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The Coping Strategies of English Instructors and Teachers with Perceived Stress While Giving Synchronous E-Lectures in the COVID-19 Era: A Non-Native EFL Context

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Abstract

Stress has been ranked among the prevalent definitions in education where teachers' time-limited duties, heavy workload, examinations, and potential administrative tasks are concerned and discussed. Particularly with the pandemic, some stress factors (or stressors), such as the sudden transition to online settings with an intense use of technology, have also seemed to impact educators' professional contentment. By taking that into account, this study set out to examine the strategies that English teachers and instructors use to cope with their perceived stress while speaking in online classes. To that end, 83 English teachers from different education levels in distinct regions of Turkey and 96 instructors affiliated with schools of foreign languages were included in the research. First, a questionnaire developed by the researcher was administered and then, interviews were conducted with eight participants in the second data collection round. Despite having encountered stress occasionally, the majority of the attendees counter-intuitively reported not feeling the severe strain of COVID-19. It was then found that they had adopted mostly functional, approach-oriented, and cognitive strategies in the face of perceived stress. Furthermore, the participants' adoption of approaches and avoidant styles in light of the brief COPE model also unearthed that they preferred cognitive strategies over behavioural ones. The educators' seniority, and ways of coping with stress, however, were not significantly correlated. Yet, their digital experiences were more effective in influencing their sense of stress. In light of the findings, some suggestions and implications have been offered to educators in terms of managing stress in synchronous virtual classes.

INTRODUCTION

With the intermittent closure of schools and universities halfway through the 2019-2020 educational term, the amorphous threat of the global crisis to education seemed as if it would last for years to come. As such, new realities emerged with an astonishing chain of events, which led to heightened negative emotions among teachers and the latter embracing preordained coping strategies during the trauma as a result. During this time, the teachers' psychological

reactions to enforced online teaching commonly included experiences of loneliness, anxiety, stress, avoidance, denial or acceptance, to which coping mechanisms were activated (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Schipor & Duca, 2021; Shinan-Altman & Levkovich, 2022). However, referring to the magnitude of the term 'stress-contagion' coined by Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2016), the study will address stress, its effects on teachers at diverse levels of education, and the various coping strategies they employed during the COVID-19 era.

Teacher stress and its correlation with the pandemic

Due to its violation of psychological, physical, and time-wise boundaries, or the quashing of beliefs concerning future education, COVID-19 undoubtedly exerted an influence on the occurrence of stress in online education. To investigate its potential negative impact on students and its echo on their learning performance, quite a few scholars have conducted empirical research mostly on learners themselves (e.g., Pabro-Maquidato, 2021; Sultana et al., 2022) or teacher candidates (see Nurfauziah et al., 2022). In addition to that, a growing body of studies has particularly concentrated on language teachers and promulgated the fact that (perceived) stress has been multiplied with the pandemic due to a myriad of factors, such as: intercultural units within the language, dangers to self-identity or sense of self, different proficiencies of the learners, the hesitancy of one's language competency and abilities, and the difficulty of handling learner stress and anxiety (Fathi et al., 2021; Gkonou et al., 2020; Gregersen et al., 2021; MacIntyre et al., 2020; Wieczorek, 2016, among others). In other words, these studies proved how stress would adversely affect the quality of this profession and the well-being of teachers. Approaching this issue from a different angle, Anderson et al. (2021) scrutinized whether the creativity in speaking practices of K-12 teachers within a sample of 57 would have a correlation with their well-being, self-efficacy, or stress in the face of the pandemic. The results displayed positive correlations between the first two above-mentioned factors and creativity; however, the COVID-19 pandemic was also known to cause teachers to experience more stress than usual, resulting in the loss of creativity. As such, their work evoked the following question for us: could we also observe the potential impact of speaking practices on the perceived stress of educators in virtual courses?

