

## **Demystifying the Challenges of E-Assessment in Turkish Preparatory Language Schools**

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### **Abstract**

Throughout the pandemic, educational systems underwent numerous changes, including alterations in how students are assessed. Teachers had to transition to remote teaching to prevent disruptions in educational services. Teachers must evaluate their students' learning processes and provide feedback for various reasons. Utilizing different platforms and tools can be a challenging and demanding task for language teachers. Nowadays, a variety of internet platforms can be employed for e-assessment. Regardless of teachers' assessment and technological literacy, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers encounter more challenges in designing and administering e-assessments than ever before. It should be noted that only a limited number of comprehensive studies have investigated e-assessment challenges. Therefore, this qualitative study examined 56 EFL teachers working at Preparatory Language Schools, outlining their perceptions of e-assessment challenges and potential solutions in Turkish Preparatory Language Schools. To achieve this, 56 teachers with M.A. and Ph.D. degrees were purposefully selected for this study. Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire and purposive sampling and analyzed using MAXQDA 2022. The findings revealed the following challenges in implementing e-assessment: individual differences, ethics, infrastructure, policy power, mediating artifacts, teacher and student assessment and feedback literacy, and teacher and student technological literacy. The results of this study can contribute to professional development, policy-making, and in-service training. In addition to educational administrators, curriculum developers, and teachers, it might be beneficial to consider whether the primary challenges identified for e-assessment in Turkish are similar to those in their contexts. Furthermore, the factors identified in this study can be used to propose a model for effective e-assessment.

**Keywords:** assessment literacy, technological literacy, infrastructure, e-assessment

## **Introduction**

Nearly every aspect of society has been affected by the COVID-19 virus, including education. The COVID-19 school lockout created a new and demanding environment for digital learning, and information must be made available to guide educational policy and practice. While natural disasters, such as earthquakes or floods, have forced regional school lockdowns in several nations, they have not always resulted in digital learning for an unknown number of weeks. In addition, few nations have yet to go through a pandemic that led to a social crisis and a subsequent lockdown of schools, so there is little information available on how to handle the present predicament and the difficulties that come from digital learning in this setting (Kulal & Nayak, 2020).

The global educational landscape has transformed due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. To meet the urgent requirement to maintain education in progress, universities were shuttered in most nations as an immediate reaction to this problem. The transition to the internet environment has accelerated dramatically due to this catastrophe. Educational program stakeholders were compelled to immediately convert to online teaching as a substitute option. This experiment has since spread around the globe and changed the way instructors and students learn. Colleges were obliged to modernize their technology infrastructure and switch to online learning. In many nations, face-to-face instruction was discontinued, leaving e-learning as the sole method for instructors to interact with their students (Li et al., 2021; Li et al., 2022).

In a similar vein, the COVID-19 lockdown has had a significant impact on EFL teaching and assessment. Although e-learning has proven helpful in these urgent circumstances, instructors may face difficulties integrating technology into the classroom. Many challenges resulted from the abrupt switch from in-person and mixed learning to full-time online instruction (Chahkand, 2021). Teachers had fewer opportunities to evaluate their students online because there was no actual contact between professors and students.

The core of the teaching process is assessment. It assesses how well students grasp the content and their capacity for advancement. Additionally, instructors' views significantly impact the educational process, especially in EFL environments (Alibakhshi & Nezakatgoo, 2019; Alibakhshi & Sarani, 2014). Therefore, the rising growth of e-learning in all its forms has thrown a lot of obstacles at higher education institutions in terms of student evaluation in the context of this change from face-to-face learning to full-time online learning (Alibakhshi & Mohammadi, 2016). However, assessment, a crucial step in the educational process, is essential to learning (Jalilzadeh & Coombe, 2023).

E-assessment creates, delivers, stores, or reports student assessment assignments using digital technology (Fontanillas et al., 2016). Its potential advantages over conventional (face-to-face) assessments have been thoroughly researched and related to improving student learning, such as making it more profound and authentic (Osuji, 2012). However, this potential becomes apparent only when the assessment is appropriately designed. The ability to conduct remote assessments from any location at any time, creating a more inviting learning atmosphere during assessments, a faster and simpler assessment procedure, and the capacity to receive feedback are all recognized by

academics as well-known benefits of e-assessment. Nonetheless, these same researchers also highlight several issues with e-assessment, most connected to technological challenges and the necessity for digital literacy (Gikandi et al., 2011). The need for digital equipment, internet access, and student identification are among the primary potential drawbacks and challenges of e-assessment noted in the literature (Haleem et al., 2022). Although the potential difficulties of e-assessment do slow the process of its proliferation, the circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic expedited the introduction of e-assessment across all levels of education, often without sufficient time for preparation and prevention of possible e-assessment issues. Due to the unprecedented COVID-19 threat to national education systems, several governments have mandated an immediate transition to online teaching and virtual education for most pupils (Stoian et al., 2022). To further understand the challenges that can prevent efficient e-learning evaluation, we must look into how instructors see the techniques used to evaluate online EFL learners (Li et al., 20).

Most of these disruptions did not need continued teaching and learning because they were either temporary or scheduled, and academic requirements were met before or after the closure. However, owing to the significance of ongoing teaching and assessment during the COVID-19 outbreak, the question of interest in this study was to explore the main challenges facing EFL teachers in e-assessing their students' learning while teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Turkish preparatory English classes. This aims to address a critical need in the educational landscape. With the ever-increasing importance of technology and the recent acceleration of online and remote learning, it is imperative to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges educators face, particularly in the context of language instruction. Turkish Preparatory Language Schools serve as a unique setting where EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers have encountered the complexities of e-assessment amid the COVID-19 pandemic. By examining these challenges from the perspective of pre-service teachers, this study sheds light on the intricacies of e-assessment in a context that has received limited research attention. Ultimately, this research endeavors to provide valuable insights that can inform professional development, policy-making, and in-service training efforts to enhance the effectiveness of e-assessment practices in Turkish Preparatory Language Schools and potentially serve as a model for similar educational contexts globally. Therefore, this study specifically aimed to answer the following research question.

1. What are the main challenges of Turkish EFL instructors in e-assessment during the Covid-19 online remote teaching?

### **Theoretical Background**

Constructivism, as a philosophy of teaching and learning, asserts that individuals actively construct or create their knowledge and that reality is determined by the learner's experiences (Elliott, 2018). Educators continue to learn from each lesson presented, each encounter with students, parents, administrators, experts, and colleagues, and each reflection on class activity, assignment, or assessment. Continuous development of one's knowledge and abilities as an educator lays the ground for adaptive expertise – the capacity to make efficient and effective judgments that enhance learners' academic advancement.

Hatano and Inagaki (1986) assert that adaptive expertise is distinct from regular expertise. It entails resolving new issues or circumstances by applying pertinent prior

information and increasing one's knowledge in that domain. According to Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005), adaptive expertise entails both efficiency - the ability to do a task efficiently and effectively - and innovation, which refers to the ability or necessity to rethink and change what one does or how one does something. The COVID-19 pandemic that began in the spring of 2020 wreaked havoc on education. It was a disturbance that prompted teachers to move to and conduct online remote teaching, with their most valuable instrument being their adaptive knowledge. Decisions were not based on best practices because there were none. Intuition was the preferred method. Due to the immediacy of the crisis, the circumstances necessitated efficiency and inventiveness since teachers were required to educate themselves in a virtual environment and a foreign manner.

