Iranian EFL Learners' Parents' Attitudes towards Online English Language Learning during COVID-19[1]

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Abstract

Parents' attitudes toward online language learning have vital effects on students' educational engagement and promote the implementation and engagement of more efficient online teaching practices. The present study aimed to explore the attitudes of Iranian EFL learners' parents toward online language learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data were collected through an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. One thousand two hundred parents participated in the study. The questions covered four themes: their opinions about online learning, their children's health, tuition costs, and academic performance. Results obtained indicate that the parents had no experience with online classes before the pandemic. Moreover, findings suggest that despite the fact that a large number of the parents perceived online classes as a mechanism to diminish the spread of COVID-19. they also thought that long and deliberate exposure to online classes and learning environments may have affected the children´s mental and physical health. Furthermore, most parents argued that course tuition, as well as the cost of internet devices and services, made online learning more expensive than traditional classes. The findings of this study can be used by Iranian educational policymakers and stakeholders to enhance online learning.

Resumen

Las actitudes de los padres hacia el aprendizaje de idiomas en línea tienen efectos vitales en el compromiso educativo de los estudiantes y definitivamente promueven la implementación y el compromiso de prácticas de enseñanza en línea más eficientes para desarrollar prácticas y actividades de enseñanza en línea. El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo explorar las actitudes de los padres de los estudiantes de EFL de Iran hacia el aprendizaje del idioma inglés en línea durante la pandemia de COVID-19. Los datos fueron recolectados a través de un cuestionario en línea y entrevistas semiestructuradas. 1200 padres participaron en el estudio. Las preguntas estaban relacionadas con la experiencia previa de los padres con el aprendizaje en línea, las ventajas y desventajas, y la satisfacción y sugerencias de los padres para las clases en línea. Los resultados obtenidos sugieren que los padres no tenían experiencia en clases en línea antes de la pandemia. Además, los hallazgos permiten establecer que a pesar de que una gran parte de los padres participantes percibieron las clases en línea como un mecanismo de afrontamiento para disminuir la propagación del COVID-19. también pensaron que una exposición prolongada y deliberada a clases en línea y entornos de aprendizaje puede afectar la salud mental y física de los niños. Además, la mayoría de los padres argumentaron que la matrícula del curso, los dispositivos conectados a Internet y sus accesorios, y los paquetes de Internet hacían que el aprendizaje en línea fuera más costoso que las clases tradicionales. Los hallazgos de este estudio pueden ser utilizados por los responsables de la formulación de políticas educativas y las partes interesadas de Iran para mejorar el aprendizaje en línea.

Introduction

With the rise of the internet and the availability of computers at home and in school settings, online language learning has gradually grown in popularity over the last decade (Butnaru et al., 2021; Ma'azi & Janfeshan, 2018; McBride,2009; Suresh et al., 2018). With the global spread of COVID-19, humanity had to undergo several changes in order to ensure its survival. Social distancing as well as mandatory face masks and other coping mechanisms had to be implemented around the world so as to reduce the global health threat. These actions were highly visible, especially in daily life, since most of the supermarkets, shops, bus and train stations, and even schools and universities had to remain closed. Nevertheless, it is also possible to affirm that the stressful situation created new opportunities to redefine social dynamics at large. The inclusion of online/remote pedagogical practices into the formal educational systems was perhaps one of the observable actions that took place as a consequence of such dynamics. Social distancing became a basic rule in face-to-face interaction to reduce the threat the coronavirus. Therefore, schools and universities were closed in March 2020, and a virtual model of instruction was introduced to most students in all grades. The COVID-19 pandemic outcome greatly influenced the educational world (Abidah et al., 2020; Maggioncalda, 2020). Mishra et al. (2020) believe that the whole educational system, from elementary to the tertiary level, collapsed during the lockdown. A report from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2024) further supports this idea. The COVID-19 pandemic affected 1.37 billion students in 138 countries around the world.