Coping with stress

Based on the perceived professional stress of teachers, the ways they manage stress and their coping resources in minimizing setbacks in past literature, chronologically speaking, the transactional model was the first major design put forward by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which mainly predicated on behavioural self-regulation and stress. In what follows, they identified two coping strategies: problem-focused and emotion-focused. The former intended to sort out stress and change resources, whereas the latter was mostly centered on how to manage emotional stress. These scholars also addressed stress management against other internal aspects (e.g., attitude, belief, or mood) as well as external stressors (e.g., demands from outside factors) with different resources. Similarly, after reorganizing the designs of Carver et al. (1989) and seizing the notion that dividing strategies into two categories would be superficial, Carver (1997) created his multidimensional model of coping called brief-COPE (Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced). He then proposed coping strategies and grouped

them into three styles: avoidant strategies, approach strategies, and neither avoidant nor approach strategies. While non-functional strategies were listed in the first strategy type (e.g., denial, self-blaming, or venting), the items in the next (i.e., the approach) mostly involved practical coping skills or acknowledgment skills, such as positive reframing, instrumental support, and planning. Later on, Garnefski et al. (2002) claimed the need for distinguishing cognitive coping strategies from behavioural ones, and accordingly, they determined nine cognitive strategies, then sub-divided them into two categories: 'more adaptive' and 'less adaptive'. The former covered positive refocusing, refocus on planning, positive reappraisal, acceptance, and putting into perspective, whereas the latter included rumination, catastrophizing, blaming others, and self-blame. Finally, Bakker and Demerouti (2007) considered stress from a broader perspective and reshaped the professional demands-resources model to point out the potential imbalance between personal demands and coping resources on behalf of enhancing well-being.

As underlined by Moore and Lucas (2020), a multitude of studies have referred to the foregoing models of coping while planning the research designs before and after the pandemic. For instance, Shinan-Altman and Levkovich (2022) aimed to clarify the possible liaisons of perceived stress of 208 Israeli teachers via two sub-items, namely personal coping resources (i.e., social support, and sense of control), and pre-determined psychological outcomes, such as loneliness or depression. Having obtained data via online surveys and analysed them using AMOS and SPSS programs, the researchers detected that perceived stress was in parallel with the psychological outcomes. Moreover, they noted the social support participants perceived during the COVID-19 pandemic and the sense of control were significantly correlated with one another. Similarly, MacIntyre et al. (2020) worked with 600 teachers from an international sampling and scrutinized their stressors using online questionnaires. Fourteen coping styles were listed in two categories (i.e., avoidant and approach). At the end of this quantitative analysis, they discovered the high exploitation of avoidant strategies were negatively correlated with positive outcomes, such as one's resilience or well-being, but well-coordinated with negative psychological outcomes (e.g., stress or loneliness). They added that even though approach coping was frequently adopted, avoidant coping also abounded as teacher stress soared in the pandemic era. Hobfoll (2011) also arrived at the same conclusion with their research into the same inquiry in a traditional education context in that teachers with low self-efficacy, or whom are unmotivated had a tendency to employ avoidance-coping strategies to shy away from the potential threat of stress. Likewise, Nazari et al. (2022) incorporated 296 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors into their seminal study to analyse the foregoing two coping strategies (approach and avoidant) during online education in addition to discovering their possible correlations with teacher apprehension and work engagement through the brief COPE scale by Carver (1997). The findings were similar in that the positive impact of strategies was observed in job engagement, while it was negatively associated with avoidance coping. Their apprehensions were also badly influenced by approach strategies but positively affected by avoidance coping. In the same vein, Xu et al. (2023) investigated the impact of stress on 7,743 Chinese instructors' well-being from the aspects of teaching engagement and job satisfaction, aside from coping mechanisms in a face-to-face education context. Having incorporated the participants from 210 universities into the study based on convenience sampling, and gathered data through online surveys, the researchers discovered challenge stressors had a significant influence on

teaching engagement, whereas hindrance stressors negatively affected their commitment to the profession. The study additionally showed that job satisfaction partially moderated the impact of hindrance stressors on teaching engagement and reduced the impact of challenge stressors on their commitment. They also noted university teachers were disposed to adopting avoidance-coping strategies to save sources if they perceived their workplace was not appropriate to maintain teaching practices.

Garnefski et al. (2002), at the time, carried out a study of face-to-face education on 1,117 Dutch attendees through questionnaires to unearth their cognitive coping strategies. Congruent with the results by Carver et al. (1989), they found that positively reappraising the situation was directly proportional to the attendees' self-esteem and inversely related to stress and anxiety. In addition, though catastrophizing, rumination, and self-blame were reported to be maladaptive unlike positive reappraisal, these four cognitive coping styles were illustrated to be of utmost significance in reporting the symptoms of stress. Schipor and Duca (2021) also investigated the strategies of 127 Romanian teachers in on-site and online situations with questionnaires to draw attention to the perceived stress and its link with external coping resources. They revealed the correlation of certain positive cognitive coping strategies (i.e., acceptance and positive reappraisal) was in parallel with the perceived difficulty of teaching demands depending on the types of learners and challenging situations in online settings. Nonetheless, online teaching was pointed to be perceived as more demanding due to online practices and tough tasks. Finally, Latif and Alhamad (2023) addressed 112 Arabic EFL teachers' perceived challenges and their ways of coping with these difficulties in a remote teaching setting by conducting a mixed-methods study. The scholars explored more general coping strategies of the participants and identified them as confronting technical challenges by taking online courses, asking for the help of colleagues, self-learning the functions of distinct portals, or solving communication problems among students. Yet, they were only reported to moderately manage learners' silence, poor interaction, and lack of enthusiasm.

