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A Phenomenological study of online EFL Classrooms during Covid-19 Pandemic: Learners' Perspectives

Linguistics Society of Iran

[1]Hemrah Salimi* **[2]Seyyed Ayatollah Razmjoo** **[3]Abdorreza Tahriri**

ABSTRACT

In this phenomenological study, the researchers probed the learners' perspectives and lived experiences of effective online English language classes at BA level, majoring in TEFL, through purposive sampling. Also, the differences between online classes and in-person ones were investigated from the viewpoint of the learners regarding their motivation.

There have been plenty of problems in online classes during Corona pandemic in all levels of education in Iran, and these problems are being considered and paid attention to just from the perspective of the administers and trainers and the lived experiences and perspectives of the learners have been totally neglected or at least not probed into yet thoroughly. The data collection technique used in this study was in-depth interviewing with seven BA students of TEFL (both males and females) and the data were coded and explicated through Colaizzi's seven step coding strategy.

The results of the study were categorized into two themes namely a) Teacher characteristics and b) Online classes. The findings of the study showed that students expect their online classes to be more communicative, practical and productive.

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1. **Corresponding Author:** PhD student of TEFL, University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran. Email: *hemra.salimi@gmail.com*, ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6347-3532

2. Full Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran Email: *arazmjoo@rose.shirazu.ac.ir*, ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/ 0000-0002-6542-9399

3. Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Guilan, Iran, *Email: atahriri@gmail.com*

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1. Introduction

There have been plenty of investigations of effective language classes throughout the history of SLA from the perspective of language teachers (Murray, 1991; Bell, 2005; Badri, et al., 2016; Islam, 2017). These researchers and many more have endeavored to investigate the teacher perceptions in different classes and educational contexts, with different learners at different age groups and different levels of education, form school age learners to higher education students. However the investigation is only in its infancy regarding the learners' perspectives (Gardner, 2010; Nesic & Stojkovic, 2018; Drood, et al., 2020). According to the researchers, the reason for this lack of research, is the fact that the learners are totally unwilling to cooperate in this kind of research.

Recognizing the learners' perceptions of ideal and effective language classes, the teachers could be more able to have better plans for their educational systems and also the sources of the changes that possibly occur during the process of teaching. Also, this is of paramount importance during the Corona pandemic in online classes. Learner perception can be investigated from myriad of perspectives, such as their perception of Teacher characteristics, Classroom interaction, and Class performance (Drood et al., 2020) as well as classroom environment, teaching materials, etc.

As the second language learners (SLLs) are the sole beneficiaries of English language classrooms, and the classroom activities will finally lead to their achievements, neglecting their perspectives of the class seems illogical and in case it is probed into, it might be fruitful both for the language teachers and the learners themselves. Moreover, the teachers, considering the needs of a given group of learners, can use the findings of this study for their prospective classes. They can take the students' needs into account and figure the problems related to their needs out. This study investigated the perceptions of English language learners of their classes.

Literature Review

Horwitz (1990) investigated the students' perceptions of the language classes and concluded that the existing differences between students and teachers' desires can cause students to have less confidence and little satisfaction with the language class they are attending. Elsewhere, Murray (1991) studied the perceptions of the students from language classes and categorized them into specific behaviors like enthusiasm/expressiveness, clarity of explanation, and rapport/interaction and concluded that these behaviors can describe effective teaching. In the same line, Arnold (1999) worked on learner-oriented visions of the ELT classes and illuminated on the importance of caring and sharing in ESL/EFL classrooms. This act would critically hamper "the type of education that sparks [young people's] enthusiasm and leads them towards a true love of learning and independent thinking" (Arnold 1998:236).

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Furthermore, Gardner (2010) studied the learner motivation and concluded that higher motivations of the language learners can lead to higher achievement of them. Similarly, Wei & Elias (2011) found out relationships between learners' perception of classroom context and motivation.

