EFL Teachers' Stressors and Their Coping Strategies During Online Education Induced by Covid-19

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Abstract: During Covid-19, Teachers faced new sources of stressors caused by the emergency conversion to online language teaching. Thus, the current study aimed to explore EFL teachers' stressors and their coping strategies in online classes. To this end, eighty-six Iranian EFL teachers from three language schools participated in this study. To identify the stressors, two study-specific questionnaires were applied. Furthermore, to study the coping strategies a short version of COPE (Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced Questionnaire) was applied. Moreover, the researcher interviewed eleven participants to attain more reliable results. The findings revealed that the students-related stressors were sources of more stressful experiences. Furthermore, it revealed that the most frequently applied coping strategy was problem-focused strategies, and the least frequently used coping strategies were avoidance strategies. The findings have implications for pre-service and in-service teacher education programs.

Key words: Coping Strategies, Online Education, Teachers' Stressors

Introduction

Teaching is a form of emotional practice (Hargreaves, 2001). It is demanding and stressful (Borg, 2008). Several studies affirm that teachers' stress, in comparison to other professions, exceeds the average level of stress (Carver, 2011; Corbin et al., 2019; Drossel et al., 2020). Teachers' job stress is explained as uncomfortable negative emotions that are caused by an imbalance between job demands and the response capability of the teachers (Drossel et al., 2020). Each teacher has a unique source of stress; however, two sources of mostly investigated teachers' stressors are the context of work and interactions with students (Folkman & Lazarus 1988; Skaalvik, 2017).

With the shift from face-to-face education to online teaching induced by COVID-19, teacher stressors extended beyond the teaching context (Sokal et al., 2020). They faced personal and occupational problems at the same time. They had to change home areas to the workplace and also had to change and redesign their teaching skills to new and often never-before-experienced contexts (Sokal et al., 2020). The lesson contents were designed to be delivered in a physical setting. However, they quickly adapted to an online format. Most of the time, lesson contents and styles did not adjust to the online teaching environment (Aperribai et al., 2020). Moreover, the teacher-student form of interaction changed. Teachers had to maintain strong relationships with their students and deliver lesson contents remotely (Klaporth et al., 2020). At the same time, they had to minimize learners' dropouts and reduce students' losses while education was virtual (Goetz, 2020). Besides, they had to perform their emotional, caregiving, supportive, and empathic roles (Goetz, 2020). Precisely, online education has been considered a "stress factor" for teachers (Sokal et al., 2020). Uncontrolled stress may have numerous negative consequences including loss

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of job satisfaction, and reduced effectiveness in teaching. With decisive and vital importance, stress can result in emotional burnout (Hakanen, 2006). Hence, it is vital to get a more profound knowledge of teachers' stress in the context of online education.

To manage distressing pressure and demands, teachers apply conscious or unconscious coping strategies. A coping strategy is defined as an attempt to handle certain external or internal forces estimated as exceeding one's resources (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). It incorporates cognitive and behavioral efforts to control psychological challenges (Carver and Connor-Smith, 2010; Chaaban & Du, 2017). Teachers' coping challenges influence the quality of learning and teaching (klapporth et al., 2020); hence, teachers' coping strategies have been the topic of interest for most researchers. As Carver and Connor-Smith (2010) recognized, coping strategy is a very broad concept and several distinctions have been made within this domain. The functions of the strategies can be categorized into problem-focused coping strategies versus emotion-focused ones (Carver, 1997; Carver et al., 1989; Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Lazarus, 1993a; Parker et al., 2012; Scheier, Weintraub, & Carver, 1986). Problem-focused coping strategies relates to managing stressful situations and modifying or eliminating the sources of stress. By contrast, emotion-focused coping strategies regulates negative emotional reactions to a stressor. Studies have shown that problem-focused strategies (e.g., planning or active coping) positively correlated with participation, work engagement, self-efficacy for teaching, and enjoyment at work (Briones et al., 2010; Foley & Murphy, 2015; Parker et al., 2012; Parker & Martin, 2009). Moreover, problem-focused and emotional-focused strategies are categorized as direct coping strategies (Parker & Martin, 2009). Direct strategies aim to eliminate the perceived stressor. On the contrary, avoidance coping strategies are short-term solutions to a stressful situation, and do not eliminate the cause of stress. Regardless of various categorizations, coping strategies are the efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as exceeding the person's resources (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel- Scetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Lazarus, 1993).

Hence, it is vital to concentrate on functional coping mechanisms which can help teachers overcome the impact of online class tensions. Thus, the present study aimed to expand former research about stressors and focus on identifying the stimulus that causes stress among EFL teachers in online classes. Also, it aims to study behavioral and cognitive tactics used by teachers as coping strategies to face distressing conditions.

Literature Review

Sources of Teachers' Stress

Teachers' job stress is defined as unpleasant and harmful emotions that teachers experience in their work. (Kyriacou, 2001). The most essential features of teachers' job stress are anxiety, frustration, anger, and tension (Kyriacou, 2001). Two primary sources of teachers' stress are the context of work and the interactions with students (Kyriacou, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Byrne (1994) considers work overload as the synchronic occurrence of multiplied goals and struggling with more than one role. Loughran (2006) defines teachers' work overload as more and more work has to be done, whereas less and less time is available to do it. On the other extreme, classroom interactions and effective relationships with students buffer against burnout and provide meaning to teachers' work (Spilt et al., 2011). However, a successful relationship with students requires social and emotional competence (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Socially competent teachers understand varieties of perspectives and contexts and take this into account in their interactions with students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Moreover, emotionally competent teachers conduct their relationships with students based on understanding the students' emotions (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Finally, it is noteworthy that the mostly applied measure of teacher stress has been the self-report questionnaires (Kyriacou, 2001).

