

Challenges and Opportunities: Experiences of EFL Teachers with the Emergency Remote Teaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract:

COVID-19 has forced Higher Education Institutions around the world to suspend face-to-face courses and implement emergency remote teaching (ERT) as an alternative with the primary goal of ensuring continuity of teaching and learning processes. This study explored the experiences of EFL teachers from the Department of English at Hassiba Benbouali University of Chlef in response to the sudden switch to an ERT environment during the times of COVID. The results revealed two main themes of opportunities and challenges. While the sudden shift to online teaching forced innovation and fostered collaborative and supportive teaching environment, teachers experienced difficulties in accessing technology, lack of digital competence and pedagogical training on the use of ICT, and difficulty of assessing students online. This study has implications in the field of education and research at large.

Keywords: Emergency remote teaching, COVID-19 pandemic, Higher education, EFL teachers, ICT

1.Introduction:

With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic (hereinafter COVID), Higher Education Institutions around the globe were forced to adapt to emergency remote teaching (ERT) (Fhloinn & Fitzmaurice, 2021) through learning management systems (e.g., Moodle, Canvas) and video-conferencing software (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams) (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020; Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021). In the second semester of 2020, the pandemic confronted teachers and students at the global level with unpredictable and unprecedented challenges.

As a direct consequence of the COVID outbreak, about 1.7 billion students in over 190 countries have been displaced and affected by school and university closures (UNESCO, 2020), resulting in a major education crisis. Emergency remote teaching (ERT) settings have been a vital answer to this education crisis, although they differ greatly from 'traditional' online learning (Huertas-Abril, 2020). Online learning is a well-established pedagogical paradigm that has been studied and debated from many angles. Educators associate online education with a variety of opportunities and challenges, and an unprecedented global pandemic, COVID-19, recently made traditional classroom teaching momentarily impossible (Fuchs & Karrila, 2021). ERT is a novel sub-paradigm that differs from traditional online

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learning in terms of characteristics and challenges. The design and implementation of ERT measures are likely to be dependent on various contextual and human factors and related challenges (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021).

Remote teaching in the Higher Education sector is a relatively common practice, and the implementation of digital solutions in English teaching offers many new opportunities and tools. During the lockdown, teaching remotely provided a good opportunity to revise teaching strategies and assessment methods that had previously been employed in normal circumstances (Alqurshi, 2020). While online education has a lot of affordances, there are also some unique challenges associated with the delivery format that require careful planning and attention during implementation. The COVID has raised significant challenges for the Higher Education community worldwide. A particular challenge has been the urgent and unexpected request for previously face-to-face university courses to be taught online (Rapanta, Botturi, Goodyear, Guàrdia, & Koole, 2020). The threat of COVID-19 has presented some unique challenges for institutions of higher education. All parties involved – students, teachers, and staff – are being asked to do extraordinary things in terms of course delivery and learning that have never been done before on this scale in the lifetimes of anyone currently involved (Hodges et al., 2020).

The challenge all teachers in Algerian institutions and around the world are currently experiencing is the sudden shift to distance learning enforced as a measure to curb the spread of COVID-19. From the mid of March 2020 the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education has urged all schools, institutions and universities in the country to indefinitely suspend student attendance, and to activate distance learning as an alternative. Henceforth, teaching was carried out remotely and replaced by virtual classrooms in what is frequently termed by researchers ‘*Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT)*’ (Abarca, 2021; Hodges et al., 2020), ‘*Crisis- prompted Remote Teaching*’ (Gacs, Goertler, & Spasova, 2020) or ‘*the Crisis-response Migration*’ (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020), especially to distinguish between courses delivered online in reaction to a crisis or disaster that would normally be taught in person and courses that are specifically created for online delivery (Hodges et al., 2020 as cited in Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021). This was possible via the use of online learning management systems such as LMS Moodle and Microsoft Teams. In this respect, the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education has monitored the transition across the country and contributed to its efficiency. The availability of a remote learning infrastructure, such as subscriptions to the Learning Management System (LMS) of Moodle, as well as the availability of experts in each institution, made it possible to continue teaching during the lockdown period.

