

Research Paper**Exploring the Cognitions of Iranian University TEFL Teachers and Students of the Efficacy of Online Assessment Practices in the Wake of Covid-19**Majid Farahian¹, Yusef Rajabi², Hamid, Gholami³¹Department of ELT, Kermanshah Branch, Islamic Azad University, Kermanshah, Iran. majid.farahian@gmail.com²Department of ELT, Kermanshah Branch, Islamic Azad University, Kermanshah, Iran yusef.rajabi@iau.ac.ir³Department of ELT, Kermanshah Branch, Islamic Azad University, Kermanshah, Iran. hamid.gholami@iau.ac.ir**Abstract**

The coronavirus pandemic not only did present public health challenges, it also disrupted education all over the world. Despite considerable human and financial losses on a global scale, the pandemic unveiled an unprecedented opportunity for educational system to embrace and incorporate online learning systems into their mainstream instructional agendas. To prevent the spread of the virus, like many other countries, the Iranian universities converted their system into distance education. Since the educational centers had already delivered two semesters of online education, there was a need to address the quality of online assessment as part of the attempt to gauge the accountability of online pedagogical practices. Thus the current study aimed to explore the perceptions of Iranian Teaching English as a Foreign language (TEFL) university teachers and students on the implementation of online assessment (OLA) during the pandemic. As such, 212 TEFL teachers and 325 postgraduate students completed the teachers'/students' views towards implementing online assessment survey developed by the researchers. The findings of the current study suggest that on the whole, both Iranian EFL teachers and students favor the web-based form of assessment. In addition, there were similarities in perceptions of the teachers and students regarding familiarity with OLA and its feasibility, OLA contribution in improving learning and feedback processes, and the worth and value of implementing OLA. However, the findings also highlight differences in the inadequacies of OLA.

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Challenges***Corresponding Author:** Majid FarahianAssistant Professor of Applied Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities,
Islamic Azad University, Kermanshah, Iran.**Email:**majid.farahian@gmail.com

Introduction

The unnoticed extensive closures of educational institutions from late 2019 onwards were a logical reaction to the burgeoning COVID-19 pandemic. Although the unprecedented conditions seem to be alleviated now, however, the majority of schools and higher education institutes have transited the educational practices to the online platform albeit fairly moderately which cast serious doubts on the accountability issues of distance education as far as the assessment techniques and procedures are concerned. One obvious reason for the nationwide schools and universities lockdowns in Murphy's (2020) terms had to do with the idea that the education systems were viewed as threats to securitization at the time of coronavirus pandemic. On the face of the fact that online assessment has been extensively utilized in education systems universally, there are still concerns about the reliability of the assessment tools and the validity of the students' scores on such tests. The enigma hinges around the idea if current online assessment techniques yield critical information about students' academic performance and achievement.

Based on the researchers' experience, opposed to the dynamic interaction between the teachers and students in real classes, distance education inherently deprives the teachers from genuinely interacting with the students. That is, the possibility of immediate on-task counselling and feedback on teachers' part is considerably minimized in online education. Things get further exacerbated when it comes to online assessment where teachers cannot directly observe the ways in which the learners engage in and interact with various test forms and items. Taking logistic elements of online assessment such as Internet access/ speed and technology literacy for granted, there are still assessment-specific issues that are more likely to influence students' performance. Clarity of test instructions, time constraints, response formats, and cheating are among such issues. Under such circumstances, there are also apparent discrepancies between stakeholders, teachers, and students' views on the most practical and pertinent online assessment procedures. Consequently, data can be gathered from stakeholders, teachers, and students to obtain useful information towards fulfilling students' assessment-oriented needs without which unrelenting disruptions will most allegedly aggravate until learners can return back to the classroom.

