

## **COVID-19: Is It Time You Made the CALL?**

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### **Abstract**

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 and the consequent closure of schools and universities, distance learning has been adopted throughout the world. However, the problems associated with this type of education under such circumstances have not been studied thoroughly. Conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with 10 English language instructors at two Iranian universities and the data from ongoing discussions the teachers had in a group on WhatsApp about their classes, the present study investigated the problems these teachers had with virtual classes. After analyzing the participants' experiences of teaching virtual English classes, three major themes emerged: Technological Aspects (pros and cons), Class Atmosphere (teachers and students), and Class Activity (pedagogy and assessment). Based on the results obtained from this study, infrastructure should be improved, and teachers need to be more resourceful, flexible, and patient. In addition, teachers should be prepared for huge shifts in their teaching paradigms.

*Keywords:* CALL, COVID-19, English teachers, perceptions, virtual learning.

### **Introduction**

Recently due to the spread of COVID-19 which forced the world into a lockdown, almost all educational institutions started offering some type of virtual classes. Before this, online classes were an option but now they have become a sine qua non. This has made language teachers take refuge in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) as the only safe way to teach and learn and maintain their classes during this crisis. However, despite its presence for more than seven decades, CALL has not yet found a proper position in syllabi and educational programs (Hayati et al., 2013; Khalitova et al., 2017), and many English

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teacher education programs do not offer courses on CALL. Now that COVID-19 has forced teachers to resort to the Internet to teach in unplanned manners, the problems that they may face in this regard seem to be a much-needed line of inquiry in language teaching literature.

Teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about CALL have been studied over the years. Results mostly tend to show that attitudes were positive, and teachers believe that CALL and Internet-Assisted Language Learning (IALL) enhance not only language proficiency (Berg, 2003; Dweik & Safadi, 2007; Poursalehi et al., 2014) but also computer skills.

Learning a language is a multi-dimensional activity, so is teaching it. According to the literature, perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes of teachers about the use of the Internet can influence the outcomes of their teaching (Abas, 1995; Blakenship, 1998; Bullack, 2004; Kuo, 2008; Sabzian & Gilakjan, 2013; Bouchefra & Baghoussi, 2017). All these studies report that English Foreign Language (EFL) teachers have a positive attitude to CALL and the results it brings in.

Watson (1998) argues that the availability of new technologies would translate into teachers' use of those technologies. However, teachers' attitudes can determine whether a new piece of technology will be successfully adopted in their classes or not (Huang & Liaw, 2005). Teachers might even resist new technologies if they believe that the technologies will not work (Sabzian & Gilakjan, 2013). According to Khalitova et al. (2017) teachers' disinclination to adopt CALL, IALL, and Social Network Sites (SNSs) in their teaching is largely due to insufficient training during Teacher Training Programs (TTPs).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the problems Iranian university English language teachers have with virtual classes when they are not properly familiar with and are not prepared for the virtual world. In addition, this paper attempts to explore these teachers' perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes under circumstances that are totally different from those of the studies cited earlier. The Corona pandemic in Iran has now led to the complete closure of all educational systems and significant lifestyle changes. The urge to stay at home, avoid public places and crowds, wash hands, wear masks, clean and disinfect, etc. coupled with the teachers' unfamiliarity with educational technology affordances will create an unprecedented situation that is worth studying.

## **Methodology**

The present study is a qualitative study based on a conventional content analysis approach. A qualitative research design was used in this study because it is flexible and reflects deeply on the participants' attitudes, complex subjective experiences, and intentions, and provides a wide range of beliefs and ideas about the phenomenon of research interest.

### **Setting**

This study took place in the city of Ahvaz in the southwest of Iran. The university instructors from two universities participated in this study including ten EFL instructors of

General English courses. The universities were Petroleum University of Technology (PUT) and Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medicine Sciences (AJUMS). After the lockdown following the spread of COVID-19, almost all institutions of higher education had their classes online.

The courses taught in PUT were General English I and II. General English, I involved speaking and listening skills and the books were Northstar series 4<sup>th</sup> edition published by Pearson Education in 2014. The students were divided into three classes according to their level of proficiency. The classes met three times a week each time for two hours, under normal circumstances which continued in the same fashion online using Adobe Connect. In General English II, the textbook was *Complete IELTS 5.5 to 6.5* by Cambridge University Press and the class met twice a week each time for two hours.

