

Research Article

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Teachers and Learners' Perceptions of Online Instruction and Assessment during COVID-19 Lockdown in Iran: A Mixed-Methods Investigation

Rasoul Mohammad Hosseinpur ^{1*}

¹University of Qom, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Humanities,
PO Box No. 37185-396, Qom, Iran

*Corresponding author: ✉ rmhosseinpur@gmail.com ☎ 0000-0002-3718-5948

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Abstract

Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, all face-to-face instruction at higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide has been suspended. Therefore, many institutions and universities relied on online learning to continue the instruction process. The perceptions of teachers and students who went through this experience can provide useful information regarding the success of the online instruction. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers and students during the COVID-19 pandemic in Iran. Additionally, it aimed at exploring the main advantages and disadvantages of online instruction during this time. To this end, 250 English language teachers and students were selected from different English language institutes and universities in Iran. Drawing upon Khan et al.'s (2021) questionnaire and an open-ended question, this study showed that both teachers and students had positive perceptions towards online learning and teaching during COVID-19 lockdown despite the fact that some students had not the necessary facilities and infrastructure for online classes. Furthermore, this study showed that validity, reliability, construction, administration, and effectiveness of online assessment was a major concern for both teachers and students. Besides, both groups expressed the benefits of online instruction more than its drawbacks. The results of this study have implications for higher education teachers, and stakeholders to get a better understanding of the students' and teachers' perception toward online instruction.

Keywords: D-learning, E-learning, learner perception, lockdown, teacher perception

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1. Introduction

On a worldwide scale, education has become a valuable commodity, both for personal accomplishment and for the growth of a nation as a whole. The increasing demand for university degrees over the last several decades has resulted in the emergence of online learning, and many students from all over the world have engaged in learning through online environments (Hosseinpur & Parsaeian, 2023). Originally, the term "e-learning" was coined at a computer-based Training systems seminar in 1999. In quest of a clearer description, other terminologies such as "online learning" and "virtual learning" began to develop (Rani et al., 2016). With the advent of the computer and Internet in the late twentieth century, and the emergence of online learning, many e-learning tools were developed in the process of teaching and learning. As a result, online learning has shown to be more efficient and adaptable to students' various family and social obligations.

This shift from the face-to-face education to online education is considered a fundamental transition in the higher education sectors in Iran following the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. For a long time, face-to-face teaching and learning process has been conducted in Iranian Higher Educational Institutions and universities. Therefore, making the shift to implementing educational activities in an innovative online environment is considered a challenging task. This transition to online teaching and learning disrupts comfort and typically creates situations filled with anxiety and uncertainties among the beneficiaries of the change (Issah, 2018). Teachers and students developed different perspectives on the feasibility of online learning. Thus, teachers' and students' perceptions may be effectively exploited to highlight the benefits and drawbacks of this unusual experience for most institutions and universities, ensuring a better teaching and learning environment (Muljana & Luo, 2019). Therefore, this study intends to investigate the perception of teachers and students about online teaching and learning during Covid-19 lockdown in Iran.

2. Literature Review

2.1. E-learning and D-learning

With the exponential growth of the World Wide Web (WWW), the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has become one of the helpful approaches that increase the effectiveness and efficiency of education. In this way, E-learning and distance education are two new achievements of ICT that may give the needed answers to overcome the complexities of traditional methods. The term "e-learning" was coined by White (1983) as "learning via electronic sources, such as television, computer, videodisk,

teletext, and videotext” (White, 1983, p. 13). Following that, other authors such as Rosenberg (2000) and Hartley (2001) developed the concept of E-learning. Simply put, e-learning is a type of learning that involves using computers and other devices to access learning materials that are tailored to particular learning needs.

Distance learning, also called distance education, refers to a type of education in which learners or students are not required to attend school every day. In other words, they learn and study their subject online without going to a college or university campus. Nowadays, the Internet serves as the primary mode of distance education for the great majority of students, who may access it from their own homes or from public libraries (Ryan, 1997). D-learning may include other technological formats such as television, DVDs, and printable materials, but many distance learners prefer Web-based learning because of its availability and functionality.