Nesic & Stojkovic (2017) proved that positive experiences of the students' prior language learning environments as well as their teacher's way of teaching can enhance their achievement in SL classes. They also proved that besides linguistic elements such as grammatical and conversational skills, learners are in need of non-linguistic assistance form their teachers in English language classrooms, examples of which are motivation, anxiety and attitudes. In the same year, Islam (2017) found that teachers' thoughtful observation and proper conceptualization of factors such as teachers' belief, teachers' talk, teachers' questioning, diversity and complexity of ELT classroom, classroom values and individual learner differences as well as teaching approaches can ensure effective English language teaching-learning practices. However, he believes that these characteristics are rather inherent in the interactional activities performed by the learners in the classrooms and demands high conceptualization by the teachers in the classrooms.

Salih & Ali (2018) reported the implication of recent growth of ELT practices and areas such as learner identity, code selection in the classroom, teaching methods, syllabus design and material development.

In a recent study, Drood et al. (2020) proved that there is a significant difference "between the teachers' real and favored classroom settings." They studied the perceptions of PhD candidates in universities of Iran about EFL classes they have attended and concluded that EFL learners in Iranian context are mostly affected by two elements of personal experiences and personal beliefs. They believe that their work is unique in its nature since instead of disarranging the nature of a phenomenon, they have endeavored to describe its nature as it happens in the real world, among the learners. This descriptive nature of the paper makes it outstanding and could be a base of further research.

Younesi & Khan (2020) found that a successful online English language program should be complemented with real sessions of teaching in post-Covid-19 period. They believe that teaching online in English language classes is a must in developing countries, especially in India, in which the perceptions of the English language learners have been totally neglected. They also suggested the creating of totally new methods of teaching in post-pandemic era to be used in online EFL classrooms.

Yet in another study, Albashtawi & Al Bataineh (2020) studied the effectiveness of Google classroom on the reading and writing of the EFL learners and concluded that Google classroom improved the learners' reading and writing abilities and it also proved that the learners gained positive attitudes in using Google classrooms in terms of their ease of use, usefulness, and

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accessibility. This study proves the usefulness of online classes in the learners' attitudes towards language learning classrooms.

Phenomenology is defined by many researchers as an enquiry method in qualitative research to discover the lived experiences of the people about the phenomena under study in the society (Husserl, 1965; Merleau-Ponty, 1956; Giorgi, 1985; Parse, 2001, Ary, et al., 2010, Wilding & Whiteford, 2015). Heidegger (1962) believed that humans manifest how to be in the real world rather than think how to be and he also believes that humans can only understand who they are by testing their actions to determine their intentions. In the same study, he mentions that in order to learn about a phenomenon one has to let the phenomenon reveal itself (Heidegger, 1962). Elsewhere, Wilding & Whiteford (2015) suggests that when doing a phenomenological study, the experiences of the participants under study should be considered in a fresh light, since it is believed that phenomenological study reveals the hidden aspects of human perceptions.

The following questions will be sought during this study

1. What are the students' lived experiences and perspectives of effective English language classes?
2. Are the language learners more motivated in online classes than other regular in person classes?

Method

Participants

The participants of this study were selected through purposive sampling from among the BA students of TEFL in Iran. According to the objective of the study which was to investigate the experiences of the English language learners in their English language classes, this non-probability sampling was used. The researcher had requested his colleagues in the universities to announce among their students that there had been a study going on and the study aimed at gathering data about the experiences of the learners in English language classes and those who are willing to participate in the study interview could send an email to the researcher. The researcher received some emails from the students and based on the aims of the study, he selected seven students who, in his opinion, were the best to provide him with responses to the interview questions. The researcher, also, tried to consider geographical variations of the students' living areas to add to the study's validity. Hence, he selected students from different cities of Iran. The seven participants were informed about the objectives and the method of the study and they were also reassured about the confidentiality of the data.

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Research Design

The study was based on phenomenological research design which is a subcategory of qualitative research in which the lived experiences of the learners are sought and investigated through operationalization of the constructs under study. As the participants' perception of an ideal class in their perspective were sought and investigated in this research, the phenomenological research type seemed proper for this the study.

