Exploring English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Teachers' Experience of Flow During Online Classes

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ABSTRACT

The present study explored Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' experience of flow in online teaching. To this aim, interviews were conducted to explore the conditions reported to facilitate or hinder the experience of flow among teachers. Twenty-four Iranian EFL teachers (eleven males and thirteen females) were selected for semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data concerning their perceptions towards the online teaching-learning process. Participants had limited experience of online teaching Findings revealed that all teachers had experienced flow in online classes. It was also found that, besides previously used concepts which led to teacher flow, students' digital literacy, teachers' feeling of dominance on the subject, and peer communication were influential in enhancing teachers' flow in online classes. Finally, the inability to judge learners' physical and emotional condition, technical obstacles as well as limitations due to face-to-face interaction were reported to be the main obstacles hindering teachers' perceived flow in online classes. Possible implications for teacher education programs are discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

Soon after the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, almost all parts of the world were impacted by its consequences. The effects of the pandemic had social, psychological, financial, and educational aspects. In fact, COVID-19 came with an interruption of education at all levels. In response to this pandemic, many countries closed face-to-face training in schools and universities to reduce the spread of the coronavirus (Viner et al., 2020). In view of this unexpected situation, education became one of the most problematic areas for government, officials, parents, teachers, and students, as they experienced new challenges in the education process which necessitated applying new strategies.

In Iran, all educational centers were closed and online education was taken as a means to run classes. Although most small universities lacked technological tools for online education, they provided students with preliminary services for online classes in a short time. In the beginning, there were major obstacles in running online classes such as instructors' and students' low level of online instruction and learning skills, low internet quality, and lack of appropriate laptops/smartphones (Badrkhani, 2021; Dashtestani & Karami, 2020). However, after some months, the situation improved through workshops organized by universities and providing students and professors with free/discounted Internet connections. Currently, students' acceptance of online education seems to be satisfactory, and most teachers are familiar with basic procedures of online education (Badrkhani, 2021).

Due to the unparalleled impacts of the changes in daily life and education in not only the learners' social life and physical health but also their psychological wellbeing (Giannopoulou et al., 2021), a number of studies were conducted to investigate their mental health (Patsali et al., 2020; Saha et al., 2020; Shigemura et al., 2020), attitude (Unger & Meiran, 2020), emotion regulation (Restubog, et al., 2020), as well as anxiety and coping strategies (Hyland et al., 2020; Savitsky et al., 2020). However, as far as psychological challenges/conditions that teachers may face are concerned, few studies have addressed these issues and probed into their possible effects (Badrkhani, 2021; Wu, 2021). Therefore, it seems quite necessary to consider the psychological aspects of education as well as educators in dealing with the online education. Considering flow as an optimal emotional state where people participate in an activity for its own sake to the extent that they are inclined to repeat it at higher levels of challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1990, 2008), and building on its theoretical foundations, this study aims to find factors leading to EFL teachers' experience of flow in online education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ONLINE EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE TEACHERS' EMOTIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a shift from traditional learning to distance and online learning in most educational institutions of the world (Almaiah et al., 2020). Language education was no exception in this process. Alterations to the medium of delivery and transformation to online learning led to several challenges, including attitudinal transformations (Ribeiro, 2020). This rapid and unexpected transformation procedure increased the instructors' workload as they were responsible for delivering the courses online (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020) and brought new challenges for teachers and students (Carter et al., 2020). Considering the changes in the medium of teaching, it seems necessary to study teachers' emotions in this online context and to probe possible impacts of online classes on their emotions.

Previous studies confirmed the importance of instructors' roles in the process of language teaching (Frenzel, 2014; Keller et al., 2014) but few studies addressed instructors' emotions during teaching (Cowie, 2011; Makhwathana et al., 2017) and their link to students' overall attitude and motivation (Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021). According to Makhwathana et al. (2017), a positive atmosphere is a good platform for teaching and learning, and there is a direct relationship between teachers' emotions and learners' behavior and performance. When teachers show negative feelings, learners feel humiliated, scared, and they might ultimately withdraw from learning. Despite the recent attempts to study teachers' affect (e.g., Taxer & Frenzel, 2015; Toraby & Modarresi, 2018; Talbot & Mercer, 2018), teachers' emotions in online classes have not received due attention (Badrkhani, 2021; Wu, 2021). In this regard, studying teachers' experience of flow would give information in terms of both their cognitive

and emotional states. Accordingly, this article aims to investigate teachers' experience of flow during online teaching and the conditions which enhance or hinder this experience. This study is important as previous literature mostly deals with the experience of flow by language learners or teachers in face-to-face classes but the current study investigates the flow experience by EFL teachers in online classes.