Sources of Teachers' Stress During Covid

The period of heightened psychological stress of the Covid pandemic has produced several stressors (MacIntyre et al., 2020). As schools and universities closed teachers and learners around the globe had to cope with the chain of challenges brought on by Covid-19 Marshall et al. (2020). For many teachers, switching to unfamiliar and difficult circumstances without preparation and training was highly stressful (MacIntyre et al., 2020). It has been expected that teachers will simply carry on and do their best by adapting, adjusting, and continuing the process of teaching. In addition to the list of pedagogical stressors, teachers were also confronted with the challenges of the pandemic itself (Wu et al., 2020).

Since, online education is a form of education that is delivered using the Internet, basic technological skills such as; using a web browser, downloading and installing software; familiarity with using browser plug-ins (e.g., PDF reader, video, and audio were required. Further, teachers dealt with a slow internet connection. Precisely, teachers faced several challenges regarding the use of technology during online education. Most of them had never attended training on how to make a good and appropriate teaching media. Malekolkalami (2020). Malekolkalami (2020) in a study conducted in Iran confirmed that teachers' main challenge in switching to online education was the low competition in applying digital. Moreover, it approved that preparing content for distance teaching was also a significant challenge. Technological problems as the main stressor. Also, Hassani et al., (2021) in a study conducted in Iran noted that improper and inadequate online teaching platforms, the digital problem of teacher-learner communication, lack of access to high-speed internet and poor connection, low motivated learners, decrease in students' class activity participation, and poor class management are parts of online teaching stressors. Also, Marshall et al. (2020) identified the challenges of teaching virtually as the reason for teacher stress and anxiety. Balancing home and work life, poor technology equipment, and more crucially lack of real-time communication with students are identified as teachers' challenges in virtual education (Marshall et al., 2020).

Hidalgo-Andrade et al., (2021) in a mixed method study about teachers' mental health and strategies reported that work-family conflict was a pressing stressor for teachers in online education. Teachers who were responsible for taking care of children and/or older adults experienced higher levels of stress than those who did not have these responsibilities. The study also indicated that the adoption of mandatory home-working intensified work-family conflict among women (Hidalgo-Andrade et al., 2021).

Teacher's Coping Strategy

Carver and Connor-Smith define coping strategies as cognitive and behavioral efforts to control psychological stress or overcome challenges (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). They also recognize coping techniques as a concept with several different distinctions (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). Back in the 80s, Folkman explained that coping has two essential functions: regulating stressful emotions and altering the troubled person-environment relation (Folkman et al., 1986). A group of researchers (Folkman 1988; Chaaban & Xiangyun 2017, Lazarus, 1993; Salkovsky et al., 2015) consider the effectiveness of coping strategies as the criterion and establish an opposition between adaptive versus non-adaptive or palliative strategies. Adaptive coping strategies improve adaptational outcomes (Lazarus, 1993). By contrast, non-adaptive coping strategies aim to reduce the impact of the stressor (Salkovsky et al., 2015). However, some other authors (e.g., Carver, 1997; Carver et al., 1989; Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Lazarus, 1993; Parker et al., 2012; Scheier et al., 1986) establish the functions of the strategies as the main criterion and contrast problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Problem-focused copings concentrate on the problem or stressor itself and aim to remove or alter the source of stress (Scheier et al., 1986). However, emotion-focused coping strategies manage or reduce emotional distress related to a stressor (Scheier et al., 1986). Recent studies show that problem-focused strategies positively correlated with workplace resilience,

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career eagerness, work engagement, and self-efficacy for teaching (Briones et al., 2010; Foley & Murphy, 2015; Parker et al., 2012; Parker & Martin, 2009). It Is noteworthy to mention that the COPE (Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced) scale (Carver et al., 1989) is one of the most widely used instruments for identifying coping strategies among different professions.

Online Education During Covid-19 and Teacher's Coping Strategies

Florian Klapproth et al., (2020) study confirmed that a great number of teachers preferred functional over dysfunctional strategies during online education. It also showed that teachers were more likely to use functional than dysfunctional coping strategies when they attributed the causes of their constraints to external factors, like parents' low motivation or the school's low level of organization. However, the study indicates that almost all of the teachers also used dysfunctional strategies including; watching TV or abandoning personal goals. It was explained that teachers preferred dysfunctional over functional coping strategies when they internalized the constraints (eg, when they complained about their level of organization or the low level of digital competence). Modirkhamene & Hassanzad, (2021) achieved the same pattern of results in a study conducted in Iran. They found out that teachers apply positive coping strategies like social problem solving compared to passive avoidant coping. The study highlighted that most of the teachers reported the use of empirically validated classroom management strategies including, hinting, discussion, involvement, recognition and reward, punishment, and aggression. Social problem solving and relaxation coping styles were recognized as the most used coping strategies. It also revealed that compared to passive avoidant strategy applying positive strategies during the pandemic could positively establish a relationship with the overall learner achievement. Hidalgo-Andrade et al., (20201) in a study conducted in Ireland revealed that teachers used more than one coping strategy, and the three most frequently reported strategies were social support, physical activity (exercise), and leisure activities.

The theatrical background presented in this chapter was applied to identify the roots that cause stress and behavioral and cognitive tactics used to manage stress in EFL teachers. However, the present chapter revealed that the literature insufficiently investigates the sources that influence the stress of teachers during online education. Furthermore, deficiencies in the literature about applied coping strategies during virtual education were identified. Also, a small number of studies have been done on the concept of stressors and strategies in the Iranian EFL context. This study was designed to address the deficiencies in the literature and identify the particular circumstance, requirements, or situations that can induce stress during virtual education. Further, specific efforts that teachers employ to, tolerate, reduce, or minimize stressful events were studied. Given the aforementioned theoretical models and considering the distinctive nature of teachers' stressors during the Covid-19 pandemic, the present study addressed the following research questions:

Research Question One: What are the EFL teachers' stressors in online classrooms?