Semi-structured Interview Procedure

The data for this study was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews taken form Drood, et al. (2020) and the participants were interviewed separately and online. In case the learners digress from the desired aims of the study, the interviewer could change the direction of the questions, hence the use of semi-structured interview (Ary, et al., 2018). In this study the style and format of the research was based on Dolbeare and Achuman's (see Schuman, 1982) three part interview to probe deep into the experiences of the participants. The researcher conducted a three part interview with the first part exploring the lived experiences of the participants as junior high and high school students. The participants were asked to talk about their first English language classes at school, the atmosphere of the class, the relationships that existed between them and their teachers and classmates, teacher behavior in the class, and the usefulness of their English language books at school. The second section of the interview was devoted to probing into the reasons of the participants' selection of the English path to continue at the university level and whether they had consulted anyone in this way, or whether the English classes they had had at school were of any use I their decision making. They were also asked to give an account of their current English classes at the university as well as their experiences of the online classes which are currently being held all over the world due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Finally, the last section of the interview dealt with the participants' expectations of the online English language classes and their characteristics, and to compare them with their pre-Covid-19 classes which were held in person in the university. The interview was conducted online through WhatsApp application with three days interval between each section and the timing of the interviews were arranged in advance so that the participants would not be busy on those days.

Data Explication

The data was collected and explicated through Colaizzi's seven step coding strategy to investigate the perceptions of the EFL learners of their desired English language classes. In order to check for the validity of the interviews done by the researchers, Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method (seven step coding strategy) of "member checking" (Drood, et al., 2020) was applied which is provided in figure 1.

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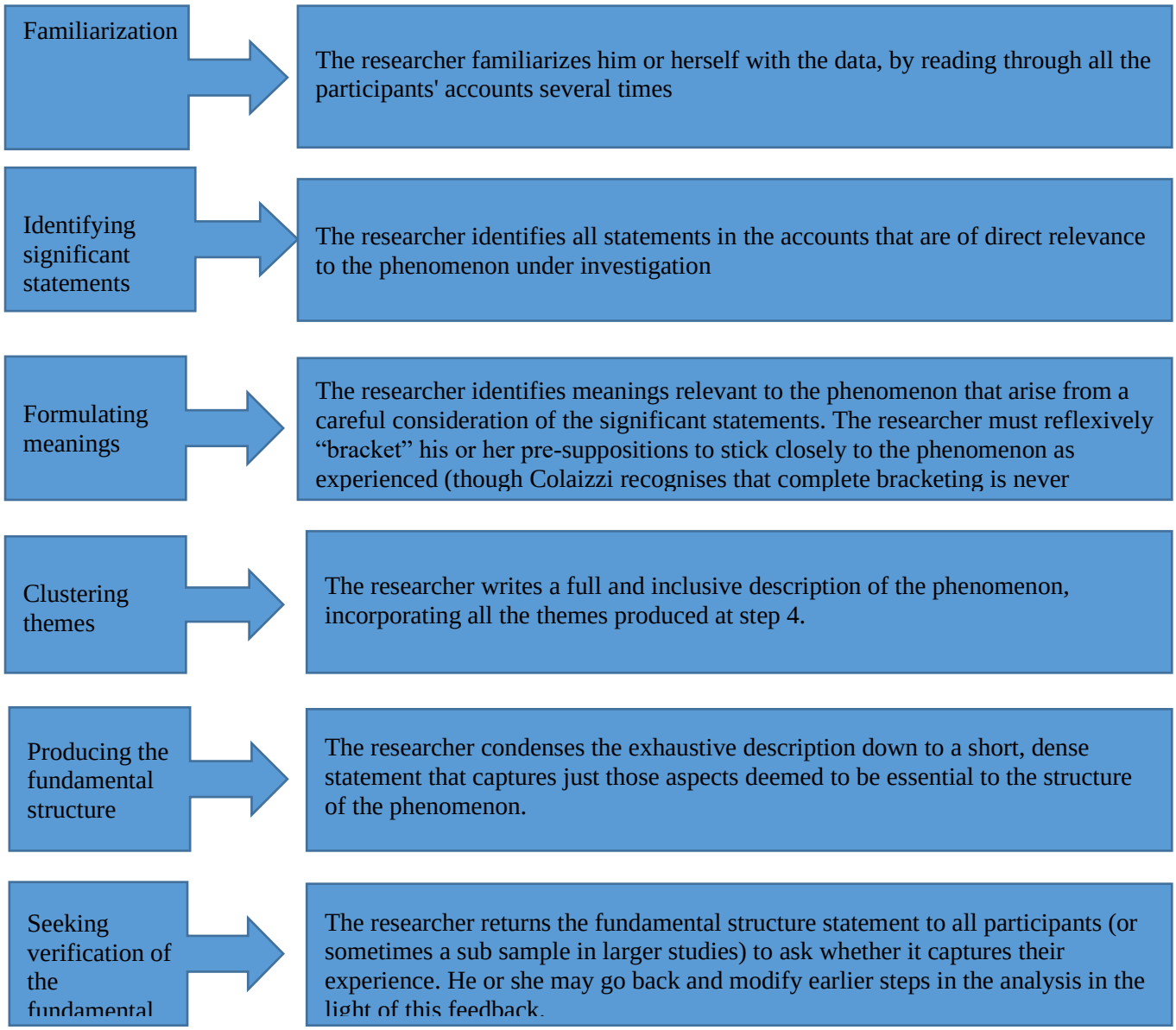


