



# Online Pandemic: Challenges of EFL Faculty in the Design and Implementation of Online Teaching amid the Covid-19 Outbreak



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## ABSTRACT

Due to the outbreak of the Corona-virus pandemic, virtual classes have become the cornerstone of education all around the world including Iran. Being an obligatory transition and the only option university professors have to continue education with, online teaching is accompanied with particular challenges which have not been experienced before and need to be investigated. This research intends to explore the challenges that EFL faculty faced in the design and delivery of online courses during the Covid-19 outbreak and seek probable solutions to those challenges. The data for the study included messages posted to the backup team over an entire academic semester which provide a live, naturalistic, and in-the-moment representation of faculty's perceptions and challenges. The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method for recurring themes and taxonomies that the postings represented. Analysis of the results revealed 6 categories of challenges the target faculty members faced in their online instruction: technical problems, concerns about exam safety and validity, the need for policies, planning, and regulations, faculty's adaptability struggles, pedagogical challenges, and challenges related to students such as inadequate distribution of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) infrastructure, lack of self-motivation, lack of interaction and the possibility of their isolation, and inadequate computer literacy skills. The findings are then discussed with reference to the solutions offered in the literature to remedy those barriers. This study provides implications for faculty's professional development programs and support services as well as policy making and planning for future online courses.

DOI: 10.22059/jflr.2021.313652.774

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## ARTICLE INFO

Article history:  
Received:  
21st, November, 2020  
Accepted:  
15th, January, 2021  
Available online:  
Winter 2021

## Keywords:

Challenges, Covid-19,  
EFL Faculty, Online  
Teaching, Solutions

Chahkandi, Fateme (2021). Online Pandemic: Challenges of EFL Faculty in the Design and Implementation of Online Teaching amid the Covid-19 Outbreak. *Journal of Foreign Language Research*, 10 (4), 706-721.  
DOI: 10.22059/jflr.2021.313652.774

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## 1. Introduction

With the outbreak of the Covid-19, the realm of teaching and learning was drastically affected. The most significant influence was the suspension of in-person courses and the sudden shift of instruction in schools and universities to virtual formats. This urgent call to move online added to the stresses and workloads of faculty who were already struggling to balance teaching, research, and service obligations, not to add life dedications and requirements ([Houlden & Veletsianos, 2020](#)). Taking English language instructors into account, the situation was no exception. One may assume that the situation was even worse for language classes since they are mainly conceived of as places full of interaction and communication while in virtual classes it's commonly hard to get students engaged.

Yet, with the rise of the Coronavirus pandemic, virtual classes have become the cornerstone of education. Being an obligatory transition and the only option faculty have to continue teaching with, online courses are accompanied with particular challenges which have not been investigated previously. In this regard, [Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust and Bond \(2020\)](#) differentiate “emergency remote teaching” under the conditions of the Corona outbreak from the high-quality online teaching with respect to instructors’ training and preparation. By the same token, [Bozkurt and Sharma \(2020\)](#) consider the obligatory nature of online education amid the pandemic as a point of contrast and highlight the importance of using different strategies and priorities.

In addition, a subject-specific examination of faculty’s perceptions of the obstacles in web-based classes is an under-researched area. The

aim of the present research is to delve into the ELT faculty’s experience of online teaching as it unfolded during the course of the educational semester and to explore the challenges they faced while employing remote teaching. Moreover, potential solutions will be offered, where possible, on how to cope with those challenges.

One limitation of previous research working on faculty’ challenges in web-based education is that they mainly rely on self-reported information and interview data from the academic members (e.g. [Gaytan, 2015](#); [Kearns, 2012](#); [Rapanta, Botturi, Goodyear, Guardia, & Koole., 2020](#)), or they delve into a review of the related literature ([Davis, Greenaway, Moore & Cooper, 2019](#); [Thomson, 2010](#)). Hence, they tend to reflect instructors’ overall perceptions and attitudes toward remote teaching in a summative way. Instead, we will use ELT faculty’s messages posted to the support team which present a live, naturalistic, and in-the-moment experience of the challenges as they were experienced by the faculty.

