



Emergency Remote Teaching in Rural High Schools during the Pandemic: Exploring Iranian English Teachers' Teaching and Assessing Practices

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Abstract

Following the COVID-19 outbreak, educational institutes around the world including Iran transitioned from the face-to-face method to an online modality to sustain education. Adapting to this abrupt transition was challenging for teachers, especially those working in remote and low-resource schools. To have a profounder understanding of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) in rural secondary schools, in this qualitative study, the researchers explored the technological tools, teaching platforms, and assessment strategies employed by 12 Iranian English teachers during the pandemic. The analysis of the data, collected through semi-structured interviews and e-observations, revealed that the participants mostly, but not exclusively, used SHAD application as their online platform and used different technological tools for creating pedagogic content such as screen recorder, video editors, and PowerPoint. The teachers also adopted different methods for delivering teaching including flipped method, live broadcasts, pre-recorded teaching materials, voices, and images. They used Google forms, Digi forms, and video calls for evaluating the students; nevertheless, they chiefly deployed these tools for designing traditional exam types. The implications and limitations of the study are discussed.

Keywords: COVID-19; Emergency Remote Teaching; English Teachers; Rural High Schools; Technology Incorporation

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the world by threatening the lives of individuals and posed serious concerns regarding educational practices. Following this unexpected outbreak, several countries suspended their educational systems and implemented Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) as a substitute for their conventional method of teaching (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020). Adapting to this temporary but sudden shift in such a short time and without preparation and planned instructional design was quite challenging, especially for those who were used to the face-to-face (F2F) method of education (Askari & Chen, 2021), or those who never had the experience of teaching online (Dau, 2022; Singh et al., 2021). Moreover, Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers had already been facing several challenges in integrating technology into their teaching activities in high schools even prior to the pandemic, such as time constraints, digital competency, accessibility to digital resources, outdated technological devices, and lack of technical support, inter alia (Dehqan et al., 2017; Heidari & Yazdi, 2021). Dealing with these technological barriers became more challenging at the time of the crisis since integrating technology into teaching activities, which was optional before, became obligatory during the pandemic. In addition, these technological barriers were even more challenging to deal with in low-resource contexts given the inadequacy of educational equipment in these remote areas (Kusuma, 2022).

A great number of studies have been conducted examining the teaching platforms, content creation software, digital tools, teaching procedures, and assessment strategies that were used by EFL teachers around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Bailey & Lee, 2020; Choi & Chung, 2021; Ghanbari & Nowroozi, 2022; Kusuma, 2022; Rahimi et al., 2021; Sari & Putri, 2022; Yulianto & Mujtahid, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). Most of these studies have chiefly focused on tertiary education (e.g., Bailey & Lee, 2020; Choi & Chung, 2021; Ghanbari & Nowroozi, 2022; Yulianto & Mujtahid, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021), and *secondary* school settings have received less attention. Hence, despite this body of research, to the best of our knowledge, no study has been conducted so far in the context of secondary schools in Iran to specifically investigate the ways EFL teachers incorporated technology into their teaching practices, content creation, and assessment during the pandemic. In addition, it seems that the literature is still lacking such a study that also explores the EFL teachers' perceptions regarding the place of technology in ELT in rural high schools, both prior to and during the pandemic, as an effective factor in technology use.

In view of this, this study aimed to explore the perceptions of Iranian EFL teachers working at rural public high schools regarding the place of technology in ELT and to discover the technological tools, the teaching platforms, and the



assessment strategies they employed during the emergency remote teaching. This study would provide insight into the significant role of digital technology in teaching English in general and specifically in times of crisis. In addition, it would shed light on the state of technology in the Ministry of Education (MOE) of Iran, and the impacts of its state on technology incorporation in EFL classes, especially in rural high schools, at the time of crisis when employing technology becomes compulsory.

1.1. Research Questions

The research questions of this qualitative study are as follows:

1. What is the perception of EFL teachers working at rural public high schools in Iran regarding the place of technology in ELT prior to COVID-19 emergency remote teaching?
2. How did these Iranian EFL teachers incorporate technology into their teaching practices during COVID-19 emergency remote teaching?
3. What were the assessment strategies that these Iranian EFL teachers deployed to evaluate students during COVID-19 emergency remote teaching?