Figure 1. *Colaizzi's Descriptive Phenomenological Method, adopted from Drood et al., 2020*

The Trustworthiness of the Study Findings

In order to validate the study findings as well as the data collection procedure, the researcher checked the interview questions with two other researchers in the field who were experts and also the findings were checked many times to have the correct coding procedure. The data collected through voice call and then were transcribed and sent back to the participants to check for any mismatches with what they had said and what the researcher had transcribed and after getting proofreading from the participants, the data were explicated and coded. Finally the results of the

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study were also shared with the participants to be checked finally by them and in case there were any ideas contrary to what they had meant, the researcher could change them accordingly.

Findings of the Study

Research question 1: What are the students' lived experiences and perspectives of effective English language classes?

In order to investigate the lived experiences of the participants, the researcher had designed some questions in the first and the second sections of the interview and the data collected in these two sections were codified and grouped into three major themes of 1) teacher characteristics, 2) classroom interaction and 3) learner characteristics, which are explicated in the following section with some direct quotations from the participants when necessary.

Theme One: Teacher Characteristics

Subtheme One: Teaching Approaches

There were different opinions regarding the teaching methods and approaches in English language classes and mostly the participants were talking about the poor teaching techniques by teachers and they mentioned that the teachers were like the slaves of the educational system and they had no initiative in teaching English. They believed that the teachers did not consider the needs of the students and used to teach whatever the book and the curriculum had asked them to do.

Maryam believes that she did not have good and competent teachers at school and they were rude with the students and also were absent most of the time. She recounted her experience with her first English teacher at school as:

My teacher hated every second that she spent in our class and she made sure to let us know that she wasn't having a good time with us. She used to take the book and start reading through it without any clear method.

Mostafa was not critical of his language teachers but he mentioned that since his English was good prior to junior high school, he was presumably neglected by the teacher in the class and was somehow blamed by the other students that the teacher is biased towards him. From what he described, it is obvious that the teacher did have a traditional way of teaching in the class by spelling and reading only methods. His experience of one of his classes was as follows:

Most of the time, the teacher used to spell the words for the students, and asked the students to read from the book and gave exams.

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Parisa talks about her teacher's major which was irrelevant to English and created kind of distrust among the students. Due to this reason, the teacher always tried to be the sole power in the class and did not let the students have freedom and creativity. She also mentions that the teacher did not let them do activities in groups. She states that:

Not only our teacher was very strict, but also, in my opinion, she wasn't qualified for teaching English because her major wasn't even English, she studied chemistry in university, so that's the reason I didn't see her qualified for this job.