This study is significant since through identifying ELT faculty’s challenges and problems, new approaches and skills which they need can be identified and general guidance and support can be provided hence, ensuring quality online learning ([Martin & Parker, 2014](#); [Martin, Polly, Jokiahho & May, 2017](#)). Additionally, meeting the needs of faculty is one way to ensure student achievement, student retention, and student engagement in higher education settings ([Davis, et al., 2019](#)). More specifically, the study deals with the following research questions:

1. What challenges do ELT faculty perceive in designing and delivering quality online courses during the Coronavirus pandemic?

2. What are some solutions to overcome those challenges?

## 2. Review of Literature

The advancements in technology have given rise to an increase in the number of programs and courses being offered online. It has also created remarkable opportunities for colleges and universities as they can invite a greater number of off-campus students from around the world. Considering students, it has also brought added assets to them as they can get away with the meeting demands of regular face-to-face classes and reach university from remote areas and at their convenience. They can also match education with their work schedule and family obligations, therefore, accessing broader and cheaper educational opportunities. In addition, it makes easier access to advanced courses, resources, and instructors which may not typically be offered in students' local areas. Moreover, it offers instructional tools and media which can be tailored to students' unique learning styles and needs (Cavanaugh, Clark, & Barbour, 2008; Li & Beverly, 2008; Reamer, 2013; Soleimani & Rahmanian, 2020). Taking language learning into account, the use of authentic and multimedia resources also provides learners with further benefits (Pazilah, Hashim & Yunus, 2019). Dhawan (2020) added one more argument to the advantages of online teaching i.e. with the explosion of the Coronavirus disease and the demand of saving the lives of students, faculty, academic staff, and the whole society, it serves as a panacea in the time of crisis.

Despite the above-mentioned assets, ample evidence suggests that faculty are taking an opposing stand toward web-based teaching and do not regard it as a preferred method. Ruth

(2018), for example, cited the annual Babson report, Inside Higher Ed, and the Gallup organization showing that the professoriate in the United States was generally opposed to all forms of distance learning. In the same vein, Pomerantz and Brooks (2017) in their study on how faculty were using technology in service to teaching and research found that faculty had a love-hate relationship with online teaching and learning i.e. while they deemed it necessary to make teaching available to more students, only few of them agreed that online teaching would lead to more effective learning.

The reasons for faculty's lack of interest in teaching courses online are manifold, but previous research indicates that the main hindrance to quality online education is the challenges encountered by faculty (Hunt, et al., 2014). These challenges can be broadly grouped at two levels: challenges related to faculty and challenges regarding students. Considering faculty, one part of problems arises from their technological skills and the virtual nature of the environment in which they carry out the act of teaching (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Kibaru, 2018). In fact, previous literature suggests that the challenges in the use of ever-changing technologies are a key hindrance to quality online teaching and learning (Hunt, et al., 2014).

Moreover, the extra amount of time allocated to material preparation and student assessment (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Hakim, 2020; Kitishat, Al Omar, & Al Momani, 2020) in conjunction with the time requirements for academic staff to be available to students and resolve their questions and concerns can contribute to faculty's disapproval. Other barriers to online education include academics' teaching preferences and the amount of time available to

teach and prepare for distance teaching ([Allen & Seaman, 2013](#)). Likewise, issues related to course workload, class size, quality of adjunct tutors, lack of proper training, and instructor-student boundaries within the distance and online worlds ([Ayala, 2009](#)) have been proposed as other reasons contributing to instructors' apprehension and reluctance to integrate technology into their teaching practice.