2.2. Technology Integration into Teaching and Learning

Technology integration, according to Redmann and Kotrlik (2004), is defined as “the use of the Internet, computers, CD-ROMs, interactive media, satellites, teleconferencing, and other technological means in instruction to support, enhance, inspire and create learning” (p. 2). Simply put, technology integration is the use of technological resources like computers, cell phones, the Internet, and other computer related facilities in regular classroom activities and school management to support teaching and learning. When technology is implemented in the classrooms, students are more engaged with learning objectives. In fact, it paves the way for differentiated instructions to address students' and learners' specific requirements.

Teachers believe that technology increases student engagement, which enhances students' performance in class (Kay et al., 2009). According to Saine (2012), students are more engaged and innovative when they use technology. Additionally, some studies indicated that technology both facilitates and encourages cooperation and engagement (Shaltry et al., 2013). However, incorporating technology into learning and teaching has various barriers and challenges. These challenges can be access to technology and online tools, time, support, professional development training, as well as teacher's confidence in their ability to employ technology and their conviction in its use. Similarly, several research have shown that learner's factor can hinder efforts to implement technology in education. The level of student resistance reflects their unfavorable perceptions regarding the usage of technology. As a result, it is critical to understand users' attitude about technology and online learning, since what is effective and important in one environment might not be useful on another. In order to develop the educational perspectives of online learning,

it is critical to address the concerns of the learners (Al-Mahmood & McLoughlin, 2004). Thus, Esichaikul et al., (2011) suggested the use of adaptive e-learning systems, which allow content to be tailored to the user's knowledge and behavior level. Otherwise, ignoring pertinent issues may lead to technical difficulties, students' frustration and reluctance to the use of technology in learning and teaching, all of which may impede successful learning.

2.3. Online Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic

By the end of December 2019, the coronavirus pandemic (known as the COVID-19) had made its way into China. Due to the circumstances brought on by the COVID-19 epidemic, e-learning or d-learning has become a common and preferred method of education, and many institutions and schools have started online classes using software such as Zoom, Skype, and/or Google Meet. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 33.1 percent of college learners were involved in some form of distance or online learning in 2017 (Grinder et al., 2019). Nevertheless, since the advent of COVID-19, this number has risen dramatically, and online learning has become a necessity for educational institutions.

In February 2020, Iran's first COVID-19 case was reported (Shalbafan & Khademoza, 2020), and the authorities chose to shut down all universities and schools, and persuaded people to stay home to hinder its spread. Due to the fact that online or distance learning fosters multimedia contact between instructors and learners (Garrison, 2011), the higher education institutions in Iran decided to conduct online instruction through available software applications and platforms soon after the government's decision to impose nation-wide lockdown. Thus, e-learning can be seen as a turning point in Iranian education due to COVID-19 outbreak. The main problem, however, is the quality of teaching and learning, which is directly related to how effectively the material is created and implemented. The effectiveness of teaching and learning is also influenced by how information is chosen for the online environment, as well as by identifying and resolving the constraints that instructors and learners encounter.

2.4. Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Online Learning

Perception, according to Qiong (2017), is a mental process that involves being aware of or comprehending sensory data. Perception refers to the entire process of the conscious human mind gathering information from its surroundings. Thus, perception might be defined as the act of comprehending the meaning of the stimulus. Based on the concept of perception given above, teachers' perception is the way they perceive the visuals and understand what

they are feeling. This process is divided into steps that begin with the collection, recognition, and interpretation of sensory data.

Different teachers and instructors have different viewpoints and perspectives on classroom management. In research conducted in Europe (Becta, 2008), teachers' perception on the effectiveness of technology in making instruction engaging, as well as classroom constructivists teaching and learning settings, were highlighted to be contradictory. Some teachers believed that integrating technology into classroom had a positive influence on students' and their own learning; that it had helped to individualize learning and enhance the connection between classroom learning and the learning outside the classroom. According to these studies, however, some teachers think that the benefits of technology integration into classrooms are not noticeable in students' performance.