FLOW IN EFL CLASSES

Csikszentmihalyi (1975) used the notion of flow to refer to a state characterized by wholehearted concentration and involvement in an activity, absence of self-consciousness and distraction, and distorted perception of the passage of time. Within a flow event, individuals develop the ability to strike a balance between what they are currently doing and the required task; their perceptions, actions, and emotions become delicately well-coordinated. This state, which was originally proposed as the feeling experienced by artists, i.e., their total involvement in their work without the need for any special effort while obtaining great pleasure, was later considered by Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre (1989) to be an experience which individuals may have even while involved in non-artistic activities. As such, many studies gave rise to the flow theory as developed by Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1990) to explicate factors that contribute to an individual's satisfaction and pleasure in performing his or her roles as white-collar employees (Aydin Kucuk, 2020), teachers (Tardy & Snyder, 2004), learners (Aubrey, 2017; Czimmermann & Piniel, 2016), spa workers and logistics technicians (Fan, Hou, & Lin, 2019), and even consumers (Ettis, 2017).

Considering the different features associated with flow, including anxiety, boredom, challenges, and development of new skills, it is potentially relevant to the ELT context which inherently encompasses both positive and negative emotions. However, there is a paucity of research in this regard. Egbert (2004) conducted one of the pioneering studies on flow in the EFL context and claimed that teachers can facilitate flow in L2 learners through assigning tasks that lead to flow. Since then, a number of researchers (Cho, 2018; Czimmermann & Piniel, 2016; Ibrahim & Al-Hoorie, 2018; Liu & Song, 2021) have confirmed the role of flow in facilitating EFL learners' engagement in classroom activities. Tardy and Synder (2004) examined EFL instructors' flow experience and, as they rightly asserted, the peak moments of flow can motivate teachers in shaping their classroom practices. In Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2019) study, flow was positively related to a higher skill in languages, higher standing among peers, and years of study, and the authors suggested that such experience could have long-lasting consequences beyond the task engagement as accumulated experiences of these positive emotions build people's enduring personal, physical, social, and psychological resources.

FLOW IN ONLINE CLASSES

Online learning flow defined as "a certain experience that online learners may have while engaged in learning in the context of a computer-mediated environment" (Shin, 2006, p. 706) has gained extensive attention in various educational settings (Esteban-Millat et al., 2014; Pearce, Ainley & Howard, 2005; Rodríguez-Ardura & Meseguer-Artola, 2017) and, recently, a number of EFL researchers confirmed learners' flow in online education (Liu & Song, 2021; Zhao & Khan, 2022). In online learning platforms, gaining knowledge of factors affecting individuals' flow and designing appropriate teaching approaches to nurture it would positively affect emotional wellbeing and this might be effective for coping with the negative consequences of quarantine and other stressful periods of uncertainty (Rankin et al., 2019). According to Savara and Parahoo (2018), there are five influential factors in ensuring an effective blended learning experience which include technology infrastructure quality, student engagement, technological competence of instructors, student interactions, and quality of course design.

Due to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on university activities and the enduring impact it is expected to have in educational settings, a number of researchers sought to probe into various psychological aspects and the mental health of learners (Giannopouloua et al., 2021; Patsali et al., 2020), their perceptions regarding online education (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020) as well as teachers' attitudes (Lapada et al., 2020; Kaden, 2020). However, there is a surprising paucity of research on teachers' psychological states. Thus, following this line of research, which validated the explanatory power of flow theory to predict teachers' motivation and give more insight into their practices (Tardy & Synder, 2004).

THE PRESENT STUDY

Alongside with what is mentioned above, the present study was conducted to investigate the conditions facilitating or hindering EFL teachers' perceived flow in online classes. Accordingly, the following questions were addressed:

1. What features could effectively induce perceived flow in EFL teachers in online education?
2. What features could hinder perceived flow by EFL teachers in online education?