A second part of the difficulties giving rise to faculty's hesitance in approving remote education concerns learners' lack of participation and interaction in online courses ([Sun, 2011](#)) as well as a decrease in their learning and achievement ([Barton, 2020](#); [Hamann, Glazier, Wilson, Pollock, 2020](#)). This is particularly problematic in classes where students' cooperation and interaction is necessary for language production ([Bailey & Lee, 2020](#)). Students' socio-economic status also affects their cooperation and participation in class activities. In this respect, the findings of Fishbane and Tomer's (2020) study demonstrated that as the level of poverty increases in a society, the availability of the Internet decreases considerably. As such, learners with a low socio-economic background are more prone to academic failure.

In addition, developing reliable and valid means for online student evaluation is a further challenge facing academics. In remote teaching, instructors' supervision over learners is minimized making it difficult to control their cheating ([Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015](#)). A second main challenge is that during the pandemic, students' academic performance is, more than any time, a function of their availability of technical resources and the family's socio-economic status ([Feldman, 2020](#)). Accordingly, it

seems that the traditional paper-and-pencil methods of evaluation are insufficient and triangulated and creative evaluation models need to be utilized.

Another array of problems is associated with student retention as a key factor affecting the success of online teaching. The literature shows that student retention in online courses is more difficult than face-to-face classes ([Glazier, 2016](#); [Murphy & Stewart, 2017](#)) even when both courses are taught by the same instructor ([Hart, Friedmann, Hill, 2018](#)), or when the content of both online and on-campus courses are the same ([Roberts, 2015](#)). [Davis et al., \(2019\)](#) maintained that additional student support, establishing a community of learning and an understanding of program expectations, policies, and procedures are necessary if student retention is to be guaranteed. They added that students' attaining a sense of self-esteem through mastery over materials, experiencing social integration by developing interpersonal relationships with peers and academic staff as well as creating social media sites can maintain higher student persistence rate.

In sum, instructor competence and training, curriculum quality and rigor, implementation of distance teaching tools, and student assessment ([Huang, Shi, & Yang, 2020](#); [Reamer, 2013](#)) are among the common concerns about online education which need to be addressed if online pedagogy is to be successful. Yet, few research has investigated ELT faculty's problems and challenges in online education. This study is an attempt to identify ELT faculty's challenges in implementing online education amid the Coronavirus spread. We believe that exploring ELT faculty's challenges may better aid in tailoring the content of supporting programs to their needs.

### 3. Method

#### Context

To investigate the ongoing challenges that ELT faculty face in their attempt to deliver their courses online, messages posted to the support group over one whole educational semester (the second semester of the academic year 1398-1399) were content analyzed with respect to the main issues that they dealt with. This group was launched in the messaging application WhatsApp where English faculty could receive the technical support necessary to handle remote classes and raise the upcoming issues. Twenty-three faculty members (8 men and 15 women with the average of 13.5 years teaching experience and the average age of 43) were contributing messages to the support group. From among the group members, 8 were tenured faculty members and 15 were adjunct members teaching different academic courses to B.A and M.A students of English Literature, Translation, and Linguistics using the Adobe Connect platform. Having eliminated the irrelevant messages (such as call for conferences, messages of congratulations and condolences, etc.), we were left with 4862 messages considered for analysis in this research.

#### Procedure and Data Analysis

The messages were analyzed to identify the categories of the challenges they represent. To do so, we drew on [Braun and Clarke's \(2006\)](#) thematic analysis method. Initially, the messages were read to familiarize ourselves with the data and notes of summaries were taken to get the initial ideas for coding. Next, we looked for recurring themes, and taxonomies were extracted from initial codes. Once the categories were created, further re-readings were done to ensure that all pieces of data have been incorporated into

analysis. Finally, segments of verbatim quotes were selected to illustrate the emergent themes. To enhance the trustworthiness of analysis, a second researcher independently coded a set of 300 messages using the agreed-upon categories. The double-coding process resulted in 95.5% agreement on data analysis. The disagreements were then discussed and the discrepancies were resolved. The researcher also solicited the viewpoints of two faculty members on the credibility of the findings and interpretations of the results.