Basically, she would start chapter each session and ask us to do some activities individually, and as the time went by, it got boring.

On the other hand, Shahin remembers good things about his teacher's teaching methodology but he doesn't exactly say anything about how he taught English language. He just says that his teacher was kind of teaching the four or five students who were good at English and somehow ignoring the others. He describes his class as such:

We were like forty students in one class and the teacher came and say everything about the book and we tried to cooperate with him but not all of the class because there were just four or five students in the class who understood his words but the others didn't.

Among the participants, Mohsen was positive about their teacher's teaching methods and the reason for that, he thinks, is the fact that one of his teachers at high school used to encourage the students by introducing some movies and songs to them, something which might be interesting for the students, something besides the boring books they had in the school. He states:

Our teachers tried their best. For example, they tried to teach us English by watching movies and songs. One of them even brought a foreign friend of his to the class to talk with us which was a very good experience for us. Honestly, it had a big impact on me because it was the first time that I met a Native American with a great accent.

Arezoo thinks that her teacher was a great help in her decision to continue English at university level and she talks about her teacher's giving tests and through the result of one of those tests, she was interested in pursuing English language. And Saman hated English classes at school and due to this reason, he does not remember anything about his teacher's way of teaching.

Subtheme Two: Teacher behavior

Some participants were not satisfied with their English language teachers at school while some others recounted their teachers' good and kind behavior with the students. It seems that those who were not satisfied with their teachers' behavior in the class were the ones who had had English

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language knowledge prior to the school, in English language institutes. It should be born in mind that the system of language teaching at the institutes are totally different from that of the school and consequently the teacher behavior in these two systems are different. In English language schools, the systems are learner centered and the learners are counted as clients or better to call them customers. However, at schools, the story is different and the learners are somehow the last people considered and the system is mostly teacher centered. As a result the teacher behavior is normally not good with the students.

Arezoo was shy and stressed out at first in school and considered her teacher as a threat to herself since she was not like the other students that is she had not participated in any English language program before school. However, after the big exam, as she calls it, and getting a good grade in that exam, she recognized that her teacher was really kind and understanding. She states that:

Well, yeah, and from then I was much more active in the class, I was much more confident and you know motivated because thank god our teacher was so kind and encouraging and motivating, so she was really supportive about (of) me and yeah from then my, you know, this pressure, this insecurity, all of this feeling disappeared and I was much more confident in the class.

Likewise, Shahin talked about his teacher's behavior with the students and considers his teacher as a guide in his English language learning and says:

My first grade teacher in junior high school kind of guided me to express my feelings in English and helped me to make a better connection with English in our class.

Mohsen is also satisfied with his English language teacher at school and talks about his teacher's friendly behavior with the students and even a long lasting one because the teacher was the same both in school and English language institute. He recounts his story as:

I've always had a good experience with my English teachers especially in the first two years of high school where my teacher in high school also was my instructor in an English language institution. He was more like an older friend to me than a teacher who was teaching in high school.

However, two of the participants were not satisfied with their English language teachers at school and they see them as their enemies in the class. For instance, Parisa complained about teacher centered classes at school and stated that:

Honestly, I didn't appreciate the environment because of the concrete centrality of the teacher in the classroom, and secondly the very tense and unfriendly behavior of the teacher.

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Similarly, Maryam talked about her teacher's bad behavior at school and said that she did not have any smile on her face and most of the time threatening the students and warning them that she would not tolerate any childish behavior from the part of the students. She said that:

In the minute she walked into the class, everyone went silent and waited for her to introduce herself, but she didn't do that, instead she stared at us for a good two or three minutes and then said "I'm Ms. A….., which was her last name and I'm your English teacher and I will not tolerate any childish act."

Finally, Saman who did not like his school at all, did not remember anything about his teachers' behavior at school and did not say anything about this question.