A growing body of published research from a number of different countries has explored educator experiences of emergency remote teaching during the period of COVID-19 confinement (Erlam et al., 2021; Fhloinn & Fitzmaurice, 2021; Jimoyiannis, Koukis, & Tsiotakis, 2021; Juárez-Díaz & Perales, 2021; Sulistyani, Utomo, & Kristanto, 2021; Valsaraj, More, Biju, Payini, & Pallath, 2021). From the study of researchers, research that discusses the Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is still small. Therefore it is necessary to conduct research on emergency remote teaching at the level of Higher Education sourced from the experience of EFL teachers to further enrich the findings of the application of English teaching during the pandemic. While there is considerable interest in the experience of remote teaching globally, knowing how this was experienced locally (i.e. within the Algerian Higher Education context), along with strategies in how to better manage to work with students requires further exploration.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to investigate how a cohort of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in the Algerian Higher Education Institutions experienced the sudden transition from traditional face-to-face teaching to emergency remote teaching during the initial university closures that took place due to the COVID-19 lockdown period, in the spring semester around March 2020. Specifically, this paper addresses the following research questions:

1. What was the experience of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers to the Emergency Remote Teaching during the time of COVID-19?
2. Were they ready for the sudden switch to the ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What are the key opportunities and challenges resulting from the COVID global pandemic as perceived by EFL teachers?

Asking such questions gave informants a greater opportunity to express themselves spontaneously in the time of the sudden switch to the ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Significance of the Study

This research is significant for a number of reasons. Most importantly, this empirical study contributes to a better understanding of how EFL teachers reacted to the sudden switch to ERT and adapted the techno-pedagogical practices during an unprecedented crisis of COVID-19. Therefore, ERT experiences of EFL teachers in this study were evaluated, including affordances and challenges enforced in online language education due to the pandemic, educational methods as well as regular use of their institution's Learning Management System (LMS) Moodle that can ensure continuity in the education of language learners at any level.

In this paper, we will analyse the experiences of EFL teachers at the Department of English at Hassiba Benbouali University of Chlef, and more specifically paying special attention to the opportunities and challenges encountered in response to the ERT environment during the times of COVID.

2. Literature Review

This section first presents the nature of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) and the potential challenges for teachers shifting from traditional face-to-face teaching to virtual settings, particularly during COVID-19. Next, it underlines the difference between emergency remote teaching and online learning.

2.1. Emergency Remote Teaching

Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) refers to a specific way of teaching offered in crisis circumstances, and it has become an alternative term used by education researchers and practitioners to distinguish it from high-quality, well-designed online education (Dvorakova, Emmer, Janktová, & Klementová, 2021). The recent outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a renewed interest in emergency ERT, a temporary crisis-prompted educational response with the primary objective of continuing normal teaching online (Hodges et al., 2020). In general, ERT includes the use of a variety of technologies (Hodges et al., 2020), including synchronous communication tools (e.g., course delivery platforms and social media), asynchronous collaboration platforms, and online electronic resources (see Table 1; Li, 2021). ERT entails the deployment of remote teaching solutions that would otherwise be delivered face-to-face or as blended or hybrid courses and will be restored once the crisis or emergency tapers off (Dvorakova et al., 2021) (Hodges et al., 2020). The key objective in these circumstances is to give temporary access to instruction and instructional supports in a

way that is easy to set up and reliable during an emergency or crisis (Hodges et al., 2020). Bozkurt and Sharma (2020) further accentuate that emergency remote teaching is an obligation (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020).

With the emergence of ERT in higher education during COVID-19, faculty members had to go through a transformation in teaching learning without preparedness (Valsaraj et al., 2021). However, many teachers may find switching to ERT difficult, especially given the limited time available for planning, preparedness, and development of ERT (Gacs et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020). Despite their efforts, teachers were short on time due to the fact that many were split between learning how to operate new technologies and teaching (Alqurshi, 2020).

ERT presents a variety of challenges in addition to those that arise in traditional online learning settings. Disasters usually strike without warning, causing educational institutions to close unexpectedly, leaving the academic community surprised and unprepared. The main challenges in such situations can include an educational institution's lack of preparation for using online technology and instructors' lack of experience offering online education, both of which can have a detrimental impact on student engagement. However, there are some benefits to ERT, such as revisiting teacher-centred teaching practises and figuring out how to shift to more student-centred and self-learning ways in the classroom. That is, learners take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers are also obliged to experiment with new technologies in their teaching practises such as the use of video conferencing services (Google Meet and Zoom). In regard to the context of the current study, EFL teachers during the lockdown became more knowledgeable about the different functionalities of the LMS Moodle at Hassiba Benbouali University of Chlef such uploading courses in different formats as well as giving assignments to their learners.