In AJUMS, the courses were offered by NAVID, a system provided by the Ministry of Health and Medical Education to all students of medical sciences for web-based virtual courses. NAVID is a learning management system (LMS), a key and essential infrastructure for the establishment and development of e-learning. This system performs tasks related to application, registration, management, tracking, assessment, program presentation, the interaction between learners, program content between learners and teachers. The English courses offered through this system in AJUMS were Pre-university English and General English. The former was based on the intro level of the book series *Inside Reading* while the latter involved a selection of units taken from all four levels of *Inside Reading*.

## Participants

In the Departments of English in PUT and AJUMS, there were ten teachers, four males and six females (Table 1) whose age range was between 27 and 49 years. Five of them held PhDs and others held MAs. One of the PhD holders majored in General Linguistics and the others graduated in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Among the MA holders one majored in English Literature, one in Translation Studies, and three graduated in TEFL. The average years of experience of the participants in this study were about 11.6 years.

Table 1  
*Participants' biographical and professional data*

Participants	Gender	Age	Education	Experience
1	Female	27	MA	1
2	Female	43	MA	12
3	Female	32	MA	5
4	Female	42	MA	15
5	Female	39	PhD	12
6	Female	29	MA	4
7	Male	41	PhD	15
8	Male	43	PhD	18
9	Male	40	PhD	10
10	Male	49	PhD	24

Written consents were obtained from the participants regarding the data elicited from them; however, their identities are kept confidential, and each participant is presented by a number, instead.

### **Instrumentation**

This study uses a qualitative methodology which is based on semi-structured interviews with a number of English language instructors at Iranian universities and the discussions that took place between them in a group on WhatsApp. Interviews were prepared by the researchers. In the first stage, the researchers explored the online discussions and examined what the teachers' experiences were with online teaching. Based on this analysis, the researchers reviewed the relevant literature and came up with some questions regarding teachers' emotions, responses, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions. Then, the questions were sent to other experts in the field to ensure the questions would be relevant to the research objectives. Afterwards, a few questions were modified following advice from the experts and reanalysis by the researchers. The interviews included eleven questions: one question was on the level of satisfaction that teachers felt about teaching online, while the other questions were on their emotions, responses, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions.

The interviews were taken in written form due to health considerations and fear of COVID-19, and they were in English. However, whenever the researchers felt there was a vague point they called, texted, and used social media to communicate with the participants to overcome it. There were 8734 words collected through interviews. The data collected from WhatsApp amounted to 3463 words. Overall, there were 12197 words from the two sources of the data.

### **Content Analysis**

To analyze the data, open coding was utilized. According to Boyatzis (1998), the thematic analysis provides the researchers with a means to explore the themes. The model used here was proposed by Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017) which involved condensation, code, category, and theme. Deductive and inductive methods were, in turn, used to identify meanings including emotions, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions leading to codes. The codes were then lumped together in categories and categories into themes in the form of phrases expressing each theme. To do the process, the data were read reiteratively by each of the researchers. There were some differences in opinions for some of the themes which were settled after lengthy discussions.

## **Results**

Three major themes emerged from the analysis of the data: a) Technological Aspects (see Table 2), b) Class Atmosphere (see Table 3) and c) Class Activities (see Table 4). As

can be seen in the tables, the themes are the result of the discovery of sub-categories from the data which are then grouped as categories. Similar categories then led to the themes.

### **Theme 1: Technological Aspects**

Table 2 shows the first theme and the relevant categories. Most teachers had mixed opinions regarding technology. Therefore, we would go through the positive aspects first. According to participants 4 and 9:

*Participant 4: “..., as there is no need to commute to class, it is more time and energy efficient.”*

*Participant 9: “Also we could share lots of contents.”*

In response to a question about what they would do to compensate for the missed qualities of real classes when they were compared to online classes, another participant explained,

*Participant 5: “No way to compensate! But I use a WhatsApp group to ask for their homework and activities and teach some parts that are missed online.”*

Apart from these positive aspects, some negative ones would be explored below. Most teachers argued that the infrastructure for teaching online is not ready now. For instance, one teacher commented,

*Participant 6: “Online teaching and learning could be more fruitful if both teachers and students were provided with better infrastructure, like fast Internet connections and sites on which uploading and playing audio files were possible.”*

Another participant, in response to whether he wanted to teach online under normal circumstances, said,