2. Review of the Related Literature

Technology has become an integral part of our daily lives, including education (Davis, 2006; Jhurree, 2005). Accordingly, countries around the world attempt to integrate technology into their education systems to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Over the last few decades, the integration of technology into English language teaching and learning has witnessed an exponential rise (Urun, 2016). The emergence of computer use in language teaching dates back to the 1960s (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). The term Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has been used ever since which refers to “the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning” (Levy, 1997, p.1). Along with the introduction of technology use in ELT, numerous studies have been conducted by researchers to investigate the impact of technology-enhanced instruction on language teaching and learning (e.g., Davis, 2006; Gillespie, 2006; Harmer, 2007; Jhurree, 2005; Tomlinson, 2009; Young, 2003). As argued by different researchers, proper use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in language teaching and learning can increase language learners’ motivation (Jhurree, 2005; Tomlinson, 2009; Young, 2003), facilitate language teaching and learning (Ahmadi, 2018; Jhurree, 2005; Urun, 2016), and increase cooperation among language learners (Harmer, 2007; Gillespie, 2006), to mention some.

With the outbreak and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, technology's role changed from optional to essential, and ICT became more valuable in education as it helped maintain education during the lockdown (Coeckelbergh, 2020; Oneyima et al., 2020). This state of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) impelled the adaptation of existing educational content, language teaching, and language assessment approaches to online education or the deployment of alternative practices which were different from those used in face-to-face language instructions. Accordingly, over the last three years, a multitude of studies in diverse educational and geographical contexts have been conducted investigating the ways ERT influenced English language instructors' teaching and assessment practices as well as the digital tools or applications, instructional platforms, and learning management systems utilized by them (e.g., Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Bailey & Lee, 2020; Choi & Chung, 2021; Kusuma, 2022; Rahimi et al., 2021; Sari & Putri, 2022).

For instance, in several qualitative studies conducted in Indonesia (e.g., Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Kusuma, 2022; Sari & Putri, 2022), Vietnam (Dau, 2022), and South Korea (Yi & Jang, 2020), EFL teachers were asked to describe their teaching and assessing practices in their online classes. The analysis of written reflections and oral interviews indicated that the teachers used multiple online learning environments like Google Classroom, Moodle, Schoology, Zoom, Google Meet, Zalo, Microsoft Teams, and social networking sites like WhatsApp for holding classes. Content maker applications like Autodesk SketchBook and TEDEd were used by some of these teachers for preparing instructional content and they chiefly used Google Forms, Quizizz, Kahoot, and LMS for creating multiple-choice or essay-type online quizzes. Other online tools that were used by these teachers were YouTube, PowToon, and Screen O Matic which assisted them in making content and were chosen due to their ease of use, accessibility, efficiency in terms of cost, and provision of interesting features. However, the teachers' classroom activities like checking students' attendance, asking questions, or assigning tasks and projects resembled the ones used in face-to-face classes revealing that "teachers' knowledge and skill on the use of technology in online learning need to be improved" (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020, p. 62). Relatedly, taking teachers' online teaching experience into account, Bailey and Lee (2020), based on the findings of their research study with EFL university instructors in South Korea, proposed that English teachers with higher experience in teaching online are likely to apply a wider range of communication-based activities and platforms and experience fewer challenges regarding using online teaching tools, grading students' online assignments, and providing feedback on them compared with those having no or less experience.

Furthermore, understanding the ways language teachers implemented online assessment in place of traditional assessment during the COVID-19 as well as their views about the rewards and drawbacks of such kinds of e-assessment has