Following a disrupted Spring 2020 semester at all levels of education as a result of COVID-19 forcing Higher Education Institutions to transfer classrooms online, we are urged to begin by differentiating between emergency remote teaching and online learning.

2.2. Emergency Remote Teaching versus Online Learning

Online learning and emergency remote teaching (ERT) are often confused and conflated. How these two modes of teaching differ in part depends on how both online learning and ERT are defined.

ERT is defined as a sudden interim shift in learning delivery from the face-to-face to the online delivery mode in response to a disaster/crisis; in contrast, online learning involves the voluntary planning and design of virtual delivery (Hodges et al., 2020). To reiterate, ERT is a teaching solution amid the COVID-19 crisis and should not be classified as general online learning (Cahyadi et al., 2021). ERT comprises ultimate exploitation of the available remote teaching tools for delivering the curriculum or educational materials that would normally be delivered physically or as hybrid or blended courses. Once the disaster or catastrophe circumstances abate, the instructional delivery will revert to its original format (Mohammed et al., 2020). Thus, ERT is characterised as being a rapid response to the current worldwide crisis. It is extremely important to note that

the primary objective in these circumstances is not to re-create a robust educational ecosystem but rather to provide temporary access to instruction and instructional supports in a manner that is quick to set up and is reliably available during an emergency or crisis (Hodges et al., 2020, p. 6).

The term 'online learning' is extensively used, however it has many different connotations. For the purposes of this research, online learning is defined as learning that is facilitated by the use of the Internet and some other important technologies to develop materials for educational purposes, instructional delivery and management of program (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). According to Hrastinski (2008), there are two types of online learning, asynchronous and synchronous online learning, that are frequently compared, but teachers, organisations, and institutions must have a thorough understanding of the benefits and limitations for online learning to be effective and efficient.

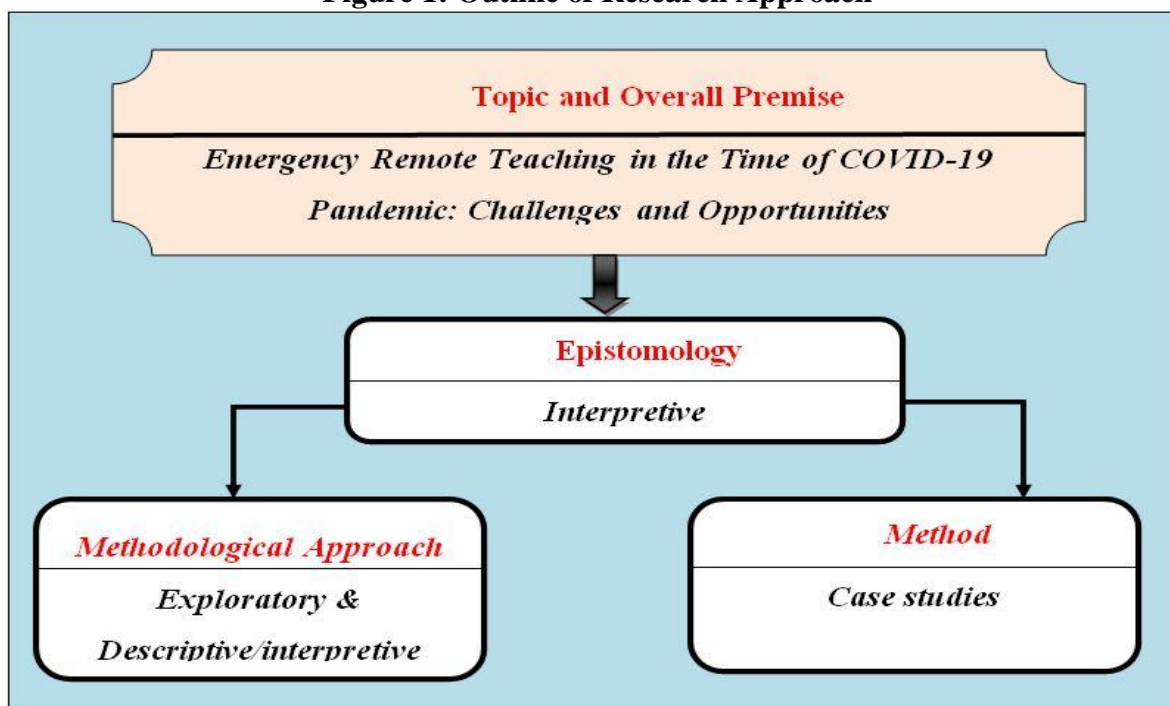
The term 'educational ecosystem' is important in understanding the various instructional features of learning environments, whether face-to-face or online, in order to provide learners with tools that assist them to develop a learning community beyond information transmission (Ucok-Sayrak & Brazelton, 2021). Furthermore, the researchers Hodges et al. (2020) point out that learning is enhanced not just by a strong curriculum, but also by the support and infrastructure that surrounds the learning process during on-site teaching. This raises the question of whether teachers have the technical and pedagogical knowledge required to design and implement an ERT process that is sufficiently professionally developed to engage students and increase online learning (Abarca, 2021).