Theme Two: Online Classes

Considering the online classes in the university, the participants had different views. At first, they reported, they had hard time adjusting themselves to the online classes that had started suddenly, however, to some extent most of them said that they were happy with the online classes. Based on the participants' interviews, two major categories were figured out which are their anxiety in online classes and the students' expectations from online classes.

Subtheme One: Learner Anxiety and online class environment

Regarding the anxiety caused by and in online classes, the participants mostly agreed on a little anxiety at the initial stages of these online classes since no one was prepared for them, while, they argue, later on they got used to it. For example Maryam believes that these online classes were not effective at first saying that:

I think everybody knows that online classes are not that effective, but it's better than doing nothing.

She also believes that later on these online classes have reduced the amount of time she spent in physical classes which made her tired. She stated that:

One of the good things about these kinds of classes is that you don't get that tired after every class and I'm saying that because when I used to go to university in person, I used to get so tired after every class, …, but now I can have four classes a day and I wouldn't get as tired as I used to before.

like Maryam, Arezoo also believed that the online classes were at first hard to get along with but little by little she got used to them and she thinks that they were much better than the classes they had in person. She also believed that these online classes were

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much more disciplined. However she talked about the confusion that these kinds of classes caused among the students by saying:

The students are confused that whether they are going to talk about different issues or not, or if they are going to participate or not.

She also believed that those students who used to discuss over trivial things in face to face classes and would take a lot of class time, did not have much time and opportunity to talk and hence the discipline in online classes. She argued that:

I can remember that some of our classmates might come up with different subjects in face to face classes, like, it's completely irrelevant to the topic of the class … this would take fifteen or twenty minutes of the class time and the class might be suffering from lack of time to deal with its own purpose.

Similarly, Mostafa talked against the effectiveness of online classes and wished an end to online classes. On the other hand, he believed that the students are learning how to work with the digital equipment and search online for the materials they require. He stated that:

I really don't agree with the effectiveness. Since the online classes are held, due to Covid-19, I think my English had a little failure in it. I think if the online classes are finished and we have normal classes, it will be better. However, it has some effects, for example we have to go through the internet because of our research.

Shahin seems not to have liked the online classes and he stated that he wanted his English classes to be real, in real environment like that of the classroom, and with real classmates. He complained about the online classes by saying:

The online classes, I can say that, I don't like them at all because you are just sitting in your room and you have just your phone and your laptop, and all of the classes, all of the students, all of that atmosphere, the teachers' attitudes, they are all just going to your phone or laptop and they are not the things I wanted.

Saman had both positive and negative attitudes towards online classes. He believed that these kinds of classes were beneficial for students like he himself who were good at self-study skills and could gain a lot of time to study more. However, he assumed online classes of no use for those students who were used to be in teacher or textbook-oriented classes. He stated that:

For me, it is economically time-saving, and due to my curiosity to pursue knowledge, there are so many effective factors in this era.

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He also adds that because of this pandemic, many students gained the knowledge of making computerized files like power-point slides.

Furthermore, Parisa was somehow dissatisfied with online classes and she believed that teaching can take place only when the feelings of the people are involved. She says that:

I don't like online classes because I have an opinion that says people, humans, have feelings, have different thoughts and when they encounter each other, they can convey their messages better and, you know, when, I don't know how to say it, the energy between people when they are around each other is more, so conveying the messages and teaching become easier and you know, more effective, actually.

Among the participants of this study, Mohsen was the only person who declared that he had enjoyed his online classes:

> I'm having a great time with online classes because I always liked online education. In terms of being effective, our online classes were really good due to choosing a good platform which made learning much better and easier.

Subtheme Two: Learner Expectations

The most important element in students' expectations of the online classes seems to be the fact that teachers and instructors had better increase the quality of their teaching and also the amount of their communication with the students. Some of the participants were complaining about not having some teachers' phone numbers to talk their problems over. For example Maryam said that the only expectation she had from online classes was to be able to talk to his teachers in private from time to time. She stated that:

> I can't see them in person and there is no way to contact them or talk to them except for the classes, and I believe that, as a student, I deserve some privacy while talking to my teacher about my problems.