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

For the purpose of this study, a convenient sample of 24 EFL teachers (eleven males and thirteen females) from eight state-run universities in Iran were selected for semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data concerning their perceptions towards the online teaching-learning process. The participants' age ranged from 25 to 48 years, and their total years of teaching experience ranged from five to 22 years, with an average of 10.3 years. Three participants were associate professors, thirteen were assistant professors, and eight were visiting scholars. They had previously taught in face-to-face classes and did not have any experience in teaching online classes before the pandemic.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

As research on flow is in its embryonic stage, flow measurement has been one of the researchers' concerns. According to Pearce (2005), techniques to measure flow in online classes need refinement to provide us with more precise results. Thus, studies apply various measurement techniques including questionnaires and interviews to get more insight into individuals' experience of flow. In this study, an interview guide was developed addressing key issues identified in previous studies and was based on details provided in studies in various fields, including language teaching (e.g., Tardy & Snyder, 2004) and sports (Swann et al., 2015). A semi-structured, open-ended approach was adopted. First, flow was introduced and defined using the procedure used within recent research on flow. Teachers were then invited to answer a number of questions (see Appendix A). The interviews were either in Persian (teachers' mother tongue) or English and were conducted by one of the researchers. They lasted for approximately between 10 to 18 minutes, with an average length of around 14 minutes. The interviews varied so much in length because the participants spoke at different speeds and were able to share different amounts of information concerning their teaching experience and flow states experienced. The interviews were audio-recorded and coded after transcription by the researchers.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

A semi-structured interview schedule was prepared to get the opinion and detailed information from teachers during the said lockdown period (March, 2020–January, 2022). The interviews were conducted on January, 2022. Their experiences, perceptions, and reflections regarding their flow experiences during the online teaching-learning process were consolidated for qualitative analysis. Then, we used thematic analysis of the teachers' comments in the interviews, which is a qualitative method used to recognize, analyze, and relate patterns through a set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We conducted the thematic analysis through the following six steps: (1) becoming familiar with the data, (2) generating coding categories, (3) generating themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) locating exemplars. Collaborative coding (Smagorinsky, 2008) was used to ensure the reliability of the decisions by providing room for discussion in relation to the data, with each decision being the outcome of a thoughtful exchange between the two researchers regarding what to call each and every data segment. Accordingly, the interviewees' comments were coded with a focus on the main variables under investigation, i.e., factors leading to teachers' perceived flow and factors hindering the flow perceived by EFL teachers. The final themes and categories were considered carefully by the two researchers to have complete agreement, and the main findings were presented in two distinct categories: 1 Conditions facilitating teachers' flow experiences in online classes. 2 Conditions hindering EFL teachers' perceived flow in online classes.

FINDINGS

In the semi-structured interviews (Appendix A), we first checked teachers' familiarity with flow and in case it was required, the term flow was introduced and defined. It was found that most teachers were not familiar with the term "flow". However, they all had experienced it and confirmed its positive effect on their career. Only two teachers had a complete information regarding flow because they had conducted research on this area and were interested in positive psychology.

All of the participants could report on their feelings on flow and remembered special cases that had experienced it. They all reported that the term flow was not taught in their preservice education. They also believed that this experience was quite enjoyable and necessary in their career. As one teacher (T11) commented:

> It is interesting to say that it does really happen most of the time. For instance, you are halfway through the class and suddenly you understand that more than one hour has passed. This especially happens to me when I want to teach grammar.

All of the teachers believed that flow experience is necessary for teaching especially in online classes which need more energy to cooperate in the class activities. In the following sections, we discuss the factors inducing or hindering flow in online education as perceived by Iranian EFL teachers.

CONDITIONS FACILITATING TEACHERS' FLOW EXPERIENCES IN ONLINE CLASSES

Interest and involvement

Most teachers (21 out of 24, 88%) reported a sense of engagement in activities which resulted in flow. This engagement involved a lack of attention to the passage of time or the environment. The teachers were absorbed in the teaching situation which resulted in complete involvement. They reported interest as a prerequisite to be involved in the context. One teacher (T9) stated:

> A couple of times, I lost track of time while I was doing my job and some students reminded me that the time was up. You do not really know how time flies. You feel that you are in the middle of nowhere teaching in a vacuum, just like taking away that part of the lesson from the rest.

Most participants regarded intrinsic motivation as a key element leading to their flow. They also reported student feedback and involvement as important features in creating flow. Overall, the teachers believed that as flow is related to their interest; it does not happen in all classes and they experienced it in classes in which they were interested.