When it comes to learning, particularly e-learning, every student clearly has their own preferred style. Therefore, it is essential to know how students recognize and respond to elements of e-learning, as well as how to apply these approaches to improve learning (Koohang & Durante, 2003). According to Lui et al. (2006), the success of educational technology integration is influenced by student perception. The perceived efficacy of an educational technology is influenced by the perceived characteristics of the technology as well as the characteristics and backgrounds of students.

On the contrary, students and learners also experienced several challenges which reduced their readiness towards online learning (e.g., Kaur & Zoraini Wati, 2004; Thaufeega, 2016). These studies also revealed that students were less satisfied with e-learning platforms than with traditional systems, or they were still not yet prepared for e-learning (Thaufeega, 2016). According to studies, institutions, policy makers and regulatory authorities must play a pivotal role in improving e-learning facilities and programs (Kaur & Zoraini Wati, 2004).

2.5. Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Learning

During the COVID-19 epidemic, online learning has been identified as a significant and necessary resource for learners and schools all around the world. Thus, many educational institutions have been forced to embrace a new method of instruction. The adoption of technology and online learning has increased dramatically in recent years and will continue to do so in the future. Online learning, like any instructional method, has its own set of advantages and disadvantages.

There are various advantages to incorporating online learning into higher education institutions. Previous studies have shown various benefits

related to the use of online learning technology in university education (Raspopovic et al., 2017). The main advantages of online learning are cost-saving and efficiency (Aczel et al., 2008) as students do not need to travel back and forth to their institutions to attend their classes. According to Arkorful and Abaidoo (2015), the flexibility and accessibility of online learning is another advantage. In online learning, learning may take place anywhere and at any time, which makes it incredibly flexible. Students do not need to be at a certain location to take lessons, as they would in a traditional classroom setting.

Furthermore, online learning systems have been shown to improve communication between students and teachers. According to Radu et al. (2015), learners can actively participate in online courses from any location, offering those who are traveling or relocating with a readily accessible resource for experience and learning. Online learning allows students to access and share content easily, either by uploading to a ready-made cloud storage, or distributing via social networks, improving student collaboration, particularly in group or project-based learning settings.

Despite having significant advantages, online learning also has its disadvantages. According to Arkorful and Abaidoo (2015), online learning in certain cases is held through remoteness; therefore, misinterpretation might happen. In fact, due to the lack of face-to-face interaction with instructors, online learning may be less successful. This may have a detrimental influence on a learner's academic success and development. Online students and teachers who spend a lot of time seated and staring at a computer may develop physical issues like sight or back problems, and their outdoor activity may reduce as a result (Nazarlou, 2013).

2.6. Previous Related Studies

Even though online learning research has increased over the past decades in terms of teaching techniques and studying the barriers to e-learning implementation, there have been few studies regarding the perception of teachers and students towards it, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Allo, 2020; Kamal & Illiyan, 2021). Drawing on published research about investigating students' perception of e-learning during the COVID-19 epidemic, Allo (2020) conducted a qualitative study and discovered that students had a favorable opinion toward online learning, considering it as constructive and effective throughout COVID-19 crisis. Besides, the study revealed that students want materials and assignments to be explained before the tasks are given.

Focusing on teachers' perceptions of online teaching during COVID-19 epidemic, Kamal and Illiyan (2021) distributed a questionnaire to 200

school teachers and analyzed the compiled ones to see their perceptions and the challenges they faced in online teaching. According to the results, on average, teachers had a favorable perception about virtual teaching during COVID-19 for reducing the learning gap and shaping students' future during the crisis. Nonetheless, they faced several challenges in online education, including technological issues, difficulty with online exams and assessment, and so on.

Based on these reviews, only a small number of research has looked at both negative and positive perceptions of long-term online education. Therefore, more study into the perceptions of teachers and students in online classrooms is required. The major goal of the current study was to explore the perception of teachers and students about online instruction and assessment during Covid-19 lockdown in Iran. Using an open-ended questionnaire, the study also intended to investigate the main advantages and disadvantages of online pedagogy from the perspective of students and teachers. More specifically, this study aimed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What are Iranian teachers' and students' perception of online instruction during COVID-19 lockdown?