Educators develop adaptive competence from the experiences, which informs them as they make future decisions. From a constructivist perspective, an educator gains knowledge about teaching and learning via all their experiences as a student or teacher. However, many teachers lacked the competence to make the seamless shift to online remote education necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

While all teachers possess knowledge and skills related to the academic content, learning objectives, or behaviors they wish to assist students in mastering, as well as a collection of approaches and strategies that have been successful in a traditional in-person setting, the majority lack a comprehensive collection of pedagogical knowledge and skills applicable to online remote learning as a mode of instruction for content and behaviors (Daniel, 2020). Adnan and Anwar (2020) believe that shifting from traditional teaching methods to online remote classes would not be seamless or straightforward in this innovative pandemic. The abrupt change would undoubtedly create numerous impediments and difficulties (Crawford et al., 2020). The transition to online remote teaching posed significant challenges for teachers, who were forced to rethink their approach to materials preparation, education, and assessment. Again, the prior adaptive skill was insufficient to justify a perfectly natural and intuitive response. Also, as Baran (2011) stated, despite students' widespread adoption of online classes, some teachers continue to have significant reservations regarding the value and quality of online teaching approaches.

The demand for a complete and immediate conversion of all levels of education in the country to online remote teaching and learning is unprecedented. Before the spring of 2020, this had never occurred. As such, there is a dearth of research on educational disruptions to this extent. While related research is rare, various opportunities exist to learn from this incident. Understanding educators' experiences in curriculum modifications in content, delivery, and assessment and their perceptions of the challenges and benefits of online remote teaching can help educational professionals, leaders, and researchers reflect on teaching and learning in all domains. Additionally, it might help them better understand the complexities involved in a complete disruption of the educational platform. Finally, a greater understanding of these experiences can inform and assist teacher training and preparation to deal with future disruptions effectively.

Consequently, both teaching and learning and learning assessment occurred under stress and uncertainty, which had unintended consequences for both teachers and students (Kafka, 2020; Zhai & Du, 2020). According to Sahu (2020), the rapid growth in confirmed Covid-19 cases has produced fear and panic among students and teachers alike about the current situation and what can happen. Teaching during a novel epidemic was

unique and unparalleled for all teachers and students. Concerns for safety, health, and well-being elevated anxiety and stress levels for teachers and students and their families and loved ones.

Considering the teacher's significant challenges, assessment and evaluation methods and techniques employed in online remote teaching are the most critical issues. On the other hand, although online remote education has existed for a long time, the assessment and evaluation aspects of these modes of teaching remain underdeveloped (Timmis, 2015). Additionally, it is believed that implementing the same standard assessment methods and techniques is a difficult challenge in online remote teaching. Further, during the present epidemic, many instructors altered or created new exam formats to accommodate the online method, regardless of their suitability or usefulness.

Even though we live in an age of digital gadgets, teacher education programs have historically been underfunded, failing to integrate technology sufficiently into the curriculum. Indeed, several recent studies have identified current teacher education programs as significant contributors to the challenges faced by pre-service teachers because they a) place a greater emphasis on theory than on practical skills (e.g., Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2011), b) isolate pre-service teachers from their counterparts with little, if any, assistance or guidance, and c) are ineffective at integrating technology (Al Zahrani, 2015; Boakye & Ampiah, 2017; Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2011). One major issue faced by pre-service teachers was determining how to assess and evaluate students. Due to their lack of experience and knowledge, pre-service instructors claimed that they were unsure whether their students understood or could execute and perform the abilities they had learned.

Online remote teaching has many benefits and drawbacks. It enables students to attend classes and teachers to supervise classroom activities from any location with an internet connection (Nagrle, 2013). Another advantage of online remote teaching is the accessibility of content. Students can access the lesson's documents whenever they wish to review them (De Oliveira et al., 2018). Another advantage of remote teaching is that it saves time. Teachers and students are not required to commute to the location of Education (Bijeesh, 2017; Nagrle, 2013).

On the other hand, one of the disadvantages of remote teaching is the lack of social connection. Students may feel isolated even though they communicate with friends and teachers via discussion boards, emails, and video conferencing software (Sadeghi, 2019). Learner autonomy is highlighted, and they must encourage themselves throughout this process (Brown, 2017). However, students may become distracted and fail to satisfy assignment deadlines and course requirements (De Oliveira et al., 2018; Nagrle, 2013).

There is some evidence in the literature that online exams place a greater cognitive burden on students than traditional paper-based exams (Prisacari & Danielson, 2017). Students are required to indicate that they have completed the course requirements and are capable of navigating technology. Due to the additional complication of an online exam, which increases students' cognitive load (Jarodzka et al. 2014), their ability will be harmed, resulting in lower exam outcomes.

According to cognitive load theory, learning is influenced by the number of mental resources necessary to meet a specific activity's demands (Paas et al., 2004; Schmeck et al., 2015). Learning is believed to be more successful when the number of cognitive resources available (e.g., working memory) is sufficient for the amount of information required to process the thought (Pass et al., 2004; Prisacari & Danielson, 2017). As a

result, educational activities that minimize the needless burden on working memory should be designed to leave greater room for concentrating on the exams (Jarodzka et al., 2014; Parshall et al., 2002; Schmeck et al., 2015, p. 94).

The online examination process may prevent students from concentrating on passing the exam questions, as it is likely to “waste” students’ cognitive resources (Schmeck et al., 2015, p. 94). According to Parshall et al. (2002), “the more intuitive and sophisticated the computer test software is, the more attention the examinee must devote to it rather than to the examination questions” (p. 5). In addition, the design of the online exam imposes “extraneous” stress on learners (Paas & Renkl, 2004). While online exams are a new phenomenon for students, they will likely become more prevalent. They use cognitive resources more since students are required to handle a greater portion of the exam situation than in a regular paper-based examination, where invigilators guarantee that everything is in order in real-time with the students.

### **Experimental Background**

Most preparatory language school educators in our Turkish context are unfamiliar with online remote teaching and the associated technologies for assessment. Research on instructional technology applications indicates that instructors generally lack the competence to integrate technology into their classrooms, and their attempts are limited in scope, diversity, and depth (Fredricksen & Warrington, 2020). The shift to online remote teaching, in which technology was used exclusively to transmit information, posed an enormous challenge for educators in assessment and education.

Moreover, there are growing concerns regarding the quality of online remote teaching and teachers’ capacity to adapt and deliver their lessons successfully in the face of this unprecedented pandemic (Auxier & Anderson, 2020). Due to the novel epidemic condition, teachers faced new issues and more sophisticated struggles with online remote teaching (Huber & Helm 2020). This new teaching context has created numerous obstacles for all teachers, particularly pre-service teachers (König et al., 2020). While online and virtual classes benefit students by providing continuity and flexibility in their learning, the rapid transition from traditional to online remote learning and virtual teaching affected teachers unevenly and placed them in an entirely unprepared and abrupt situation.

As König et al. (2020) mentioned in their study, they aimed to examine the issues connected with online remote teaching from the perspective of pre-service teachers teaching English in private schools or universities during the Spring 2020 semester.