Different from these studies, Ghanbari and Nowroozi (2022) discussed the coping strategies of teachers in accordance with Hill's (1958) ABC-X model which represents a basis for a crisis aroused by an immediate transition to the current circumstance (see Figure 1). They conducted a qualitative case study on two Iranian EFL instructors with semi-structured interviews, and revealed that teachers were ambivalent about current practices and using technology while maintaining their e-tutoring. Main coping strategies were identified as technological, affective, pedagogical, and institutional. These styles were also detected to function well together in the pandemic struggle, a full-scale crisis.

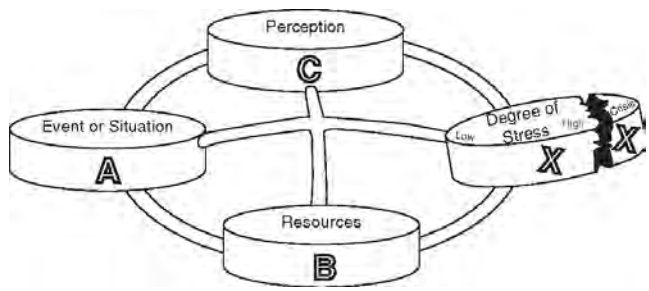

Figure 1 ABC-X model by Hill (1958, p. 142)

If we adopt the findings of Ghanbari and Nowroozi (2022) to Hill's model, the abrupt shift to e-learning can be regarded as a stressor among teachers, intimidating their well-being and professional identity. At that point, seniority in the profession might have a significant effect on handling stress, a remarkable resource that Hill (1958) emphasized on while identifying the importance of mutual interactions between perceptions and resources. Similarly, Pham and Phan (2023) examined seven Vietnamese EFL instructors' emotions during synchronous teaching experiences in the COVID-19 era by recruiting them from a diverse group in terms of their seniority using the purposive technique. They detected participant instructors experienced a wide range of both negative and positive emotions during online teaching and espoused distinct coping ways to manage them due to values in school culture and power and social relations. In the end, conflicting notions of the participants with different teaching experiences concerning their emotion regulations in offline and online classes were observed. Further implications of these analyses have brought us to the heart of the matter: the associations between seniority, (perceived) stress, and coping strategies seem to be underrepresented in the field.

The present study

Though studies on coping strategies exist in the research paradigm, the idiosyncratic character of the pandemic, and its reflection as a sudden shift to e-learning have cast doubts on the compatibility of prior studies with the online education system (Ghanbari & Nowroozi, 2022; MacIntyre et al., 2020). As a case in point, Pham and Phan (2023), and Schipor and Duca (2021) could not discover consistent responses regarding participant teachers' stressors and coping styles in online and offline classroom environments; thus, they called for more studies particularly in the online teaching setting. Accordingly, the current study hopes to fill this gap by reaching conclusive findings in the context of e-teaching. Vast literature also calls attention to the perceived stress of teachers, and their coping strategies mostly in a behaviour-oriented way; however, there is yet room for exploring both their cognitive and behavioural strategies in online settings. Therefore, the main motive behind the operationalization of this research is to shed light on the activated coping strategies of participant educators during a period of emergency remote teaching in managing the stress they perceive while speaking in virtual classes.

The current research would also contribute to the existing literature by raising awareness of the solutions teachers come up with when under stress. Consequently, this study would improve the quality of teaching and pave the way for developing further new coping strategies. There is none, if any, research emphasizing what cognitive and behavioural coping strategies English language teachers and instructors would adopt while speaking the target language during COVID-19 in a Turkish context. Moreover, as far as we know, previous studies on this issue did not recruit language teachers from different instructional levels (i.e., primary and secondary schools or universities) in their designs. Finally, the possible correlations between coping strategies and teachers' seniority in the profession would also be investigated. In brief, the current study sets out to answer the research questions as follows:

1. Did English language teachers and instructors feel stressed while speaking English in online lessons at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic? If so, what was the stress caused by?