RQ2. What are Iranian teachers' and students' perception of online assessment during COVID-19 lockdown?

RQ3. What are the main advantages and disadvantages of online pedagogy in the COVID-19 situation?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Due to administrative issues, convenience sampling was used to choose participants for this study. In this type of sampling, the researcher decided to select the participants that were available to be investigated. In this study, two groups of participants, about 50 male and female English language teachers and university professors in Iran, as well as 400 EFL students (BA and MA students) from different English language institutes and universities in Iran, were invited to take part in this study through email and professional networks. The researcher selected various educational institutions in Iran since he was aware that during the COVID-19 lockdown, they were actively employing e-learning platforms for their courses and assessments.

Since the researcher employed convenience sampling technique for this study, 46 English language instructors and teachers (26 males and 20 females), as well as 204 EFL students (98 males and 106 females), were found

accidentally and selected as a sample. The teachers and students were selected from the University of Isfahan, Qom, Tehran, to name a few. Moreover, most of the teachers had one to five years of teaching experience. Regarding the students, most of them were BA students. Those who volunteered to participate in this research were presented with a teacher and student survey questionnaire and a descriptive question.

Due to the lockdown imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey questionnaire and the descriptive questions were sent to all sample participants through an email or a Google link. Afterward, they were assured that their participation in this study would be voluntarily, and their personal information would be treated confidentially.

3.2. Instruments

The researcher adopted the questionnaires as the major data collection instrument. Two questionnaires, considering teachers' and students' perceptions of online instruction and assessment during COVID-19 lockdown in Iran, and an open-ended question were employed in this study to gather the data.

The questionnaires utilized in this study were borrowed from Khan et al. (2021). These questionnaires were adopted as the main instruments because they were in accordance with the needs of the researcher. These two questionnaires comprised two sections. The first section dealt with some demographic information of the respondents such as institutional affiliation, gender, designation and teaching experience for the teachers, and level of study for the students. The second part of the questionnaires consisted of some Likert-type, yes-no and multiple-response questions that addressed three major themes: Teachers' and students' readiness for online instruction during COVID-19 pandemic, pedagogy and materials, and assessment.

Teachers' and students' online class experiences, their training, logistics, and affordability were considered under readiness. The students' active class participation and engagement, their participation in group discussion, the feedback they received, and learning materials and teaching aids were dealt with under the second theme pedagogy and materials. Issues such as test fairness, construction, and administration were taken care of under the third theme assessment. Overall, there were 18 questions in the teacher questionnaire and 17 questions in the student questionnaire.

Along with these two questionnaires, an open-ended question was employed to get further information from the participants. The participants were invited to write at least one paragraph about online instruction and assessment. The main rationale behind this open-ended question was to extract

some further information from the participants that the questionnaires have failed to do so.

3.3. Procedure

Due to the social distancing amid COVID-19 pandemic and the continued lockdown in the country, the face-to-face interaction and questionnaire distribution could not be conducted. Therefore, the questionnaires and the open-ended question were designed on Google Forms, and then the links were forwarded to the sample participants through emails and professional networks such as Telegram or WhatsApp. It is worth noting that the necessary permission for conducting the study was obtained from institutions and universities before the questionnaires were distributed. Besides, the participants were well-informed about the objectives of the study.

Also, the researcher explicitly indicated that the participation in this study would be voluntary, and that the participants' privacy and anonymity would be protected. Then, the researcher assured that the participants had received the questionnaires by some follow-up emails and messages in the professional networks, and he attempted to address any questions the participants had about the questionnaires. Besides, through further follow-up emails and messages, the researcher tried to maximize response rate. Then, data were collected over two weeks. Finally, the researcher ascertained that all the participants successfully completed the questionnaires, and the data were gathered completely. In other words, those questionnaires that were not completed or incorrectly filled out, were discarded or excluded from consideration for data analysis.