Research Question Two: What are the strategies that EFL teachers apply to cope with their stress in online classrooms?

Method

Participants

Eighty-six Iranian EFL teachers participated in the present study. They were 56 female and 30 male EFL teachers. The average age of participants was 29.72. Ninety-seven percent of the participants had a Bachelor's degree or higher. Their teaching experience ranged from 3 to 24 years. Sixty-four participants (nearly75%) claimed that they did not use any medication for the treatment of their anxiety disorder in five years (the reliability of their claims was not feasible for the researcher).

Instruments

The Study Information Journal

The study information journal was used to familiarize the participants with the concepts of stressors and coping strategies. Then, a few examples of online education stressors and coping strategies were provided.

Questionnaires

Intending to assess stressors, the researcher devised two study-specific questionnaires. To conduct the study-specific questionnaires, the researcher reviewed the related works of literature. As the theoretical model, Shaalvik (2017) stressor categorization was applied. Shaalvik categorization is comprised of two main categories: the context of work and interactions with students (Skaalvik, 2017). Moreover, to obtain a more in-depth perception of stressors, eleven online classes were observed. In the light of Skaalvik (2017) theoretical modeling, and class observation two questionnaires were designed. The first devised questionnaire asked of work-related stressors. It included six work-related questions: decrease in usual job satisfaction, decrease in sense of efficiency, managing work-life balance, inability to perform the mentor role, changing the workload, and lack of receiving academic support. See (Appendix 1). The second questionnaire contained student-related stressors. Student-related stimulus that causes stress: dealing with students' discipline, dealing with uninterested students, decrease in students' learning rate, change in students' demands, teacher-learner communication barriers, and dealing with passive learners. See (Appendix 2). Both questionnaires applied a 4-point Likert scale response.

The initial questionnaire that measured work-related stressors consisted of seven items, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for complete scale was 0.75. The results of reliability analysis indicated that the removal of one item of the questionnaire would improve the internal consistency of the scale. Since item number two was the only item in the scale that had a significantly lower item-total correlation in comparison to the item-total correlations of other items it was removed and the alpha coefficient increased to 0.84. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the student-related stressors scale was 0.88. All the items had approximately equal and optimal item-total correlation therefore, none of the items were removed from the scale.

To explore the teachers' coping strategies, the researcher applied a sub-scale of the Carver's Brief COPE Inventory (carver, 1997). The shortened version of COPE consisted of 28 items. It incorporated 14 subscales (two items per sub-scale). It classified strategies into three groups; problem-focused, emotional-focused, and avoidance strategies. Each strategy is subcategorized into 4 or 6 subdivisions. For example; avoidance strategy is categorized to denial, substance use, venting, behavioral disengagement, self-distraction, and self-blame. Also, problem-focused strategy is characterized by the subscales of active coping, positive reframing, planning, acceptance, seeking emotional support, and seeking informational support. The questionnaire was in the form of a four-point Likert scale response (Appendix 3). Brief COPE Scale is a widely applied questionnaire with acceptable psychometric properties. Researchers report relatively satisfactory reliability estimates. Test-retest reliability coefficients (r) ranged from between 0.46 and 0.86 (Carver et al., 1989). Also, several validation studies of the Brief-COPE have been carried. Perczek et al. (2000) studied the convergence between the scale in English and Spanish. Also, Garcia et al, (2018) studied psychometric properties of the Brief-COPE for the evaluation of coping strategies in the Chilean population. The study identified Brief-COPE as the valid and reliable tool for assessing coping strategies in a Chilean population exposed to different types of stressors and to evaluate functionality or dysfunctionality of the use of certain strategies in such contexts.

Interview

In an effort to achieve a more comprehensible perception and obtain additional information about stressors and coping strategies, eleven participants were interviewed. The first part of the interview covered information about the main content ideas presented in the interview. The second part concerned the source of stress encountered by the participants. The next part asked teachers about their coping strategies. The last section of the interview was designed for the participants to anticipate additional information and the possible final remarks. The interview contained seven semi-structured questions. The first three questions asked about teachers' stressors and four other questions concerned about coping strategies see (Appendix 4). To check the reliability of the quantitative part of the study the researchers carefully controlled the transcripts for the possible mistakes. Moreover, each of two researchers continually shared their analysis of quantitative data to follow a sustained approach. The inter-coder agreement using the Cohen's Kappa was estimated as 0.82.

Procedure

An email containing a demographic information questionnaire, a study information journal, and two study questionnaires were sent to each participant. The demographic information asked about the participants' age, gender, and education. The study information journal familiarized the participants with two main ideas of the study: stressors and coping strategies. Online teaching stressors were defined as any environmental condition or external stimuli of virtual education that cause physical or emotional tension. The coping strategy was explained as the practical techniques that may be applied unconsciously and unplanned to cope with stressors. Moreover, it was explained that they had to retrospect their occupational life during Covid-19 to identify their coping strategies. Then, the required information that the participants were asked to write was specified. To analyze the data, the researcher calculated the total number of responses for each item of the questionnaire. To analyze the questionnaire related to the coping strategies, the researcher calculated the total number of responses for each item.

To achieve more extensive insight, the interview was conducted with eleven participants. First, semi-structured interview questions were developed. The interviews were conducted individually in Persian and English. Each participant was interviewed for approximately 25 minutes. The participants answered the interview questions in English, but they sometimes added Persian explanations. An explanation of the main presented ideas of the interview was provided. After exposing the participants to the concept of stressors, two groups of semi-structured questions: work-related and student-related stressors were asked. The participants were asked to answer the questions, give examples, and add their experiments or additional information. The second part of the interview was about coping strategies.