Happening when dominant on the issue

Many teachers (18 out of 24, 75%) believed that they needed to be dominant on the subject of the course and materials to experience flow in their classes. In such cases, they could express themselves with more clarity, properly handle the class, and address the topic adequately. In addition, those who were technologically competent could better adapt themselves to the current situation.

As one of the teachers (T7) commented:

> Since I am skilled in using social media, I had no problems using online educational platforms. By having clear planning of the sessions, preparing PowerPoint files, and setting some regulations in conducting the class, I could run the class smoothly.

This is not surprising as dominance and skill regarding an educational issue can lead to self-confidence/self-efficacy which can act as a trigger for experiencing flow. Teachers also reported that they regarded having clear and definite objectives as a necessary tool for having dominance and attaining flow in online classes. This sense of having dominance on the issue and being able to control the situation is equivalent to one of the dimensions of flow, i.e., control, proposed by Csikszentmihalyi (1990).

Authentic communication

Another theme that emerged out of the interviewees' answers (15 out of 24, 62%) was authentic communication. The teachers asserted that successful teaching should involve authenticity as this was one of their goals in language teaching. They thought this feature was largely ignored in some language classes and teachers, as well as students, should devote more attention to this feature. In this regard, one teacher (T14) commented:

> When I feel that my communication and my teaching had a kind of authenticity, it gives me a good feeling, and focus on content rather than form. Real communication enhances what you referred to as flow.

This theme was mentioned by most of the teachers. This finding was in line with Tardy and Snyder (2004) who mentioned this feature in their study. Of course, online teaching endangers this feature to some extent as teachers cannot interact face-to-face, and therefore, they have to use more teacher talk (simplified speech). This is due to limitations in using body language and other non-verbal devices.

Students' critical thinking

Critical thinking was reported to be among the elements leading to flow experience by some teachers (10 out of 24, 42%). One teacher (T8) put it this way:

> When I teach oral reproduction of short stories, students' discussion of hidden layers of the stories really entices me. I am not interested in mere reporting of the events and students' analysis of data really motivates me and leads to flow experience.

This finding is quite new with regard to features leading to creating flow among teachers. Critical thinking skills are among the most precious skills which educators need to promote among students. This feature may be enhanced in online teaching as students have direct access to a bulk of information on the Internet, can evaluate the information they receive and, finally, improve their critical thinking.

Students' peer communication/interaction

Most previous studies on flow refer to the interaction between teachers and students; however, interviews showed that even students' cooperation with their peers may result in teacher flow. This factor was mentioned by most participants (16 out of 24, 67%). One teacher (T18) commented:

> In some of the classes that students' show disagreement and comment on their peers' performance or even when they confirm their friends, I become excited and absorbed with the situation.

This finding is related to teachers' conceived goals. When students communicate with each other and share their ideas in an online class, this shows that they have followed the class procedure and learning is happening, but when students are not cooperative, this may be due to a lack of interest and engagement which can influence teachers' flow consequently.

Students' digital literacy

One important theme that emerged in the study is related to students' online literacy. Some teachers (9 out of 24, 38%) regarded that as an important factor related to flow experience in online classes. In fact, most students were not accustomed to learning with smartphones. One participant (T11) stated:

> At the beginning of online classes, my students had lots of problems with using technology. However, now some of them show great familiarity with the online medium. For example, when they are required to deliver a lecture online and they do it professionally, I become excited and happy.

As mentioned by teachers, students' cooperation leads to enhanced flow experience by teachers. In classes where students have better digital literacy, they can cooperate more effectively in class activities. This is predictable as students without the necessary skills for using online tools fail to cooperate successfully in the class. Another reason for the importance

of digital literacy is that, when students are not able to use technology well, they may interrupt the class to seek help which prevents teachers from experiencing flow.

Opportunity to use educational videos

Some teachers (8 out of 24, 34%) held the view that the online education during COVID-19 made it possible to use various applications/media to deliver learning material (e.g., WhatsApp, YouTube videos, Google Form, …) which helped students learn the subject matter better and reduced the energy required on the part of teachers. One teacher (T2) said:

> While I was trying to find some new instructional videos, I did not notice the passage of time. I also could learn something new about how to better instruct learners and teach such concepts.

This can be due to features of using technology in teaching which can enhance the learning environment quality.