been the focus of several studies (e.g., [Choi & Chung, 2021](#); [Ghanbari & Nowroozi, 2022](#); [Rahimi et al., 2021](#); [Yulianto & Mujtahid, 2021](#); [Zhang et al., 2021](#)). [Choi and Chung \(2021\)](#) conducted a mixed-method study at a university in South Korea to investigate EFL instructors' and students' satisfaction with the adopted methods of online language assessment. The findings showed that the teachers deployed a variety of alternative and formative assessments like “multimodal projects”, and self-and peer-evaluation. While a high level of satisfaction with language assessment was reported by the students, the overall level of assessment satisfaction by the teachers was somehow low as they found the process of designing online quizzes, monitoring, and feedback providing challenging and time-consuming. [Zhang et al. \(2021\)](#) in an interview-based qualitative study also explored the transformations six Chinese EFL university teachers made to their language assessments during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results suggested both minor changes like raising the percentage of formative assessments or adding more discussion-based activities to class, as well as more fundamental changes such as using open-book exams and administering ongoing quizzes on massive online open courses (MOOCs). Similarly, 12 Indonesian university English teachers participating in [Yulianto and Mujtahid's \(2021\)](#) study asserted that they chiefly used Google Forms, WhatsApp, and Google Classroom to run traditional multiple-choice and essay-type exams or performed more creative assessments like asking students to make audio or video recordings. Problems like poor internet connection, especially in rural areas, teachers' and students' lack of technical and technological knowledge and experience, late submission of assignments, and difficulty in monitoring the performance of a large number of students in each class were among the challenges the teachers were dealing with. In another qualitative study, [Ghanbari and Nowroozi \(2022\)](#) explored the challenges of online assessment confronted by EFL teachers at Persian Gulf University during the pandemic. It was found that the participants used LMS and Moodle for online teaching and learning and faced several technological, pedagogical, institutional, and affective barriers at the beginning. They gradually managed to adapt themselves to the new situation; however, they still faced several challenges mostly due to their lack of knowledge of online assessment.

As argued by [Atmojo and Nugroho \(2020\)](#), studies on online language teaching and assessment in EFL contexts during the COVID-19 pandemic have chiefly been conducted at the “tertiary education level”, and secondary school settings have received less attention. According to the literature, it seems that no qualitative study has been conducted so far to explore the perceptions of EFL teachers with respect to the place of technology in ELT at rural secondary schools in Iran and to examine the actual experience of these teachers concerning their teaching practices and assessment strategies during the pandemic. In light of that, the present study set out to explore the perceptions of 12 EFL teachers working at rural public high schools in Iran concerning the

place of technology in their English classes and to discover their actual use of technology during emergency remote teaching. The aim of this study was to explore how these teachers viewed technology, held their classes, and assessed their students during the pandemic through employing technology.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants of the study were 12 female Iranian EFL teachers working at rural public high schools in six main provinces in Iran, including Khorasan Razavi, Khorasan Shomali, Khorasan Jonubi, Mazandaran, Golestan, Alborz, and Tehran. One of the researchers, an officially employed EFL teacher, attempted to approach the teachers who were conveniently accessible. Given the prevailing conditions of the country due to the pandemic, convenience sampling was a suitable choice since these participants were easily available and willing to take part in the study (Dornyei, 2007). The criteria for selecting these EFL teachers were teaching to high school students, having at least three years of English teaching experience, working at rural public schools, and having the experience of teaching online during the pandemic. The participants' ages ranged from 26 to 30. They held a B.A. or M.A. degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) or were M.A. students of TEFL at the time of the study. Their teaching experience was between four to nine years; however, they had no prior experience in online teaching. Table 1 provides a summary of the participants' demographic information.

Table 1

Teachers' demographic information

No.	Age	Degree	Years of Experience	Teaching Level	Place of Teaching
1	26	M.A.	4	Junior and senior high school	Khorasan Razavi-Razavieh
2	28	M.A. student	6	Senior high school	Khorasan Razavi-Rashtkhar
3	27	M.A. student	5	Senior high school	Khorasan Shomali-Shirvan
4	30	B.A.	9	Senior high school	Khorasan Jonubi-Zirkuh- Haji Abad
5	29	B.A.	8	Junior and senior high school	Mazandaran- Suburbs of Babol
6	26	M.A.	5	Junior and senior high school	Mazandaran- Suburbs of Sari
7	28	B.A.	5	Senior high	Golestan- Suburbs of



No.	Age	Degree	Years of Experience	Teaching Level	Place of Teaching
				school	Minoodasht
8	30	B.A.	8	Senior high school	Khorasan Razavi-Bakharz
9	27	M.A.	5	Senior high school	Khorasan Razavi-Firoozeh
10	28	M.A.	5	Junior and senior high school	Tehran- Andisheh
11	29	M.A. student	7	Junior high school	Golestan- - Suburbs of Bandar Torkaman
12	28	M.A.	6	Junior high school	Alborz- Suburbs of Karaj

3.2. Instruments

A basic qualitative design best suited the present study since it helped capture the participants' view regarding their real-life experiences (Yin, 2011). Hence, this study was conducted qualitatively and the data was gathered by means of semi-structured interviews and online observations.