### 4. Results and Discussion

The major categories emerged from the analysis of the messages posted to the support group revealed 6 areas of challenges: technical problems; exam safety and validity; policy, planning, and regulation; challenges related to faculty; pedagogical challenges; and challenges pertaining to students respectively.

#### Technical Problems

First-order barriers to successful implementation of online courses faced by ELT faculty concern technical issues. This category accounts for 48% of messages posted to the group. Problems with bandwidth, spotty and low internet connection, connecting microphones and webcams, poor quality videos and audios, uploading and downloading files, installing and navigating different tools, outdated hardware or software, network overload during the high usage rate periods, adaptability of software, sharing gadgets, creating class links, accessibility of class archives, voice quality, online class settings, server safety, and the issues related to making online exams and evaluating students through computers were just a few examples of the obstacles reported by the ELT faculty. The



following message illustrates the point more clearly:

*I had a class at 8:00. ... In the first few minutes, more than 30 students were present in the class. Unfortunately, my laptop microphone stopped working unexpectedly and for no good reason. I was trying up to 9:15 and finally, I got it connected. However, by that time most of the students had left the class and it was called off. (Msg. 457)*

The integration of technology poses challenges and pressures to both instructors and learners. [Sun \(2011\)](#) warned about overlooking the effect of technical failing on learners' learning behavior considering that the alternation of interaction ways and class meetings usually scare learners. With respect to the effect of technical obstacles on educators, [Hampel and Stickler \(2005\)](#) argued that lower level skills concerning basic ICT and technical competence of dealing with hardware and software were the foundation of pedagogical competencies such as online socialization, facilitating communicative competence, creativity and choice, and teachers' own style. Considering that faculty's concerns about technical skills constituted one of their major pressures, the significance of supporting faculty cannot be underestimated. Faculty support has also been frequently referred to as one of the key criteria for measuring online course quality and ensuring high standards of online teaching and learning ([Martin & Parker, 2014](#); [Martin, Polly, Jokiah & May, 2017](#); [Shelton, 2011](#)).

In addition to supporting academics in terms of training workshops, in-service programs, webinars, online and telephone support centers, and online forums, [Siebert and Spaulding-Givens \(2006\)](#) proposed that instructors enroll as

observers in online courses before they can develop, design, and implement their own courses. Besides, universities can invest in faculty's skills during summer. They can devote summer months to exploring and experimenting with new technologies to meet faculty and students' specialized needs. Another solution is that tech-savvy students can be identified and activated to provide remote mentorship for students and other members of digital learning team in the use of digital technologies.

### **Exam Safety and Validity**

Another major concern of ELT faculty which was reflected in 13.2 % of messages involved online evaluation. The major cause of instructors' concern was the validity and safety of online exams as measures of students' capabilities. It was contended that since all students have access to social media groups, online websites, wikis, and google scholar, even if the questions are not identical for all learners, there is a high probability of students' cheating in exams (Msg. 3185). One of the participants in the group stated that her student copied the answer to one of the questions from Wikipedia, something that she had never taught (Msg. 1062). Students were also reported to have exam assistants or to hire someone to take the exams for them (Msg. 4305). Asking students to activate their webcams while exams also created a new set of problems including higher internet costs and lower speed of delivery particularly when hundreds of students were simultaneously using the platform to take exams (Msg. 3445).

Suggestions proposed to increase online exam safety included setting time limits, changing the order of questions and the choices, grouping students and administering each group different questions, requiring students to move

one-by-one on the questions each on a separate page without being able to move backward to previous questions, not activating immediate feedback option on LMS while the exam is still open, and choosing questions randomly from a pool of items. However, it was acknowledged that the best way to enhance the integrity and validity of online evaluation is to have an amalgamation of proper assignments, regular tests at short intervals, collaborative projects, and open-book questions.

A number of concerns associated with the implementation of e-assessment have been also reflected in other studies. Examples include plagiarism detection, reliability and validity of critical and high stakes assessments, accessibility issues, invigilation issues, user identity, and academic staff's time and training ([Whitlock & Brasher, 2006](#)). Moreover, the tools utilized for online assessment purposes mainly constitute multiple choice questions, true/false, short answer, and fill in the blanks questions which evaluate knowledge at the lower levels of Bloom's taxonomy ([Pachler, Daly, Mor, & Mellar, 2010](#)).

