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Special Issue Editorial

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The years 2020 and 2021 will be recorded and remembered for unprecedented challenges, restrictions, disruptions, and changes the world pandemic, COVID-19, has brought about. This global crisis has had profound impacts on education and has changed its future landscape. Readers interested in reading more broadly on the impact of COVID-19 on different aspects of education and in other contexts might want to read some recent publications. These publications include, for example, Gary (2021) on the impact of COVID-19 on university admission and placement tests; Harry (2020) on the impact of COVID-19 on Dutch higher education; and Jung et al. (2021) on COVID-19 pandemic and higher education Hong Kong. Educators worldwide have figured out how to deal with the new pandemic and design online education systems to meet different stakeholders' needs.

English as a Second Language (ESL) education has been no exception as one of the areas in general education. Stakeholders in this area have responded quickly by adhering to the principles of distance education and incorporating relevant and efficient technology. The new challenges and responses by the ESL community also provoked research to understand the issues and plan for solutions. This Special Issue grew out of common

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interest in reflecting on the ESL students and teachers' experience during this pandemic in Iran and fostering scholarship for quality education in this area.

The guest editors initially reviewed all submissions for this issue. Those articles that were found relevant and insightful underwent the normal double-blinded review process and several rounds of revisions. Finally, six articles successfully passed the review process. These papers address varied issues of interest concerning ESL students and teachers. In the following brief summaries of the articles are presented.

We would like to thank all authors who contributed to this issue. Our thanks also go out to all the reviewers for their professional efforts. We also acknowledge the support of and thank the Editor-in-chief and Editorial board of the Journal of Teaching Language Skills.

The first article by Abdi and Mohsepour looks at the lived experience of a group of Iranian adult English language learners learning English through one-to-one audio call sessions as an alternative to traditional face-to-face learning in the time of COVID-19. Using semi-structured interviews with the participants, they found out that it was a satisficing instructional experience with its advantages and disadvantages. The teachers' expectations and the participants' preferences, along with the requisites for on-the-phone learning, were also noted in their analysis. Several recommendations were made based on the study results for individualized learning of the four languages skills and in tandem with other available technological assets and assistants.

The second article by Derakhshan examines the impacts of emergency distance education (EDE) on the language skills of Iranian EFL students during COVID-19. This qualitative study involved a large sample of Iranian university students of English and multiple data sources. Thematic analysis of the triangulated data generated the disadvantages, challenges, and advantages as befitted the EDE. In particular, it was revealed that speaking was most negatively, and listening was most positively affected

by EDE. Finally, the researcher presented some suggestions on how to enhance online courses in the time of COVID19 and in the future.

The third article by Hassani focuses on the impacts of COVID-19 on English language teacher education in Iran. The study drew on multiple data sources through a grounded theory approach to investigate both challenges and opportunities of COVID-19 in English teacher education. The study highlighted the need to move from anomaly to congruity through training, identity (re)construction, formative assessment, and technology inclusion to change the emergent challenges to opportunities for teachers and learners to secure quality in Education.

In the fourth article, Mahmoudi-Dehaki and his colleagues report findings on the pedagogical effects of utilizing the two main User-Generated Content (UGC) platforms in E-learning (Learning Management System (LMS) vs. Learning Experience Platform (LXP)) on the results of an electronic high-stakes test among Iranian English for Medical Purposes (EMP) learners across their digital-divide status (digital natives vs. digital immigrants) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the statistical analysis indicated that the LXP group significantly outperformed the LMS one on the test results. Moreover, the digital natives obtained statistically higher scores than the digital immigrants in both groups. Through a series of focus-group E-interviews, the study also explored why the differences were observed in their performances. The article concluded with some pedagogical implications, mainly for EMP students, teachers, educators, and policymakers.

The fifth study is a qualitative case study by Shahnama and her colleagues, which addressed the challenges facing an Iranian EFL teacher throughout an online English course of intermediate level. More specifically, it explored the causal mechanisms involved in the course's beginning, middle, and end by adopting a process-tracing approach. The study findings demonstrated that the challenges faced by the focus teacher in online education were diverse and varied during the online course. The

suggestions were all centered on preventing the challenges and, in case of occurrence, handling them most effectively.

Finally, Rahimi and his colleagues set out to disclose the effects of online portfolio assessment (PA) on developing Iranian high school students' English writing skills. They further studied the Iranian high school students' perceptions about the merits of online PA in promoting their writing skills. Comparing the results of two intact groups after an online course involving PA, they demonstrated that PA was significantly effective. They also conducted focus-group interviews with the students and generally suggested some perceived advantages of PA in promoting their English writing skills. The results also led to some implications for E-assessment in general and PA in particular.

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