3.3. Data Collection

3.3.1. Interviewing

The primary means of data collection in this study was interviewing. Interviewing was a suitable method of data collection because it let the researchers access the participants' perceptions and experiences regarding technology incorporation during COVID-19 emergency remote education. The prompts for the interviews were devised by the researchers by consulting the existing literature on ERT. Interview questions concerned issues such as the participants' perceptions of technology, their technology use and online experiences, the teaching platforms and assessment strategies they employed during ERT, their view regarding the future of virtual teaching, and so on (Appendix).

3.3.2. Online Observation

The other source of data was online observations performed by one of the researchers in order to discover the platforms, online tools, and assessment strategies used by the participants. She observed three sessions of each

participant's junior or senior high school English classes (36 sessions as a whole) during the school lockdowns in the academic year 2020-2021 and took notes about how the sessions proceeded. Observing more sessions was not possible due to the restrictions imposed on the teachers by their principals. The field notes from the observations allowed the researchers to record first-hand data regarding the activities in which the participants engaged in.

3.4. Procedure

This study was conducted qualitatively through interviews and observations. As the participants were from different provinces and cities, and also because of the limitations imposed due to the pandemic, interviews were conducted through online chats (in Telegram and WhatsApp applications) and phone calls. All the interviews were conducted in Farsi, the participants' mother tongue, to give them the freedom to express themselves easily and as fully as possible. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes to one hour and the interview questions helped provide information regarding the platforms, online tools, and assessment strategies used by the participants. To observe the ethical issues, consent was taken from the participants prior to the study. Through the consent form, the participants were informed about recording the interview, and the purpose of the research was explained to them. In addition, the participants' responses were used anonymously except for general demographic information. To transcribe the data, the researchers carefully listened to the recorded interviews or went through the chats with the participants and wrote them down in a verbatim way.

The other source of data was the online observations which provided the researchers with useful information regarding what actually was taking place in the participants' online classes. Junior high school English classes (from 7th to 9th grade) were held once a week and senior high school English classes (from 10th to 12th grade) were held twice a week. The normal time of English classes was about 90 minutes; however, it was reduced to about 30 minutes during the pandemic. The number of students in the participants' classes varied from 20 to 30 students. One of the researchers was added to these online classes by the teachers and she, acting as a passive participant, took notes regarding how the sessions proceeded.

3.5. Data Analysis

The researchers employed inductive thematic analysis to analyze the data. Employing thematic analysis helped identify the themes in the dataset, and describe them in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In so doing, the researchers first coded all the data manually and then re-coded them several times. This ultimately led to the emergence of the final themes and categories which



provided answers to the research questions of this study.

To enhance the research credibility, the researchers employed two methods of data collection (interviews and observations) that suited the purpose of the study and are commonly used in comparable studies by other researchers (Mertens, 2010; Shenton, 2004). To improve transferability, the researchers tried their best to provide a thick description of the research participants, and its context (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Shenton, 2004). To strengthen dependability, the researchers provided information regarding the research design and the process of data collection. Lastly, two TEFL university professors were requested to re-examine the data and the findings, and their interpretations and suggestions proved beneficial in improving the conformability of this study (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

4. Results

4.1. Teachers' Perception of Technology Incorporation in ELT

The analysis of the interview data indicated that all the participants held a positive view about incorporation of technology in their English classes since they believed it “provides language learners with multiple resources”, “results in better and deeper language learning outcomes”, “results in efficiency in terms of time, cost, and energy”, “makes English classes more interesting”, and “can attract students’ attention” as “some parts of the lesson such as listening cannot be taught without technology”. The following excerpts represent the teachers’ perceptions regarding technology:

T5: *...Technology can make any subject interesting for students. Using technology can help us as language teachers to transfer our data in more interesting ways. I think this can result in better and deeper language learning outcomes.*

T6: *...It can provide various resources for language learners. One of its boldest effects is that it frees you from being bound to time and place. This results in efficiency in terms of time, cost, and energy for many people.*

These teachers argued that although using technology is beneficial in language teaching and learning, it has not yet acquired a suitable place in the Iranian MOE due to reasons such as “low speed of internet”, “lack of budget and digital literacy”, “shortage of facilities”, and “injustice and inequality in the rural schools”. Below are two of their comments:

T6: ...Unfortunately, despite the effectiveness of using technology in teaching and learning, not enough attention is paid to it. Lack of budget and digital literacy can be among the reasons.