Several approaches and models of online education have been proposed in the literature on distance learning. Anderson (2011) builds upon Bransford, Brown, and Cocking's (1999) model of online education where the Internet functions as an interface among the four overlapping themes around which effective learning environments hinge: community-

centeredness, knowledge-centeredness, learner-centeredness, and assessment centeredness. Another distinctive feature of the model has to do with the kind of interaction the teacher and the students have with one another as well as with the content where meaning is constructed collaboratively. Similarly, in Bosch's (2016) Blending with Pedagogical Purpose Model of online learning, the online technology caters for a framework in which pedagogical objectives and activities direct the approaches. In practice, online learning platforms, as the model posits, bring the objectives, activities, and approaches together within diverse modalities that interest an extensive array of students. Content management systems (CMSs) and learning management systems (LMSs), as two widely utilized online education platforms, provide a number of tools to assist assessment of students' learning. Projects, portfolios, tests, assignments, and peer assessments are among the chief techniques used for the assessment of learning which can be effortlessly done electronically. Besides students, such online assessment techniques seem to be potentially useful to instructors to reflect on and assess their teaching and to examine the strengths and the weaknesses of online classes.

A good specimen of distance education system in Iran, with its root in the Electronic branch of Islamic Azad University (IAU), is the virtual education system known as Vadana. IAU is a non-governmental university and the world's sixth-largest university. It has been set up in order to integrate and improve the quality level of distance and online education at the IAU. With the inception of Covid-19, the first wide scale online exams in the form of semester-end summative tests were administered throughout the country in all IAU branches. Based on the researchers' experience, implementing online courses has had its advantages as well as challenges. Since this was literally the first large-scale trial in the country, it seems necessary to explore university teachers' perceptions of web-based assessment in general and EFL university teachers in particular in the wake of COVID-19 as to the effectiveness of the online assessment. Thus, the present research grew out of a desire to investigate TEFL teachers' perceptions of the efficacy of online assessment in IAU.

Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic distressed the education system on a global scale and it resulted in the partial or full closure of schools and universities across the globe. To counterbalance the negative effect of the contagious disease, education has changed dramatically and with the rise of e-learning, teaching is undertaken on digital platforms remotely. With this sudden shift away from the physical classrooms in many countries across the world, the situation, as Murphy (2020) argues, turned to what he called 'emergency e-learning.' The term is defined as "the temporary shift of instructional

delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances” (p. 6). In such a situation, accustomed to face-to-face classes, Iranian teachers had to totally depend on online courses as their only choice to teach, as such they had faced tough days (Badrkhani, 2021). Iranian educational institutions and universities launched online education systems and changed classes from face-to-face to online courses.

As a platform for online learning, the Learning Management System (LMS) which had already been introduced to the context of Iranian educational system in 1990 in a very small scale (Mahmoudi-Dehaki et al., 2021) was employed by majority of universities (Ebadi et al., 2020). One such system, Vadana, was used by IAU. As a private university, IAU is among the largest universities in the world which is scattered mainly inside Iran. IAU have updated and improved its electronic infrastructure and systems with a large number of students and educational units scattered throughout the country and in different cities to facilitate educational and student affairs.

Despite the fact that the situation is far from ideal, IAU was better prepared to transition to the online learning environment, as it had already launched its Electronic Campus and students from the country and abroad had been studying through online courses. Despite the benefits, such as accessibility to the course from anywhere at any time, asynchronous discussions with teachers and classmates, immediate feedback on tests, and so on (Ahmady et al., 2020), based on the researchers’ experience, online learning is different from the one in face-to-face courses due to its particular nature. Although it seemed that it was not likely to predict the exact time of the end of pandemic (Ebadi et al., 2020), if properly utilized, such an opportunity may have turned into a valuable asset to the educational systems and for students to get involved in learning and knowledge sharing if timely decisions were made.

What sounds imperative at this point has to do with the assessment of the students’ achievement in the online classroom system. In both face to face and online courses, tests provide critical data to achieve two definite goals: to secure accountable teaching and learning and to guide decisions on subsequent academic measures. As Jimenez (2020) argued, the data required to meet these purposes come from three major types of assessment, which yield different yardsticks. Diagnostic tests are administered at the beginning of the academic year to determine learners’ starting levels and help the learners themselves as well as the teacher’s access to graded content. Formative tests offer teachers touchpoints throughout the academic year to help them tailor their attempts to enhance learning. Finally, year-end summative tests, as Jimenez (2020) contended, provide information on how successfully the learners progressed toward preordained goals and academic standards.