The processes of data analysis consisted of analyzing two groups of data; stressors and strategies. To categorize stressors, the grounded theory was applied. The grounded theory involves the application of inductive reasoning (Glaser 2005). The raw data were examined, and the critical concepts were identified. The process of reviewing data, and conceptualizing and categorizing ideas constantly continued. It started from the first recognized idea through the processing of all the ideas. Then, the ideas were examined for similarities and differences. Subsequently, initial conceptual categories were identified. The next step included joining concepts together and recognizing how each concept can be related to a larger, more inclusive concept. The final stage was linking concepts together and constructing the main category that held the concepts together. For example, one of the participants stated: I feel disabled to perform my professional activities completely. Online teaching has decreased my self-perception, and it makes me anxious. In this context, the teacher felt anxious because of the disability to perform professional activities. This stressor was named "self-perception". Because self-perception is an image people hold about their abilities and traits, this stressor was categorized as the subcategory of self-efficacy. Finally, self-efficiency

belongs to the work-related category because it concerned the efficiency of teachers based on occupational activities. The next stage of data analysis was concerned with coping strategies. Again, grounded theory was applied. For instance, a participant stated: I try to use an adaptive way of dealing with the stressful situation. For me, it is associated with greater competence. I don't try to run away conversely; I look right into the eyes of stressors and apply my cognitive resources to handle the situation. Since the participant reported an application of strategy that deals with stressors, it was named reasonable strategy. Considering the pragmatic nature of practical strategy, it was considered the subdivision of active coping. And finally, because active coping strategies directly work to control a stressor through appropriately targeted behavior, it was considered a subcategory of Problem-focused strategy.

Results

The first part of the study was related to the teachers' stressors. Two groups of stressors, including work-related and student-related stressors, were studied. Table 1 indicates the average score in two stressors.

Table 1

Frequency of Stressors Among EFL Teachers

Stressors categories	Average score
Work-related stressors	48.6
Student-related Stressors	70

Work-related Stressors

Six work-related stressors were analyzed. Work-related stressors stemmed from the decrease in usual job satisfaction, decrease in sense of efficiency, managing work-life balance, inability to perform the mentor role, change in workload, and lack of receiving academic support. Table 2 shows the average score in work-related stressors.

Table 2

Frequency of Work-related Stressors

Work-related stress during Covid-19	Number of participants	Average score (172 to -172)
Decrease in sense of efficiency is stressful	Completely agree: n = 38 Agree: n = 22 Disagree: n = 25 Completely disagreed: n= 1	71
Change in workload is stressful	Completely agree: n = 31 Agree: n = 28 Disagree: n = 17 Completely disagree: n= 10	36
Managing work-life balance is stressful	Completely agree: n = 36 Agree: n = 25 Disagree: n = 13 Completely disagree: n= 12	60

Lack of receiving academic support is stressful	Completely agree: n = 21 Agree: n = 25 Disagree: n = 27 Completely disagree: n= 13	14
Inability to perform the mentor role is stressful	Completely agree: n=25 Agree: n=31 Disagree: 17 Completely disagree: n=13	38
Decrease in usual job satisfaction is stressful	Completely agree: n = 41 Agree: n = 23 Disagree: n = 12 Completely disagree: n= 10	73

Results indicated that job dissatisfaction was a crucial work-related stressor. Teachers asserted that their sense of job contentment decreased during online classes. This caused teachers have a negative self-perception which affected their performance. Furthermore, they rated the respectful treatment as the influential factor in creating stress. For example, a female teacher stated: "I rarely feel respect and engagement in online teaching. "I feel like my work as a teacher is not recognized. Besides, I don't experience a sense of achievement in my job anymore". Moreover, workload and disciplinary problems of students were indicated as the related factors causing stress. non-effective disciplinary conditions and low student cooperation negatively impact my job satisfaction". "Considering everything, I am not satisfied with my job during this time". The second most frequent work-related stressor was the decrease in teachers' sense of efficacy. Participants declared that they held a sense of efficiency which motivates and drives them to commitment and dedication. Online education lowered their sense of self-efficiency and increased their level of stress. The challenges to juggling with personal and work responsibilities emerged as the third most frequent work-related stressor. Related to this issue, participants believed that it isn't easy to equally prioritize the demands of their job and the demands of their personal life. Mismanagement of work-life balance decreased their professional abilities including managing discipline, reinforcement of knowledge, and adaptability and flexibility. For example, a male teacher stated: "During virtual teaching, coordinating between personal and occupational life was a daunting task for me". "I felt disabled to control and manage both my personal and occupational life". Participants believed that it was hard for them to play their role as a mentor in online classrooms. This condition was recognized as the fourth most frequent work-related stressor. Teachers asserted that the leadership role of the teacher has a positive effect on student engagement and achievement. However, the mentor role as a wise and experienced teacher isn't easy to achieve in online classes. For example, a female teacher stated: "it's assumed that a mentor teacher guides students in the process of language learning yet, constructing a professional relationship with students which supports and scaffold them is challenging in online education". Change in teachers' workload was the fifth most frequent work-related stressor. Teachers claimed that the change in their responsibilities and the structure of the tasks they had to perform was highly stressful. For example, a female teacher believed the change in responsibilities of teachers intensified the workload and respectively increased the teachers' anxieties. The least frequent work-related stressor was the lack of receiving academic support in virtual education. Participants believed that regular academic support is critical to professional development. It creates an environment for sharing experiments, knowledge, and perspectives. Moreover, it makes teachers feel supported, which in turn they can better extend that same support to their students. Therefore, the inability to work together and receive academic support increase anxiety.

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Student-related Stressors

Six student-related stressors were studied. Teachers experience stress due to factors such as students' discipline, dealing with uninterested students, decrease in students' learning rate, changes in students' demands, teacher-learner communication barriers, and dealing with passive learners. Table 3 indicates the average score in student-related stressors.