Ekmekçi (2015) conducted a study assessing online remote teaching from the perspective of EFL students enrolled in English courses via remote education. The survey discovered that more than half of the students had favorable sentiments toward online remote teaching as a result of the flexibility of the course. However, the study also revealed that nearly half of the students expressed dissatisfaction with assignments and assessments. Similarly, Altunay (2016) discovered that when EFL learners were asked about their attitudes toward online remote learning, they preferred traditional classrooms over online remote learning environments. Similarly, another study by Özüdoğru and Hişmanoglu (2016) revealed that most students were dissatisfied with English courses offered via online remote learning. As a result, students overwhelmingly preferred face-to-face instruction.

Altunay (2019) examined the perspectives of first-year students at a university on learning English using online remote teaching. The study's findings suggested that, despite a lack of technological equipment, students were satisfied with remote learning because it allowed time and location flexibility. Finally, Mailizar et al. (2020) examined the obstacles Indonesian secondary school instructors faced when it came to online remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study discovered that the most frequently reported challenges were students' lack of technological knowledge and skills, lack of access to technological devices, and issues with the internet and connectivity.

Although some studies examined EFL teachers' attitudes toward online remote teaching (Dashtestani, 2014; Osika et al., 2009), they were generally conducted with teachers with little or no experience with online remote education. Moreover, few studies examined EFL teachers' perceptions of online remote teaching during the Covid-19 outbreak (Housseine & Sahli, 2020; Nugroho & Mutiaraningrum, 2020). Due to the growing importance of online remote education over the last two years, academics have been forced to interview EFL teachers about their perspectives and experiences with online instruction. Nevertheless, to the authors' knowledge, no comparable studies have been conducted in the Turkish educational context. To address the problems just raised, research conducted in other regions of the world during the pandemic advocated the eclectic combination of approaches and techniques for implementing online instruction in teacher education programs (Khatoony & Nezhadmehr, 2020; Nugroho et al., 2021).

The difficulties that teachers, particularly pre-service teachers, endure are a fact of life. Recent scholarship has highlighted several of these difficulties. For example, recent research has identified a greater emphasis on the problem of content knowledge and knowledge delivery. Tynjälä and Heikkinen (2011) discovered that one of the most common difficulties encountered by early career teachers was an insufficient grasp of topic information and expertise. Additionally, they indicated that most pre-service teachers believed their teacher education programs did not effectively prepare them for teaching by providing them with the necessary skills and abilities (Boakye & Ampiah, 2017). Indeed, Watson (2006) discovered that, for most teacher education programs, there is a mismatch between the curriculum content and the area of expertise.

One of the primary difficulties in the academic setting may be related to the fact that when assessment systems are not trusted to produce accurate results, the validity of qualifications and the credibility of certificates and degrees are called into question. (Goff et al., 2020; Martin, 2017). Furthermore, an additional concern is that society's trust in academic institutions will be questioned. Additionally, it is worth noting that academic dishonesty and professional dishonesty are interrelated. As Carpenter et al. (2004), Nonis and Swift (2001), and Guerrero-Dib et al. (2020) demonstrate, students who have engaged in academic fraud are more likely to engage in dishonest behavior in their professional workplaces in the future.

According to Moreno (1999), educational institutions serve as the first laboratory for corruption and dishonest behavior. This belief is especially true in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has compelled many institutions to adopt didactic models based on remote teaching and online student assessment (Crawford et al., 2020; Raje & Stitzel, 2020; White, 2020). Students have been asked in some situations to take tests and exams online in an unsupervised setting where it is difficult to ensure that the student is completing the assessment of their abilities without resorting to unethical techniques. Academic dishonesty is prevalent in online teaching models, and the elements that

contribute to it include personality, cognitive skills, and teaching approaches. However, some environmental variables that influence cheating behavior include social learning, an integrity culture, honor codes, student support, a trusting environment, external pressure to compete, peer pressure to cheat, faculty responses, the institution's ability to identify misconduct, and the type of punishment (McCabe et al., 2001).

Without the appropriate evaluation, teachers may struggle to adequately identify and meet the requirements of students (Köni et al., 2020). Similarly, ethics are frequently related to different sorts of online examinations. Watson (2020) and Davidson and Coombe (2022) remarked that it is difficult to supervise students' behavior while they are engaged in online or remote learning, which may result in misbehavior, such as cheating during online examinations. Kaur (2020) stated that what had exacerbated the situation was the inability to conduct face-to-face assessments online during COVID-19.

To comprehend why students cheat, it is necessary first to investigate the underlying psychological theories of moral reasoning. Kohlberg (1971) offered a six-stage paradigm of moral reasoning, including three distinct stages of moral development. Moral judgments are made at level one (Pre-conventional Moral Reasoning) based on personal needs and cultural conventions. At level two (Conventional Moral Reasoning), ethical decisions are made based on one's family, culture, or national expectations, regardless of observed repercussions. At the last stage (Post-conventional Moral Reasoning), a person's moral values or principles are defined and established as having validity independent of any individual or group. Kohlberg's theory applies to student cheating behavior since a student may cheat to satisfy a personal need, as mentioned at the pre-conventional level.

Research indicates that gender may play a role in ethical decision-making. While investigating and evaluating ethical activities, Borkowski and Ugras (1992) discovered that females articulated more ethical viewpoints than males. Similarly, Shepard and Hartenian (1991) found that females chose more ethical attitudes than males. Ruegger and King (1992) discovered that age and gender affected the growth of business students. Their findings indicate that gender plays a crucial role in ethical behavior. Females are perceived to be more righteous than males in corporate ethical circumstances. Humbarger and DeVaney (2005) concluded that female students are more ethical than male students and that ethical ideals increase with age. Humbarger and DeVaney (2005) reached a similar finding in Stevenson (1999), noting that females scored much higher on cognitive moral judgment tests than males. While gender may be a factor, research reveals that other external factors may influence students' ethical behavior. Students who participated in sports exhibited less ethical behavior than students who did not. Stevenson (1999) has already reached the same conclusions as Humbarger and DeVaney (2005). Stevenson (1999) noticed that females demonstrated a much greater capacity for moral judgment than males. Competitive athletics has a detrimental influence on athletes' ethical reasoning and development. Compared to non-athletes or individual sports players, student-athletes who engaged in team sports demonstrated considerably worse moral behavior (Stevenson, 1999).

Numerous recommendations exist for addressing contract cheating and promoting academic integrity. Lancaster and Clarke (2016) summarize these, arguing that academics should assess the types of tests they design to make them difficult for students to outsource cost-effectively. While reinforcing trust and integrity ideals is likely the most frequently addressed strategy for academic integrity in the literature (Culwin, 2008; Lang,

2013), integrity training alone is insufficient to deter cheating. Amigud et al. (2018) comprehensively analyzed academic integrity measures and concluded that there is a need for continual identity and authorship assurance to construct a system of checks and balances. Aligning learner identities with learning outcomes may be facilitated by technology.

Prisacari and Danielson (2017) investigated the effect of taking an exam on paper versus using a computer on the cognitive strain. They assessed cognitive load by two self-report questions about “felt mental effort” and “degree of difficulty.” Among the examinations were algorithms and chemistry issues of a conceptual and definitional nature. The researchers determined that computer-based examinations did not add to students’ cognitive strain. This study discusses how to keep students from becoming distracted by the technical aspects of a computer-based exam.