Although the digital world had already established e-learning education using various e-learning platforms, the demand for online language teaching platforms was apparently boosted during the COVID-19 outbreak. Therefore, the urgent demand for virtual education can be viewed as a turning point in education in the world. Educational institutions had to turn to virtual teaching and adopt teaching apps instead of delivering face-to-face classes. Along the same line, academic centers in Iran used various platforms such as *Edmodo* and *Shad* (a platform for teaching elementary school designed by the Iranian Ministry of Education), as well as web-conferencing applications such as *Adobe Connect* and S*kyp*e, in order to continue educational progression two or three months after the COVID-19 outbreak. Many studies (Butnaru et al., 2021; Mishra et al., 2020; Namaziandost et al., 2021) investigated the effectiveness of online classes and applications in language teaching, and their challenges and opportunities (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). Moreover, the issue of attitude toward online language learning attracted academic attention and many researchers investigated students' and teachers' attitudes toward online classes (Afroz et al., 2021; Ismaili, 2021; Mahfouz & Salam, 2021).

Online education has constituted in the last few years a matter of concern for the academic community. According to Janfeshan (2023), online education has become an indispensable part of the curriculum in most educational systems around the world. Therefore, scholars have investigated the effectiveness of online classes from teacher and student views. However, few studies seem to have examined this aspect from the parent's perspective (Abdallah, 2018; Heba & Sultan, 2020). In the context of Iran, this situation is similar. A first look into scholarly literature in Iran shows that despite the fact that some studies have revolved around online education, the parents' prespectives have never been taken into consideration. In this light, the current study seeks to make a contribution to this area of knowledge in Iran by reporting the parents' attitudes concerning online language learning in the Iranian context during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature Review

With the rise of the internet and the availability of computers at home and in school settings, online language learning has gradually grown in popularity over the last two decades (White, 2003). According to Treve (2021), the widespread belief that online courses are costly has prompted more providers to enter the sector of online language learning. Williams (2016) believes that technology is a vital thing in English language education and teaching. In Coombs' (2010) view, the extension of online teaching also impacts the recent development in information technology. As technology has evolved, more students can be taught at a distance (Scheg, 2014). As a result, examining the impact of computer technology and social media in second and foreign language classes becomes the main purpose of many studies (Janfeshan & Janfeshan, 2021; Joosten, 2012). Many studies have been published regarding its practicality and efficacy (Abuhmaid, 2020; Dolan et al., 2015), benefits and shortcomings (Alves et al., 2017; Pope, 2020; Sadeghi, 2019; Suresh et al., 2018), and teachers and students' attitudes (Cınkara & Bagcecı, 2013; Ma'azi & Janfeshan, 2018).

Comparing online language learning with traditional classes, Alenezi (2020) asserted that very few studies showed that online learning and traditional teaching methods produce the same results, and no significant differences are found in learners' performance. However, Arkorful and Abaidoo (2015) argued that many types of research revealed a great positive view towards online classes. Moreover, they claimed that some studies found negative effects of online learning on the learners' achievements.

Regarding the benefits and drawbacks of online learning, the controversy continues. For instance, the advocates of online learning enumerate the advantages as follows: first, resources in different formats are easily available and accessible from anywhere, anytime, and for anybody. Secondly, online learning extends the asynchronous communications between teachers and learners. Thirdly, autonomous and independent learning is promoted due to immediate feedback on tests, and finally, learners' motivation and interest in learning are affected by the use of technology (Sadeghi, 2019; Suresh et al., 2018).

In contrast, other researchers (Alves et al., 2017; Rowe & Rafferty, 2013) believe that online learning, which may not always be easy to use, is hardly applicable to all teaching situations. They argue that online learning pushes students into isolation, prevents them from social development, and brings about language difficulties such as lack of interpersonal contact and isolation from their peers, as well as physical and mental disorders. Learners' attitudes toward language learning drew the attention of scholars such as Dörnyei (2001), Horwitz (1988), and Gardner (1985). They studied the theoretical basis and important concepts of attitudes and confirmed that positive attitudes of learners play an important role in improving language learning, while negative attitudes reduce learners' motivation, thus hindering successful language learning (Delić, 2020).

The issues of students' attitudes toward online language learning through different applications were investigated by many researchers long before the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, A study by Cınkara and Bagcecı (2013) found that students with positive attitudes toward online language learning had higher course scores. Furthermore, other researchers (AbuSa'aleek, 2015; Alshawil & Alhomoud, 2016; Hosseinpour et al., 2019; Janfeshan & Janfeshan, 2021; Ma'azi & Janfeshan, 2018) found that using online platforms can lead to positive attitudes, which consequently enhances and encourages educational achievement.