Based on the above discussions, it is obvious that emergency remote teaching differs from online learning; the primary objective of ERT is to provide temporary access through available and reliable media or platforms during an emergency (Cahyadi, Hendryadi, Widyastuti & Suryani, 2021) while online learning is more sustainable, and instructional activities will become more hybrid, if the challenges encountered during the pandemic are thoroughly explored and transformed into opportunities. Thus, the ERT method can be understood as a rapid solution and should be distinguished from 'online learning'.

3. Research Methodology

This study draws on an interpretive/constructive paradigm because of the nature of the research that is conducted to gain a deeper understanding and insight about the perceptions of the lived experiences of the EFL teachers in relation to the unexpected and sudden switch to the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in an emergency remote teaching environment during the unusual circumstances with the spread of COVID. A qualitative research design was used to gain a broad overview of the issues pertinent to the three research questions through individual, semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face to facilitate in-depth exploration and rich insight into informants' lived experiences and perceptions. Therefore, the philosophical stance that is taken for the current research is interpretivism. Relating to this philosophy the appropriate research approach that is incorporated for the study is inductive. The research approach used for this study is diagrammatically shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Outline of Research Approach



Source: Reviewing the literature

An exploratory qualitative research is carried out to understand the experiences of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in regard to the sudden shift to the ERT environment during times of COVID. It seeks to access the inner world of perception and made to understand, describe and explain the social process from the perspective of study informants. This type of inquiry takes the researcher on a voyage of discovery as it takes an inductive approach to data analysis and research outcomes.

3.1 Informants and Context

In order to achieve the study objectives, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four EFL teachers at the Department of English Hassiba Benbouali University of Chlef regarding their perspectives and experiences with the sudden switch to emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 confinement.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

A qualitative research methodology was used to gain a broad overview of the issues pertinent to the three research questions. Data were collected through individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews to facilitate in-depth exploration and rich insight into informants' lived experiences and perceptions of emergency remote teaching.

The qualitative analysis of the data was performed with NVivo Plus version 11, a qualitative analysis software. While software can help researchers organise enormous volumes of qualitative data, it is the researcher's mind, not any software programme, that drives analysis. Thematic analysis was employed for data analysis in order to achieve a detailed description. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) and Schwandt (2007), thematic analysis is an exploratory approach in which the research analysis aims to uncover patterns or themes within the texts. Bryman (2012) asserts that these themes are related to the study's

central premise, and that they should also be included in the interview questions, assisting in the response to the research questions.

4. Results and Interpretation

The crux of the informants' responses to their experiences teaching English in an ERT environment was reduced to seven themes during the analytical process, which resulted in a complex interaction among the various themes. Three themes relating to Research Question 1 (aligned with ERT teachers' experiences) were identified. To Research Question 2, two further themes (concerning the preparedness for a sudden switch to the ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic) were answered. Finally, Research Question 3 was represented by the other two themes (which were connected to the opportunities and challenges that EFL teachers saw while teaching in an ERT environment). The results are shown below according to the three research questions.

4.1 EFL Teachers' Experience of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT)

This study set out with the first research question of assessing EFL teachers' experiences of teaching in the context of COVID-19 ERT.