### **The Currents Study**

This study aims to frame and assess teachers’ subjective experiences using the perspective of adaptive expertise. That is the adaptability of both material or subject matter and pedagogical knowledge in the face of the pandemic’s dramatic and forced changes in educational approaches and environments. The current study attempts to analyze EFL instructors’ perspectives on e-learning assessment. It underlines the difficulties faced since there has not been much research on teachers’ perceptions of evaluating full-time online teaching in the Turkish EFL setting. This study is concerned with the response of this final group of professionals. Its purpose was to learn about preparatory school teachers’ transitions from traditional classroom settings to online remote teaching due to school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. While teachers in the preparatory schools of foreign languages in Turkey and elsewhere grappled with the whirl of uncertainty and processed numerous severe changes on a human level, they were tasked with switching to online remote teaching to preserve the routine academic cycles and activities for their students. Nobody anticipated or even envisaged this scenario. This state was something for which most teachers were neither prepared nor trained. Moreover, schools in Turkey have historically been closed due to weather disasters, violent acts or threats, construction, and other unforeseen circumstances (Reich et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2014).

### **Methodology**

#### **Design**

We employed a phenomenology research method. Phenomenological studies deeply delve into human lived experiences. This type of qualitative research is mainly used for investigating the fields with little or no knowledge (Cohen et al., 2018). “Individual participation was accepted on a volunteer-only basis after an initial explanation of how the study would be carried out was explained to all individuals present” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 50). We informed informants about the time parameters and the likely follow-up interviews in line with ethical considerations.

#### **Participants**

The participants were recruited from different universities in Turkey. Theoretical sampling was used to recruit the informants in this study. The first author (corresponding author), who positioned himself in the study as a researcher interested in assessment and

e-assessment, nominated the teachers and sent each a message through WhatsApp and Google Meet. The interview date was announced to each of the selected teachers. Most informants (18) were interviewed through google meet, while the rest (13) were interviewed through online applications such as WhatsApp. Data saturation occurred when the researcher interviewed the 28<sup>th</sup> teachers, and the researchers felt sure that a sample consisting of 28 EFL teachers made an appropriate sample for a phenomenology study.

### **Instruments**

One type of data collection tool that allows for a deep understanding of the phenomenon is an interview, including individual face-to-face interviews, phone interviews, and online interviews (Tavakoli, 2012). Because of the pandemic consequences, we used online interviews. The informants were interviewed after they filled in the informed consent form. As teachers were all proficient in English speaking skills, we conducted the interviews in English. The teachers were asked to elaborate on the teaching activities they use/do when they want to help the language learners overcome their classroom anxiety, elaborate on why they think these strategies are helpful, and mention the most essential and effective coping strategies for foreign language classes.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The researcher reviewed and listened to each interview once before the transcription. Then, they listened to the recordings again to transcribe the participants' statements verbatim. Moreover, as the structure of the interviews was informal, the researcher also tried to reflect this informality by recording the participants' colloquial expressions and phrases. Furthermore, the transcriptions were undertaken daily, which means the researcher would transcribe the participants' statements after the interview sessions. Each transcription was then checked for the initial phases of the data analysis, which were thoroughly described in the next section. Usually, the researcher could conduct one or two interviews daily, and the rest of the time went to the transcription. Each interview took an average of 50 minutes, and the discussion varied between 30 and 70 minutes.

### **Data Analysis and Results**

The researcher used qualitative content analysis to analyze the data obtained from the interviews. This method "systematically describes the meaning of qualitative data" (Schreier, 2013, p. 170) by assigning data segments to categories or coding frames. In addition, it does not hinge upon statistical analysis. It is used for systematically analyzing a wide range of text, not only at the level of manifest meaning but also at the level of themes and ideas found in the text. Thematic analyses typically interpret latent content and focus on describing rather than developing Theory (Trisko & Maschi, 2015).

Two coding methods, descriptive coding and in vivo coding, were employed to code the data from the interview transcriptions. These techniques were mainly in the initial coding phase. Then, the codes obtained from this stage were reviewed using a pattern coding method to develop more generic significant themes or patterns in the data (Saldaña, 2013) to present an image of the researcher's self-disclosure concisely and

economically as possible. A table with examples was introduced later to illustrate the process of coding.

Moreover, the researchers tried to create the codes iteratively in coding the data. When a new interview transcript was being coded, the researcher attempted coding it from scratch and compared the codes with the previous one; in cases where there was a match between the last code and the current content, the researcher used the previous code. In other cases, a new code was ascribed to that section of the interview content. The same went on with all the transcripts until the researcher had an inventory of codes that could sufficiently describe the data obtained through the interviews.

The following section presents the themes extracted from the data using the MAXQDA 2022 software regarding EFL teachers' challenges in assessing their language learners' linguistic knowledge and ability in their online English classes in Turkish schools. The extracted themes are as follows.

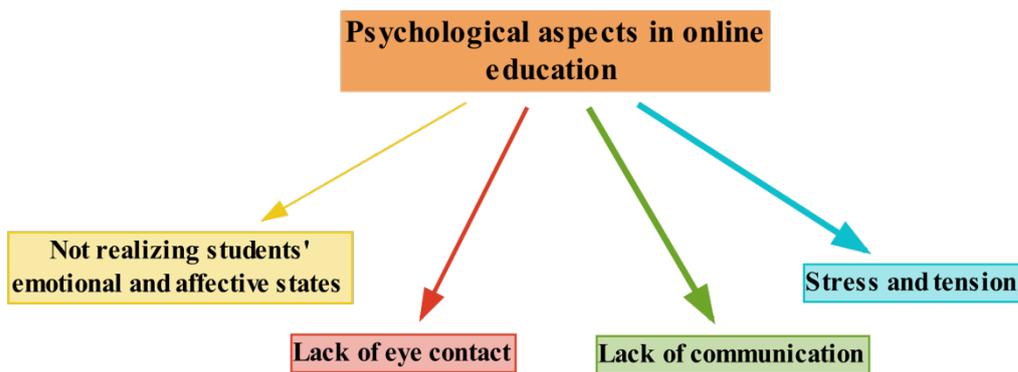
### **Theme 1: The Psychological Aspects in Teaching**

The participants addressed the shortcomings of online remote teaching from a psychological perspective. They mentioned that the emotional and affective states of the students are not realized. Accordingly, in an actual class, eye contact has the potential to make things much more accessible. At the same time, in online remote teaching, face-to-face relations are restricted despite using high-quality infrastructures. Although informants in this research acknowledged that the study positively depicts the effectiveness of online remote education for students during Covid-19, they also confirmed the stress and tension during online remote teaching as a significant stressor for students, which may be due to the challenges created by technology use, time management, and anxiety. They believed that lack of face-to-face contact reduces students' self-confidence while answering questions.

Furthermore, lack of communication was another psychological aspect during online remote teaching and assessment. Culturally, some students are not keen to turn on their cameras and ask questions. Consequently, the absence of mutual communication prevents them from realizing what they do not know. Poor internet connection was also reported as hindering communication during teaching and assessment. The themes and sub-themes are shown in Figure 1.

