shared new ideas together. First, we had a class with each other and a demo to prepare ourselves. It was hard but enjoyable. Most of [my] colleagues liked it. It was a good and useful experience and I was pleased.

Unfortunately, none of the teachers credited how the government helped language teachers boost their skills to have quality and effective online teaching. Tess mentioned that: *unfortunately those who were responsible for preparing teachers and students in this era did not do anything special at all*. Arya confirmed Tess's statement by saying that: *in Iran, the government was not so good at changing the environment to the online teaching and learning era*. Although Samar believes that running Shaad mobile application was a help, she complained that: *the manager in our school just gave [us] some general guidelines about the curriculum and classes and formed the classes in Shaad, no training*.

Discussion

The findings established that EFL teachers were employed a restricted CALL before the pandemic in their classes. Also, their knowledge of online teaching was inadequate. Moreover, they were not well-prepared for such a massive transition from face-to-face to online teaching. This unanticipated transition brought about many challenges, but EFL teachers set out to develop their online teaching skills to overcome such obscurities. Based on Bronfenbrenner's ecosystems framework ([1979](#), [1993](#)), all the four systems are involved in the successful transition to online teaching.

Nested in *microsystem* which pertains to with teacher's self and their immediate context, teachers' required knowledge and literacy (see [Dudeney et al., 2013](#); [Hubbard & Levy, 2006](#); [Tafazoli, 2021c](#)) plays a significant role in the lucrative preparation and integration of technology in online language teaching. However, Hobbs et al. ([2017](#)) reported that teachers do not rely on the necessity of digital literacy pedagogies and see themselves as "enthusiasts or at least curious about digital literacy" (p. 15). Also, previous studies on English language teachers highlighted the lack of required knowledge and literacy in the appropriate implementation of technology in language teaching ([Alavi et al., 2016](#); [Dashtestani, 2013](#), [2014a](#), [Dashtestani & Hojatpanah, 2020](#); [Gómez-Parra, 2021](#)). However, one of the drawbacks of the previous study is the focus on generic computer literacy (e.g., [Son et al., 2011](#)), digital literacy (e.g., [Hedayati et al., 2018](#)), and addressing the interface of language pedagogy, content, and technological knowledge that constitutes CALL literacy have not been elucidated. Teachers experienced this shortage when they reported the lack of pedagogical knowledge on online assessment and evaluation, preventing cheating, managing the lack of interaction, engaging students, attracting students' attention, managing the online classroom, and reducing students' stress.

Besides teachers' literacy, teachers' positive attitudes and perceptions play a crucial role in CALL integration's degree of success (Canals & Al-Rawashdeh, 2019; Hsu, 2016b), which is adversely narrated by the participants. Another factor in the microsystem that negatively impacted teachers' preparedness is teachers' psychological barrier such as fear, stress, and negative attitudes (Hobbs et al., 2017; Raygan & Moradkhani, 2020), which might be rooted in teachers' competence in CALL (Bataineh et al., 2020), and lack of readiness in accepting technology (Dashtestani, 2013; Van Gorp et al., 2019).

Teachers underscored the complexities they have confronted with parents in online teaching, such as technical support for parents to solve students' issues and lack of trust among them. The new dominant role of parents can be considered as a phenomenon in language education. Previous studies suggested that the mutual understanding between the teacher and parents can effectively develop and sustain the involvement of both sides in education (Moosa et al., 2001; Souto-Manning & Kevin, 2006). In addition, teachers should be cognizant of the decisive role of parental attachment and then use various strategies to suitably involve them in the students' progress (Kalayci & Öz, 2018).

In the *exosyetem*, high-level authorities in education should provide teachers with requirements (e.g., tools and content) to be successful immigrants in such a transition. However, the findings revealed that teachers were not blissful with the supplied facilities. English language teachers raised the lack of proper local platforms and lack of high-quality- and context-appropriate materials. Successful

transition to online education would not be attainable without the support of authorities and decision-makers in education. The Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology (MSRT), the decision-makers in the Iranian education system, should adopt supportive strategies and decisions to help out teachers by affording the required tools and resources. Although one of the participating teachers supported the MoE through Shaad mobile application, a qualitative study on its efficiency indicated that teachers did not find it a well-designed and practical tool (Tafazoli, 2021b). A high-quality and planned online language teaching requires CALL materials, content, and tools, which are not available at the moment based on the findings of current and previous research (Dashtestani, 2014b).