3.4. Data analysis

To answer the questions of this study, both qualitative and quantitative techniques were employed for data analysis. The data obtained from the first two research questions of the study were quantitative data, and they were analyzed through descriptive statistics. To organize and analyze teachers' and learners' perceptions of online learning during the COVID-19 lockdown in Iran, SPSS software (version 22.0) was employed by the researcher. The qualitative data gathered through the open-ended question related to the third research question of the study were coded, categorized, and analyzed thematically (Dörnyei, 2007).

4. Results

This study was aimed at investigating teachers' and learners' perceptions of online instruction during the Covid-19 lockdown in Iran. The collected data from teachers and learners were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques. To examine the first research question (i.e., what are Iranian teachers' and students' perceptions of online instruction during COVID-19 lockdown?) questions 1-10 of the students' questionnaire and 1-11 of the teachers' questionnaire were examined.

4.1. Addressing Research Question One

Considering virtual instruction during the pandemic lockdown, the participants expressed different opinions. For example, 60.9% of the instructors preferred virtual instruction, whereas 23.3% were not clear about it. About 53.4% of the students, on the other hand, stated that the educational centers should welcome online instruction; however, 27.5% of them were against online instruction, and the rest of them were double-minded on the issue. As with online teaching and learning experiences, the results of the study indicated that almost all teachers (100%) had received sufficient instruction on online teaching. In the same vein, it came to light that many students (95.1%) had already experienced online classes, and just 4.9% of them were not that familiar with online courses.

Regarding technology skills, logistics, and affordability, about 67.4% of the instructors held that they enjoyed the required skill and ability to run online classes, and a considerable number of them (87%) stated that they had access to facilities such as laptops and smartphones. In the same vein, about 67.4% of the teachers were under the assumption that their students enjoyed the required devices for making presence in online courses. Likewise, about 54.3% of the instructors were of the opinion that the students could afford the Internet expenses for participating in online courses. On the other hand, 61.2% of the students believed that they enjoyed the necessary skills and abilities for participating in virtual classes, and just 47.1% of them trusted the ability and knowledge of their teachers in running online classes. Considering technological facilities, many students had access to smartphones (49.5%) and laptops (43.1%), and the rest drew upon desktop computers (4.4%) and tablets (2.9%) to attend online classes.

The results of the survey demonstrated that the participant teachers had already had the experience of employing a wide range of teaching aids and materials in their classes. They expressed that they had already taken

advantage of video clips (71.7%), power point slides (67.4%), eBooks (56.5%), audio lectures (52.2%), printed materials (23.9%), online articles (19.6%), whiteboards (2.2%), and other instructional materials (13%).

Having access to the Internet was not a problem for almost all of the students (97.5%); however, apart from 5.9% and 23.5% of them that were satisfied with their Internet speed and considered it very strong and strong, respectively, the low speed of the Internet was a serious concern of most of the students, and 51% of the students labelled their Internet connectivity as average and 19.6% of them regarded it as poor or very poor. Regardless of connectivity, the participant students' opinions varied considering the costs of the Internet access. Most of them had no problem with the Internet cost (54.9%), 24% of them stated that they may not be able to afford the Internet cost, and 21.1% of them were sure that they would not be able to afford it.

The students' involvement and engagement in the process of online teaching and learning was a serious concern of most of the teachers. More than half of them (54.3%) had their own doubts regarding active student involvement, and about 69.6% of them believed that there was no way to keep track of students in online classes. To 63% of the instructors, having group discussions in online classes was an unattainable goal. However, 30.5% of them believed that they could provide immediate feedback in their virtual classes. 46.6% of the students, on the other hand, stated that they could interact with their teachers in online courses, and 40.7% of them were satisfied with group discussions held in online programs.