Additionally, not unlike traditional teaching and assessment that are primarily teacher-centered, the ultimate aim of online teaching and assessment practices, as a more student-centered form of

education, is academic attainment and accountability. Despite the wide range of possibilities online learning offers for presenting and sharing teaching materials that facilitate the learning process, it still proffers practical concerns when it comes to assessing students' performance. While evaluation is exclusively carried out by the teachers in traditional assessment and its efficacy draws substantially on teacher's knowledge and skills, it is primarily performed with the application of tools and systems that mediate between the students and the tests. Hence, students' performance on online tests is influenced not only by their competency in the subject matter, but also by their nimble control of these tools and systems as a facet of test methods. The situation further exacerbates once assessment security is taken into account as a determining factor in remote assessment. Assessment security, as Gamage et al. (2020) argued, aims at securing assessment practices against issues such as cheating, and on identifying any instance of cheating that might have occurred. Gamage et al. (2020) pointed out that a vital element in assessment design is to safeguard the idea that "assessments enable students to demonstrate their learning practically" (p. 5). It seems that one of the big challenges in front of the teachers is how to prevent cheating on online exams. While previous studies have mainly focused on the efficacy of online teaching courses (e.g. Abdel-Rahim, 2021; Coman, et al., 2020), research specifically targeting online assessment is scarce. Meccawy et al. (2021) explored the views of students and faculty members towards online assessment. As they reported, there is need for the problem of cheating in online courses. Such a measure includes "raising student awareness and ethics, training teachers to detect cheating methods, and institutions activating their code of practice and applying severe sanctions on those who engage in such practices" (p.1). Verhoef et al. (2021) studied academic integrity of university students during COVID-19. As the researchers found, due to pandemic-related issues the students were dishonest, however, there were some other reasons for their dishonesty like feeling overwhelmed and stressed and struggling with technology lack of time management.

Ghanbari and Nowroozi (2021) conducted a study in the context of Iran to examine 20 Iranian English language teachers' views towards the online assessment challenges during COVID-19. They carried out semi-structured retrospective interviews with the teachers at different intervals throughout an academic course. The findings of this study pointed to idea that after the move to online assessment, the teachers primarily encountered acute instructional, technical, administrative, and affective barriers; however, they could gear their actions to the demands of the new situation as the course went on.

Statement of the Problem

As Iranian universities began to address the Covid-19 pandemics in 2020, the inclination towards replacing exams with online assessment hastened. Based on the researchers' experience, the fast-paced transition at scale to online exams which was for the time of emergency did not meet the guidelines necessary for administering university exams. Concerns for academic integrity from one hand and the possible negative washback effect encouraged the researchers to investigate TEFL teachers' and postgraduate students' cognition on the circumstances.

Apart from the benefits such as immediate feedback (Bonham et al., 2000), improving the quality of student learning (Saricoban, 2013) and more frequent administration of assessments (Bull & McKenna, 2004), such a rapid transition to remote assessment could give rise to various concerns such technical issues, students' and students' technological incompetence and academic integrity (Khan& Khan, 2018; Guangul, et al, 2020; Zamani et al., 2015), online proctoring (Sullivan 2016), and tests being limited to objective-type formats like multiple choice (Bull & McKenna, 2004). Although these studies assessed the efficacy of online assessment from the viewpoint of either teachers or students, literature is scarce when it comes to the comparison of the perceptions of teachers and students especially in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic. Accordingly, we formulated the following research:

- Q1. What is Iranian TEFL instructors' attitude towards the efficacy of online assessment during COVID-19?
- Q2. What is Iranian TEFL postgraduate students' attitude towards the efficacy of online assessment during COVID-19?
- Q3. Is there any significant difference between Iranian TEFL instructors and TEFL postgraduate students' perceptions about the efficacy of online assessment during COVID-19?

Methodology

Sampling and Sample Size

As for the participants, we recruited 325 postgraduate students including TEFL M.A. and Ph.D. students. All students were selected on the basis of purposive sampling technique (Teddlie & Yu, 2007) since we believed that they could provide us with reliable information. They were composed of 114 males (35%) and 211 females (65%). As for the teachers, the selection criteria for 212 of them were made based on their experience of teaching two executive term after the inception of COVID-19 via online courses, having Ph.D. degree and having the experience of teaching TEFL at both BA and MA levels for more than 10 years. There were 143 males (67%) and 69 females (33%).