CONDITIONS HINDERING EFL TEACHERS' PERCEIVED FLOW IN ONLINE CLASSES

As for the conditions which hindered teachers' flow, a number of subthemes were found in the interview data. Teachers mostly referred to technical obstacles such as poor internet quality, the necessity of face-to-face interaction for some subjects, and the difficulty experienced in judging learners' physical and emotional states.

Technical obstacles

Some students come from remote areas of the country with low economic status, and some even did not have smartphones, let alone tablets/laptops; some teachers (17 out of 24, 71%) pointed to such technical problems as well as an unstable network connection, especially in the suburbs as an impedance to their flow experience since they were worried about learners' follow-up.

Face-to-face interaction for some subjects

Some teachers (11 out of 24, 46%) had difficulty teaching certain subjects, especially when it came to explaining abstract concepts which, according to them, demanded face-to-face interactions. Most referred to the difficulty experienced when teaching writing and reading skills, as they could not check the learners' performance and comprehension.

Inability to judge learners' physical and emotional condition

Some of our participants (10 out of 24, 42%) raised concerns about learners' presence in classes. They doubted whether they were merely logged into the LMS to have their name appearing on the participants' list or to actively participate and follow the class proceedings. As one of the participants (T6) commented:

> I had no clue about their home conditions. Whether they are in their own room, following the lecture and listening attentively to the subject or they are having their breakfast with their family with my voice being heard by all family members.

A number of participants pointed to the time of class, especially for morning classes, as one (T12) stated:

> Morning classes are always shunned by some learners and difficult to handle by some teachers, let alone in the current condition that learners are not required to become ready and have some refreshments before the class. When students are sleepy, it is difficult to have flow and it takes lots of energy to warm the class and make them prepared.

Some of the teachers also pointed to the inability to judge learners' emotional state. They also expressed some problems in monitoring learners' interest and teachers' difficulty in encouraging learners to participate in class activities. As one (T21) put it this way:

In face-to-face classes, you can have learners' reactions toward each new concept being presented and you are more emotionally connect with learners as their gestures and even silence would give you a hint of whether you can go on to the next issue or you should provide more details on the current issue. While we do not have such information in online classes.

This would ultimately affect teachers' relationship with students and students' participation in learning. And accordingly, some students can then not follow the lessons and experience delays in completing the assignment that the teacher demands.

DISCUSSION

The emerging threat of the COVID-19 outbreak resulted in the immediate closing of universities and, within a short period of time, teachers were required to conduct alternative teaching to mitigate the cancellation of classes and the loss of learning. Subsequently, teachers were not only challenged to provide meaningful educational experiences to all their students, but also faced the challenge and many unknowns and stressors related to the ongoing pandemic. Confined to working from home, with existing lesson plans no longer adequate, challenged to quickly learn new technologies and removed from students themselves, many teachers experienced the single most traumatic and transformative event of the modern era. Thus, studying their flow yields valuable results in the lockdown period with various emotional and cognitive distractions associated with it, since teachers should only focus on the task and disregard the surrounding during the pandemic. This state, i.e., the flow condition, is associated with many positive psychological states required for instructional performance such as feeling happy, having fun, experiencing joy and optimism.

The findings clearly showed the existence of flow among teachers. Analysis of interviews regarding teachers' experience of flow pointed to the features of flow as defined by Csikszentmihalyi (2008) including passionate concentration and involvement in an activity as well as the absence of self-consciousness and distorted perception of the passage of time. The data also confirmed Tardy and Synder's (2004) results in that it was found that flow can motivate teachers in shaping their classroom practices. In addition, it can be concluded that teachers' feeling of flow is related to the goals they have in their minds as well as their personal attitudes. For example, some reported flow experience when peer communication occurred during online class hours. This is due to the fact that they regarded peer communication in class as an indication of learning, interest, and engagement.

It is worth mentioning that our findings confirmed that flow experience is present in online classes too, which was in line with the findings obtained from learner subjects in previous studies (Esteban-Millat, et al., 2014; Liu & Song, 2021; Pearce, et al., 2005; Rodríguez-Ardura & Meseguer-Artola, 2017). In addition, flow was found to be linked to four of the five influential factors proposed by Savara and Parahoo (2018), namely technology infrastructure quality, student engagement, technological competence and student interactions. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, although our teacher participants mostly reported less flow in online classes, it does occur in such classes. This finding is attributable to the absence of face-to-face interaction which can influence positive emotions in an unfavourable manner.