4.2. Addressing Research Question Two

Regarding validation, reliability, the construction, administration, and effectiveness of online assessment, the results of the study showed that online assessment was the main drawback of the online programs from both teachers' and learners' perspectives. About 63% of teachers found online test and exam administration a tough and demanding activity, and 45.6% of the instructors believed that test construction for online courses was challenging. As with validity and reliability of the online assessment, just 34.8% and 13% of the teachers believed in the validity and reliability of the online assessment, respectively. However, a small number of the teachers (15.2%) believed that online assessment is an effective means for measuring students' learning outcomes.

Regarding fairness and the effectiveness of online assessment, about one-fourth (27%) of the students viewed assessment during online courses fair;

however, 46.1% of the students were under the assumption that online assessment was not fair, and a larger number of the students (56.4%) stated that the obtained exam scores were not a true reflection of the students' knowledge.

Cheating was considered one of the main shortcomings of the online assessment by both teachers and learners. About 69.6% of the teachers and 58.3% of learners were of the opinion that online assessment furnished the ground for the cheating of the students. Among different testing techniques, 63% of the teachers advocated written assignments, while this technique was favored just by 47.1% of the learners. Having quizzes as a means of online assessment was favored by most teachers (69.6%) and students (78.4%). The employment of oral tests and presentations were controversial among teachers and learners. While most teachers were in favor of oral tests (63%) and presentations (73.9%), less than half of the learners regarded oral tests (42.2%) and presentations (46.1%) as effective means of online assessment. In addition, 43.5% of the teachers and 52.9% of the students supported short questions, while 41.3% of the teachers and 21.1% of the students favored reading tests.

The students had various opinions regarding the quality of online instruction. About a quarter of them held that online instruction could ensure quality education; however, a larger number of them (50.9%) did not believe in the quality of the online instruction. Considering finding online study materials, the students were divided in their opinions. More than half of them (61.2%) believed that they can find study materials online, whereas about one-fifth (18.1%) of them thought the opposite.

As regards the introduction of online classes in the department, the students were divided in their opinions. Nearly two-thirds (64.7%) of the participants believed that if online classes are introduced in their department, they will be at a disadvantage, whereas more than one-third (35.3%) of them thought the opposite.

4.3. Addressing Research Question Three

The data of this section were analyzed after collecting the answers of the respondents to the relevant qualitative open-ended question (i.e., What are the main advantages and disadvantages of online pedagogy in the COVID-19 situation?). Initially, positive and negative factors were extracted separately from the opinions expressed by each respondent for both groups of teachers and students (Table 1).

Table 1
Analysis of Initial Codes

Groups	Advantage	Disadvantages
Teachers	teaching remotely	non-engagement of students in the learning process
	saving time and energy, helping the environment to be cleaner	physical and mental harms, misunderstandings
Students		lack of communication, poor connection, lack of access to teachers, lack of participation
	Access anytime and anywhere, feeling more comfortable	Misunderstandings, physical and mental disorders/diseases

Table 2 lists some of the most important advantages and disadvantages for teachers and students.

Table 2
Advantages Extracted as Secondary Codes

Secondary codes	Example Quotes		Frequency	
	Teachers	Students	Teachers	Students
access and learning anytime and anywhere	The main advantage is being able to teach remotely.	Advantages are ease of access to the online classes due to the fact that online classes are easily available wherever net is available. You can feel more comfortable in online classes rather than formal ones.	7	14
saving time and cost	Saving time and energy by establishing online classes wherever net connection is available and helping the environment to be cleaner by using no public transportation or private vehicles for commuting to work/schools every day.		5	11
helping the environment to be cleaner			1	2
saving energy			4	5
flexibility in setting time			-	3
saving contents			1	-
getting familiar using new technology			1	3
having time for doing physical activities			1	-
easy to access to teacher			3	1

As shown in Table 2, the frequency of access and learning anytime and anywhere and saving time and cost are the most frequent advantages reported by both teachers and students, with students having higher frequencies (n= 14, n=11) than teachers (n= 7, n=5). Table 3 lists some of the most important disadvantages for teachers and students, which were extracted from the qualitative data.