The findings also highlighted other prohibitive factors in the successful transition to online teaching nested in the *macrosystem*. The lack of infrastructure at the government level, including poor internet connection, low internet speed, high cost of the internet for teachers, and frequent power outages, were emphasized by teachers. Consistent with the findings, Iranian scholars cited the same concerns even before the pandemic (Dashtestani, 2013, 2014b; Dashtestani & Hojatpanah, 2020; Pourhosein Gilajkani & Rahimy, 2019), except for power outages that appeared recently in Iran. It should be noted that factors in the macrosystem are not limited to Iran, and many countries suffer from the same obstacles (Laabidi & Laabidi, 2016; Teo, 2009).

The findings reaffirmed the available challenges in moving to online teaching.

However, one solution for enabling teachers to overcome barriers, updating their online teaching practices, engaging them in various online planning and evaluation processes, and empowering them to utilize technologies appropriately is through teacher education and professional development courses. Unfortunately, the literature signifies that the PD courses have no emphasis on integrating technology into content and pedagogy, and the focus is on basic computer skills - if there is any (Desimone & Garet, 2015; Gray et al., 2010). In addition, an appropriate PD course is an ideal tool for reshaping the teachers' preceding views and mindsets (Dixon et al., 2014). Therefore, CALL PD can motivate teachers to apply technology to online teaching practices properly. EFL authorities should support teachers with the mandatory tools and upskill them to perform efficaciously in a new online environment. The findings also showed that the participating teachers had not been developed professionally and systematically, but they might unprofessionally be developed through self-education. Previous research shows that ineffective PD has been among the most substantial hurdles in technology implementation (Alzahrani & Althaqafi, 2020; Lucas, 2020; Rasheed et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020).

Teachers also narrated that they have teamed up with their friends and colleagues to develop their online teaching skills which happened at the *microsystem* and *mesosystem*. These findings based on the necessity of moving to online teaching showed that, in contrast with Hedayati et al.'s (2018) outcomes, language teachers have received a kind of CALL teacher training courses in the language institutes, and

peer-learning had happened among them. However, attending CALL workshops and webinars (Hedayati et al., 2018) is still a current self-develop trend among teachers. Unfortunately, the findings asserted that teachers have received no PD courses from the stakeholders nested in the *exosystem* to upskill themselves for such a huge transition.

Conclusion

The importance of the teaching profession is appropriately highlighted as the most eminent career in society (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2015), and it experiences many challenges these days. In this study, I investigated Iranian English language teachers' narratives of their lived experiences amid the COVID-19 pandemic to understand how they perceive their readiness for transition to online teaching, what challenges they have encountered, and how they have developed their online teaching skills to overcome the obstacles. The findings showed that teachers were not prepared and ready for the transition and faced various challenges. Most of the challenges fall in the *microsystem* where teachers might be able to control them. Teachers were not aware of how to upskill their online teaching skills at first, but they decided to help themselves in different ways. Unfortunately, although the external bodies should seek how to solve difficulties by providing suitable professional development courses, teachers, with the help of themselves, friends, and colleagues, began to develop their skills. The findings indicated that influential factors in the *microsystem* and *mesosystem* played a significant role in their development through professional and unprofessional ways. It can be interpreted that the *exosystem* and *macrosystem* to some extent exploit and misuse

teachers' commitment. However, this might give a warning to EFL authorities that teachers' self-commitment and intrinsic motivation would not be sufficient for guaranteeing their development and, therefore, a systematic professional intervention is required. Language teachers should not be overlooked, and national authorities should give precedence to teachers' invaluable roles in society and invest in their professional development and satisfaction.

Profound, efficacious, and practical PD programs should respond to teachers' immediate need to tackle new challenges that involve thoughtful planning, implementation, and feedback based on educational settings changes which is precisely the case for the current situation of Iran. I would like to insist that commencing systematic PD programs can be a key way in overcoming challenges reported in the findings of the present study and by previous scholars in the field of language education, including a) language teachers' resistance in implementing technology as they believe that teaching with technology is not sufficient and establishing effective classroom practices through CALL is not possible, b) developing language teachers' required skills, experiences, and literacies for teaching through CALL teacher education and professional development, c) enabling language teachers to repurpose the required materials.

Acknowledgments

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