Instruments

The Efficacy of Online Assessment Questionnaire

Based on the related literature (Attia, 2014; Sharadgah & Sa'di, 2020), we developed a scale to measure the efficacy of online assessment questionnaire in TEFL courses (see the Appendix). The scale consists of 30 items with four subscales. The questionnaire includes 19 items and four subscales: (1) familiarity with OLA and its feasibility (1-4), (2) OLA contribution in improving learning and feedback processes (5-8), (3) the worth and value of implementing OLA (9-14), and (4) shortages of OLA (15-19). In addition, a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree to identify both TEFL teachers' and students' perceptions toward online assessment.

Development of the efficacy of online assessment questionnaire (EOAQ) was initially developed in two phases. Phase 1 - Based on the literature research, a list of 35 items was compiled and distributed for pre-validation review and comments to five expert researchers in the TEFL, and fifteen postgraduate students of TEFL at a state university in Iran. We asked the experts and the students provide a critical review of the items regarding the clarity, and fitness.

Phase 2- After taking experts and students' comments into consideration, the remaining 27 items were subjected to exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The first results of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) 0.61 was not satisfactory. After we eliminated 8 items that suffered low levels of factor loading (below 0.50) we ran EFA again, so that the KMO raised to 0.79. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was also statistically significant ($\chi^2(476) = 5772.33, p = 0.000 < 0.05$). A principal component factor analysis with Varimax rotation revealed that all remaining items had acceptable loadings. As such, the final draft of the scale included 19 items. A 5-point Likert scale was used ranging from 1 indicating "not at all", 2 "to a small scale", 3 "to some extent", 4 "to a moderate extent, and 5 "to a great extent". As the last step, to make sure whether the items elicited consistent responses, the reliability which was estimated based on Cronbach α found to be adequate (.86).

Procedure

The EOAQ was distributed among 325 TEFL students. Because of the Covid-19 lockdown we did not have direct access to TEFL teachers and students; therefore, we developed the scale and gathered them via Google Forms. Of 376 questionnaires, 325 copies were returned (a response rate of 86.4). Of 250 questionnaires sent to TEFL teachers, 212 copies were returned (a response rate of 84.8). It is noteworthy that the researchers informed teachers and students that their information and participation would remain confidential and that their participation was voluntary. It took about 2 months to gather the data.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the questionnaire was analyzed both descriptively and inferentially. To answer the first and second research questions, the means calculated for both the students and the teachers were compared with those of related populations to see if there exist any significant differences. To answer the third research questions, the four subscales of the questionnaires were considered as dependent variables and having the assumptions met, MANOVA was utilized.

Results

The first research question inquired the perceptions of Iranian TEFL instructors towards the efficacy of online assessment during COVID-19. To analyze the data on subscales, the score of each participant on all the items of each subscale was added up so that the possible minimum and maximum scores for each participant on the first three subscales would be between 4 and 20 respectively while for the last subscale (with five items) it would be between 5 and 25.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics on the Subscales of the Questionnaire Administered to EFL Teachers

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	
Subscale A	52	8.00	8.00	16.00	12.78	.3400	2.45218	6.013	-.583	.330
					85	6				
Subscale B	52	16.00	4.00	20.00	11.80	.50	3.60675	13.00	-	.330
					269	017		09	.193	
Subscale C	52	16.00	4.00	20.00	13.26	.5761	4.15445	17.25	-.521	.330
					92	2		9		
Subscale D	52	13.00	12.00	25.00	19.23	.3731	2.69069	7.240	-.262	.330
					08	3				

To answer the first research question, four one sample t-tests were run. Before running a t-test, however, it was also necessary to verify the normal distribution of the data in the questionnaire. The results of skewness tests conducted for this purpose proved the normality of the data collected in this part since the calculated values for the subscales in the teachers' questionnaire ranged between 1.96 and -1.96, the data were normally distributed. The H0 at this point assumes that there is no significant difference between the calculated means and the average (10 for the first three subscales and 12.5

for the last subscale. To testify the null hypothesis, four one-sample t-test conducted. Table 2 shows the results of one-sample t-tests for all the subscales.