Table 3
Disadvantages Extracted as Secondary Codes

Secondary codes	Example Quotes		Frequency	
	Teachers	Students	Teachers	Students
non-engagement of students in the learning process	The main disadvantage is non-engagement of students in the learning process.	The disadvantages are you're not in person and face to face. You might have some issues on the internet, you can't ask and answer questions easily, you can't camper sentences in exercises you do	1	1
physical and mental harms	Physical and mental harms that appear due to long-term using digital gadgets by which students enter online classes will be one of the negative side effects of online classes and also misunderstandings that happens almost in online classes is the second disadvantage		2	1
misunderstandings			1	3
improper teaching and learning			-	1
invalid and unreliable testing and measuring students' abilities			4	1
cheating			-	7
lack of communication between teachers and students			4	7
Lack of group work			1	1
lack of access to teachers			1	2
lack of motivation			2	2
no face-to-face communication			2	1
lack of test administration			1	-
teachers' burnout			1	-

As depicted in Table 3, with regard to disadvantages, students reported cheating (n=7) and lack of communication between teachers and students (n=7) as the most disadvantageous factors while teachers reported invalid and unreliable testing and measuring students' abilities (n=4) and lack of communication between teachers and students (n=4) as the most negative factors.

5. Discussion

This study explored teachers' and students' perception toward online teaching and learning during the Covid-19 pandemic in Iran, as well as the main advantages and disadvantages of online pedagogy from the perspective of students and teachers. Regarding the perceptions of online instruction during the COVID-19 lockdown, the questionnaires consisted of some constructs, such as shifting to online classes, training and online experience, technology skills, to name a few. In terms of shifting traditional classes to online classes, the data suggested that most of the teachers had positive perceptions toward shifting the environment. Similarly, a substantial number of learners believed that their classes should be converted to online programs. In fact, both groups of study thought that shifting to online classes is required for the HEIs and universities, and that no problems would occur because of this transition. Nevertheless, this perception differed from that of Issah (2018), who found that shifting to online environment make students uncomfortable.

In terms of training and online experience, the data revealed that all teachers had experience of online instruction. Likewise, most of the students had prior experience of participating in online classes. Therefore, both groups had positive experiences with online instruction. This suggested that Iranian teachers and students were ready to embrace technology and online instructions and had a positive perception about them. This finding was in line with that of Kamal and Illiyan (2021) who discovered that teachers had positive perceptions toward virtual teaching amid the COVID-19 for reducing the learning gap and shaping students' future.

With regard to technological skills, logistics and affordability, the data revealed that more than half of the teachers had the technological skills and devices for delivering online lessons. Moreover, more than half of the teachers believed that the students had the required devices, and they would be able to cover the cost of accessing the Internet for online education. Likewise, more than half of the students had necessary technological abilities to participate in online programs, while a little less than half of them thought that their instructors have the necessary skills for conducting online courses. Regarding the cost of the Internet, more than half of them responded that the costs of the Internet is not a serious concern. Overall, this suggested that technology skills,

infrastructure and facilities, and economic problems were not a barrier for almost half of the teachers and students, and teachers had positive perceptions toward them. This finding was not like that of Ramij and Sultana (2020) who reported lack of technology infrastructure, and the expensive Internet cost were obstacles to online learning and teaching in Bangladesh.

Regarding teaching aids and materials, the results of the study pointed that the teachers were considerably more likely to employ video clips, PowerPoint slides, eBooks, and audio lectures for teaching purposes. However, a small number of them utilized printed materials, online articles, and whiteboards for teaching. Similarly, a large percentage of students also utilized cellphones and laptops to attend online classes. This finding implies that both groups of respondents had no difficulty facilitating teaching materials and receiving them. In fact, this kind of asynchronous teaching and providing video clips, PowerPoint slides, and audio lectures made it easier for students to obtain the content.