T7: In my opinion, in Iran, technology does not have the position it should have. The low speed of the internet, the unfamiliarity of teachers and students with the electronic world, and inaccessibility to the internet in many rural areas are among the reasons why technology doesn't have a proper place in language education in Iran.

Participants also asserted that their use of technology such as smart whiteboards, computers, laptops, projectors, or smartphones connected to the internet in rural areas was very limited even before the pandemic due to “lack of facilities and infrastructure in rural areas”, “lack of digital literacy”, and “time constraints”. They also mentioned that social, economic, and technical “problems at rural schools” and “lack of cooperation of school staff” were among the impediments. Below are two excerpts:

T3: Unfortunately, sometimes the school staff does not cooperate and due to time constraints, especially for 11th and 12th English classes, using technology was not possible before the pandemic.

T7: I used it rarely because the facilities are limited to the data projector, which is also used in limited rooms, while it should be available in any class at any time...

4.2. Technology Incorporation during COVID-19 Emergency Remote Teaching

4.2.1. The Teaching Platforms

The data revealed that the majority of these teachers used SHAD, a local social network provided for teachers and students all over Iran to hold online classes, as their main teaching platform. These teachers were forced to use this application either by the authorities or due to some factors such as being “a free application”, being “designed only for educational purposes”, “being under the supervision of the MOE”. The following excerpts have been taken from the interviews with the teachers:

T3: This year we only used SHAD. Of course, there were still times when we had problems with this application, but as they forced us to only use SHAD, we deleted our groups in Telegram and WhatsApp and continued teaching in SHAD...



T8: ...The reason for using SHAD was the emphasis of the MOE on this issue. We were informed by our office that we are only allowed to use SHAD for holding our classes...

Yet, three participants used applications like Adobe Connect, Skyroom, Telegram, and WhatsApp as well since their “principal cooperated with” them and their “students had no problem using them”. In addition, there were also two other participants who wished that they would be able to use platforms other than SHAD. Below are two excerpts from the interviews:

T1: For one of my schools I was using SHAD and for the other one I was using Adobe Connect and actually the principal herself provided us with Adobe Connect platform...

T12: ...I wish we could use Skyroom and similar platforms just like private schools in cities and easily establish video communication...

Finally, there was only one teacher who said she used other applications in place of SHAD. The excerpt from her interview is cited below:

T5: I didn't use SHAD a lot since it has so many problems. I used Telegram and WhatsApp instead. Fortunately, my students had no problem with that and liked it better actually because of the speed and ease of sending and sharing files.

4.2.2. Content Creation

The data collected through observations and interviews showed that the majority of the participants created the teaching content themselves. They stated that teacher-generated content aided them to “connect” with their students more effectively as their students “had got used to hearing” their “own teacher’s voice” and because they had a better understanding of their students and “their level”. Two participants mentioned that they also used ready-made content as complementary to their own content. Helping students to get familiar with different teaching methodologies offered by other teachers and the higher quality of some of the ready-made contents were among the other reasons why these teachers used ready-to-use materials, either as the main content or as a supplementary to their own ones. Below are two excerpts taken from the teachers’ remarks:

T10: ...As much as I can, I definitely create content myself because I believe that the familiar voice of the teacher is effective in building the students' trust and in enhancing learning...

T5: ... *I used my own content because I like my students to hear my own voice. I also used content created by others to complement my content.*

There were only two participants who used ready-made content as they saw content production as laborious, “time-consuming”, and “undervalued” by the students. The excerpts from their interviews are cited as follows:

T11: ...*Unfortunately, with all the efforts I put in, I found out that some of the students didn't even open the videos I sent. This caused me to lose motivation for creating content and made me use ready-made content more.*

T7: ...*I usually use ready-made content since creating content is very time-consuming...*

4.2.3. Technological Tools

As stated by the participants, they used various technological tools for creating learning materials. The technological tools that they chiefly used included screen recorder, video editor, video compressor, PowerPoint slides, and various educational sites, channels, and applications. Below are two excerpts from the interviews:

T1:...*I created the educational content myself by using a screen recorder and talking on the PDF version of the book.*

T11:... *I explained the grammar on the board, recorded a video of myself, and sent it to the students...*

4.2.4. Teaching Procedure

The classroom observations and interviews also suggested that the participants went through a fairly similar teaching procedure. This chiefly included having a short greeting, calling the roll, delivering teaching, evaluating, and ending the class by assigning homework. Nevertheless, the teachers adopted different methods for delivering the content. For delivering teaching, two of these participants used the flipped method in which they asked the students to watch the lecture videos and study the materials prior to the class. The following excerpts show this teaching procedure:

T1: ...*My teaching methodology was flipped. I sent my students the educational materials before the class and at the time of the class, we were just practicing....*

... *The teacher asked students whether they had watched the video she had sent earlier. Students said that they had watched it and that it was about a passage*



from their book concerning how our body works. Then the teacher asked everyone to type one or two sentences about the passage if they could recall. Some students wrote similar sentences and some others typed new ones... (Sample excerpt from observation)

Two other teachers used live broadcasts on SHAD for holding their classes. Using live videos, the students were able to see the teacher's face and send comments. However, the quality of the live stream was not always good due to weak internet connections. A sample excerpt from a class observation is cited below:

...There was a live session today and the teacher wanted to teach past progressive tense. The teacher first asked students whether they knew when we use this tense and asked them to reply by typing comments in the chat box. The majority of the students guessed right. So, the teacher fixed her cellphone somewhere and she wrote some sentences on the small whiteboard. The sentences were all in the past progressive tense. She asked the students to try guessing the common rule... (Sample excerpt from observation)

Five teachers prepared the teaching materials in advance and sent them to the group simultaneously, at the time of the class. They gave the students time to watch these pre-recorded materials and then engaged them in some form of chat-based discussions. The following two excerpts show this procedure:

T11: *...I explained the grammar on the board, recorded a video of myself, and sent it to the students...*

T2: *...I prepared the content prior to the class using a screen recorder application so that I would not run out of time in the class...*

Finally, there were three teachers who taught by sending photos or images and voices which were recorded at the same time they were delivered. Below is a sample excerpt from the observations:

... The teacher taught passive sentences today. She sent an image containing several typed sentences to the group. She sent a voice and asked the students to find the subject of each sentence. One student asked whether they have to type the subjects one by one or send them all together. She replied... (Sample excerpt from observation)

4.3. Online Assessment Strategies

The data collected through observations and interviews showed that the assessment strategies these teachers used during emergency remote teaching

were different from the ones that they formerly used. The participants mostly agreed that using formative assessments was more effective than using summative assessments during this period. Two excerpts from the interviews have been brought below as examples:

T4: *I think that the assessment during the pandemic should be done during the semester, not at the end of it. So, I assigned scores based on the students' overall performance in the class during the whole semester and their score on the final test did not play a very significant role in my decision...*

T6: *I was not looking for a one-shot event in assessing and evaluating my students. So, in every session, I tried to ask questions from a few students without informing them in advance and then summed up all their scores. However, the school made us hold a final exam which was not valid at all in my opinion....*

For evaluating the students, these teachers used Google forms, Digi forms, photos of questions and answers, and video calls. They mostly used traditional exam types such as multiple choice, short answers, true/false, and oral ones. Unfortunately, almost all the teachers were dissatisfied with the validity of the results of these exams mostly due to the cheating likelihood. The following excerpts have been taken from the interviews with the participants:

T11: *Mostly I had to send questions, they sent photos of their answers, but the result was not satisfying because they were cheating and I think it was just a waste of time...*

T5: *I used online sites such as Google forms but I couldn't trust the result...*

Besides the aforementioned types of exams, some teachers also considered several other factors for assessing their students such as students' "assignments", "overall performance in the class", "attendance", "being active in the group", "sending homework on time", and "class activities". Below are two excerpts from the interviews:

T8: *I actually considered several factors for evaluation such as the scores of online exams, scores obtained from video calls, attendance, and participation in class activities...*

T7: *...The important thing for me in the evaluation was their presence in the class, being active in the group, and sending homework on time.*

To sum up, the analysis of the data, collected through semi-structured interviews and observation of online English classes, revealed that the



participants rarely used technology in their classes prior to the pandemic due to multiple personal and contextual factors. Furthermore, the teachers mostly used SHAD application as their online platform and used different technological tools for creating and delivering content including screen recorder, video editor, video compressor, and PowerPoint. They also used Google forms, Digi forms, and video calls for evaluating the students; however, these tools were chiefly deployed for designing traditional exam types like multiple-choice or true/false items.