### **Figure 1**

*The Psychological Aspects in Online Educational (Theme 1)*

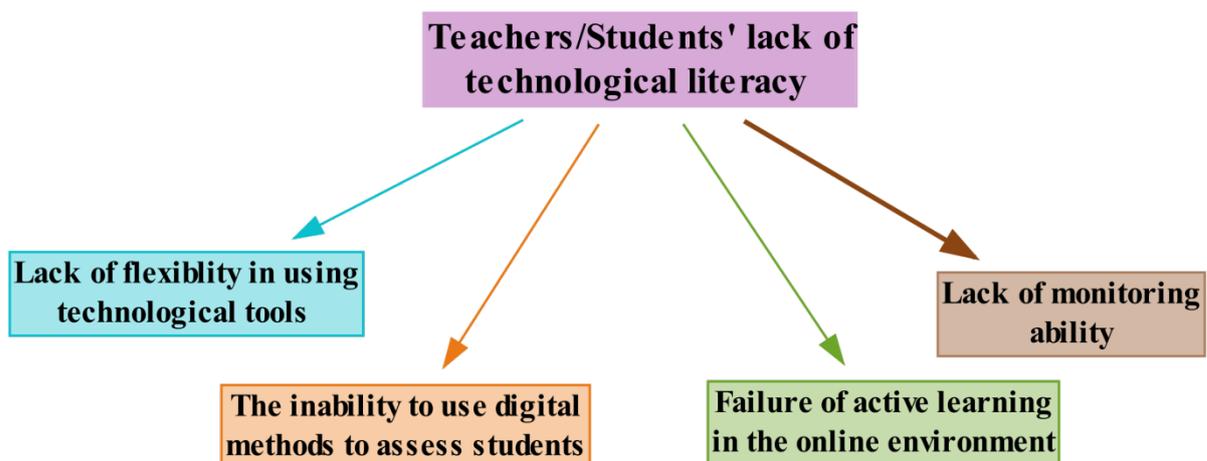


### Theme 2: Teacher and Student Technological Literacy

Participants acknowledged that e-assessment requires both the students and the teacher to be technologically literate. However, they believed neither had the appropriate knowledge to teach and assess in this new environment. As shown in Figure 2, the lack of technological literacy causes failure to monitor teaching-learning processes and outcomes, active learning, and the inability to use digital methods to assess students. This will negatively influence teacher-student and student-student collaboration in online remote classes' teaching, learning, and assessment processes. The participant teachers in this study expressed concern about the problems their students face due to their failure to participate in online remote teaching processes and activities. They also complained about the lack of flexibility in using various technological tools for e-assessment, which leads to cheating and unreliability of assessment results. Again, poor internet connections and the demands of typing and feeding in answers in e-assessment were proposed as severe problems by the participant teachers in this study.

**Figure 2**

*Teachers/Students' Lack of Technological Literacy (Theme 2)*



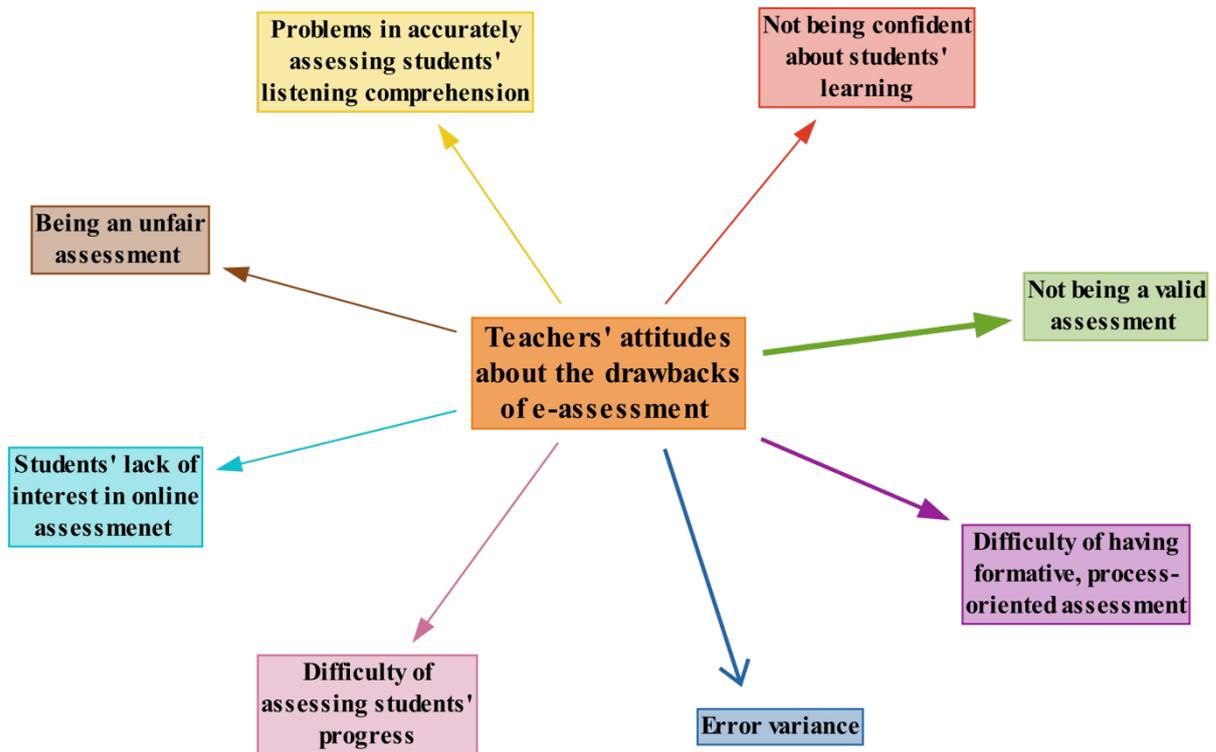
### Theme 3: Teachers' Attitudes about the Drawbacks of E-Assessment

Participants mentioned that e-assessments are invalid due to a lack of teacher supervision and that not all assessment types apply to e-assessment situations. They also believed there are challenges in using subjective assessment types to measure students' integrative knowledge and meaningful learning formatively in online remote classes instead of relying on one-shot multiple-choice tests to measure their recognition-type knowledge. This is a significant challenge for assessment traditions that are predominantly multiple-choice question-based. Using new strategies for formative assessment needs stable internet connectivity, which frequently challenges teachers and students. Some of the participants stated that even the process of entering online remote classes becomes a cumbersome process for students and teachers alike. They recommended upgrading the broadband connections.

The teachers should not merely focus on the final results and achievements (Figure 3). Therefore, teachers should know how to monitor students' progress during online remote teaching. However, the participants confirmed the difficulty of assessing students' progress. For instance, sometimes it is difficult to ensure the integrity and fairness of e-assessments because of the problems and challenges in implementing and administering exams online during the semester. The participants complained about the unwillingness and reluctance of many students to take tests in online remote classes due to these challenges and problems. They argued that such students perform very well on face-to-face assessments while doing poorly in e-assessment. Therefore, it would be challenging for EFL teachers to understand whether their weak performance is due to student learning problems or test-taking problems. This confusion was explicitly reported to be the case with e-assessing listening comprehension, where the students could look at listening scripts at the end of the book without necessarily understanding audio materials.