Table 2

One Sample t-test Results on the Subscales of the Questionnaire Administered to EFL Teachers

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Subscale A	8.200	51	.000	2.78846	2.1058	3.4712
Subscale B	3.653	51	.001	1.82692	.8228	2.8310
Subscale C	5.675	51	.000	3.26923	2.1126	4.4258
Subscale D	18.039	51	.000	6.73077	5.9817	7.4799

The calculated means for the variables were compared to the desired means, and since the reported significance values (.000) are all less than the significance level of .05, the H0 is not retained hence, it is concluded that the means calculated for both factors are significantly different from the average. In other words, it can be inferred that teachers held significant positive attitudes towards the use of online assessment in English classes.

The second research question sought the perceptions of Iranian TEFL postgraduate students towards the efficacy of online assessment during COVID-19. To analyze the data on subscales, the same procedure, as followed for teachers, was considered for students. So the students' scores on each item of the same subscale were added up. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for the students on all the subscales.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics on the Subscales of the Questionnaire Administered to EFL Learners

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std.	Variance	Skewness	
				Statistic	Std. Error	Deviation		Statistic	Std. Error
Subscale A	103	8.00	17.00	13.3107	.22334	2.26668	5.138	-.534	.238
Subscale B	103	4.00	20.00	12.6311	.36400	3.69417	13.647	-.641	.238
Subscale C	103	6.00	19.00	13.3301	.28723	2.91510	8.498	-.429	.238
Subscale D	103	11.00	24.00	18.0485	.26589	2.69851	7.282	-.129	.238

To answer the second research question, four one sample t-tests were run. The results of skewness tests conducted for this purpose proved the normality of the data collected in this part since the calculated values for the subscales in the teachers’ questionnaire ranged between 1.96 and -1.96, the data were normally distributed.

Table 4

One Sample t-test Results on the Subscales of the Questionnaire Administered to EFL Learners

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Subscale A	14.823	102	.000	3.31068	2.8677	3.7537
Subscale B	7.228	102	.000	2.63107	1.9091	3.3531
Subscale C	11.594	102	.000	3.33010	2.7604	3.8998
Subscale D	20.868	102	.000	5.54854	5.0211	6.0759

Table 4 presents the test results of One-Sample t-test, with mean differences, t values, degrees of freedom, and two tailed significances of these tests. The means for the subscales were compared to the desired means, and since the reported significance values (.000) are all less than the significance level of .05, the H0 is not retained; hence, it is concluded that the means calculated for

both factors are significantly different from the average. In other words, it can be inferred that students held significantly positive attitudes towards the use of online assessment in English classes.

The third research question explored if there are any significant differences between Iranian TEFL instructors and TEFL postgraduate students' perceptions about the efficacy of online assessment during COVID-19. To answer the question, since the four subscales were considered as dependent variables, MANOVA was utilized. The descriptive statistics as presented in Table 5 shows the mean score and standard deviations for both of the groups. It worth mentioning that the participants' scores on each item of the same subscale have been added up as done in the previous data analysis procedures.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics on the Subscales of the Questionnaire Administered to EFL Teachers and Learners

	GROUPS	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Subscale A	TEACHERS	12.7885	2.45218	52
	STUDENTS	13.3107	2.26668	103
Subscale B	TEACHERS	11.8269	3.60675	52
	STUDENTS	12.6311	3.69417	103
Subscale C	TEACHERS	13.2692	4.15445	52
	STUDENTS	13.3301	2.91510	103
Subscale D	TEACHERS	19.2308	2.69069	52
	STUDENTS	18.0485	2.69851	103

The test of equality of covariances (Table 6) indicates that the observed covariance matrices of the dependent variables are equal across groups.

Table 6

The Test of Equality of Covariances

Box's M	19.062
F	1.843
df1	10

df2	50314.384
Sig.	.088

Results of the tests of between subjects demonstrated significant interaction effects for groups and subscale D. Table 7 reveals that there is no significant difference between the groups in the first three subscales while there exists a significant difference in subscale D as the sig. is less than (0.05) as the alpha decision level.