Similarly, teachers' attitudes differ with regard to integrating computers and internet-based applications in language classes. For example, Kisanga (2016) and Khoshsima et al. (2018) asserted that teachers' attitudes toward online classes were positive because of their novelty and positive impacts on the learning process. However, Canals and Al-Rawashdeh (2019) stated that teachers had contradictory attitudes towards using online language instruction and believed that online classes were more effective for practicing receptive skills than productive skills.

After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic many universities and schools restricted all activities to online only (Sobaih et al., 2020). Ali (2020) reported that the shift from traditional face-to-face to online classes in schools and institutions was the main effect of COVID-19 on teaching since it changed the communication between teachers and students. Social media now allow teachers and students to communicate and exchange information using internet-based technologies. Therefore, computer-assisted language learning (CALL), which had been used for a limited number of language classes, is now practiced by a many of English teachers around the world. Likewise, online English language learning for students at all levels in Iran has been achieved through registered programs on TV and online through a national social media platform called *Shad*.

Online language learning during COVID-19 became the focus of attention of many scholars. Numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the effect of COVID-19 on education in general (Abidah et al., 2020), higher education (e.g., Ali, 2020; Mishra et al., 2020; Sobaih et al., 2020; Treve, 2021; Zubașcu, 2020), with additional studies on students' attitudes toward online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Afroz et al., 2021; Ismaili, 2021; Mahfouz & Salam, 2021) parents' beliefs (Bhamani et al., 2020; Dong et al., 2020; Heba & Sultan, 2020) and COVID-19 challenges on teachers' cognition (Hindun et al., 2021). Moreover, the effects of the pandemic on students' physical activity were investigated too (Dunton et al., 2020). The results of these studies confirmed that the COVID-19 had a significant impact on many aspects of education.

In addition, some researchers (Butnaru et al., 2021; Hashemifardnia et al., 2021; Namaziandost et al., 2021) investigated the factors contributing to the effectiveness of online learning in comparison with traditional face-to-face education. For instance, Butnaru et al. (2021) explored students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of online education in Romania. Their findings revealed that students had different reactions to online education. Learners' proficiency in using computer technology, their ability to access online courses, along with the teachers' ability to perform different learning activities, all determined the students' reactions.

Since online language learning during the pandemic exposed the necessity of using some computer applications, researchers have tried to discover the practicality of these applications. For example, to examine the practicality of the *WeChat* application, the impact of *WeChat*-based online education on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge was examined (Namaziandost et al., 2021). The findings revealed that W*eChat*-based instruction not only helped Iranian EFL learners to improve their vocabulary knowledge, but also increased their motivation and interest in English language learning. Later on, Namaziandost et al. (2021) did the same experiment with the *Rosetta Stone* application and arrived at similar conclusions. Similarly, Hashemifardnia et al. (2021) explored the impact of a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on Iranian EFL learners' speaking complexity, accuracy, and fluency. The findings showed that applying MOOC instruction significantly improved those aspects of Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability.

Parents' attitudes towards their children's online learning

A few studies have investigated the attitudes of parents toward online learning. Heba and Sultan (2020) studied the attitudes of 122 parents in the UAE. Considering the educational level of student, the parents of elementary students were highly satisfied. All parents emphasized the importance of teacher-parent communication as well as positive, constructive, and personalized feedback of teachers on students' assignments to improve their achievement. Similarly, Daniela et al. (2021) investigated 738 parents' views in Latvia. The parents requested some instruction about how to support their children with learning online;

furthermore, parents wanted to know about their children's academic performance. The mothers who were familiar with computers, the internet, and online apps were successful in supporting their children with schoolwork. Similarly, Cui et al. (2021) investigated the attitudes of 1008 elementary school students' parents toward online learning in China during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Chinese parents stated that their children's performance in online classes was extremely low, and their after-school work was done carelessly. For these parents, the content delivery of the courses was completely unsatisfactory. Furthermore, the parents asserted that they experienced too much stress. The researchers classified the parents' complaints and concerns toward online learning into six categories: "(1) disappointment regarding timely interaction in courses; (2) apprehension about students' understanding of the course; (3) the increased burden of annoying adult responsibilities; (4) concern about children's eyesight; (5) the idea that teachers' explanations were not detailed enough; and (6) concerns about the decline of students' interest in and attention toward online courses" (Cui et al., 2021, p. 7).