**Figure 3**

*Teachers' Attitudes about the Drawbacks of E-Assessment (Theme 3)*

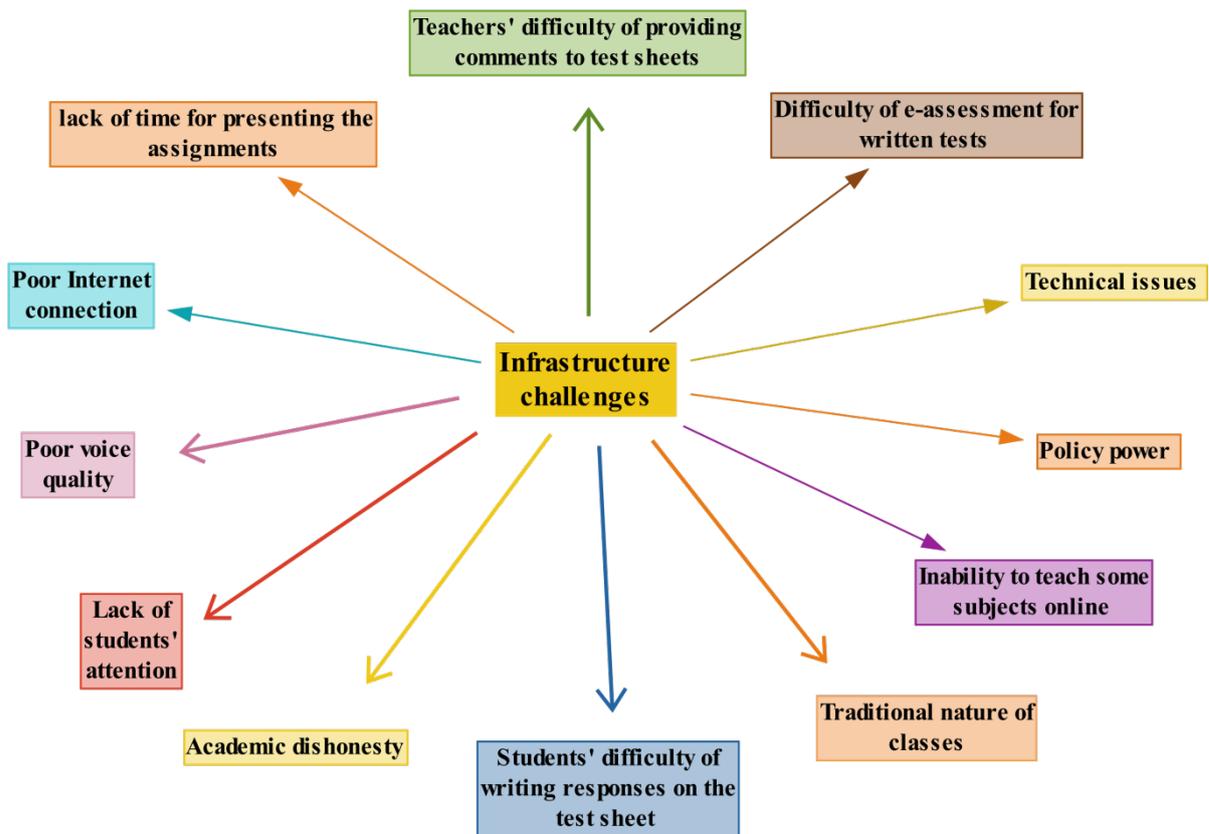


#### Theme 4: Infrastructure Challenges

One of the main themes extracted from the data in this study is related to the infrastructures and policy power for internet connection, the devices that students utilized when attending classes, and the software used for assessing students' learning (Figure 4). Poor internet connection and poor voice quality cause a lack of attention for the students attending the class. In addition to a weak and unstable internet connection, another challenge in e-assessment was the difficulty for the students to write their responses on the test sheet and for the teachers to provide comments on the test sheet when the test was delivered in PDF format instead of a Word Document format. The participants in this study mentioned technical issues without any support.

#### Figure 4

*Infrastructure Challenges (Theme 4)*

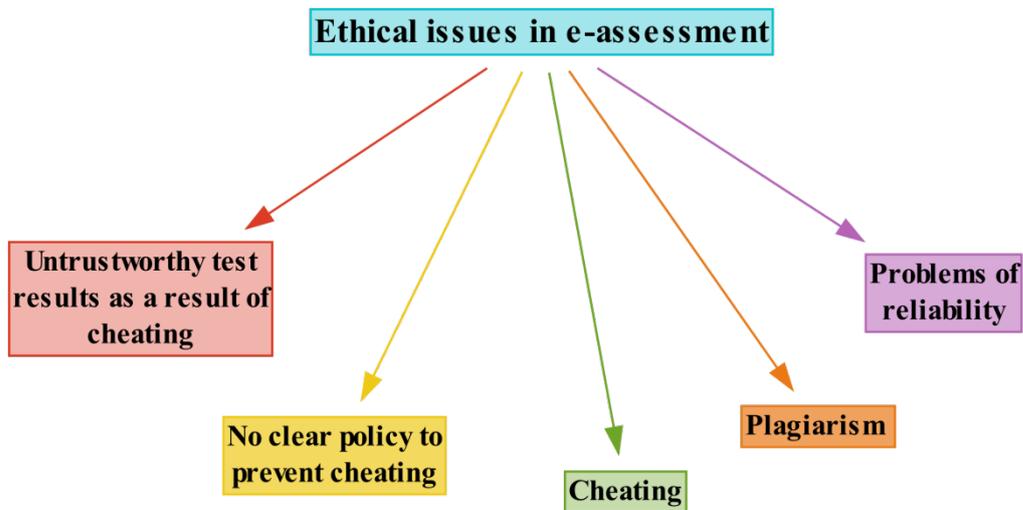


### Theme 5: Ethical Issues in E-Assessment

Similar to infrastructure issues, ethical issues, including cheating, were this study's most frequent coded theme. The participants mentioned cheating, plagiarism, and reliability problems as significant challenges and problems related to online remote exams (Figure 5). Unfortunately, there is no clear structure or policy to prevent students from cheating or help them avoid cheating. This uncertainty has the potential to make assessment results considerably unreliable.

**Figure 5**

*Ethical Issues in E-Assessment (Theme 5)*



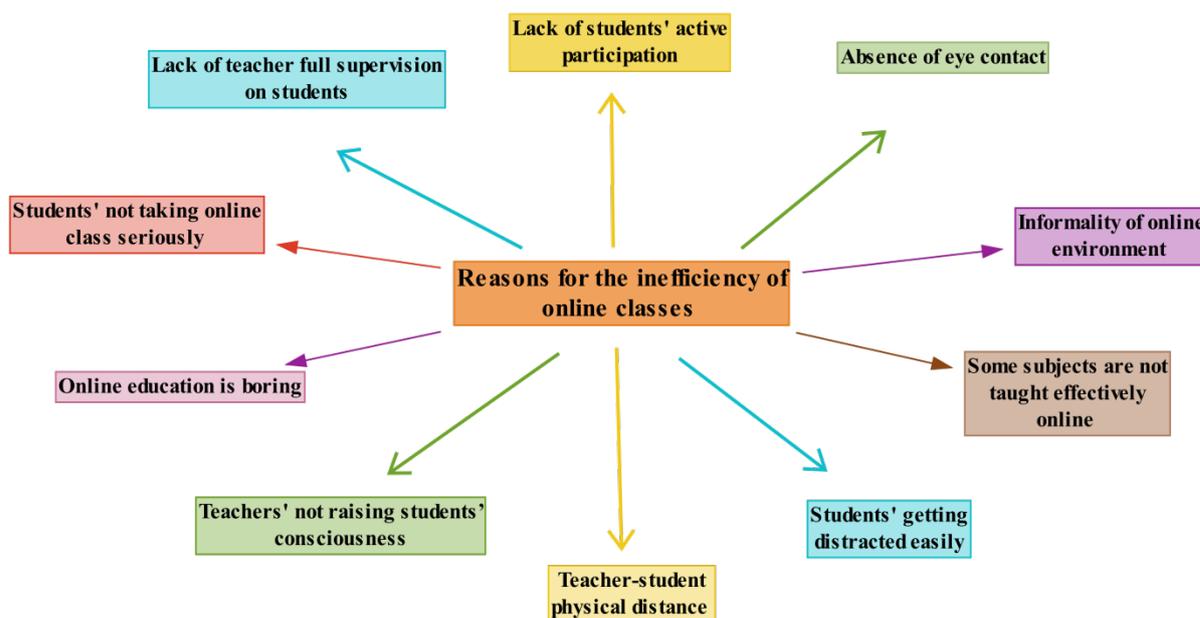
### Theme 6: Reasons for the Inefficiency of Online Remote Classes