*Participant 10: “I prefer not to, because the infrastructure is not ready.”*

Other teachers cited students’ lack of equipment and familiarity with technology as a major problem. For example,

*Participant: 3: “Also since lots of students do not have microphone it is very hard to interact and the interaction has gone into a chat system which does not have emoji’s and it’s like talking in vacuum.”*

Another teacher pointed to the limitations of the platform. She said,

*Participant 8: "...the interaction is limited only to their (students') typing and answering the questions which is quite time consuming and this makes me feel isolated sometimes."*

Another participant said,

*Participant 1: "Technology can be frustrating as sometimes it doesn't work properly or some repeatedly get kicked out of the meeting or cannot hear me well due to poor Internet connection."*

Table 2  
*Theme 1: Technological Aspects*

<b>Theme 1</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Sub-categories</b>
Technological aspects	Pros of online teaching	1. Teaching online is time and energy efficient. 2. Teachers use WhatsApp, Telegram and other social networking applications to compensate for the drawbacks of the main platform. 3. Teaching online allows easier share of materials.
	Cons of online teaching	1. The infrastructure for teaching online in Iran is not ready yet. 2. Teachers believe students lack equipment and expertise.

### **Theme Two: Class Atmosphere**

Table 3 presents the second theme which is Class Atmosphere and the related categories and subcategories. This theme is the abstraction of how teachers believe and perceive themselves and learners in online classes as well as their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions. Generally, teachers perceive that classes are more teacher-centered online. One teacher said,

*Participant 3: "But not satisfied with the fact that it's more-teacher oriented and less student-oriented."*

In addition, they believe there are fewer opportunities for pair and group work. A teacher complained,

*Participant 8: "Cooperative learning such as pair work and group work is completely missed in this platform."*

Some teachers believed that students sometimes logged in to classes but started surfing the Internet, visiting social media, and even taking a nap. For example, one of the teachers stated,

*Participant 2: "I feel some of the students would go online but get involved with other activities, or maybe take a nap. I try to call their names one by one for each task to alert them."*

However, there was the belief that the practice of teaching and learning online might promote learners' autonomy. We can go through some teachers' comments.

*Participant 8: "... I think some students feel more responsible for learning."*

*Participant 9: "... students learn to be responsible and self-disciplined. Active and independent."*

Teachers, on the other hand, believed their online performance lagged behind that of the classroom. Most teachers preferred classroom to online teaching, but a few liked online. The following comments are made by different teachers.

*Participant 8: "Of course not. Face to face teaching in the classroom environment where students can have enough interactions and you can have a better control on them to follow you, listen to you and even learn something is 100 % required."*

*Participant 2: "I'd rather not as long as Internet connection and online-class systems fail us."*

*Participant 9: Of course not. I'm not satisfied with teaching online. Without attending classes, I do not call myself a teacher! Besides this personal feeling, I highly believe in face-to-face interactions."*

As can be seen from the comments, most of this dissatisfaction is the result of poor infrastructure. However, some teachers were more than happy to teach online. The comments below are a few examples,

*Participant 4: "Sure, as I'm a huge sucker for technology, teaching online via a right medium appears so fascinating and would definitely open new possibilities for teaching. Also, it is flexible, lucrative, and less time-consuming."*

*Participant 5: "I'd say yes I would like to teach online if the students are enthusiastic enough and I am assured that they would study their lessons."*

Some argued that online teaching could be complementary to teaching in class, but not an independent way to do so.

*Participant 9: "... teaching online may complement a series of sessions through which the teacher learns about students' strengths and weaknesses."*

Another teacher said,

*Participant 7: "Being reasonable, in fact it is impossible to shift to distance learning overnight without lots of trials and errors. Honestly speaking, I'm struggling hard to offer the same lessons I would normally do in real classes, but it definitely couldn't be the same."*

Teachers also believed their power and authority are lost online.