The above-mentioned review of the literature investigating parents' attitudes toward online language learning in different parts of the world shows that parental engagement and involvement in the education of their children, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, are among the factors that contributed greatly to the success of foreign language learning. However, few studies investigated Iranian EFL parents' attitudes toward online language learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate Iranian learners' parents' attitudes towards online English language learning during the COVID-19 outbreak.

The present study attempts to answer the following question:

What are Iranian EFL parents' attitudes toward online English learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Methodology

Research design

The current study employed a survey questionnaire which was previously been validated through a pilot study. To do so, some parents were called and asked to answer some questions. Their ideas were helpful in developing, improving, and revising the items of the questionnaire. The wordings and grammar of the questions were checked again by two university professors to eradicate any ambiguity. These parents were not included in the final reports. The online questionnaire was administered to parents who enrolled their children in English online classes at different private language institutes.

Participants

One thousand two hundred parents were chosen using a purposive sampling method since simple random sampling was not feasible. The parents were from Tehran, Karaj, and Kermanshah, Iran, and their mother tongue was Persian. The majority of the respondents were identified as female i.e., 1100 females (91.6%) and only 100 (8.4%) males. Regarding their ages, most of them were between 25 and 40 years (70%), and between 20 and 25 years (15%), while a few of them were between 41 and 55 years (11.7 %) and only a 3.3% of the total were 56 years old or more. Considering the family size, 320 (26.6%) parents had one child, the largest sample of 670 (55.8%) had two children and 210 families (17.6%) had three children. Moreover, 730 (60.8%) of the parents held a bachelor's degree, while only 260 (21.6%) had an MA or a doctoral degree, and 210 (17.6%) had no university degree. Finally, 740 (61.6) students used cellphones for online classes, 220 (18.3%) used personal computers, and 240 (20.1%) s used their parents' laptops.

Data collection instruments

A questionnaire was designed by adapting existing instruments reported in the literature (Sadeghi, 2019; Suresh et al., 2018). There were two sections: the parents' demographic information, and 39 closed-questions based on a five-point Likert scale to allow the parents to express their attitudes toward online language learning during the pandemoc. The items were translated to the Persian language to make them understandable for the participants.

The questions divided into four themes

The first theme was about the advantages and disadvantages of online language learning from the parents' prespectives with 12 items (1-12). To build an initial item bank, the researchers selected questions from studies on online learning (Dong et al., 2020; O'Doherty et al., 2018; Singh & Thurman, 2019).

The second theme was mainly concerned with the physical and mental health of children using online language learning with ten items (13-22). To construct the appropriate items for this theme, the researchers selected questions examining different types of psychological and physical problems (Afroz et al., 2021; Ismaili, 2021; Mahfouz & Salam, 2021, Sadeghi, 2019; Suresh, et al., 2018).

The third theme with six items (23-28) investigated the cost-effectiveness of online classes from the parents' perspective (Chen, 2010; Khurana, 2016).

Finally, the last theme investigated teachers' and children's performance in online classes with 11 items (29-39). These questions were about the children's interactions, the way they did their homework, the teachers' methodology, and activities in online classes (Alenezi, 2020; Butnaru et al., 2021).

The internal consistency of these four parts of the questionnaire was measured through alpha co-efficient, and the reliability for its four themes subscales was 0.88, 0.83, 0.91, and 0.85, respectively, showing an acceptable degree of reliability.

Procedures

The survey was administered online at the end of the first term and during the second term. Hence, the parents had already been exposed to online learning and had gained considerable experience. The study collected the data within four months, from 10 March through 22 July, 2021 with a 100% completion rate. At the time of registration the parents were requested to answer the questions as this was part of registration; thus, participation rate was very high. They were requested to freely express their views, experience, and attitudes to obtain information not only about their attitudes, but also about the advantages and disadvantages of online language learning regardless of the type of devices their children were using. For the sake of ethical considerations, the parents were informed about the objectives of the study. They were also promised that their identities would be kept private throughout the study and afterward. Also, their participation in the study was completely on a voluntary basis. The parents were informed via *WhatsApp* and *Telegram* to complete the online questionnaire on *Porsline* (www.survey.porsline.ir) one of the online survey platforms in Iran.