Concerning the Iranian teachers' and students' perceptions of online assessment during COVID-19 lockdown, the results revealed that online assessment was a serious issue for both groups of study. Their concern was related to validity, reliability, construction, administration, and effectiveness of assessment. Only one-third of the teachers noted that assessment in an online environment would be valid. It is worth noting that nearly one-seventh of teachers thought that assessment in an online environment would be reliable. Moreover, a large number of them thought that administration of online tests would be challenging. In the same vein, only one-fourth of the students discerned that online assessment would be fair, and nearly half of them had negative opinions about it. Moreover, both groups believed that online examinations would increase student cheating. Overall, both teachers and students expressed a significant lack of faith in online assessment during COVID-19 pandemic. This finding was like that of Khan et al. (2021) who found out that the issues of affordability and equity in online assessment posed a major threat.

Regarding the main advantages and disadvantages of online pedagogy in the COVID-19 situation, the data suggested that a great majority of the students found online learning beneficial and advantageous since they could study at any time from any location. They could also save time and cost with online instructions. Students thought that online learning would help them stay safe during this pandemic. Moreover, some students thought that online learning was beneficial since it could provide relief for their shyness. Teachers also believed that online teaching would save their cost and energy. With online learning integration, teachers thought that they could access a lot of

educational content and saving them easily. These findings were like that of Aczel et al. (2008) as well as Arkorful and Abaidoo (2015). However, some respondents pointed out some interesting advantages for online learning and teaching. To name a few, some students noted that online learning was advantageous since they had more individual attention and responsibility, and it made them increase their abilities and skills. Likewise, some teachers believed that with online learning, students could get a degree from anywhere in the world.

Concerning the online learning disadvantages, most of the students stated that no interaction and communication happens between teachers and students. Moreover, they added that cheating is endemic among students in online assessments. Students also stated that they are unable to concentrate clearly in an online environment and it is distracting. It is obvious that some students and teachers faced with poor Internet connection during online instruction which is another disadvantage of online learning. On the other hand, some teachers believed that testing and measuring students' abilities would not be valid and reliable. They also thought that online learning could cause physical and mental harms. These above-mentioned findings were also similar to that of Arkorful and Abaidoo (2015) and Nazarlou (2013).

6. Conclusions and Implications

Several key findings could be obtained from this investigation. Firstly, both teachers and students agreed on the move to online education. With respect to having good experience of online teaching and learning, in fact, they showed a positive perception about online instruction amid COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, the result of this study showed that technology skills, infrastructure and facilities, and economic problems were not a constraint to online instruction even though some students would be left behind because of the inaccessibility to technological tools. Thirdly, providing teaching materials and receiving them was not a challenge for both teachers and students since they had necessary technological skills. Fourthly, the study findings indicated that both teachers and students were concerned about the validity, reliability, construction, administration, and effectiveness of online assessment. They had negative perceptions towards online assessment. Finally, online instruction seemed to be advantageous for Iranian teachers and students since they expressed more benefits for that.

The findings of this study illustrated that the teachers must be adept in dealing with the new online teaching styles to produce a completely successful online learning environment. Teachers in HEIs should recognize that the change is unavoidable, and they must be prepared to adapt and try new approaches to classroom instruction. Moreover, they should recognize that

they have a vital role in providing a supportive atmosphere for students that are already suffering because of the sudden transition in the educational system.

On the HEIs level, they should be ready to construct the essential capacity to have a robust and powerful educational system that would be prepared for any future crises. The priority must be to have a strong online learning system. Furthermore, these institutions should offer teachers with the technology abilities and competencies which will allow them to be extremely skilled professionals who can successfully use online learning technologies. Besides, HEIs should give emotional and technological support to their students by assisting them in acquiring the necessary electronic devices. Finally, stakeholders who work in English language education should guarantee that higher education is available to all Iranian teachers and students. They should implement additional laws and regulations to make online learning as simple as possible, especially in times of emergency.

Furthermore, the current study was confined to investigating the perception of teachers and learners. Hence, a recommendation for further research is to investigate the perception of stakeholders that work in English language education. To generalize the findings of the research, the number of participants needs to be as large as possible. Since this study was limited to 250 teachers and students, further studies with many participants could be done to get a better understanding of the students' and teachers' perception toward online instruction during the COVID-19 lockdown.

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