### **Policy, Planning, and Regulations**

Concerns pertaining to policy, planning and regulations were reflected in 10.5% of posts. Many of the problems associated with online education were attributed to the absence of an appropriate acceptance culture by faculty, students, and society. Therefore, it demands serious planning, policies as well as regulations which govern its operation. One such planning needs to be done with respect to preparing the necessary technical requirements and infrastructure and in so doing, students' socio-economic level and their technical and scientific skills need to be taken into account (Msg. 712).

The second area in need of planning is the rigorous, summative and formative evaluation of the effectiveness of online education through ways other than controlling classroom archives since faculty considered it “*an incorrect interpretation of the evaluation process.... And something which is devastating to faculty's sense of integrity and academic authority*” (Msg. 780)

Third, faculty expressed concerns regarding class duration in the online environment. It was claimed that since on the one hand, students have less cooperation in online classes and mainly teacher talk dominates the classroom discussions and on the other hand, materials and content are prepared beforehand rather than being written on the board, the duration of online classes should be less than that of the physical ones (Msgs. 871, 312).

Fourth, there were calls in the messages for clear regulations about students who do not attend the classes at all, those whose attendance is less than required or who just attend at the roll call time, those who intend to drop the courses, privacy and gatekeeping, students visibility and proper codes of clothing on webcam, and supervision over exams and scoring. Furthermore, faculty deemed it necessary that netiquettes and principles of appropriate conduct in the virtual learning environment be specified and accessed by all the students and faculty to prevent the probable problems of misbehavior.

Regarding exams, academics believed that just as in-person exams, “*absence exam (!) should have its own principles and framework and university is in charge of final exams not the faculty. Faculty is in charge of making the exam and answering students' questions during the exam session.*” (Msg. 2587; exclamation in origin). In line with this remark, another faculty reminded that “*administering the exams is under*

*the duties of education sector. The role of the faculty is making the exam, supervising the exam session, and marking students' papers"* (Msg. 754). They believed that leaving things undecided "*disturbs educational discipline and unity and opens up an avenue for subjective interpretation and personal interest of faculty which at times leads to students' objections against everything*". (Msg. 2579).

Unfortunately, little research has tackled how policy change can affect the practice of distance education and what policies are crucial for its delivery. This is an area in need of serious attention given the importance of policy development and planning for successful fulfillment of the goals of online education.

### **Challenges Related to Faculty:**

#### **Adaptability Struggle**

With the pandemic lockdown being unexpected, many instructors felt obliged to quickly adapt the learning content into online format. Yet, the adaption of technology was not welcome by many academics as was reflected in 8.5% of the corpus. One of them asserted that "I have been used to teaching with chalk and board for over 30 years, so do not expect me to teach through the computer like others." (Msg. 65). A second member added that he accepted the situation only because he had no other alternative; in the lockdown situation, people's health was the most primary concern (Msg. 153).

Another reason for faculty's reluctance to immerse themselves in online teaching was that they had hostile and aversive views toward computer-mediated teaching and were largely dubious about its effectiveness. One analogized the teacher in online classes to "an actor who has to play all his roles

sitting" (Msg. 1651). Another believed that online education was doomed to failure due to lack of the necessary infrastructure, logistics, and in particular low internet speed (Msg. 1905). One of the teaching staff referred to the professor of mathematics, Maryam Mirzakhani, who taught using chalk and board as a verification that traditional methods of teaching were still the most influential ones (Msg. 1920). Another participant emphasized that they could have an amalgamation of tools in physical and real classes even those used for online teaching and for this reason, real classes enjoyed extra advantages (Msg. 1948). A further cause of faculty's disinclination in distance teaching is that online classes take a considerable amount of time and more intensive work than traditional classes. Coupled with this, educators stated that online teaching meant greater commitment as they had to be available to students every time and everywhere (Msg. 1350).