After collecting data, these were analyzed by using SPSS (version 25). Since the questionnaire was a five-point Likert scale, researchers coded (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) no idea, (4) disagree, and (5) strongly disagree (a five-point Likert scale). The mean value was the crucial index e. For meaningful interpretation of each mean value and rank, the interval of each point was calculated. To do so, the interval length of the Likert was calculated by (5-1=4) and then divided by 5 since this value was the greatest value of the scale (4-5=0.8). Consequently, the mean values included in the interval {1-1.8} and {1.8-2.6 } represented that the parents agreed with the statement. When the means were found in the intervals of {3.4-4.2} and {4.2-5}, it showed that parents disagreed with the item. The mean scores in the interval {2.6-3.4} represented that the parents neither agreed nor disagreed with the items.

Results and Discussion

The first part of this study (12 questions) investigated the ideas of the Iranian EFL learners' parents toward the advantages and disadvantages of online language learning (Table 1 below). The examination of the quantitative data revealed four key concerns. The first theme had a mean of 3.18 and a medium standard deviation of 0.74. The results showed that most of the parents (95.8%) agreed that online learning was needed to protect their children from contagion, the main concern of the families. Some parents (77%) stated that they spent more time with their children, and in this way, they could get deeper insights into their children's language learning process. Moreover, the majority of parents (84.1%) claimed that online classes offered them the chance to directly watch the teaching methods and the teachers' activities. Also, a majority of parents (89%) agreed that online English classes reduced travel time and their children benefitted from virtual learning. And finally, many (66%) of the parents were happy that students could record the classes and watch many times. However, the parents of this study reported the following disadvantages of their experience with online language learning: a lack of immediate feedback (71.6%), a huge number of assignments (54.8%), incomprehensible instructions (85.4%), no teacher-to-student or student-to-student interaction (91.6%), long and tiresome classes (65%), and ill-structured sequencing of lessons (70.4%). Therefore, according to the parents' responses and the analysis of the results, the disadvantages greatly outweighed the advantages. As a negative point of online learning, many parents (74.1%) stated that due to slow internet speed, a lack of infrastructure, and frequent power outages, the online classes were frequently postponed. For these reasons, materials were delivered slowly.

The second theme of the study explored the physical and mental health of children using online language learning from their parents' perspectives. The mean for the second theme was 2.81, with a medium standard deviation of 0.63. Considering the health problems of children, most parents (79.5%) agreed that their children became overweight because they moved too little. Additionally, some parents (34.5%) asserted that their children experienced eye problems because of the long screen time. They had bad eyesight or blurred vision, and in some cases (5%) they had to wear eyeglasses. A few parents (15.8%) stated that their children experienced backaches and neck pain because they put undue stress on the neck and back for prolonged periods. Another point which a majority of parents (80.5%) were concerned about was the mental health of their children. Many (84.75%) believed that too much loneliness in online learning threatened their children's social relations and reduced face-to-face communication, which in the long run may have lowered their children's self-confidence. Similarly, some parents (23.3%) reported signs of depression, such as sleep disturbances, including insomnia or sleeping too much, as well as quickly becoming angry or irritable. Another issue that endangered the health of students was their addiction to cell phones and the internet (12.5%). A majority of the parents (66%) said that they asked the children to put away their cellphones many times at night since the children pretended to use the internet for the sake of doing online class assignments while they played online or surfed the internet for inappropriate sites. And finally, almost half of the parents (46%) confirmed that social isolation impacted the mental well-being of their children.

The third theme of the questionnaire centered on the cost-effectiveness of online classes from the parents' perspective. The majority of the parents (93.3%) were happy that the online English language applications were free. Similarly, a majority of the parents (91.6%) argued that online learning reduced the cost of commuting to language classes as well as buying clothes, shoes, and stationery. However, the expenses of online classes were very high. Besides online tuition, they had to spend a lot of money buying internet-connected devices such as cellphones and computers. Furthermore, most of them (56.6%) agreed that they had to buy some accessories such as headphones, flash memories, microphones, and printers just for online learning. A few parents (8.6%) mentioned that they had to buy the items twice because their children were careless in maintaining the items. Some parents (29.1%) stated that the price of internet packages and electricity greatly increased due to the pandemic. The online class expenses for the parents who had more than two or three children were greater. Others (14.1%) said that they had to buy one or two internet-connected devices because the class times overlappped or their children wanted to do their homework at the same time.