Mostafa also agrees with Maryam regarding the lack of connection between the teachers and the students and mentions the hardship of talking to a teacher whenever they want by saying:

> In normal classes we have eye contact and we have real connection, easy connection with the teacher, we could talk every time we wanted, but in online classes you have to, for example, push the button to talk, or ask for a talk.

He also expects his further online classes to be more two-way; the boards the teachers use to be more active and intelligent; and also the teachers to turn their videos on. He stated that:

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Most of the online classes, I think, are one-way, and I think they must be two-way. For example the students must talk too, as well as the teacher. I think the board must be active and the teacher must use the board and write something on it, like normal classes. Also, in normal classes you have eye contact with your teacher but in online classes you don't, you just hear the sound of the teacher. Sometimes, you actually get distracted from the whole class and this is not good.

Shahin has also the same view as the previous participants and he believes that the amount of eye contact in online classes is not enough and he expects the university to choose a better platform for teaching which makes more eye contact possible. He believes that expressing feelings online is a rather difficult task:

In online classes, I wanted to express my feelings but they were just some words. I should type some words in order to express my feelings and that was too difficult, I mean the voice connection is so good, much better than the typing but we don't have eye contact, and we don't see our friends' and teachers' faces.

He also pointed to the fact that in online classes they couldn't have any discussion with their classmates and since language classes require sort of free discussions, he was dissatisfied with the way things were going on in online classes.

Furthermore, Saman talks about lack of practicality in English language classes online. He believes that language education should be more practical and it should take place by active participation of all the students. He also complains about the platform the university uses for which, he believes, there is no possibility of grouping the students to talk and discuss some issues come up in the class. He stated that:

I think Adobe Connect is not the good choice because there are no rooms to have conversations, you know, to do some pair work or group work activities. So for me, as a student, I want the classes to be dynamic, to see more videos, you know, educational videos.

Parisa thinks that their online classes lack productivity and in her idea they should have more fun activities for the students. She believes that these classes should add to their knowledge and she is against giving a lot of homework or projects in these kinds of classes. She also complains about the way some teachers hold their online classes by just reading through the material and not having any variety in their teaching methodology. She mentioned that:

If you have to throw your classes online, you have to make a plan for it. You have to be prepared to connect with the students individually, all of them, I mean not to consider them as robots who are just listening and showing them some slide and giving them some projects to do, no it's not about that, I mean you have to actually do your job, you have to teach something, and teaching is

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not just reading some materials and stuff from a page or slide. Well, yeah, that's my opinion towards this matter.

She also talked about the poor platform their university was using and suggested that the university could have done better by selecting a much better platform to teach online.

Mohsen, like the other participants, mentioned the poor characteristic of the platform the university was applying for teaching materials to them and believed that there are much better applications and platforms to be used in online classes. He also believed that participation and creativity are two crucial elements of a language class which should not be neglected at all. He was talking about the creativity from the part of the teacher in order to attract more participation from the part of the students. He stated that:

The teacher's creativity would gather students' attention and because of that the participation would be more. Actually, it affects student participation and the chances of learning would increase as well.

Finally, only Arezoo seemed to be positive towards these online classes and she was satisfied with the way they are held in their university. She stated that the online classes were fine and she had no further expectations of them.

Discussion

In response to the research questions in this study, the findings revealed two themes and some subthemes for each. The first research question which was about learners' lived experiences of English language classes can be explained through the first theme, *Teacher Characteristics,* with two subthemes, *teaching approaches* and *teacher behavior*. Moreover, the second research question of the study which was about the experiences of the learners in online classes can be explained through the second theme, *online classes*, with two subthemes, *Learner Anxiety and online class environment* and *Learner Expectations*. In the following section the themes of the study which were based on the experiences of the learners, both in site and in online classes, are discussed in more detail.