Table 3

Frequency of Student-related Stressors

Student-related stress	Numbers of participants	Average score (172 to -172)
Dealing with teacher-students communication barriers is stressful	Completely agree: n = 28 Agree: n = 32 Disagree: n = 24 Completely disagree: n= 2	60
Decrease in students learning rate is stressful	Completely agree: n = 31 Agree: n = 33 Disagree: n = 10 Completely disagree: n= 12	61
Dealing with students' disciplinary problem is stressful	Completely agree: n = 51 Agree: n = 27 Disagree: n = 2 Completely disagree: n= 6	115
Dealing with uninterested students is stressful	Completely agree: n = 31 Agree: n = 35 Disagree: n = 18 Completely disagree: n= 2	75
Dealing with passive learners I stressful	Completely agree: n = 27 Agree: n = 32 Disagree: n = 16 Completely disagrees: n= 11	48
Change in students demands is stressful	Completely agree: n = 31 Agree: n = 32 Disagree: n = 13 Completely diagree: n= 10	61

Among six student-related stressors dealing with students, discipline was reported as the most frequent stressor. Participants asserted that class discipline helped students stay focused. Accordingly, disciplinary problems affected teaching and learning to the large extent. For example, a male teacher asserted that it is not possible to apply classroom standards nor to make students cooperate in online classrooms. He stated:" Discipline problems are the main impediment to learning. Focused instruction that engages students and encourages cooperation requires high disciplined classrooms which is not achievable in online education". The second most frequent student-related stressor was students' lack of interest in online education. In this context, participants believed lack of interest in learning, disabled learners to follow the class subject and engage with the received information. Moreover, students didn't interact with their classmates and did their home assigned activity grudgingly. For example, a female teacher considered a lack of interest in the student a critical stressor because she believed students' inability to connect with the learning subjects makes them passive and decreases their level of learning. On the contrary, a male teacher stated: "I don't think students last their interest in virtual education". Conversely, they mostly like online education because they can improve their self-discipline and technical skills." Both changes in students' demands and the decrease in

students' learning rate stand in the third most frequent stressor place. Participants considered the decrease in students' learning rate as the stressor because they believed in comparison to their historical level students' acquisition formed a smaller value. Moreover, they stated that virtual education increased the amount of unfinished learning and disrupted education provision at an unprecedented scale and poor students seemed to be bouncing back more quickly. Participants also believed the learning needs of students are usually a product of diverse factors including individual learning history and their background knowledge. However, it is not easy to assess students' needs nor to determine their current knowledge and skills in virtual education. Moreover, participants believed communication barriers decreased positive rapport and diminish the safe learning environment. In contrast to the conventional classroom setting in the virtual classroom, teachers and students weren't able to communicate instantly, fluidly, and continuously. Therefore, it was hard for teachers to determine when, why, and with what concepts or materials students were struggling. For example, a male teacher stated: "Most of the communications took place via email or other social media therefore, teachers weren't able to observe body language and non-verbal cues in the classroom conversation". "I credit physical distance as the main stressor because it dramatically decreased the level of students learning". The least frequent student-related stressor was the passive learners. Participants believed that one of the challenges of virtual education was losing the built-in sense of community in the classroom environment. Students didn't engage with the course content as they had been naturally in the face-to-face classroom. For example, a female teacher stated: "the learning was completed asynchronously and students often feel disconnected from their instructor". "These unengaged students weren't often able to apply their learnings accurately or make connections with previously learned material". "Therefore, it can be difficult for a teacher to teach online when she struggles to know whether students are participating in learning experiences or not".

Analysis of Teachers' Coping Strategies

The second research question concerned EFL teachers' coping strategies. To answer this question three overarching coping strategies including problem-focused, emotional, and avoidance strategies were studied. Table 4 shows the average score in three coping strategies

Table 4

Coping Strategies

Coping strategy categories	Average score
Problem-focused strategies	48
Emotional-focused strategies	34
Avoidance strategies	-14

Problem-focused Strategies

Problem-focused strategies are characterized by four facets including active coping, use of informational support, planning, and positive reframing. An average score in each of four aspects of problem-focused coping strategy is outlined in Table 5.

Table 5

EFL Teachers Frequency of Applying Problem Focused Coping Strategy During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Problem-focused	Numbers of Participants	Percentage
Active coping	I've been doing this a lot: 34 A medium amount: 31 A little bit: 12 I haven't been doing this at all: 9	69
Use of information support	I've been doing this a lot: 23 A medium amount: 31 A little bit: 11 I haven't been doing this at all: 21	24
Positive reframing	I've been doing this a lot: 26 A medium amount: 20 A little bit: 23 I haven't been doing this at all: 17	15
Planning	I've been doing this a lot: 34 A little bit: 37	84

Planning was reported as the most frequently applied problem-focused coping strategy. Concerning planning strategies, participants tried to find applicable techniques and concentrated on the steps to achieve the practical strategy. For example, a female teacher stated:" I concentrate to come up with a feasible coping strategy and establish the process to achieve it". The second most frequent problem-focused strategy was active coping. Related to this strategy, participants indicated that they apply the cognitive and behavioral approach to manage stressful situations and decrease their adverse effects of it. They directly dealt with the source of stress. They concentrated on constructive and feasible strategies such as seeking information. Use of information support was reported as the third most frequently applied problem-focused strategy. In this concern, participants tried to get help and advice from other people. They got information and help from experienced people. The least frequent problem-solving strategy was positive reframing. Concerning this strategy, the participants tried to look at the positive sides of what was happening. For instance, a female teacher stated: "I told myself let's look at the bright side of it (online education) because staying positive is protective against mental and physical problems".