*Participant 1: "I guess the important quality missing at online classes is teachers' not being able to supervise students' learning process."*

*Participant 4: "However, because of lack of time management, authority, real time activities, collaboration, and possible lacks of control over the students' learning."*

*Participant 5: "Sometimes I have to switch to Farsi."*

*Participant 9: "Although I regularly seek my students' feedback on the efficiency of my teaching, I think I will not be able to present a reliable evaluation of my online teaching performance at the moment."*

*Participant 6: "Teaching in classroom is more realistic and I feel more confident about the effectiveness of my teaching."*

*Participant 8: "My online teaching may become weaker than my classroom teaching because I cannot use my body language, e.g., eye contact and different gestures, to get my message across."*

Table 3  
*Theme Two: Class Atmosphere*

<b>Theme 2</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Sub-categories</b>
Class Atmosphere	Learners in an online class	1. Classes are more teacher-centered now. 2. Opportunities for learning through pair and group work are lost. 3. Students get distracted online. 4. Teaching online might promote learners' autonomy.

	Teachers in an online class	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers are not very satisfied with teaching online.</li> <li>2. Teachers need to be trained on online teaching.</li> <li>3. Online teaching as a complement of traditional teaching is welcome.</li> <li>4. Teachers' power/control over the class is lost.</li> <li>5. Teachers complain about the lack of interaction.</li> </ol>
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### Theme Three: Class Activity

One major complaint that teachers made was the lack of the usual interactions they had in classrooms. Here are some of the participants' comments in this regard:

*Participant 3: "Since my online class is a speaking course, the major factor missed in online classes is interaction between the students. I tried making them write conversations on their own and share with class, yet I believe it is definitely not enough."*

*Participant 8: "...an important part of the class interaction is missed in online classes."*  
*Participant 2: "I think the most important quality that is missed online is the common face-to-face interactions among students-teachers and students-students."*

Table 4

#### Theme Three: Class Activity

Theme 3	Categories	Sub-categories
Class Activities	Pedagogy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers have demanded students to write, record their voices, listen to different materials and do vocabulary and grammar exercises.</li> <li>2. Pedagogically, teaching online is not comparably efficient.</li> </ol>
	Assessment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Diagnostic assessment is the Achilles' heel of online teaching.</li> <li>2. Vocabulary and grammar are the best online assessments.</li> </ol>

Table 4 shows the theme class activities which relate to pedagogy and assessment. This theme covers the activities teachers do or have their students do to learn a language and assess the students' learning. As presented in Table 4, teachers demand that their students write, record their voices, listen to different materials and do vocabulary and grammar exercises.

*Participant 8: "I have asked them to do their workbooks, be prepared for their following session by studying their following lesson, and be ready for their online flash card exam."*

*Participant 9: "I usually check their mastery of new vocabulary and grammar points the next day and make them write down conversations related to the new lesson for the next week."*

*Participant 3: "For the listening class, some extra listening materials were given to practice on."*

*Participant 3: "For improving their vocabulary knowledge, a vocabulary book is introduced 504 Absolutely Essential Words."*

*Participant 5: "So far, I have asked them to do vocabulary and grammatical exercises, reading comprehension exercises and translation practices."*

*Participant 1: "Summarizing readings and doing exercises of each unit."*

On the other hand, most teachers believe that teaching online is not as efficient as that of the classroom. Also, they were not very satisfied with teaching online.

*Participant 2: "Sometimes, I lose track of what I am saying due to the lack of class interaction. Although I asked different question during my presentation, I am not sure about the effectiveness of my teaching because the students might copy other students' responses or check the answers using dictionaries or the answer key."*

*Participant 9: "Truth be told, I doubt the efficiency of online classes for the very reason that I have mentioned above."*

*Participant 4: "Essays were better because usually I gave feedback to them later, and it did not change. But for speaking I usually provided feedback immediately but now I do later and I guess it is not as effective."*

Some class activities are linked with teachers' concerns of how they would be able to assess their students. They assume that they would not be able to assess their students online. This roots in the traditional final examination. Some comments are given below.

*Participant 6: "My second problem relates to exams. Since it's hard to guarantee the reliability of online exams, I'm still wondering how to devise tests that reflect students' true proficiency."*

*Participant 7: "I believe coming up to precise evaluation needs more time at least the end of the term."*

Despite the negative perceptions above, teachers began developing some ways of assessment including, writing, speaking exercises that are recorded and sent to teachers, vocabulary and grammar worksheets, and listening exercises.