The participants reported that students did not take online remote teaching and assessment seriously. It is difficult for teachers to raise their students' consciousness, as they are distant from each other. Therefore, they do not take online and remote teaching classes as seriously as face-to-face courses and instruction. The reason is that they are at home while attending online remote courses and can easily be distracted within the comfortable home environment by surfing the web or doing other things without being supervised by their teachers and encouraged and motivated by peers actively participating. In addition, there is no actual eye contact in the virtual classroom, which prevents teachers from knowing whether their students have understood.

Many students do not actively and willingly participate in online classroom activities. The participant teachers stated that these cause many problems, particularly for assessment. Additionally, online remote teaching was reported as being boring for some students. Some teachers believed that several subjects could not be taught online.

### Figure 6:

*Reasons for the Inefficiency of Online Remote Classes (Theme 6)*



## Discussion

This study explored EFL teachers' challenges and problems in assessing their students' knowledge and ability in English as a foreign language (EFL) in online classes during COVID-19 in Turkish schools. Generally, the findings of this study revealed that the EFL teachers' attitudes toward e-assessment can be summarized in the form of six themes, each with some subthemes. The six significant themes included *psychological aspects of e-assessment*, *teachers' and students' technological literacy*, *teachers' attitudes about the drawbacks of e-assessment*, *infrastructure challenges*, *ethical issues in e-assessment*, and *reasons for the inefficiency of online classes*.

Under the first theme, i.e., *psychological aspects*, there appeared such subthemes as the challenges created by technology use, time management, internet problems, and anxiety, students' loss of self-confidence, stress and tension caused by the lack of communication, some students' cultural issues with online classes and technology. The second theme, i.e., *teachers and students' technological literacy*, covered such subtopics as failure in monitoring teaching-learning processes and outcomes, active learning, and the inability to use digital methods to assess students caused by a lack of student and teacher technological illiteracy, its negative influence on teacher-student and student-student collaboration in teaching, learning and assessment processes in online remote classes, and lack of flexibility in using technology for e-assessment which leads to cheating and unreliability of assessment results. The third theme, i.e., *teachers' attitudes about the drawbacks of e-assessment*, included the subthemes of assessment invalidity due to lack of supervision, the inapplicability of different types of assessment in online remote classes, the predominance of multiple-choice tests for online purposes, fairness issues in e-assessment, students' unwillingness to participate in e-assessment, generalizability issues in e-assessment and challenges in e-assessing listening comprehension. The fourth theme, i.e., *infrastructure challenges*, covers such issues as poor internet connection, recording responses, and challenges related to devices and

software. The fifth theme, i.e., *ethical issues in e-assessment*, is related to cheating, plagiarism, and reliability problems. Finally, the sixth theme, i.e., *reasons for the inefficiency of online remote classes*, covered such subthemes as students' perceptions of online remote teaching and e-assessment, consciousness-raising problems, lack of student motivation, lack of students' involvement, classroom boredom for students, unwillingness in classroom participation, and incompatibility of some subjects for online remote teaching and e-assessment.

The fact that many different themes and subthemes appeared among the teachers' responses to the survey questions in this study can be interpreted as evidence suggesting that the novel situation that was created as a result of Covid-19 had considerably challenged the EFL teachers in this study to the extent that they had felt and experienced many different issues being raised in the new educational environment. In other words, the demands of the new academic context, i.e., online remote teaching and e-assessment, had made them conscious of unprecedented challenges and needs they faced and had to resolve in one way or another. This remark reflects Hatano and Inagaki's (1986) notion of 'adaptive expertise,' which entails resolving new issues or circumstances, and Darling-Hammond and Bransford's (2005) view that adaptive expertise, in addition to efficiency, also involves innovation or the ability to think of new ways of doing or dealing with something new. The feeling of such newly-imposed necessities and conditions was apparent in the participant teachers' responses to the new stimuli created by COVID-19. Put differently, the fact that the teachers had felt new professional demands and the necessity to think of new approaches and techniques reflects the truth of the adaptive expertise concept. The findings reveal that it is through the new requirements imposed by contextual conditions that people's expertise gets continually adapted and refined to fit those conditions. As instances of such new demands in educational terms, one can refer to the various themes and subthemes mentioned by the participants in response to the realities of the newly-created educational situation. Each theme, with its accompanying subthemes, reflected new demands and new solutions.

The finding that almost all teachers and students lacked sufficient knowledge and expertise of the needed technology to deal with educational emergencies aligns with Fredrickson and Warrington's (2020) assertion. They stated that teachers' insufficient technological competencies prevent them from integrating technology into their professional practice. It also reflects Daniel's (2020) claim that most teachers lack sufficient pedagogical knowledge and skills applicable to online remote teaching. For instance, the psychological issues raised by the teachers in this study partly followed the conclusion reached by other researchers investigating the educational conditions in the same period, who mentioned the stressful academic situations that had negative consequences for both teachers and students (Kafka, 2020; Zhai & Du, 2020).

This study's findings support the commonly expressed concern by parents, students, and professionals alike about the pitfalls and dangers of confronting a new educational platform and its accompanying difficulties. These are the concerns expressed by some researchers about the quality of online remote teaching and teachers' capability to adapt and deliver their lessons effectively and efficiently in the face of this unprecedented situation created by the pandemic (Auxier & Anderson, 2020), how it has left teachers and students unprepared for the new position and obstacles (König et al., 2020) and whether they can overcome the struggles brought about as a result of the emergent

conditions (Huber & Helm 2020). However, the extracted themes and subthemes in the current study provide evidence against the assertion by some researchers (König et al., 2020) that the true nature of the challenges and the common factors that contribute to them remain unknown.

As indicated by the results in this study, almost all teachers, in some way, held the view that online remote teaching and e-assessment, in particular, present numerous challenges and problems for them and their students, which are usually difficult to resolve and overcome. As evidence of such challenges and difficulties, they provided answers from which the themes were extracted, most of which refer to the drawbacks and shortcomings of online classes, online remote teaching, and e-assessment. These echo the views held by other researchers about the inadequacies and difficulties of online remote education. For example, they agree with the views held by Baran (2011), who argued that some teachers have significant reservations concerning the value and quality of online teaching approaches. The findings also provide support for the claim made by Adnan and Anwar (2020), who maintained that shifting from traditional teaching methods to online remote teaching is not without its challenges in this pandemic situation and for the warning made by Crawford et al. (2020) who stated that the abrupt change would undoubtedly create numerous impediments and difficulties.