To investigate how EFL teachers would describe their experience of emergency remote teaching, it was first of interest to establish a baseline for their experience in online teaching. This proved to be very low, with the vast majority (95%) of informants reporting little or no experience prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. As one of the informants stated, 'Now, I myself had an experience too, with online lessons, but there is a problem. The first time you hear something called online lessons, say moving from face to face to online teaching. Online teaching which means that all your students are connected with the Internet. And they are, for example, sitting at home and watching you online teaching then. No, this is not the what is really happening here.' Though many regarded this as an opportunity, the interviews revealed that teachers were unprepared, both in terms of digital pedagogical skills and their competence to modify existing materials for online use. Excerpts from the four teachers are presented below, revealing their experiences coping with teaching of English in an ERT environment during the times of COVID-19.

4.2 EFL Teachers' Readiness of ERT

The second question in this study sought to assess EFL teachers' readiness for teaching in an online environment.

There were two opposing viewpoints in regard to the readiness of teachers to the implementation of ICT in an ERT context. On the positive side, one of the informants said, 'I was ready for the sudden switch to the ERT during the COVID 19 pandemic because I keep saying that I'm the one who can be considered as the advocates of ICT usage.' On the flip side, an informant stated, 'Some of the teachers prefer to use ICTs and encourage others to use technology, at least a step-by-step process. And some others don't welcome the idea. Even if they didn't say it, frankly, but through their daily behaviour, you will notice that they are not really ready to use technology or ICTs.'

4.3 Key Opportunities and Challenges of Teaching English Remotely

The third research question aimed to explain the underlying challenges and opportunities that EFL teachers encountered with the novel mode of teaching in an ERT environment within the times of the spread of COVID. Addressing the third research question between challenges and opportunities for teaching English remotely, six sub-themes emerged during the analytical process (see Figure 2).

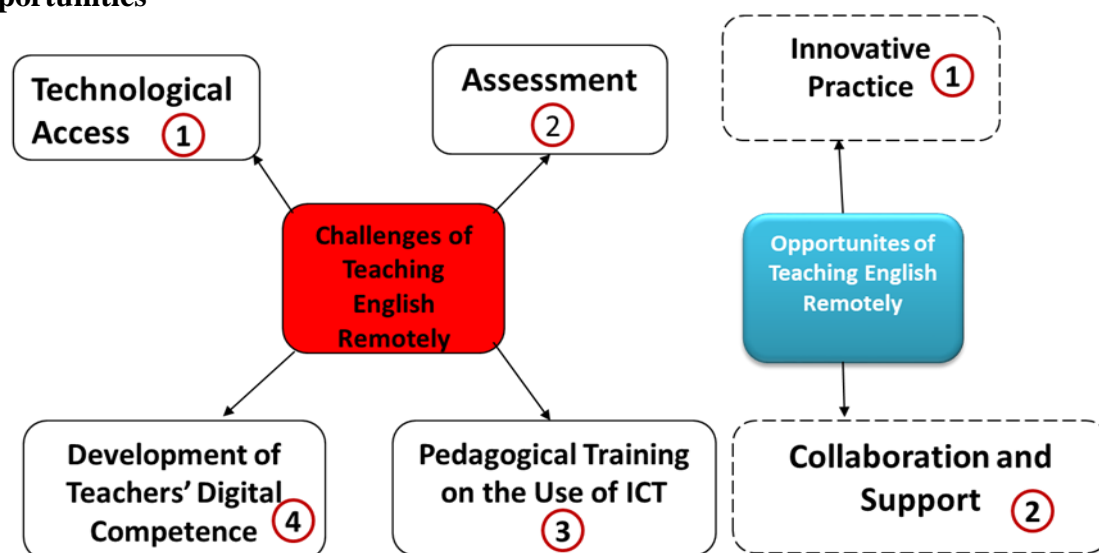
4.3.1 Challenge 1: Technological Access

All informants mentioned that access to the internet and maintaining a stable connection are two major concerns in teaching and learning in an ERT environment. As clearly stated by one of the participants, ‘We have internet connection we have wireless internet without password, no password. It means no access to the internet we have the internet but no access to this internet... It affects both the teacher and the learner ... because of no access to or no easy access to the internet, or it is slow. So it’s a real obstacle for teachers’. In this respect one of the informants emphatically stated, ‘many students living in rural places or that are considerate, shadow area where they lack even the electricity, water. So it is far to talk about something called the internet. So the teacher should take this into consideration.’ A responding teacher drew an analogy between the internet connection and a turtle by saying, ‘Even when you have the internet, it is slower than the turtle itself.’