Theme one: Teacher Characteristics

The first theme investigated the participants' experiences with different teachers and their approaches and characteristics. The results revealed that most of the participants considered their EFL teachers as slaves of the educational system of the country who were just obeying the rules in their teaching approaches without any creativity. They believed that their EFL teachers were to some extent traditional in their views towards teaching English that is they believed that despite having the new series of English books at high school, their teachers were mostly teaching in a

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traditional way, for example emphasizing on reading and translating a lot and assessing the learners based on these two procedures. Some participants were talking about the irrelevance of their EFL teachers major to the subject they were teaching that is English. This problem is partly related to the lack of expert teachers in the field of English language teaching in Iran and also the wrong belief that English is a foreign language which is learned outside many curriculums in English language schools and does not require any university studies, as a result, teachers from other fields fill their schedule by taking English subject at school, which is against the international norms and causes a lot of friction between the teacher and the students.

This issue causes further problems in EFL classes which were mentioned by the participants of this study. There are two groups of students in an EFL class; those who have previous experience of learning the language prior to the school and those who have no experience of English language and they encounter it for the first time at school. Those without any prior education of the language seem not to have any problem with the teachers by other majors. However, those with prior English knowledge look more confident about their English language level and see the teacher as an illiterate person, which categorizes theses students into two subgroups; First, those students who neglect the teacher and do not care about his or her knowledge and do their own task and duties in the class and are mostly the center of attention in the class by the teachers. Second, those who cannot tolerate the flaws made by the teacher and try to stand against the teacher's approaches, which causes a lot of problems in the class.

As a conclusion for the first theme, the students were mostly dissatisfied with their English language classes at school and were talking about the poor conditions of their EFL classes and the teachers' traditional ways of teaching in spite of having new series of English books available in the school system. Furthermore, it seems that the teachers in the field of EFL should have the English language teaching knowledge by getting a degree from a university to be accepted by the students as dependable teachers. According to the participants the teachers with the lack of English knowledge or those from other fields of study act aggressively towards students in order to hide their inefficiency in the field and also not to let the students to question the way he or she is teaching.

Theme two: Online Classes

The second theme was about the experiences of the students in online classes and their expectations of these kinds of classes. Most of the participants agreed upon its sudden start, due to Covid-19 pandemic, for which no one was ready from the university to the teachers and the students. This caused a lot of anxiety at the beginning of the era but the conditions improved gradually. According to the participants, they are currently used to the online system of education

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but they are not satisfied thoroughly. Some believe that these online classes have taken the opportunity of seeing their teachers as well as their peers due to the platform the universities were applying. The platform for online teaching, the participants believe, is not that effective. They think that the universities could have used a better platform which had the possibility of having face to face communication with each other and the teachers.

They also were talking and complaining about the one-way direction of the communications in online classes which is from the teacher to the students only. They argue that English language teaching should take place in a two-way communication approach where the students could also share their ideas as well as their feelings. One of the participants mentioned that he used to talk eagerly in language classes at the university and could express his feelings to his peers and teachers, but now in online classes he cannot do such a thing and he believes that his English feelings are kind of being suppressed.

Another problematic area for the participants in their online classes was the teachers' not turning their videos on while teaching. They believed that EFL classes should be handled with the teachers' videos on so that the students can see the gestures and facial expressions of their teachers for a better understanding of some difficult issues.

Conclusion

This study investigated the lived experiences of the EFL learners both in site and in online classes before and concurrently with the Covid-19 pandemic. The researchers tried to understand the students' perceptions of EFL classes and the results showed that the students seemed to be more satisfied with in site classes rather than online ones. They expected their universities to provide much better platform for the prospective classes which permit face to face interaction as well as the possibility of grouping the students especially for EFL courses which require to be interactive. They expected their online classes to be as practical and as productive as their classes had been before the Covid-19 and in person. They also demanded a high participation from the part of the students in online classes which, they think, is the duty and responsibility of the teacher to manage.

Implications of the study

The results of this study is initially for the benefit of the students themselves since their needs and expectations of the online classes are dealt with and delineated. In case they are accepted and improved by the teachers and the authorities, the students might enjoy their classes better than any time. Second, the teachers are also beneficiary of the findings of this study since they can use them to improve their teaching condition in online classes.

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