2. Were there any differences between the perceived stressors of English language teachers and the instructors?
3. What were the solutions of English language teachers and instructors in overcoming the challenges of speaking in online English lessons at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic?
4. Were the strategies associated with the teaching experiences of the English language teachers and instructors in any way?

METHODOLOGY

Participants and procedure

After obtaining approval from the ethics committee to conduct the study, the link of a survey was distributed to the school principals with the consent of the Ministry of Education (MoE) and to the administrative body of the 'foreign languages unit' of a Turkish university in the Higher Education (HE) context. In-service EFL teachers from different instructional levels and several schools in distinct districts across Turkey were invited to partake in the study via the random sampling technique. The researcher also embodied a chain-referral sampling method to recruit English instructors affiliated with the school of foreign languages of the university.

A total of 179 attendees from the council of HE (N = 96) and MoE (N = 83) agreed to complete the online survey anonymously via Google Forms in the first half of March 2021. The tables below provide further detailed information about the participants.

Table 1

The seniority of the participants

		$\bar{X}$	SD
Prior teaching experience by education level	**Years of experience**	**n**	**%**
Kindergarten	I do not have educational experience.	147	82.1
	1-3	14	7.8
	4-7	4	2.2
	8-10	2	1.1
	11 or more	12	6.7
Primary school	I do not have educational experience.	104	58.1
	1-5	62	34.6
	6-10	9	5.0
	11-15	2	1.1
	16-20	1	0.6
	21 or more	1	0.6
Secondary school	I do not have educational experience.	71	39.7
	1-5	69	38.5
	6-10	24	13.4
	11-15	12	6.7
	16-20	1	0.6
	21 or more	2	1.1

		$\bar{X}$	SD
Prior teaching experience by education level	**Years of experience**	**n**	**%**
High school	I do not have educational experience.	89	49.7
	1-5	62	34.6
	6-10	10	5.6
	11-15	4	2.2
	16-20	7	3.9
	21 or more	7	3.9
University (Associate degree)	I do not have educational experience.	115	64.2
	1-5	29	16.2
	6-10	12	6.7
	11-15	14	7.8
	16-20	2	1.1
	21 or more	7	3.9
University (Bachelor degree)	I do not have educational experience.	91	50.8
	1-5	23	12.8
	6-10	27	15.1
	11-15	18	10.1
	16-20	8	4.5
	21 or more	12	6.7
Total		179	100.0

According to Table 1, 82.1% of the participants did not have any teaching experience in kindergarten, 7.8% had 1-3 years of seniority, 2.2% of them had 4 to 7 years of experience, 1.1% taught English for 8-10 years, whereas 6.7% has provided 11 years or more of education to young learners. For the primary school teachers, 58.1% of attendees did not have prior experience teaching in a primary school, 34.6% had 1-5 years of teaching experience, 5% of them taught English for 6-10 years, and 1.1% has provided English lessons for 11-15 years. Moreover, 0.6% of the participants have garnered 16-20 years of teaching experience, and only 0.6% of them were seasoned with 21 or more years.

In addition, 39.7% of the educators had no experience in secondary school education, while 38.5% had 1-5 years of seniority, 13.4% provided instruction for 6-10 years, 6.7% practiced teaching for 11-15 years, 0.6% was experienced with 16-20 years, and 1.12% were established teachers with 21 or more years. As for high school, 49.7% of them did not have any experience, 34.6% were equipped with 1 to 5-year experience, 5.6% spent 6-10 years teaching English at this level, 2.2% reached 11-15 years, and 3.9% taught English for 16-20 years, whereas only 3.9% had 21 or more years of experience. Finally, 64.2% of the instructors did not lecture students in associate degrees, 16.2% had 1-5 years of teaching experience, 6.7% worked for 6-10 years, 7.8% taught English for 11-15 years, 1.1% were experienced with 16-20 years, and 3.9% had a length of service of 21 years or more. For the bachelor degrees, 50.8% of instructors did not have prior experience teaching at the undergraduate level, 12.8% gave lessons for 1-5 years, and 15.1% were qualified with 6-10 years of experience. The rate of seniority decreased to 10.1% for instructors with experience of 11-15 years. It appears that only 4.5% had 16-20 years of teaching practice, whereas 6.7% had seniority of 21 or more years in the HE context.