4.3.2 Challenge 2: Assessment

Most of the teachers were worried about the best way of performing tests online. In this regard one of the informants said, ‘When teachers are performing an exam online, students are likely to cheat and plagiarise that’s a handicap or a problem while using online courses.’

Figure 2. Thematic map for visual representation of themes related to Challenges and Opportunities



Source :Prepared by the researchers of this research paper

4.3.3 Challenge 3: Pedagogical Training on the Use of ICT

Other teachers commented on the significance of being trained on how to use ICTs pedagogically for the benefit of the learners. In this respect, one of the informants shared, ‘we need training. Real training is requested concerning the appropriate use of ICT and to keep it in its field, which is the pedagogical field on how to benefit your learner. This is the big goal, how to put ICT in service to your learners. This is the way.’ In a similar vein, another informant said, ‘I feel that I need more training in the use of ICTs.’

3.3.4 Challenge 4 Development of Teachers’ Digital Competence

The transition to online education has been challenging for many teachers as a result of the sudden shifting to online environment instead of face-to-face teaching due to the

restrictions of confinement imposed on Higher Education Institutions across the globe to limit the spread of COVID-19 pandemics. Despite this, it could be regarded as a promising opportunity to enhance teachers' digital skills, especially for EFL teachers.

Although these comments reflect the challenging negative points to online learning, the teachers also discussed the opportunities at length.

3.3.5 Opportunity 1: Innovative Practice

Responding teachers agreed that the transition to emergency remote teaching provided opportunities to enrich their lessons with different activities. Their comments provided important information about their perspectives on the opportunities of online teaching of English. One teacher commented that there are two categories of teachers in regard to the use of ICT by saying, *'Some people are for the use of ICTs, and they think that it's very beneficial, and it's high time to start using those ICTs. But some people are still sticking to those traditional ancient methods and they refuse any sort of change and they stick to their old methods of teaching.'* However, a frequently mentioned positive point was the innovation of their teaching practices as compared to before the time of the spread of COVID pandemic. In this regard, an informant stated that, *'COVID as a pandemic, as it has many negative points. I'd say it brought some positives, which is the sudden use, as you said, the sudden move towards online teaching. It means that this pandemic was a source toward modernising teaching. According to me, pandemic or COVID-19 was a positive thing concerning ICT usage.'*

Overall, informants reflected on the need to alter their pedagogical approaches to engage learners in the online classroom. The vast majority of the participants emphasised on the integral role of engaging learners at the centre of this online environment. In their efforts, teachers pushed themselves to learn how to use video conferencing applications such as Google Meet and Zoom. Though many noted this as an opportunity, it became clear in the interviews that teachers were unprepared both in terms of their digital pedagogical skills and their ability to adapt existing materials for online use. An informant, for example, stated, *'Technology didn't come to be an obstacle for teachers but indeed it comes to pave the way towards more modernised teaching styles.'*

3.3.6 Opportunity 2: Collaboration and Support

The majority of the informants agreed upon one point of receiving great help from the Head of the Department of English during the spread of COVID and the unexpected closure of Higher Education Institutions in Algeria during the Spring Semester of 2020. In this regard, one of the informants said, *'the Head of the Department and her staff are taking the initiative to encourage teachers to use ICT is to use technology in online teaching. For example, they are encouraging online meetings today, online meetings such as the use of Zoom and Google Meeting applications.'*

5. Discussion, Implications and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion of Findings

This research paper posed three research questions relating to the experiences of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Higher Education adapting to emergency remote teaching. Initially, we tried to understand how Algerian EFL teachers would describe their experiences with emergency remote teaching during the time of COVID in the Algerian Higher Education. It is worth noting that over 95% of informants reported little or no prior experience of teaching English in an online environment and the sudden shift to online teaching necessitates the development of 'new digital skills and competencies' in which both teachers and students adapt themselves to the new situation (Huertas-Abril, 2020). This is

consistent with the findings of Fhloinn and Fitzmaurice (2021). Understandably, teachers around the world were not prepared for this rapid shift to online teaching (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021). Despite this, the findings of this research has found that the Higher Education EFL teachers had an overall positive acceptance of ICT and perceptions of teaching English in an online environment.