Emotion-focused Coping

Emotion-Focused coping is identified by the facets of venting, receiving emotional support, humor, acceptance, self-blame, and religion. Participants associated emotionally focused coping with coping strategies that regulate emotions. For instance, a female teacher stated:" I mostly try to apply coping strategies that control and balance my emotions because I think emotions are a crucial part of our daily life". An average score of six aspects of the emotionally focused strategy is indicated in table 6.

Table 6

Language Teachers' Frequency of Applying Emotional Focused Coping Strategy During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Emotional focused	Number of participants	Avrage score (172 to -172)
Emotional support	I've been doing this a lot : 23 A medium amount : 21 A little bit : 32 I haven't been doing this at all : 13	9
Venting	I've been doing this a lot : 42 31 A little bit : 11 I haven't been doing this at all : 4	85
Humor	I've been doing this a lot : 12 A medium amount : 20 A little bit : 43 I haven't been doing this at all : 11	-21
Acceptance	I've been doing this a lot : 42 A medium amount: 27 A little bit : 13 I haven't been doing this at all : 4	90
Self blame	I've been doing this a lot : 20 A medium amount : 28 A little bit : 24 I haven't been doing this at all : 18	8
Religious	I've been doing this a lot : 34 78 A medium amount : 36 A little bit : 6 I haven't been doing this at all : 10	78

The first frequent emotional-focused strategy was acceptance. In this respect, participants applied an acceptance strategy built on the appraisal of their control and the possibility of changing the stressful situation. Because of the nature of Covid-19 participants' assessment concluded that it wasn't a manageable context therefore, they accepted the situation and tried to deal with it. For example, a female teacher stated: "I normally analyze the situation. If I have the possibility to change it, well, I would". "Otherwise, I try to live with it. I think this is logical to assess the situation first". Venting was reported as the second most frequently used emotionally-focused strategy. Participants applied a venting strategy to express their negative emotions and to let their unpleasant feelings escape. Finding comfort in religion or spiritual beliefs was the third most frequent emotional-focused strategy. Teachers reported praying, applying religious beliefs, and meditating as the emotional strategy to cope with their stress. Humor was the fourth most frequently used emotional-focused strategy. Given the potential for humor to relieve tension and settle frayed nerves, participants apply it in the pandemic as a coping technique to face stressors. Moreover, participants found the relationship between the different humor styles and responses to COVID-19. They found that a healthy sense of humor relates to lower degrees of negative emotion surrounding the pandemic. Getting comfort and understanding from others was the fifth frequent emotional-focused strategy. Emotional support helps participants receive emptiness, support, and encouragement from others. Verbal and nonverbal communication reassured them to comfort. The least frequently applied emotional-focused strategy was self-blaming. In this concern, participants cognitively attributed the occurrence of a stressful event to themselves. A few numbers of participants in the present study applied a self-blame coping strategy. There was no participant in the interview part of the study who applied self-blame as the emotional-focused strategy.

Avoidance

Avoidance coping strategies are identified by the facets of self-distraction, denial, substance use, and behavioral disengagement. Participants asserted that avoidance coping provided physical or cognitive efforts to disengage them from the stressor. The average score of four parts of the avoidance strategy is indicated in table 7.

Table 7

Language Teachers' Frequency of Applying Avoidance Coping Strategy During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Avoidance	Numbers of Participants	Average score (172 to -172)
Self-distraction	I've been doing this a lot : 36 A medium amount : 23 A little bit : 11 I haven't been doing this at all : 16	52
Substance Use	I've been doing this a lot : 2 A medium amount : 11 A little bit : 53 I haven't been doing this at all : 20	-78
Denial	I've been doing this a lot : 5 A medium amount :13 A little bit : 35 I haven't been doing this at all: 29	-41
Behavioral disengagement	I've been doing this a lot : 29 A medium amount: 31 A little bit: 16 I haven't been doing this at all : 10	53

The most frequent avoidance strategy was behavioral disengagement. Concerning this strategy, the participants tried to give in or reduce their efforts in dealing with the situation. They may consciously or unconsciously apply this strategy to avoid tackling problems. For instance, a female teacher stated:" I withdraw using any strategy. I believe it is useless to apply any technique". The second frequent avoidance strategy was self-distraction. In this respect, participants tried to attend the emotionally less disturbing situation such as going to movies, watching TV, reading, sleeping, or shopping. The participants who applied the denial strategy tried to protect themselves by refusing to accept the truth about the occurred situation. For instance, a male teacher denied the seriousness of the pandemic. However, he admitted the presence of the pandemic. As the least frequent avoidance strategy, participants applied vanities of substances, including alcohol, tobacco, and sedative. For example, a female teacher stated: "During online education, however, I used tobacco in an excessive amount". "Healthy or not I daily need hookah to make myself feel better".

Discussion

The first part of the questionnaire assessed work-related stressors. Other studies also assessed higher levels of distress in teachers due to an increased workload during online classes (Aperribai et al., 2020; van der Spoel et al., 2020). The data revealed that the decrease in job satisfaction was the most frequent work-related stressor. Studies confirmed that job stress directly influence job satisfaction (e.g., Chaplain, 1995; Greenglass & Burke, 2003). The obtained result of the present study revealed that conversely, job satisfaction influences teachers' stress. It may imply that there is a two-way relationship between job