The fourth theme was about teachers' and children's performance in online English language learning classes. The majority of parents (87.8%) were highly satisfied that the children became proficient in using the internet. For instance, the children were able to download the files and upload their assignments, send emails to their teachers, and make some *PowerPoint* files. Moreover, most parents (83.6%) believed that the availability of the recorded online classes and the flexibility to access the educational content anytime and anywhere gave an opportunity for students to s to practice more and this in return enhanced student performance. Most parents (55.5%) agreed that the online classes boosted their children's self-esteem, and reduced the amount of stress which they suffered in traditional classes. A few parents commented that children suffered less stress in online classes in comparison to face-to-face English classes since no classmates directly watch them. Some parents (89.8%) stated that before the pandemic they had some strict rules limiting the number of hours working with smartphones and computers; however, these rules were overlooked since most of their class activities and assignments had to be be done with these applications. The way students performed in online classes was another major complaint of parents. Results revealed that a majority of parents (90.8%) agreed that their children were inactive, did not pay attention to teachers' lectures, did not do their homework, and attempted to copy and paste assignments. Similarly, some parents (63.3%) said that their children were easily got distracted by online games. They preferred to spend hours playing games with others instead of doing their language assignment. According

to some parents (72.1%), the rate of class involvement was low. A majority of parents (83.2%) said that they made a virtual group during the quizzes and exams to answer the questions cooperatively. All parents (100%) agreed that the rate of cheating was high on online learning and there was no competition, which was prevalent in traditional classes. Furthermore, regarding the concern of the parents toward teachers' performance in online learning, some parents agreed that (64.7%) many teachers had limited knowledge of digital media, and therefore online teaching, and the teachers did not know what to do or how to teach. Some parents (70.5%) complained that most teachers did not establish any teacher-student interaction nor give them any constructive feedback; furthermore, the voice of the teachers was not clear at all.

No.	Items	Frequency of strongly agree	Mean	SD
1	Online learning offers the children an opportunity to stay away from coronavirus.	95.8	4.88	0.10
2	While we spend more time with children, we can gain a deeper insight into the children's language learning process.	77	4.32	0.81
3	Online classes offer parents the chance to directly watch teaching methods and teachers' activities.	84.1	4.58	0.55
4	Reducing travel time is one of the most important benefits of virtual learning.	89	4.71	0.67
5	Students can access recorded classes indefinitely using virtual tutorials at any time and place.	66	3.11	0.16
6	As a parent, I think my children receive no immediate feedback.	71.6	4.12	0.63
7	As a parent, I feel my children do a huge number of assignments in online classes.	54.8	3.50	0.87
8	Most of the time the children receive incomprehensible teachers' direct instruction in online classes.	85.4	4.64	0.64
9	As a parent I think there is no teacher to student or student to student interaction in online classes.	91.6	4.61	0.12
10	My children become tired because of long and tiresome online classes.	65	3.80	0.31
11	My children encounter ill-structured sequences of lessons in online classes.	70.4	3.92	0.54
12	Due to low Internet speed, lack of infrastructure facilities, and frequent power outages, the online classes were frequently postponed, and materials were delivered slowly.	74.1	4.65	0.61
13	My children become overweight and obsessed because they move too little.	79.5	4.30	0.36
14	The children face eyesight problems because of too long screen time.	34.5	2.33	0.80
15	My child has to wear eyeglasses because of bad eyesight or blurred vision from online screen devices.	5	1.05	1.91
16	The children experience backache and neck pain because they put undue stress on the neck and back for prolonged periods of online classes.	15.8	1.74	0.43
17	Online classes threaten the mental health of the children.	80.5	4.12	0.32
18	Too much loneliness in online learning threatens the children's social relations and reduces face-to-face communication which in the long run may lower the self-confidence of the children.	84.75	4.69	0.42
19	I saw some signs of depression, such as sleep disturbances in my child.	23.3	2.18	0.74
20	I think my children are addicted to cell phones and the Internet.	12.5	1.09	1.12
21	During the COVID-19 pandemic, my children tell me more lies about doing online class assignments while they play online or surf the net for inappropriate sites.	66	3.66	0.62
22	Online learning can cause social isolation which impacts the mental well-being of my children.	46	4.27	0.32
23	Online English language applications are free.	93.3	4.10	0.12
24	The expenses of online classes are very high.	91.6	4.73	0.85
25	I have to spend a lot of money buying Internet-connected devices such as cell phones and computers.	56.6	3.32	1.40
26	My children force me to buy some accessories such as headphones, flash memories, microphones, and printers just for the sake of online learning.	8.6	0.97	0.12
27	Parents have to buy the items twice because their children are careless in maintaining the items.	29.1	1.16	0.48
28	I have to buy one or two Internet-connected devices because the class times overlap, or children want to do their homework at the same time.	14.1	0.97	0.86
29	I think during the COVID-19 pandemic my children became proficient in using the Internet, computers, and online applications.	87.8	4.35	0.46
30	The availability of the recorded online classes and the flexibility to access the educational content anytime and anywhere allowed to give an opportunity to students to practice more.	83.6	4.52	0.33
31	As a parent, I think online classes boost children's self-esteem. the children suffered less stress in online classes in comparison to face-to-face English classes.	55.5	3.05	0.68
32	The strike [4] rules concerning the number of hours working with smartphones and on computers are overlooked since most of the online class activities and assignments are done via these applications.	89.9	4.67	0.56
33	I think my children are inactive, do not pay attention to teachers' lectures, nor do their homework, and attempt to copy and paste assignments without thinking in online classes.	90.8	4.60	0.90
34	My children are easily distracted by online games. They prefer to spend hours playing games with others instead of doing their language assignment.	63.3	3.13	0.87
35	I think the rate of class involvement is low.	72.1	4.16	0.90
36	I notice that children make a virtual group during the quizzes and exams to answer the questions cooperatively.	100	5	0.22
37	I acknowledge that the rate of cheating is high in online learning.	100	5	0.22
38	I think many teachers are not familiar with knowledge of using digital media, and online teaching.	64.7	3.38	0.68
39	As a parent, I believe that most teachers do not establish any teacher-student interactions nor give them constructive feedback.	70.5	4.03	0.79