Teachers' dissatisfaction with e-assessment during the pandemic is counter to the finding held by Ekmekçi (2015), who investigated students' attitudes towards assessment of online remote teaching and found that more than half of the students had favorable sentiments toward online remote education as a result of the flexibility of the course. However, it is in accordance with the finding in the same study that nearly half of the students expressed dissatisfaction with assignments and assessments. Similarly, the result in this study about dissatisfaction with online remote teaching agrees with the one by Altunay (2016), that EFL learners preferred traditional classrooms to remote education, and Özüdüro and Hişmanolu (2016), who concluded that most students were dissatisfied with online English courses and desired face-to-face instruction.

The theme relating to technological infrastructure and technological literacy in this study reflects the technological obstacles observed in the Indonesian context during the COVID-19 pandemic, including lack of technological knowledge and skills, their lack of access to technological devices, and issues with the internet and connection (Mailizar et al., 2020). The assessment shortcomings reported in this study remind us of the assessment inadequacies in online remote teaching proposed by some researchers (Timmis, 2015). The drawbacks of distance education and e-assessment reported by the participants in this study, such as lack of face-to-face communication, group work, self-confidence, and so on, are almost parallel to those found in other similar studies (De Oliveira et al., 2018; Nagrale, 2013; Sadeghi, 2019).

One especially important subtheme in the present study relates to cheating, assessment unreliability, and non-generalizability. This was frequently referred to and reported by the teachers and has appeared under different themes due to its significance. There is a theoretical warning against this drawback in unsupervised e-assessment. For instance, Moreno (1999) asserts that educational institutions are the first locus for corruption and dishonest behavior, which is particularly the case in unsupervised situations, such as online remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has given rise to the adoption of didactic models based on online remote education and student e-assessment (Crawford et al., 2020; Raje & Stitzel, 2020; White, 2020).

Cheating, coupled with the unreliability of assessment results, renders teachers incapable of adequately monitoring their students' learning weaknesses and difficulties and, therefore, unable to meet the requirements of their students (König et al., 2020).

The ethical considerations raised in this study also exert the same or similar influence on assessment outcomes. As argued by the teachers in the present study, one drawback of e-assessment is related to ethical issues, including cheating and fairness, which they reported as difficult to manage and control in online remote teaching. Other researchers also claim this. For example, Watson (2020) lamented that it is difficult to supervise students' behavior in online remote teaching platforms or environments, which is very likely to contribute to misbehavior such as cheating during online examinations. Kaur (2020), who attributes this disadvantage to the lack of face-to-face assessments in online remote teaching during COVID-19, takes a similar stance.

The different limitations proposed in e-assessment in this study, such as poor internet connection, challenges of using technology, lack of self-confidence caused by the absence of face-to-face communication, and other related factors, are likely to contribute to what has been called "cognitive load" by some researchers (Jarodzka et al., 2015; Prisacari & Danielson, 2017; Schmeck et al., 2015). Although the teachers in this study did not directly mention this concept, the teachers alluded to instances of cognitive load created by psychological issues and other challenges caused by different factors in e-assessment. Therefore, many of the themes and subthemes proposed in this study can directly or indirectly be related to the notion of 'cognitive load' by overloading the students' minds with different aspects typically not part of the learning and evaluation processes in ordinary face-to-face education and assessment.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, this study explored the multifaceted challenges and issues EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers face when assessing their students' knowledge and abilities in online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic in Turkish schools. The findings have illuminated six overarching themes, each with a range of subthemes, which encapsulate the complex landscape of e-assessment challenges faced by these educators. These themes encompassed various dimensions, from the psychological aspects of e-assessment, including challenges related to technology use, time management, and student anxiety, to the issue of teachers' and students' technological literacy, which influenced the effectiveness of teaching, learning, and assessment in online remote classes.

Additionally, the study revealed teachers' concerns about the drawbacks of e-assessment, encompassing issues of assessment validity, applicability of assessment types, fairness, and generalizability of results. Furthermore, infrastructure challenges, such as poor internet connectivity and difficulties related to devices and software, were highlighted as significant hindrances to effective e-assessment. Ethical dilemmas, including cheating and fairness concerns, posed additional complexities in the e-assessment landscape.

The study also underscored the reasons contributing to the perceived inefficiency of online remote classes, encompassing students' perceptions, motivation, and involvement and the compatibility of certain subjects with online teaching and e-assessment.

The identified themes and subthemes collectively reflect the tremendous challenges and demands placed upon EFL teachers as they navigated the unprecedented educational

landscape created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The study aligns with ‘adaptive expertise,’ wherein educators adapt and refine their expertise to meet new demands and conditions. The findings highlight the critical need for educators to develop technological competencies and pedagogical skills for effective online remote teaching and assessment.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study carry significant implications for various stakeholders in the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and e-assessment, particularly within the context of Turkish Preparatory Language Schools. These implications span a range of critical areas within education and require concerted efforts to address the challenges and opportunities revealed:

1. **Teacher Training and Professional Development:** The study underscores the immediate need for comprehensive teacher training programs that equip educators with the technological skills and pedagogical knowledge essential for effective online teaching and e-assessment. To thrive in the evolving educational landscape, institutions, and educational authorities should prioritize investments in professional development initiatives to enhance teachers’ adaptability and proficiency in online teaching and assessment methods.
2. **Technology Integration:** EFL teachers must integrate technology into their teaching practices proficiently. Schools and institutions should prioritize technology integration and provide teachers with ongoing support and resources to facilitate this process. This entails technological literacy and an understanding of how to utilize various digital tools for effective e-assessment.
3. **Assessment Redesign:** The study underscores the necessity for critically reevaluating assessment methods and practices, mainly focusing on adapting assessments to the online learning environment. Assessment designers and educators should explore alternative assessment formats that move beyond traditional multiple-choice tests to ensure the validity and authenticity of assessments in online contexts.
4. **Infrastructure Improvement:** Efforts should be concentrated on addressing infrastructure challenges such as unreliable internet connectivity and limited access to essential devices and software. Collaborative endeavors between educational institutions and policymakers are crucial to providing students and teachers with the necessary technological resources for successful online learning and assessment.
5. **Student Engagement:** Understanding the factors contributing to students’ motivation and engagement in online classes is paramount. Educators should actively explore innovative pedagogical approaches and technologies that foster active learning, collaboration, and meaningful student participation in the online learning process.
6. **Curriculum Adaptation:** Curriculum developers should remain cognizant of the challenges posed by online teaching and assessment when designing course materials. Flexibility and adaptability in curriculum design are paramount to accommodating the diverse needs of students in online settings.

In summary, the implications drawn from this study underscore the importance of a coordinated and collaborative effort among educational institutions, policymakers, and

educators to enhance the quality and effectiveness of online education and e-assessment. Addressing the multifaceted challenges while capitalizing on the opportunities identified in this research can pave the way for a more resilient and adaptable educational system capable of thriving in traditional and online learning environments.

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