The results of the study show the urgency of the sudden shift to online teaching during the time of COVID-19 pandemic necessitated teachers' readiness and acceptance of technologies. This general finding is in line with Li's (2021) findings, that highlight that 'EFL teachers were overall affirmative in acceptance and knowledge, implying their general readiness for the ICT use in COVID-19 emergency remote teaching. Many teachers may find transitioning to ERT challenging, especially given the limited time available for planning, preparation, and development (Li, 2021). Thus, ERT needs teachers' readiness for ICT since it can influence the speed and quality of ICT integration (Petko, Prasse, & Cantieni, 2018). In order to enhance the successful use of digital technologies in an online environment, teacher readiness needs to be addressed.

When asked about the particular challenges associated with the emergency remote teaching of English, most of the responding informants stated the lack or total absence of the Internet connection especially in rural and shadow areas. The lack of access to a fast, affordable, and stable Internet connection in some areas of Algeria is a major obstacle to the ERT implementation, as earlier researchers have pointed out (e.g., Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Cahyadi et al., 2021; Mohammed et al., 2020). Further, the study shows – also in line with previous findings – that students in rural and shadow areas may lack network bandwidth, resulting in a loss of educational opportunities.

Teachers have been challenged in various ways by the ongoing ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic, needing a higher level of ICT integration on their part to cope with the crisis. ERT requires teachers to develop technological knowledge for the wide adoption of ICT tools. However, the informants highlighted that they found more obstacles in responding to the challenges of innovative teaching. They were not confident in integrating ICT in pedagogy and subject matter. To address digital competence as an emergency remote teaching challenge, Ala-Mutka et al. (2008) proposed that educational institutions should design a platform for learning digital skills and integrate it in teaching and learning process of all subjects (Babatunde Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). Thus, a quick needs analysis is needed in an unexpected circumstance with remote teaching to understand teachers' and students' needs in terms of technology, workload, access, accessibility, equity, and inclusion (Gacs et al., 2020).

Within a couple of months of the spread of COVID, most of the teachers felt that their experience with the sudden switch to emergency remote teaching would impact upon their future teaching by developing new digital pedagogical skills that they intended to pursue to use in the future, a finding that agrees with numerous studies regarding the online teaching of English (Kohnke & Jarvis, 2021). Teachers who do not have sufficient skills to use digital technology in their teaching practices are unlikely to use ICT on a regular basis and in an effective way. Different strands of research have come to similar conclusions (e.g., Petko et al., 2018; Tarhini, Arachchilage, Masa'deh, and Abbasi, 2015).

A further unexpected challenge of remote learning is portrayed on the part of the teachers in the face of competing needs and no training for both teachers and students for online learning. This had a negative impact on both students' and teachers' experiences, but a few were able to thrive thanks to their autonomous learning skills. This result is similar to

Juárez-Díaz & Perales's (2021) finding that the inexperienced teachers made an effort to learn how to teach remotely on their own when they were faced with the reality of ERT and the lack of clear institutional policies and support. In this regard, the researchers Valsaraj et al. (2021) concluded that professional development for faculty members is required to guide them on course delivery by enhancing themselves through support systems, training, and upgrading various skills to enhance online teaching and learning effectiveness. As a result, students experiencing this change are also needed to boost their various IT abilities.

While there were many challenges with the speed of the lockdown during the COVID, there were also some unexpected benefits discovered by EFL teachers working remotely. One such benefit supported in the literature (Kohnke & Jarvis, 2021) was innovative practice. A study of Mexican EFL teachers demonstrated similar concern by which online teaching generated positive feelings in some participants such as satisfaction when teachers could develop new teaching strategies, learn about ICT, and apply their knowledge to ERT (Juárez-Díaz & Perales, 2021). A further unexpected positive aspect of remote teaching is the collaboration and support among teachers. A study of Japanese teachers demonstrated similar concern particularly for teachers to seek and offer support to one another in the form of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (Gorham & Ogata, 2020).