Table 1: Parents' Attitude towards online language learning during COVID-19 Pandemic.

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[4] Before the COVID-19 outbreak, Iranian students were allowed to use cell phones for limited hours since no educational platforms were used for educational purposes and students used cell phones for playing games.

Conclusion

Considering that parents' influences on children's learning are essential during emergency online teaching caused by situations like the COVID-9 pandemic, the present study aimed to explore the attitudes of Iranian EFL learners' parents toward their online language learning experiences during the pandemic. The data were collected through an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The results of this present study are in line with Cui et al.'s (2021) investigation which found that the students were reluctant in doing their homework which led to parent-child conflicts. Similarly, the results of the present study showed that the learners' procrastination causes emotional problems for both parents and children. The results of the current study concerning the parents' suggestions for teacher training for online classes are also in accordance with Bhamani et al. (2020) as they found that teachers training courses with high quality and long-term professional development should be considered. Parents strongly stressed the importance of teacher-parents relationships. This corresponded with what was stated in the Al Soub et al.'s (2021) study which recommended ongoing collaboration between parents and teachers to maximize advantages.

To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to explore Iranian EFL parents' attitudes toward online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although parents agreed that the best alternative to continue language learning under the pandemic was online learning, they were not completely satisfied with online learning as it was presented. They stated that they suffered too much stress while helping and supervising the students' online learning. Most parents also complained about the physical and mental health of their children during this period citing weakening eyesight, obesity, neck pain, and backache. In addition one of their major concerns was the lack of interactivity between teachers and students the high cost of online learning. Considering this cost, parents said that while they did not have to pay for taxis and buses fares, buy uniforms, new shoes and different types of stationery; the cost of the internet packages and electronic devices became heavy burdens. Many parents assumed that online language learning would be inexpensive, and they were often surprised when they saw that tuition was equal to or higher than the face-to-face classes. They also noted that teachers should be equipped with a variety of practical skills, and programs for improving their performance while teaching online. In short, it can be stated that a majority of Iranian parents had a negative attitude towards online learning for English language development.

Pedagogical Implications

There are many steps that should be taken with future emergencies in mind. Certain instructions regarding online learning should be provided through TV and radio programs, leaflets, and on social educational sites. Language policymakers, in general, and managers of language institutes, in particular, should revise the curriculum to match the current state of language learning compatible with online resources and data dashboards. Moreover, the government should provide free internet access, and stakeholders should devote more time to developing an English language curriculum that includes various forms of social educational networks in order to improve students' language abilities.