*Participant 4: "Spontaneous speaking techniques are not really tested or practiced in online classes and that is very unfortunate for such classes of speaking and listening skills. So, I have asked them to answer some questions on grammar and vocabulary."*

*Participant 10: "I believe assigning them to study for their flash card exam has been effective to some extent since this exam makes up 2-3 marks of the total mark of their final exam if there is going to be an exam at all."*

## **Discussion**

### **The problems**

A large number of teachers all over the world are currently offering virtual learning courses, and classes have moved from schools and universities to students' cellphones and computers. The current study was conducted to investigate the problems university English language teachers have with virtual classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. After analyzing the participants' experiences of teaching virtual English classes, three major themes emerged: Technological Aspects (pros and cons), Class Atmosphere (teachers and students), and Class Activity (pedagogy and assessment).

According to our results, the main problem associated with the first theme (Technological Aspects) was related to the poor infrastructure of the country in terms of virtual education and the teachers' incompetence for CALL classes. Managing virtual classrooms in a situation where the necessary software and hardware infrastructure for distance learning is not available was reported to be a very difficult task. This situation is exacerbated when combined with teachers' weak knowledge of know-how and know-what of CALL classes, putting them under more psychological and even physical pressure since they are not properly familiar with and are not prepared for this particular medium of instruction (Bezerra, 2020). Therefore, evaluating teachers' performance under such circumstances, without addressing the infrastructural problems and lack of formal training for them, which are both at the heart of distance learning is problematic. Poor infrastructure and incompetent teachers are a dangerous combination as far as CALL is concerned, and can lead to negative emotions, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions (Huang & Liaw, 2005), and this can, in turn, result in resistance to new technologies (Sabzian & Gilakjan, 2013). On the other hand, the unexpected pandemic and its consequences were so quick that stakeholders were not able to properly equip themselves accordingly. Therefore, the outcomes of online classes can seriously be influenced.

As far as Class Atmosphere was concerned, the main criticism leveled against virtual learning was undermining the real face-to-face interaction, which is a vital aspect in any

language teaching class (Allwright, 1984; Hall & Walsh, 2002; Börekci & Aydin, 2020). It can be assumed most of the teachers' dissatisfaction with their online performance could be linked to the problems caused by the lack of usual interactions that teachers were accustomed to. The teachers in our study stated that they like to feel the atmosphere of the university and to have more interaction with the students in the physical space of the university. Certainly, person-to-person interaction in the learning environment facilitates the transfer of ideas and helps to better identify any problems posed during this transfer (Melchor-Couto, 2019; Sert, 2019). As the participants in this study rightly pointed out, in virtual education, it is not possible to understand who has understood the subject, who is tired, or who needs more attention because there is not much eye-to-eye interaction. This loss of interaction can hinder language learning according to Long's (1981) Interaction Hypothesis which emphasizes that two-way interaction is more facilitative to language acquisition than one-way interaction. Two-way interaction allows more extensive negotiation of meaning and results in more comprehensible input (Ellis, 2008). As with interaction in a CALL setting, Börekci and Aydin (2020) believe that those EFL teachers should create a positive environment for interaction on Facebook to support their learners' personal and academic development. Furthermore, student-teacher interaction provides opportunities for scaffolding as the expert provides the proper Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) for novices (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Finally, the most commonly experienced problem cited by the participating teachers in terms of Class Activity was related to an accurate and valid assessment of the students. Of course, such complaints are not new to the CALL literature. For example, according to Leakey (2011), the CALL assessment has been surrounded by skepticism since its inception for about fifty years. Leakey (2011) believes that there is a need for a clear, accurate, and reliable model of CALL evaluation in terms of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. He also points out that to date there is no one rubric or set of concrete guidelines available to provide CALL educators with a fair, complete, and consistent model of evaluation. As far as CALL assessment is concerned, a number of learner characteristics such as cognitive/affective factors, gender, and ethnic background (Chapelle & Jamieson, 1986, Gass & Varonis, 1986; Pederson 1986) along with lesson types (Abraham & Liou, 1991) play an important role in CALL assessment. Of course, the problems associated with CALL assessment are not confined to these issues. For example, the use of technology for assessment has been reported in the literature to make cheating and plagiarism easy (Bartley, 2005; Rowe, 2004; Gathuri et al., 2014).