satisfaction and job stress. Also, it may suggest that there is an association between virtual teaching conditions and teachers' job satisfaction. It could pertain to the nature of online education where teacher workload, student discipline problems, and other complications decreased teachers' job satisfaction and accordingly increased their level of stress. The second most frequent work-related stressor was decreed in sense of self-efficiency. Studies indicate that teachers with higher self-esteem are likely to be happier and more effective in the classroom. They also experienced less stress in their work (Demirtas, 2010)). The obtained results revealed that the decrease in sense of self-efficiency is the source of stress. It may imply that there is a mutual relationship between teachers' self-efficiency and their stress. In the interview phase of the study about work-related stressors, the following findings were obtained. First, the quantitative part of the study about work-related stressors revealed that most of the participants considered the lack of adequate computer equipment, along with low internet connectivity, as the major stressors. Present findings mirror complaints that diverse agents in society have made years ago (Harwardt, 2020). Teachers faced technical problems that were already known, but during the lockdown, they became visible (Harwardt, 2020). Second, the interviewed teachers indicated that online education impacts their personal life. They added that balancing personal and occupational life is a source of stress and affects their psychological well-being. Other studies also confirmed that virtual education confronts teachers with several consequences which may be challenging, such as managing work from home and handling different digital tools for online learning (Hodges et al., 2020). Third, teachers highlighted that teaching the elements of the course including topics, a weekly schedule, the list of tests, and assignments as the potential stressors. Teachers also rated organizing the different educational tasks, including providing feedback and evaluating tests, as challenging. They indicated that they need more autonomy and freedom in how to teach remotely. These findings are in line with Kundu and Bej (2021) research. They found that teachers wanted to be able to freely choose how to facilitate their online teaching during the lockdown.

The second part of the questionnaire assessed student-related stressors. Student-related stressors were dealing with disruptive or aggressive behaviors of students that lead to teachers' stress. The obtained data of the present study indicated that student-related stressors in comparison to work-related stressors were the more frequent source of stress. The qualitative part of the study about student-related stressors provided a more comprehensible picture of stressors. The following results were obtained from the interview phase of the study about student-related stressors. First, data indicated that dealing with students' disciplinary problems was the most frequent student-related stressor. Lateness and unauthorized absence, cheating, and engaging in other content during online classes were reported as the source of students' disciplinary problems. Teachers highlighted that teacher-learner contact restriction impeded controlling learners' discipline. They also explained that their authority to change, improve, and control the classroom during online education was restricted. Therefore, ineffective classroom management conducts an unfocused learning environment that contributed to a stressful setting for teachers. Second, it is revealed that there is an association between learners' frustrations with technology and teachers' level of stress. Interviewed participants also added that a large percentage of students often experienced problems with internet connectivity or software or hardware problems that affected their course participation and engagement. Third, it was revealed that teachers' concern about students' low motivation elevated their level of stress. Present obtained results reinforce the findings of other researchers about the sense of declining motivation as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on students (Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2021; Hicks et al., 2021; Tasso et al., 2021). More specifically, Usher et al., (2021) asked undergraduates about the most stressful aspect of the pandemic in an open-ended query. Approximately one-third of all students mentioned difficulties with motivation and self-regulation (Usher et al., 2021). Fourth, The qualitative phase of the study also identified a link between learners' engagement and teachers' level of stress. Interviewed participants defined learners' engagement as the effort in learning activities, active responses to learning tasks, and self-regulation. They explained that student engagement is the key to delivering effective online courses. They added that during online classes, learners' degree of curiosity, interest, and especially attention decreased. They defined that most universities and language schools were unfamiliar with using

technology tools to engage students. A large number of the participants used the same content materials and pedagogy that they employed in the face-to-face environment, and designed limited or no interactivity for their courses. They added that only a small number of the students had assignments that ask them to meet in 'breakout groups' during a live class and work on group projects separately from the course meetings. Fifth, it is revealed that teachers identified insufficient relationships with the learners as one of the main sources of their stress.

Concerning coping strategy, the quantitative part of the study revealed that teachers applied problem-focused coping strategies more than dysfunctional coping strategies. It may underline that teachers embrace responsibility for dealing with stressful situations. They accept their role as a vital component of resilience in the stressful context of online classes and attempt to plan, seek information, or reframe the meaning of the problems. By contrast, data revealed avoidance coping was the least frequently applied coping strategy. It may suggest that teachers cognitively assess online classes as an unavoidable and invariable context. Therefore, they prefer not to step toward substance use or other self-distribution techniques. In contrast, they try to apply dynamic activities and realistic techniques to cope with their stress. The quantitative part of study unveiled that positive strategies were used more often rather than negative strategies. However, while many teachers preferred problem-focused or positive strategies over dysfunctional strategies, nearly all teachers also used dysfunctional strategies such as; watching more TV, spending time on social media, and Hoka smoking. These findings are in line with Klapproth et al., (2020) study concerning teachers' strategies during online education induced by covid-19. They defined that teachers were more likely to use functional than dysfunctional coping strategies when they attributed the causes of their constraints to external factors, like parents' low motivation or the school's low level of organization. Moreover, participants in the interview phase of the study defined that they were apprised of the stressful events and experiences before applying strategies. They evaluate and construe the stressors to apply practical coping techniques. These findings are in line with the transactional theory of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The crucial element of the Lazarus and Folkman theory is the focus on how an individual appraises a stressor. The interview part of the study also revealed that teachers accept crisis obligations and try to adapt to the online status of education. Therefore, they preferred problem-focused strategies to manage the situation and modify the source of stress. Nearly all of the interviewed participants maintained that despite the sudden shift to online education they adapted and continued the educational process in the new online mode. Hence, to adjust their teaching to the new educational system and to preserve the teaching process, they try to apply more problem-oriented strategies. It also revealed that virtual education constraints recreate new professional identities for teachers. As a consequence of the sudden shift to online education, teachers were forced to evaluate their available resources, employ some aspects of themselves into action, and apply the enhanced sense of self to cope with the new situation. Hence, they tried to embrace their dynamic role and adapt their beliefs, values, and commitment toward teaching. These findings are consistent with Abid et al., (2021) study. They conducted the study about e-learning during Covid-19. They stated that psychological mechanisms based on teachers' professional identities formed to help them interpret challenges meaningfully and deal more adaptively with highly emotional situations (Abid et al., 2021). Moreover, the data highlighted that the established set of attitudes held by teachers shapes the way they select and apply coping strategies. These findings are associated with Herman et al. (2021) paper. In Herman et al. model, stress mindset and meditation precede and in part determine levels of stress. The direct effect of mindset on teacher stress is also supported in the Kim et al. (2020) study which explained that stress mindset predicted job stress and have an indirect effect on teacher turnover at the end of the academic year.