5.2 Implications

The findings of the present study have implications for education practitioners, policymakers, and researchers as a whole. This is a transformative period, with huge opportunities for digital technology to improve remote teaching and learning at all levels of education around the world. This research paper recounts human experiences with the unexpected transition from traditional face-to-face teaching to emergency remote teaching for current and future Higher Education under undesirable COVID outbreak conditions. The current study also emphasises how difficult this abrupt change was on teachers' lives, and how successfully they need to be mentored for the future by policymakers maximising the opportunities gained by the Coronavirus disease. Another implication of this research is that when preparing for ERT, not only teachers but also students need to be trained. This training should not only focus on technology skills, but also autonomous learning skills. The adoption of online education is ineffective without adequate infrastructure. The pandemic has made us aware that Algeria still has severe constraints, particularly in terms of reliability, stability, and low-cost Internet access. Future research could identify effective tools and techniques for enhancing university professional education.

5.3 Limitations and Associated Opportunities for Future Research

Although present study has yielded valuable findings, it has several limitations with respect to sampling and methods. First, this study is a case study aimed at investigating the experiences of EFL teachers of Higher Education Institutions who had to adapt to the new norm of enforced online teaching or ERT to ensure the continuity of teaching and learning process. A major limitation was the small sample size, which could have been caused by the restrictions imposed on the recruitment of informants, with most invitations to participate being restricted. Despite the fact that this was a small qualitative case study, its findings provide essential insights into EFL teaching by uncovering the experiences of teachers in regard to the challenges and opportunities that they encounter during emergency remote teaching environment. Furthermore, using a variety of research methods might be beneficial. Qualitative approaches are appropriate for an initial investigation in an emerging field, but a quantitative or mixed-method study combining qualitative and quantitative methods could yield more robust results. Future studies could use questionnaires, observations, and reflective

accounts to collect additional data points. A quantitative or mixed-method methodology might also be used to examine a larger sample size for the collection of additional data points.

Future opportunity is associated with the aforementioned limitations that may lead researchers to do the future studies by collecting data from the informants of different Higher Education Institutions in Algeria or from another country in the Arab world or by conducting future studies in a multi-country and comparison can be drawn to explore the experiences of shifting from face to face teaching to an ERT environment in a cross-cultural context. Overall, the willingness of teachers to try novel pedagogical practices, their readiness to embed new technologies in their pedagogy, and the incorporation of engaging activities were all factors in successful emergency remote teaching. Future research could investigate whether the pedagogical innovations brought about by the pandemic were sustained, adapted, and blended into a technology-enhanced teaching. Future studies are also needed to tackle the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on educators as well as students. Investigations into student experiences would be of paramount importance in determining which learning and teaching strategies would be most well received in the future.

5.4 Conclusion

The results of this qualitative research provide a snapshot of a unique period in time, where teachers scrambled to adapt to emergency remote teaching in order to ensure the continuation of their students' education. The current study has highlighted the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers transitioning to unexpected remote teaching environment at a university in the west of Algeria. Many teachers have found themselves navigating 'shifting sands' in both their professional and personal lives in the face of digital technologies in this unusual circumstances of the disease. The insights into the experiences of the four EFL teachers, most of whom had little to no prior history of teaching in an online environment, provoke many more questions regarding the most appropriate manner to design online programmes in English teaching, and how to adequately address the numerous challenges raised in relation to the effective provision of English education online. These challenges included the lack or absence of stable Internet connection for both teachers and students, a lack of digital competence and pedagogical training on the use of ICT, and difficulty of assessing students online.

Noted in the semi-structured interviews with teachers is also the embracing of new learning opportunities. More positively, the shifting to a sudden remote teaching has enabled and encouraged collaboration and support among colleagues with one or different Higher Education Institutions, and it has been a beneficial experience for teachers for the innovation of their teaching practices in the future. A significant percentage of informants have amassed experience, knowledge and resources that will complement their face-to-face teaching moving forward.

The informants in this study have insisted on the urgent need of providing training sessions for the benefits of both teachers and learners in order to maintain learning and teaching and coping with challenging times. Reiterating the words of one of the informants, *'We need training programmes. They are beneficial. They provide new experiences and new inventions in the field of teaching.'* This research has provided an opportunity to think about how teachers react and respond in challenging situations. The shift to the ERT is a potential choice for the future, but its implementation needs to consider various aspects, namely infrastructure and technology resources (hardware, software, devices, and a fast, affordable,

and reliable Internet connection), financial resources (the socioeconomic problems of the whole of the faculty members), the internal organisational environment (curriculum, staff development, support technicians, teachers, technology, and others).

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