As for the later phases of the research procedure, interviews were also held with the participants who noted their e-mail addresses at the end of the survey to voluntarily take part in them. Though 15 out of 179 attendees provided their e-mails to further contribute to the study, only 8 of them responded to the follow-up correspondence to join online meetings on Zoom. As the online education process was hectic and required the teachers to expend a lot of effort before and after each course, the interviews were conducted throughout 5 weeks by scheduling an appointment for each participant. Thus, the data collection process was only completed at the end of the academic term.

Instruments

The questionnaire started with eliciting background information of the educators, such as the instructional level at which they teach, and their seniority in the profession by years. In what follows, the researcher created a survey using a five-point Likert scale and based on related inquiries and scales developed by scholars in past literature (see Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1990). To illustrate this process in-depth, the first and second items in the scale were adapted from a self-developed questionnaire by Kralova and Tirpakova (2019), the third and fourth items were modified from the original scale by Chametzky (2019), some minor changes were conducted on Horwitz's (1996) inquiry for the penultimate item, and finally the last statement of the instrument was formed by the researcher.

The questions in the survey were centered on cognitive distractions and the possible incompetency of the teachers in dealing with the challenges. In light of the cognitive emotion model by Garnefski et al. (2002), and one of its items from the 'less adaptive' strategies, the catastrophizing technique was intentionally adopted to narrow attendees' attention down to a particular emotion. That is, all of the nine cognitive coping strategies were not included in the survey exclusively. The researcher included it in the final form hinging upon her own teaching experiences as well. He/she then translated the questions into the mother tongue (i.e., Turkish) by following the opinions of two experts (professors) from the English Language Teaching (ELT) department to prevent blocking participants' thoughts and manage data fluency.

As for the second data collection tool, interviews were held to ensure triangulation of the data. Five questions were posed to the educators to reveal both cognitive and behavioural coping strategies with perceived stress. Accordingly, the researcher addressed whether speaking English in online classes was stressful, and if so, he/she would ask the educators to detail their most stressful moment(s) along with their techniques or solutions in managing it. The attendees also discussed whether teaching experience could affect coping strategies with the stress of online speaking, and whether and how experience gained from different levels of education could be reflected in their stress levels. As the interviews were semi-structured, further details concerning stress, its sources, and teachers' coping strategies from a cognitive and behavioural point of view were investigated in-depth. Firstly, the fourteen-item brief COPE model by Carver (1997) was employed to examine the answers of each attendee. Then, as Roth and Cohen (1986) conceptualized approach and avoidant coping strategies as emotional, behavioural and cognitive activities, these items were considered from a broader perspective and thoroughly as a whole. In other words, the researcher respected the approach by Litman (2006) who also

listed the coping sub-scales in different categories according to the results of his research. Thus, while referring to the adopted strategies, the categories were reconsidered to interpret cognitive and behavioural dimensions of teacher stress, and hence, to see the big picture.

The analysis of the interviews was conducted by three experts in qualitative data analysis from foreign language teaching departments of different universities. After creating the transcriptions, and completing the verbatim translation of the dialogues (≅ 5,300 words), each participant educator was assigned the letters of A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and H. The data was coded in three waves. Initially, the codes of the first two questions were done line by line individually, despite keeping all codes in a single hermeneutic group. Then, the experts compared the generated codes of these two question sets and refined them again after merging. They drew out the themes and codes which were appointed to categories separately on the third wave of coding. Additionally, to find the answers of the last two questions and identify salient solutions and strategies of the participants, they mainly categorized the responses in light of the aforementioned model. In the end, they shared the grouping of codes and started the discussion for agreement. Accordingly, the raters arrived at a 0.83 inter-rater reliability, so this analysis can be regarded as excellently reliable in statistical terms (Fleiss, 1981).

Statistical analysis

Data were analysed using both Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows 25 and Analysis of a Moment Structures (AMOS) to address the fact that the questionnaire was developed by the researcher. Descriptive statistical methods (number, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were also used when assessing the data. The reliability of the questionnaire was examined using Cronbach's Alpha (see Cortina, 1993). In the reliability analysis, as the Cronbach's Alpha (α) coefficient value varies between 0 and 1, the questionnaire cannot be regarded as reliable if it is between 0.00 and 0.40; it is considered to be of a low reliability if it is between 0.40 and 0.60, while 0.60-0.80 represents a fairly reliable instrument. Finally, it is considered to be highly reliable when the ratio reaches a point between 0.80 and 1.00 (Charter, 1997). After examining the results, it was determined that the questionnaire was highly reliable with an alpha value of 0.83.