Overall, it is evidenced by the messages that lack of experience with technology-based language teaching, lack of required knowledge, skill, and equipment, heavy workload and demands, as well as psychological barriers were the major reasons why ELT faculty were slow to embrace digital teaching. Results of previous research also confirm that many academic staff members often feel apprehensive and are not properly equipped to teach online particularly while they themselves are still learning to cope with the requirements of the platform ([Rucker & Downey, 2016](#); [Schmidt, Tschida, & Hodge, 2016](#)). It has been also revealed that the workload demands in distance education accounting for at least 14% more time than traditional instruction



([Tomei, 2006](#)) lead to considerable opposition and lower morale on the part of the academics ([Ryan, Tynan & Lamont-Mills, 2014](#)). To amend the situation, it would be a more effective strategy to fit in the course developmental time with the teaching workload; otherwise, either the research or the course will suffer from lack of time dedicated to each ([Ruth, 2018](#)).

### **Pedagogical Challenges**

Eight percent of the messages discussed the pedagogical challenges faculty confronted. First, information was usually transferred in a one-way direction from tutors to students and there were little feedback sources from students (including their facial expressions and direct comments) to rely on. Second, students were often reluctant to participate in the classes. One of the members attested that one reason for students' lack of cooperation in online classes was that the instruction was not effective enough. *"If instruction has visual and scientific attraction, students will attend voluntarily; otherwise, their names are on the screen while their bodies and souls are elsewhere."* (Msg. 3696).

Concerns were also expressed on how to improve the quality of online education. It was advised that educators work together with other faculty across the country to share content and experience or to have team-teaching. Additionally, setting up conditions in which faculty can receive regular feedback on their remote teaching can bring about a more advanced level of teaching. The sources to draw on can vary from short student surveys to data derived from the university's learning-management system.

Classroom-level practices to upgrade teaching and learning were also highlighted. Keeping students engaged through weekly assignments and reminders, encouraging students

to actively participate through the virtual environment tools (stickers, voice message, etc.), using attractive multimedia content, cooperative learning, jigsaw tasks, creating online libraries or study rooms, and collaborative projects were just some examples noted by faculty. One of the educationalists reported the use of breakout rooms in LMS to encourage group cooperation and pair work in the speaking class (Msg. 3801). One of them also explained how she used streaming oral stories with subtitles in the storytelling class to prevent students from late attendance (for calling the roles only) and their copying the summaries from the Internet and reading them aloud from the paper in case the written stories were presented to the students before the class (Msg. 3005).

To ensure online quality teaching, instructors need to harness technology, IT tools, Apps and audio and video resources to enrich and add value to the classroom. Online classes should not be lecture-based classrooms online, rather they should set the scene for active learning experience. [Gillett-Swan \(2017\)](#) cautions against applying a "one-size-fits-all approach" where the content or delivery used in face-to-face contexts is adapted to a seemingly compatible online format and is considered appropriate for all learners. Results from [Thomson' study \(2010\)](#) also indicated that teaching in an online environment necessitates an array of different strategies the most significant of which revolves around individualization and differentiation of content to address students' varying ability levels, learning styles, interests, and study skills.

[Anderson \(2008\)](#) also introduced a theoretical model, "community of learning", which encompasses three components for effective online learning. These components include: cognitive

presence, social presence, and teaching presence. Cognitive presence is provided through a learning environment that stimulates cognitive functions such as deeper understanding and critical thinking. Social presence involves creating a sense of comfort and safety in which students can share their outcomes of learning. Finally, teaching presence can be promoted through planning and designing the course, facilitation of discussions and educational guidance, developing student-to-staff interactions, and increasing knowledge and skill. Platforms such as SlideShare, Voice Thread, Google Docs, Google Drive, Google Hangouts, Edmodo, Minecraft, MS Teams, Kahoot, Mural, and Skype, can be employed to actively engage students in the learning opportunities and provide for students' collaboration, individualized needs, and learning styles.