Also, the findings of this study can help EFL teachers and syllabus designers since it can familiarize them with the positive and negative views of EFL parents toward online language teaching. EFL teachers should present more information about the students' language understanding to their parents. Moreover, teachers do not have enough time in class to teach all skills online; therefore, they should inform the parents about the significant role of social media networks to compensate for the time constraints and to share a range of information, including photos, text, audio, and video, to give quality resources for various language skills.

It is worth noting that the present study had some limitations. The first one was the inclusion of EFL learners from only three provinces of Iran, out of 31, as they are not representative of all Iranian EFL learners. Therefore, we cannot overgeneralize the findings to other provinces. Furthermore, some of the items of the questionnaire include more than one idea. Thus, this may have impacted the responses. Moreover, future studies can employ qualitative methodologies such as in-depth face-to-face interview, observation, and focus groups to improve the validity of findings and depict a more vivid picture.

Acknowledgment

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Appendix

Parents' Attitude towards Online Language Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic

No	Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
First theme: The advantages and disadvantages of online language learning from the parents' perspectives with 12 items(1-12)						
1	Online learning offers the children an opportunity to stay away from coronavirus					
2	While we spend more time with children, we can gain a deeper insight into the children's language learning process					
3	Online classes offer parents the chance to directly watch teaching methods and teachers' activities					
4	Reducing travel time is one of the most important benefits of virtual learning.					
5	Students can access recorded classes indefinitely using virtual tutorials at any time and place.					
6	As a parent, I think my children receive no immediate feedback					
7	As a parent, I feel my children do a huge number of assignments in online classes					
8	Most of the time the children receive incomprehensive teachers' direct instruction in online classes					
9	As a parent I think there is no teacher to students or students to students' interaction in online classes					
10	My children become tired because of long and tiresome online classes					
11	My children encounter ill-structured sequences of lessons in online classes					
12	Due to low Internet speed, lack of infrastructure facilities, and frequent power outages the online classes were frequently postponed and materials were delivered slowly					
Second theme: The physical and mental health of children using online language learning with 10 items (13-22)						
13	My children become overweight and obsessed because they move too little.					
14	The children face eyesight problems because of too long screen time.					
15	My child has to wear eyeglasses because of bad eyesight or blurred vision from online screen devices					
16	The children experience backache and neck pain because they put undue stress on the neck and back for prolonged periods of online classes.					
17	Online classes threaten mental health of the children.					
18	Too much loneliness in online learning threatens the children's social relations and reduces face-to-face communication which in the long run may lower the self-confidence of the children.					
19	I saw some signs of depression, such as sleep disturbances in my child.					
20	I think my children are addicted to cell phones and the Internet					
21	During the COVID-19 pandemic, my children tell me more lies about doing online class assignments while they play online or surf the net for inappropriate sites.					
22	Online learning can cause social isolation which impacts the mental well-being of my children.					
Third theme: The cost-effectiveness of online classes from the parents' perspective with 6 items (23-28)						
23	Online English language applications are free					
24	The expenses of online classes are very high					
25	I have to spend a lot of money buying Internet-connected devices such as cell phones and computers					
26	My children force me to buy some accessories such as headphones, flash memories, microphones, and printers just for the sake of online learning					
27	Parents have to buy the items twice because their children were careless in maintaining the items.					
28	I have to buy one or two Internet-connected devices because the classes' time overlap or children want to do their homework at the same time.					
Fourth theme: Teachers' and children's performance in online classes with 11 items (29-39).						
29	I think during the COVID-19 pandemic my children become proficient in using the Internet, computers, and online applications.					
30	The availability of the recorded online classes and the flexibility to access the educational content anytime and anywhere allowed to students to practice more.					
31	As a parent, I think online classes boost their children's self-esteem. the children suffered less stress in online classes in comparison to face-to-face English classes.					
32	The strike rules concerning the number of hours working with smartphones and computers are overlooked since most of the online class activities and assignments are done via these applications					

33	I think my children are inactive, do not pay attention to teachers' lectures, nor do their homework, and attempt to copy and paste assignments without thinking in online classes.
34	My children are easily got distracted by online games. They prefer to spend hours playing games with others instead of doing their language assignment.
35	I think the rate of class involvement is low.
36	I notice that children make a virtual group during the quizzes and exams to answer the questions cooperatively.
37	I acknowledge that the rate of cheating is high in online learning.
38	I think many teachers are not familiar with knowledge of using digital media, and online teaching.
39	As a parent, I believe that most teachers do not establish any teacher-student's interactions nor give them constructive feedback.