Table 7
Results of Tests of between Subjects Effect

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter
GROU PS	Subscale A	9.424	1	9.424	1.736	.190	.011	1.736
	Subscale B	22.345	1	22.345	1.663	.199	.011	1.663
	Subscale C	1.228	1	1.228	.061	.916	.000	.011
	Subscale D	48.296	1	48.296	6.645	.011	.042	6.645

Discussion

The COVID-19 not only did pose unprecedented physical and psychological, social and economic challenges, it also casted serious doubts on the efficiency of the long-established and time-honored educational orthodoxies on a global scale. The first research question of the present study specifically addressed the perceptions of Iranian TEFL instructors towards the efficacy of online assessment during COVID-19 the findings from which indicated that teachers held significantly positive attitudes towards the use of online assessment in English classes. Partially in line with the present study, in a study of pre-service English teachers' views regarding web-based assessment, Öz (2014) found that although EFL teachers did not seem to fully appreciate the use of online assessment and displayed some lack of interest to use this form of assessment in their future classes, they showed a positive attitude towards ease of use of online assessment testing. In addition, they did not favor a shift to a fully web-based form of assessment and the majority preferred an online assessment in combination with paper-based assessment.

The findings from the first research question supports those in Ghanbari and Nowroozi (2021) that point to the participating teachers' ability to adjust their practice to the peculiarities of the

pandemic. Although their participants initially turned to hold uncertain attitudes towards successful administration of online assessment at the outset of the pandemic, they could eventually overcome the challenges toward the end of the academic course.

The results from the first research question do not seem to support the findings from Hedayati and Marandi (2014) in which they investigated Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions toward implementing computer-assisted language learning (CALL) with a primary focus on technology integration in Iranian EFL classes. Based on their results, Iranian EFL teachers referred to teacher, facility, and learner constraints as the three main obstacles in implementing CALL in language classrooms. One reason for such an incongruence in the results can be merely attributed to the very outbreak of the COVID-19. Under the pandemic-induced circumstances, language teachers felt an insistent demand to incorporate online assessment techniques into their practices and as a corollary of implementing remote classes, they began to improve their technology skills and restructure their attitudes towards CALL in general and online assessment in particular.

The first research question results are also in line with the results from Guangul et al. (2020) which examined the challenges of online assessment during COVID-19 pandemic in Middle East College. The perceptions of 50 faculty members were collected and analyzed through questionnaires. The participants held positive attitudes towards online assessment and viewed academic dishonesty and infrastructure as the main inhibitors to online assessment among other factors and suggested several suggestions to minimize academic dishonesty.

Turning to the second research question that investigated the perceptions of Iranian TEFL postgraduate students towards the efficacy of online assessment during COVID 19, we found that students hold significant positive attitudes towards the use of online assessment in English classes. In a study, Rezaei (2020) studied methods of online tests and as reported they include face-to-face exam, virtual written exam, virtual oral exam, oral question and answer, virtual presentations, electronic portfolios and formative evaluation. As the researcher reported, participants believed that the online assessment should not be limited to a particular type of assessment.

The results of the second question partially corroborate those of Tümen Akyıldız (2020). The participating college students in this study carried out in Turkey believed that the pandemic education has had both drawbacks such as constraints in interaction and face-to-face communication which direct the students to isolation and the load of assignments on the one hand and advantages like flexibility of time and place, students' active participation in their own learning and comfort in exams on the other. The final advantage, i.e., comfort in exams, marks the interface between Tümen Akyıldız's (2020) results and the present study's finding where the participants in both studies held positive attitudes toward OLA.

The findings from the second research questions are not in line with those in Khan and Khan (2019) in which students did not show positive attitudes towards OLA. In particular, they did not recognize the need for online assessments, were technologically incompetent, viewed online assessments as restrictive for certain subjects.

Azimi et al (2016, p.214) explored Iranian and Russian students' viewpoints regarding the quality of assessment. As the authors reported, Iranian students considered "providing sufficient information about the final exam conditions, the type of scoring, time and place of exam", "diversity in methods of assessing and supervising the work of the students" and "offering regular feedback to the learner with the aim of solving the learning problems "as important factors which promotes quality of online assessment while Russian students regarded three factors such as "fight against fraud and plagiarism, the quality of pre-test to assess students' pre-knowledge and consistent of evaluation methods with educational content " as factors that are important in the quality of assessment.

Zamani et al (2015) aimed to identify challenges of evaluation in virtual college from the view point of students. Based on the results, the greatest challenge for the students was technical problem. Khan et al (2021) who sought the challenges of assessment during COVID 19 found that among other findings quality of Internet, prior knowledge of ICT, and family income were among the factors which affected the quality of assessment. Özden et al (2004) also investigated students' perceptions of online assessment and reported that the based on the students' views most noticeable features of the online assessment system were "immediate feedback, randomized question order, item analysis of the questions, and obtaining the scores immediately after the exam" (p.89). Overall, participants agreed on the effectiveness of the online assessment system.