### **Challenges Related to Students**

#### **Inadequate Distribution of ICT Infrastructure**

Robust IT Infrastructure is a prerequisite for online learning. However, not every student has access to the required gadgets for online learning. There were 5.2% of messages reflecting faculty's concern about students from underprivileged families with inadequate financial and technological resources. There were students living in the rural contexts with little or no internet coverage. One of the faculty copied her student's message to the group saying that he lived in a village where there was no internet coverage and due to the problems of commuting, he had to take the term off (Msg. 328). Or, another student had to go to the city and sit in the car during the class time in order to have internet coverage to attend the class. (Msg. 498).

It seems that remote education is widening

the digital divide and some students may be left out primarily due to lack of tech access. [Lakbala \(2016\)](#) also revealed that limited access to computers and poor physical infrastructure were some of the barriers faced by health profession educators in Iran. Other researchers including [Attardi and Rogers \(2015\)](#) and [Bediang et al. \(2013\)](#) also identified poor internet connectivity, Wi-Fi, and access to physical infrastructure as barriers in proper implementation of e-learning. One response to these concerns has been for universities and institutions to offer stipends for internet access and laptop rentals or purchases or to loan equipment, laptops, and hot spots to under-resourced students.

#### **Self-motivation**

While there are normally some inattentive students in physical classes, the number of students with subsiding motivation and accountability increases dramatically in distance education. This concern was echoed in 2.6% of the posts. For example, in one thread, faculty were expressing their dissatisfaction with M.A students who did not pursue their proposals and theses (Msg. 931). In another case, it was reported by an instructor that he had made the necessary arrangements with students (calling individual students, sending SMS, and sending a message to the class group) to set up a class session, but only 1 out of 5 attended the class (Msg. 251).

Students' lack of motivation is partly due to lack of technical requirements and partly due to the absence of a regular meeting demand with academic members and their peers. The unfavorable mental health conditions emerged as a result of the lockdown can contribute to lack of enthusiasm in students, too. As a consequence, there is a higher risk for struggling students to fail

or withdraw if they do not receive sustained interaction with and support from their instructors.

The same set of sentiments about students has been echoed in other studies including potential lack of access, lack of emotional cues in communication via text messages, the failure to adapt to diverse student demographics and abilities, forming networks and interacting with instructors and other students, slow internet connections or old computers, and a greater possibility of lagging behind for students with low motivation and discipline ([Hunt, et al., 2104](#); [Rovai & Wighting, 2005](#)). [Li and Beverly's \(2008\)](#) review of literature also revealed that distance learning environment may not be ideal for students with low motivation, self-discipline, and independence. Moreover, students who require more hands-on assistance, lack basic computer skills, or have difficulty with communication, time management, and organization skills were found not to be a good fit for web-based teaching.

Online education necessitates more accountability and the exercise of greater self-discipline and self-motivation from the part of the students. To assist students overcome these problems, a number of strategies have been proposed in the literature. These strategies include clarity of format, expectations, and instructions; identifying course timelines with clear deadlines and procedures for group participation; and varied and student-centered activities which are designed around authentic problem solving and which stimulate students' reflection and self-monitoring of understanding ([Artino, 2008](#); [Cavanaugh, Clark, & Barbour, 2008](#)). In addition, instructors need to establish online office hours on a regular basis, for example once a week, and monitor students'

progress on the assigned tasks and research activities. Setting connections among students is another strategy to prevent students' motivation from waning. Students' mental problems arising from social isolation restrictions can also be addressed with the help of mental health services on campuses through video options for mental health advice, online mindfulness classes and applications, and in partnerships with tele-health and tele-counseling providers.