### **The pseudo-solution**

The vague prospect of effective assessment at the end of the semester coupled with the lack of interaction stated earlier leads teachers to focus more heavily on out-of-class activities to have more freedom in evaluating students and to provide more comprehensible input that used to be already created through real classroom interaction. Therefore, they tend to take full advantage of the high-tech amenities at their disposal and bombard the students with numerous extra materials because the online platform happily allows for such undertakings. However, the haphazard provision of students with materials whose pedagogical efficiency has

not already been reflected upon is merely a pseudo-solution and cannot compensate for the lack of interaction in virtual classes. Moreover, the time and energy the teachers spend in this process are not negligible. Based on one estimate, the labor required online is significantly greater than the amount of preparation needed for traditional lecture/discussion (Boettcher, 1998). In our study, this was attested by the teachers' negative attitude towards the effectiveness of these activities. The vague outcome can lead to negative attitudes and beliefs which, in turn, might affect teachers' perceptions of these activities which might be effective in enhancing some aspects of language proficiency, but the teachers in this study believed that it was very hard to compensate for the little interaction that went on in the class.

### **The real solutions**

Because COVID-19 is a gate-crasher that is intending to sit in the front row and is not leaving there anytime soon, the language learning enterprise in universities has to find a way to handle this situation despite all the problems associated with it, and we pointed to the most important of them. Here, based on our review of CALL literature and our 3-month experience of and reflections on teaching virtual English classes at different universities, we propose a number of possible ways to alleviate these problems.

As far as the poor infrastructure of the country is concerned, teachers need to be ultimately prepared. The preparation required for teaching online is on three fronts. The first is to learn as much as possible about online facilities and teaching online. The other is to be as resourceful as teaching online demands because while teaching online many things can go wrong, and a resourceful teacher has a better chance of managing the trouble. The third issue is flexibility and patience; in other words, online teachers should be flexible and patient because several things can happen that might force the teachers to change plans at the last minute.

Technology has brought about drastic changes in language learning, and this has profound implications for who is a competent CALL teacher and what is the required knowledge of this teacher as well as what to be included in a teacher education curriculum (Hubbard & Levy, 2006). The problem of unprepared CALL teachers can be traced back to teacher preparation programs that "have largely neglected to equip their graduates with the related knowledge and skills they need to enter today's technologically advanced language classroom" (Kessler, 2006, p. 23). According to Easton (2003), online teachers need to have a paradigm shift in terms of how they allocate instructional time and space, how they manage their class in a virtual space, and how to engage students through virtual communications. Hampel and Stickler (2005) also believe that in addition to the different skills needed by traditional language teachers in face-to-face classrooms, online teachers have to learn other skills such as how to deal with the lack of non-verbal clues in audio conferencing. They also consider the competence to use networked computers and the familiarity with basic applications as the prerequisites needed for effective online language teaching. Put in a nutshell, first of all, teachers need to be trained to be computer-literate and Internet-literate. Then, they should learn the proper and smooth use of the particular systems used (e.g., NAVID or Adobe Connect). In doing so, their complaints about poor infrastructure could also be reduced.

Researchers in the field of language assessment need to identify a viable methodological avenue to make an objective assessment in virtual classes possible. One way to achieve this according to Bauer and Anderson (2000), is to let students know, at the beginning of the course how, their work is evaluated (e.g., the importance of participation, presenting papers and writings, participating in discussions, etc.). Using digital portfolios is also recommended for student evaluation. A digital portfolio according to Wiedmer and Kappan (1998), is “a purposeful collection of work, captured by electronic means, that serves as an exhibit of individual efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas” (p. 1). The portfolio indeed contains all the activities that the students? have done during the study.

## Conclusions

The use of new technologies in the education system in recent years, in both schools and universities, has always been important, but it was mostly used as a backup and auxiliary option. However, with the outbreak of the Covid-19 and the consequent closure of schools and universities, technologically-based pedagogies came to be considered as a necessity rather than an ornamental accessory for traditional classes. In this paper, relying on the experiences of English language teachers, we dealt with the main problems associated with classes held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and we tried to provide solutions for these problems. Despite all merits reported in the literature for distance learning, under these circumstances, we are not sure how much these technologies are effective in enhancing education, especially foreign language learning when the students and the teachers both are not sufficiently prepared for this type of education. Nor are we convinced of the urge to keep the classes ongoing at the expense of wasting valuable time for devising new integrated approaches.

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**Informed Consent Statement:** The authors declare that written informed consent was obtained from the participants in this study which can be provided upon request. Participants’ identities were protected and they are anonymous.

**Data Availability Statement:** The authors declare that the data could be provided to whomever upon request by email after receiving permission from the Deputy of Research and Technology of Petroleum University of Technology and Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences.

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