5. Discussion

Overall, regarding the first research question which concerned EFL teachers' perceptions of technology incorporation in ELT, the analysis of the data revealed that all these teachers held a positive view about using technology in English classes and were aware of the benefits of doing so. However, despite their positive attitude, they faced several challenges including the lack of equipment, lack of time, and lack of digital literacy which forbade them from employing technology properly in their English classes even prior to the pandemic. Likewise, [Dehqan et al. \(2017\)](#) found that the technology use of Iranian EFL teachers was limited since they confronted barriers such as lack of time, lack of competency and training, inadequate and improper technological facilities, and lack of support.

The second research question concerned the way the participants employed technology in their teaching practices during the emergency remote education. According to the data, these teachers used various platforms such as SHAD, Adobe Connect, Skyroom, WhatsApp, and Telegram. Although some participants stated that they used SHAD due to the low cost, the force from the authorities, students' request, and so on, several others argued otherwise. They preferred to use other platforms such as Skype and Adobe Connect; as these platforms could offer benefits such as higher speed, more responsivity, visual meeting, and more advanced features for interaction. Similarly, [Akbari](#) in assessing SHAD application refers to "difficulties in the interaction and communication between teachers and students" as the reasons "why students and teachers are not interested in this network" ([2021](#), p. 299). Conversely, as shown by different researchers, EFL teachers in other countries chiefly used non-local online platforms for teaching during the pandemic including Zoom, Google Classroom, Google Meet ([Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020](#); [Dau, 2022](#); [Lusiyani & Anindya, 2021](#); [Sari & Putri, 2022](#)), Schoology ([Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020](#); [Lusiyani & Anindya, 2021](#)), and Moodle ([Lusiyani & Anindya, 2021](#); [Sari & Putri, 2022](#)). Although initiating local online educational applications such as SHAD should be cherished, it seems that serious measures should be taken for making them appropriate for language teaching.

The findings of this study also showed that most of these teachers created the materials themselves in order to increase their students' motivation, enhance their learning, or prepare more suitable materials based on their students' level of proficiency. In other words, the sudden transition from face-to-face to remote education forced teachers to exploit the vast number of resources and "authoring tools" (Mishan & Timmis, 2015) that are available on the Internet to prepare pedagogically-suitable teacher-designed materials for their own classes. However, a few of these teachers stated that they preferred ready-made materials since they believed content creation is a very time-consuming and under-valued task. Helping students get familiar with different teaching methodologies offered by other teachers and the higher quality of some of the ready-made contents were among the other reasons why a number of these teachers used ready-to-use materials either as the main content or as a supplementary to their own ones. Similarly, Yi and Jang (2020) asserted that while many teachers in Korea used the ready-to-use contents provided by the MOE, some believed that these contents are not suitable for students with different levels of language proficiency and preferred to create content themselves so that it would be more suitable to their students' needs and levels. Furthermore, it was discovered that the participants used several technological tools both in delivering their teaching and evaluating such as PowerPoint slides, screen recorders, video editor and compressor, as well as educational sites, channels, and applications. Likewise, Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) discovered that EFL teachers utilized ready-made materials or created content in the forms of PowerPoint slides, videos, pictures, Word and PDF documents. Lusiyani and Anindya (2021) also discovered that EFL high school teachers in Surabaya used online tools such as YouTube, Padlet, PowerPoint, and Screen Casting for making content during the pandemic.

Another finding of this study was that the participants followed fairly the same procedure for teaching including having a short greeting, calling the roll, teaching, and evaluating, and mostly ended their classes by assigning homework. In a similar vein, Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) found that most of the procedures and class activities of online teaching performed by EFL teachers resembled the ones used in face-to-face classes suggesting lack of knowledge and training on holding online classes on the part of the teachers. Findings of this study also showed that these EFL teachers used various online teaching methods for holding their classes during the pandemic including flipped method, live videos on SHAD, pre-recorded materials, pictures, and voices which were recorded at the same time they were being delivered. Critically speaking, while a few of the teachers started practicing innovative methods of teaching, like flipped method, the rest stuck to their former methods of teaching. Likewise, Zou et al. (2021) also discovered that EFL teachers utilized several methods for teaching such as live online teaching, recorded teaching materials, combination of live and recorded lessons, and other new methods for delivering contents.