### **Interaction**

Student-student and teacher-student interaction is a necessary ingredient in language learning; however, making connections with students through a screen can be a challenge for faculty as was shown in 2.3% of the postings. One of the faculty members held that the elimination of the social aspect of learning is an injustice to human interactions. He called online teaching the 'robotization' of instructors and warned that our world is overwhelmed by monitors, screens and pictures, we had better not change education into pictures. If this continues, he alleged, we have to anticipate loneliness and solitude from our students (Msg. 2821).

One of the teaching members complained about the loss of group and pair work which was one of the significant factors in language teaching (Msg. 3416). In conjunction with this, it was pointed out that the new mode of education is devoid of experimental and sensory learning as well as direct observation. One lecturer deplored that the absence of eye contact, intimacy and affiliation, non-verbal communication, moments of laughter and fun and other social ties has turned online classes to emotionless, lifeless, and tiresome places (Msg. 490).

Some instructors offered remedies to make contact with students. Mainly, they utilized social

media such as WhatsApp and Telegram to increase communication with students in less formal ways. To engage students in learning, instructors can offer virtual spaces such as virtual tutoring networks and online student centers with online staff and advisers during consistent hours to enable the university community to connect. Meanwhile, universities can consider initiating virtual homerooms based on students' geographical place of residence to establish continued student engagement. Breakout rooms in virtual teaching platforms including Zoom, Blackboard Collaborate, or Adobe Connect can also be employed in order to foster group cooperation ([Levin, Whitsett, & Wood, 2013](#)).

### Computer Literacy

Students' lack of computer literacy was also referred to as one of the major hurdles facing academics in online format. This was particularly an issue in online exams where they had to type their responses within a limited time frame and some lost the whole exam as they were not able to confirm their responses in due time. Some students faced difficulties logging into classes, applying communication-related apps and websites, browsing study materials, and in particular, overcoming technical problems in remote education.

[O'Doherty, et., al. \(2018\)](#) in their review on barriers in developing and implementing online learning programs for medical students found that lack of technical skills, insufficient computer and typing skills, together with poor infrastructure were some of the major limitations met by educators. [Parkes, Stein and Reading \(2015\)](#) also reported that while today's generation of learners are digital natives, they generally had low preparation for several e-learning and academic-type competencies including critical thinking

skill, reading and writing, and the use of Learning Management Systems (LMS). Although a small portion of messages (1.7%) discussed students' poor technical skills, attending online classes calls for a certain degree of digital literacy and technological proficiency which enables students to follow their courses and manage their assignments and courseware. Hence, establishing basic courses in computer literacy, providing them with technical support, and resolving their problems are essentially required to enhance students' knowledge and participation in the courses, boost their motivation, and ensure higher student retention.

### 5. Conclusion

This study attempted to explore ELT faculty's challenges and perceptions in computer-mediated classes amidst the lockdown. Analysis of the messages indicated that complying with online mode of teaching, changing teaching methodologies, developing engaging and interactive resources, ensuring the quality of e-learning programs and coming into term with technological demands were the main hassles faculty faced. Further, engaging students and making them participate as well as monitoring students' performance were among educators' main concerns in remote teaching. Lack of clear educational policies about e-learning programs and adequate standards for quality control, development of resources, and content delivery added to the problems, too. What is more, the development of quality e-learning entailed a considerable amount of investment in the devices and equipment which caused education not to be available to all learners. Ensuring digital equity and reducing digital divide is a crucial point in this time of crisis as neglecting it may give rise to

many students' losing out learning opportunities (Dhawan, 2020). Overall, our study confirmed the factors which have been proven to be effective in the success of computer-based teaching including planning, financial management, quality assurance, student retention, faculty development, and online course design and pedagogy (Rovai & Downey, 2010).

The results of this study can be utilized by further research to identify the causal and correlational relationship between the challenges that faculty face and other classroom factors such

as quality of teaching, student retention, and student achievement. They can also point to the areas of needs that faculty perceive in online curriculum implementation. Besides, future lies of research can investigate the best practices in the distance education which provides for positive student achievement, student retention, and student engagement. Last but not least, students' perspectives on the challenges of online education need to be explored in order to further clarify the status of online teaching and learning.

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