The findings from the second research question are also in line with those in Attia's (2014) study which examined the postgraduates' perceptions toward OLA they had taken. Attia found substantially positive perceptions toward OLA. In addition, he identified gender and information and communication technologies' familiarity as two main factors to significantly influence postgraduate students' responses.

Concerning the third research question which investigated the differences between Iranian TEFL instructors and TEFL postgraduate students' perceptions about the efficacy of online assessment during COVID 19, we found that except in the last scale, shortages of OLA, there is no difference between both groups. The findings from the third research question corroborate mostly the results from several similar investigations (Öz, 2014; Rezaii, 2020; Wahid & Farooq, 2020;). In Öz's (2014) study, the participants exhibited a positive attitude towards ease of use of web-based testing for their courses, but they did not prefer a shift to an entirely web-based form of assessment.

The results of the analysis of instructors and students' perception on the challenges and solutions to the assessment of students' performance during the pandemic pointed to the proximity of their view which seem to be congruent with the present study's results. Specifically, eclectic assessment encompassing several forms of tests, electronic portfolio assessment, and oral online tests were among the different assessment techniques the participants suggested for online assessment of students' performance. In Wahid and Farooq's (2020) study, the teachers held positive views on the administration of online exams from home. In sum, both teachers and students had a positive view towards online testing. This is against the researchers' expectations since as the COVID-19 pandemic spread in the country, government suspended education activities temporarily and in a short time full-online classes named emergency e-learning replaced face-to-face education (Murphy, 2020). Perhaps, it is likely that although the virtual courses did not perform at their best, the online courses served as a suitable remedy for face to face courses.

Conclusion

In designing education systems in general and online educational techniques and resources in particular, instructors and students' viewpoints must be taken into account to ensure dynamism, motivation, and interaction. The two main agents in online education systems, i.e., instructors and students, need to be convinced of the efficacy of the transition from long-established well-trodden educational system to uncertain and untrodden online assessment before they embrace it voluntarily. Inasmuch as the results of this study are brought to the fore, training courses and workshops on online technology and resources have to be incorporated into foreign language teacher education and in-service teacher training courses and curricula through which instructors can get familiar with and boost their understanding of implementing online assessment techniques. Such transitions can focus on low stake assessments at their first attempts and gradually move toward high stake assessments.

Despite the COVID-19 personal and online classes technological challenges for TEFL instructors and students, they still held positive attitudes towards OLA and believed that it can be used to determine if students have achieved the educational aims. The COVID-19 pandemic became a reality in our life for some time and it continued to upset the normal rhythm of our communities. Within status quo, it is incumbent upon the education systems to continue to warrant accountability. To assure accountability, they need to integrate rigorous and reliable online assessment adds-in into the current virtual class software and applications.

Education system authorities and teachers need an extensive array of information about their students in order to deliver geared assessment. Supporting teachers in developing restructured online assessments that accommodate a wide range of student and contextual factors is a necessary first step if educational systems including those of universities are ever to compensate for the unprecedented

learning gaps. As the results of the present study disclosed, both instructors and students held positive attitudes towards the efficacy of online assessments. Prior to the administration of online tests, as a corollary of this finding, education leaders and teachers have to ensure learners' engagement and facilitative conditions for taking the test. This is not an easy feat, as a number of factors such as internet access and speed are not in the hands of the teachers, but it is necessary to address the drawbacks associated with OLA as echoed by several studies (Ahmady et al., 2020; Badrkhani, 2021; Guangul et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2021).

The integration of technology into foreign language classroom provides direct accessibility to information and this sounds a vital component to the foreign language curriculum in that technology has diffused literally into every aspect of our daily encounters with specific reference to education and access to information. The implementation of technology into the foreign language curriculum which is known as CALL, entails competence in information and communications technology (ICT). The teachers and students must have certain degrees of mastery over a number of techniques and instruments. Taking ICT skills such as sending emails, searching the internet, and using smart gadgets like tablets and mobile phone for granted, EFL instructors have to gain control over certain other areas of technology such as word processing software, database skills, technology-integrated materials development, test development skills within the LMS, file management and browsing skills among others to fairly adequately integrate online assessment into their teaching.