The present study was one of the first empirical studies to examine both teachers' stress and strategies during COVID-19 in Iran. However, there are limitations to the present study that future research should look to strengthen. First, given the descriptive nature of the study, causal interpretation can't be drawn from the data. Second, the present study contained a relatively small sample size. It didn't represent teachers in all areas of Iran. Sample restriction limits the generalization of the findings. Third, applying a

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cross-sectional method limited the detailed assessment of change in stressors and strategy over time as the pandemic continued.

The present study has the following crucial theoretical and practical contributions. First, poor teacher-student relationships were identified as a frequent source of teachers' stress. Present results assert the integrated classroom management intervention that increases teachers' class management capacity and foster skill to advance teacher-student relationships. Second, the obtained data of the present study identified crucial factors such as a change in teachers' self-identity and sense of achievement as the source of stress. It highlighted the professional development of teachers to accept their independent and influential role, embrace the realistic outlook, moderate the expectation, and respond to the complex demands of teaching with tolerance during uncertain conditions as of the covid-19. Third, the practical implication emerging from the analysis of coping strategies can be used to train teachers in optimal coping techniques as the leverage points to alert the negative effects of stress. In particular, the findings of this study would benefit intervention programs that foster effective strategies and activities to support teachers' self-care during the pandemic or other crises. The programs educate teachers to apply practical coping strategies to face and tolerate unpredictable conditions to accomplish and processed the complex demands of teaching.

The following research agendas are delineated for future studies. First, Future research needs to continue to explore the impact of COVID-19 with extensive and diverse samples to provide more representative results. Second, future research is required to define optimal strategies during the covid pandemic and link these strategies to the guiding theories of teacher stress and strategy. Third, further research can also unpack the interplay between variables within each subcategory of stressors. For instance, student-related stressors comprise many complimentary sets including, student disciplinary, teacher-student interaction patterns, and relationships. Unpacking each of these elements and determining their unique and combined information would be helpful. Likewise, the research that simultaneously studies co-workers and leaders' support as work-related stressors may yield robust benefits in teacher and student outcomes.

Conclusion

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic imposed unexpected changes in the activities, and routines of schools, teachers, students, and families. However, despite the constraints of the pandemic, the essential task of education proceeded. The conversion of face-to-face education to virtual online education, the increase in students' psychosocial and educational demands, and the technological problems were potential stressors for teachers. Given the novelty of covid pandemic, and the limited research in Iran about stressors and strategies, the present study examined teachers' stressors and coping strategies during the covid crisis.

This study explored work-related and student-related stressors and three groups of coping strategies; problem-focused, emotional-focused, and avoidance. The obtained results revealed that student-related stressors were the most frequent sources of stress. The data also indicated that teachers apply problem-focused coping strategies more than emotional-focused strategies and avoidance strategies.

Despite its limitations, the present study identified points of intervention to avert the negative effects of stressors. It turned the spotlight on improving the capacity of educational systems to the possible emergent situation. In particular, the picture of the stressors and coping strategies urges educational institutes to draw on their resources and adapt them to the requirements of external changes such as the one experienced in the case of COVID-19.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1: Work-related stressor

1) Decrease in sense of efficiency is stressful.
2) Change in workload is stressful.
3) Managing work-life balance is stressful.
4) Lack of receiving academic support is stressful.
5) Inability to perform the mentor role is stressful.
6) Decrease in usual job satisfaction, is stressful.

Appendix 2: Student-related stress

1) Dealing with teacher-students communication barriers is stressful.
2) Decrease in students learning rate is stressful.
3) Dealing with students' disciplinary problem is stressful.

4) Dealing with uninterested students is stressful.
5) Dealing with passive learners I stressful.
6) Change in students demands is stressful.

Appendix 3: Coping strategies

1) I've been turning to work or other activities to take my mind off things.
2) I've been saying to myself "this isn't real".
3) I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in.
4) I've been using alcohol or other drugs to make myself feel better
5) I've been getting emotional support from others.
6) I've been giving up trying to deal with it.
7) I've been taking action to try to make the situation better.
8) I've been refusing to believe that it has happened.
9) I've been saying things to let my unpleasant feelings escape.
10) I've been getting help and advice from other people.
11) I've been using alcohol or other drugs to help me get through it.
12) I've been trying to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive.
13) I've been criticizing myself.
14) I've been trying to come up with a strategy about what to do.
15) I've been getting comfort and understanding from someone.
16) I've been giving up the attempt to cope.
17) I've been looking for something good in what is happening.
18) I've been making jokes about it.
19) I've been doing something to think about it less, such as going to movies, watching TV, reading, daydreaming, sleeping, or shopping.
20) I've been accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened.
21) I've been expressing my negative feelings.
22) I've been trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs.
23) I've been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do.
24) I've been learning to live with it.
25) I've been thinking hard about what steps to take.
26) I've been blaming myself for things that happened
27) I've been praying or meditating
28) I've been making fun of the situation.

Appendix 4: Teachers' Interview Questions

1) What were the causes of stress resulting from some aspect of your work as a teacher? Which of your assumptions about teaching was affected?
2) What were the causes of stress related to your student?
Why did you consider this event or situation stressful?
3) What coping techniques did you apply to face these stressors?
4) Have you preferred to turn to other activities to take your mind off things?
5) Have you been concentrating your efforts on doing something about the situation?
6) Have you been receiving emotional support from others?
7) Have you been giving up trying to deal with it?
8) Have you been expressing your negative feelings?