Students' critical thinking was another theme reported by teachers which led to flow experience. Since developing higher-order thinking skills is quite critical in new approaches to learning and teaching, and teachers try to develop such skills in students, to ensure independence and control, the current situation that students show critical thinking skills may trigger flow experience among teachers.

As the literature shows, there is a relationship between teachers' emotions and learners' feelings, behaviors and achievements (Makhwathana et al., 2017; Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021). Thus, based on those studies and the present one, it can be concluded that teachers' flow would affect learners' flow and vice versa. When learners are in their zone of flow, or the ideal state for learning, teachers will most likely experience the same feeling as their goals are clear and they can get immediate feedback on their teaching. Due to the importance of learners' psychological states in this pandemic (Patsali et al., 2020), more attention should be devoted to teachers' emotional and cognitive states, so that we can have flow as part

of our daily experience. Accordingly, knowledge of teachers' flow is a source of value in this lockdown period. When teachers experience the utmost feeling of flow, they have more desire to dedicate energy to tasks and activities, and in this period when the highest burden is on their shoulders, more attention has to be paid to their emotional states and factors contributing to their optimal experiences.

Our findings have some implications for teacher training programs. For example, it was revealed that teacher dominance of the educational content could lead to a positive flow experience. This may be due to self-confidence that arises when teachers are competent enough to teach. As such, we suggest that policy makers give an important role to teachers' competence which can influence their flow experience. Language teachers in turn can influence learners' perceived flow by providing interesting tasks which would ultimately lead to a more positive classroom atmosphere and language development.

It is worth mentioning that the study is not without limitation. The teacher participants were extracted from a limited number of universities, thus making the generalization of results to the entire population of university teachers difficult. Therefore, it is suggested that future research involve a greater number of teacher participants from a larger variety of universities. Furthermore, although the current study provides important insights into the factors leading to teachers' flow, it does little to further the understanding of how various strategies can be applied to improve flow.

Thus, there are a number of avenues for further research. For example, we need to know what reduces flow experience in online classes. Furthermore, conducting experimental studies on how to develop a flow experience among teachers can contribute to our understanding of this important concept pertinent to teaching. Another interesting area for future research would be comparing the states of flow between teachers and students to find possible differences and/ or similarities. Finally, as the findings showed, students' digital literacy can lead to teachers' flow experience, so one could investigate the possible relationships between students' digital literacy and teacher flow in quantitative/qualitative large-scale research.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we reported a qualitative study exploring EFL teachers' experience of flow in online teaching. Our findings suggest that flow experience is present in online classes too, which was in line with previous literature. We also found that students' digital literacy, teachers' feeling of dominance on the subject, and peer communication were influential in enhancing teachers' flow in online classes. The COVID-19 pandemic clearly showed that both teachers and students need to be competent in using information technology to act effectively in unprecedented situations like this pandemic. Some educational programs and/or courses should be designed to aid teachers and students develop their IT skills. This would be quite significant, especially in emergency situations where face-to-face education is not possible. Anyway, online education is expected to be prevalent worldwide even after the pandemic. Therefore, it is not an option but a necessity.

APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW GUIDE

Please answer the questions considering your online teaching experience during the pandemic:

1. During your teaching activity, you may have experienced times in which you lost your sense of time and were completely immersed in what you were doing. In fact, when you are working on something and you are working well, you have the feeling that there's no other way to do what you are doing and there are no other things to think about or no worries. This state is called the flow experience.

2. Have you ever had an experience like this in your online classes? Please describe it.

3. Can you provide an example of one such experience which sticks out in your memory?

4. In as much detail as possible, can you describe what these experiences are like?

5. What are the most distinguishing characteristics, or clearest indicators of being in flow? (or What are the most notable differences between being in and out of flow?)

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6. What are you most aware of during flow?

7. Which course gives you the highest experience of flow?

8. What prevents flow?

9. Are there times when flow is more or less likely to occur?

DATA ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

ETHICS AND CONSENT

All procedures performed in the study were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the ethical guidelines of the 1964 Helsinki declaration. In addition, at the onset of the study, our participants were informed that the data of the study will be used only for research purposes and that all data will be used anonymously.

Informed consent was obtained from all the participants.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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