This study was constrained on several grounds. Sampling for the study was restricted to purposive procedure due to the aims of the study. The sample might not have represented the entire population fully. Due to its qualitative nature, the findings are not generalizable to the population. The use of a convenience sample and relative similarity of participants within each focus group means that the views reflected cannot represent the entire university students' population. In the times of COVID-19, every one of us experienced certain levels of apprehension and consequently the participants' responses might have been influenced by the context negatively influenced by Covid-19. Therefore, further investigation can examine teachers and students' views on online assessment after the pandemic.

In order to make online assessment more gratifying for students and teachers, the results of this study imply that the interaction patterns between them have to be dynamic, meaningful, and personalized. Moreover, both teachers and students' interests and concerns should be addressed to successfully incorporate online assessments into TEFL courses. To render online assessment efficient

and enduring, teachers are encouraged to use inspiring and interactive techniques to engage students during online assessment. It is incumbent upon teacher education programs to equip the teachers with skills to apply sophisticated software and assessment tools during online assessment.

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Appendix

The Efficacy of Online Assessment

			Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
familiarity with OLA and its feasibility	I think OLA can be a good alternative to traditional paper-based exams	F %	33 (21.6)	90 (58.8)	27 (17.6)	3 (2)		1.94
	OLA is compatible to assess all lessons in TEFL	F %	35 (22.9)	95 (62.1)	22 (14.4)	1 (.7)		
	Teachers have sufficient experience in conducting online assessment	F %	31 (20.3)	96 (62.7)	21 (13.7)	5 (3.3)		
	Universities were not ready for OLA due to the abrupt and rapid transition to e-learning under the COVID-19 pandemic	F %	38 (24.8)	97 (63.4)	17 (11.1)	1 (.7)		
OLA contribution in improving learning and feedback	OLA improves the quality of learning	F %	34 (22.2)	95 (62.1)	21 (13.7)	3 (2)		1.93
	OLA motivates students to learn	F %	41 (26.8)	92 (60.1)	16 (10.5)	4 (2.6)		
	OLA effectively assesses students' level of knowledge	F %	33 (21.6)	99 (64.7)	17 (11.1)	4 (2.6)		
	Immediate feedback from OLA could help students learn	F %	34 (22.2)	96 (62.7)	20 (13.1)	3 (2)		
the worth and value of implementing OLA	OLA is more interesting than paper-based exams	F %	10 (6.5)	56 (36.6)	21 (13.7)	33 (21.6)	33 (21.6)	2.85
	OLA can be time-saving	F %	19 (12.4)	44 (28.8)	21 (13.7)	36 (23.5)	33 (21.6)	
	OLA is economical	F %	15 (9.8)	56 (36.6)	12 (7.8)	42 (27.5)	28 (18.3)	
	OLA is objective and fair when assessing students' performance.	F %	24 (15.7)	51 (33.3)	8 (5.2)	40 (26.1)	30 (19.6)	
	OLA is more rapidly accessible to remote students than paper-based exams.	F %	15 (9.8)	57 (37.3)	12 (7.8)	37 (24.2)	32 (20.9)	
	OLA assess students' knowledge more objectivity than paper-based exams	F %	-	56 (36.6)	90 (58.8)	4 (2.6)	3 (2)	
shortages of OLA	Students who take OLA, are more anxious than the time they take paper-based exams	F %	17 (11.1)	82 (53.6)	48 (31.4)	6 (3.9)		2.33
	Cheating and plagiarism are easier in OLAs than paper-based exams	F %	11 (7.2)	67 (43.8)	68 (44.4)	7 (4.6)		

	Not having adequate proficiency in dealing with ICTs affects students' performance in OLAs	F %	9 (5.9)	91 (59.5)	48 (31.4)	5 (3.3)		
	students' lack of online facilities and resources negatively affects' the results of the tests	F %	13 (8.5)	83 (54.2)	48 (31.4)	9 (5.9)		
	The need to adapt the tests to suit online hardware and software capabilities takes a lot of time and effort.	F %	16 (10.5)	84 (54.9)	53 (34.6)	-	-	