The third research question concerned the assessment strategies that the participants employed during the pandemic. Findings showed that these teachers utilized software tools such as Google forms, Digi forms, and video calls for the purpose of evaluation. Similarly, as argued by different researchers, EFL teachers used various environments such as Google forms (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Sari & Putri, 2022; Yuianto & Mujtahin, 2021), Quizizz (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Lusiyan & Anindya, 2021), and LMS (Ghanbari & Nowroozi, 2022; Sari & Putri, 2022) for evaluating students during the emergency remote education; nevertheless, these tools were chiefly deployed for designing traditional exam types like multiple-choice or true/false items. According to the findings of the present study, the participants agreed that formative assessment should be used instead of summative assessment in remote education to yield more credible results. These teachers believed that they could not trust the results of final exams and had to evaluate the overall performance of the students throughout the whole academic year. Thus, most of the participants considered several factors such as students' homework, participation and activities, plus their class attendance in evaluating the students rather than merely trusting the scores obtained from a single final exam. This is in line with the findings of other studies indicating that during the pandemic, EFL teachers increased the ratio of formative assessment in comparison to the ratio of summative assessment to enhance test justice and fairness and to pay more attention to students' learning process (Zhang et al., 2021; Zhang & Wu, 2022). None of the participants of this study was satisfied with their assessment strategies during the pandemic and argued that the results of their exams mostly lacked validity and credibility due to the increased rate of cheating among the students. Likewise, according to other researchers, one of the major challenges faced by EFL teachers during ERT was the online assessment of the students mostly due to cheating and lack of supervision by the teachers (Ghanbari & Nowroozi, 2022; Hermansyah & Aridah, 2021).

6. Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of 12 Iranian EFL teachers who taught online for the first time during ERT. It aimed to discover the perceptions of these teachers concerning the role of technology and to explore the technological tools, the teaching platforms, and the assessment strategies they employed. Data revealed that all these EFL teachers held a positive attitude towards incorporating technology into their English language teaching practices due to its advantages. Thus, as they already had this positive attitude, the next step would be to identify the reasons behind their limited use of technology and to take actions to remove the barriers blocking their ways. These barriers were identified in this study and the similar ones; hence, the authorities and the stakeholders could benefit from the findings of these studies if they are willing to take actions. In addition, since SHAD is a newly-born application with several

problems, actions should be taken to update and improve it in order to be used more efficiently in the future. Furthermore, it was found that basic use of technological tools by these teachers prior to the pandemic and at the time of it was not only due to the teachers' lack of digital literacy, but due to several other reasons which in fact played more significant roles in this regard. That is, due to several reasons including lack of time, lack of equipment, and lack of collaboration of school staff, employing technology was both optional and difficult. Hence, EFL teachers did not really feel the need to increase their digital literacy because the conditions for putting their knowledge into use were not prepared in the rural schools. Thus, it is suggested that increasing the digital literacy of teachers, though necessary, is not enough and other factors should also be taken into account if we want to see any effective change. Teachers with advanced level of digital literacy might not be able to make any changes if the required equipment is not available, the school staff does not cooperate, or if the teachers are struggling with the lack of time to teach the books' content all the time. In a nutshell, it is essential to take into account several factors to obtain effective results concerning the technology integration in EFL classes. These factors include increasing the time of EFL classes, increasing digital literacy, encouraging the school staff cooperation, equipping the rural schools, and so forth. In addition, these EFL teachers did not trust the results of their online exams which stress the need to develop proper and practical methods of evaluations to be used in online environment in the future.

Although this study may contribute to the existing literature by describing what happened during the COVID-19 emergency remote teaching in rural and remote areas, several limitations urge for further research on this topic. It should be noted that this study was gender specific with the participation of only 12 female teachers. Further studies are suggested to be conducted with male EFL teachers and with a larger number of participants. Moreover, the study mainly focused on English teachers' perceptions and practices. Future investigations may consider the views of other stakeholders such as school staff and principals. The extent to which English teachers benefit from their emergency remote teaching and assessing experiences during post-pandemic era could also be explored in future studies.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

1. Demographic information: Age- Teaching experience- Latest educational degree- Level and grade of teaching- Name of the city and the province where you teach.
2. What is your opinion about the role of technology in ELT in general and specifically during the pandemic?
3. In your opinion, what is the place of technology at the Ministry of Education in Iran? Explain please.
4. To what extent did you use technology in your English classrooms prior to the pandemic?
6. How did you teach English during the pandemic? Please explain the teaching platforms, the educational materials, and the like.
7. What is your opinion about SHAD application?
8. What was your evaluation method during the pandemic? Please explain the assessment strategies and tools that you used.