In addition, the exploratory and confirmatory analyses were performed for the construct validity (see Table 2 and 3). However, before the implementation of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was applied to test the suitability of the sample size for factorization (Kaiser & Rice, 1974). As a result, it was detected that the KMO value was 0.83, thus, the sample size and items were 'sufficient' for factor analysis. In addition, when the results of the Bartlett's test of sphericity were examined, it was discovered that the obtained chi-square value was significant ($\chi^2(15) = 397.58$; $p < 0.01$). It proves that the data consisted of a multivariate normal distribution. After confirming the suitability of the data for factor analysis, EFA was conducted using the principal component analysis method to reveal the factor structure of the questionnaire. As the table below reads, the one-dimensional structure explains 55.26% of the total variability of the scale.

Table 2

EFA results of the questionnaire

Items	Factor
	1
I1	0.66
I2	0.82
I3	0.77
I4	0.54
I5	0.82
I6	0.78
Eigen value	3.31
Explained variance	55.26
KMO = 0.83; $\chi^2(15) = 397.58$; Bartlett sphericity test (p) = 0.00	
Total explained variance = 55.26	

According to Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), the structural equation model result of the scale was significant at the p = 0.00 level (also see Table 4). As the model was modified, co-variance was also created between errors with high model modification values.

Table 3

Findings of CFA

Indices	Perfect fit	Acceptable fit	After modification
X^2/SD	0 ≤ χ2/df ≤ 3	3 ≤ χ2/df ≤ 5	1.60
RMSEA	0.00 ≤ RMSEA ≤ 0.05	0.05 ≤ RMSEA ≤ 0.08	0.05
CFI	0.90 ≤ CFI ≤1.00	0.80 ≤ CFI ≤ 0.90	0.98
GFI	GFI ≥ 0.90	GFI ≥ 0.80	0.97
AGFI	0.95 ≤ AGFI ≤ 1.00	0.80 ≤ AGFI ≤ 0.95	0.93
NFI	NFI ≥ 0.90	NFI ≥ 0.80	0.96
IFI	0.95 ≤ IFI ≤ 1.00	0.90 ≤ IFI	0.98
TLI	0.95 ≤ TLI ≤ 1.00	0.90 ≤ TLI	0.97

In accordance with the results of the first level of one-factor analysis (see Figure 2), when the goodness of fit indices of the related questionnaire was examined, it showed a perfect fit (Bentler, 1995; Sun, 2005). It means that the construct validity of the tool was verified.

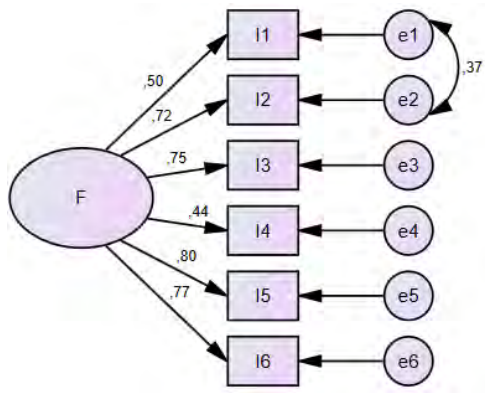

Figure 2 One-factor model

Finally, factor loadings were discovered considering the fact that if the factor loading values are above 0.30, the items are suitable for the structure and also the structure is appropriate to be confirmed (Kirisci & Moss, 1997). Moreover, t value was included in the analysis since t statistics would show whether the items were statistically significant or not.

Table 4
CFA and factor loadings

Item	Standardized factor loadings	Unstandardized factor loadings	S.H.	C.R. (t statistics)	p
I1	0.57	1.00			0.00
I2	0.76	1.51	0.20	7.53	0.00
I3	0.73	1.31	0.19	6.89	0.00
I4	0.45	0.89	0.17	5.01	0.00
I5	0.79	1.34	0.18	7.31	0.00
I6	0.74	1.39	0.20	6.86	0.00

According to Table 4, all t-values were detected to be significant and the factor loadings of all items were above 0.30 (0.45 to 0.79).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study would be discussed in light of the four research questions, respectively. Research question 1 (RQ1): *Did English language teachers and instructors feel stressed while speaking English in online lessons at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic? If so, what was the stress caused by?*

Surprisingly, majority of the participants were found not to feel stressed while speaking in English lessons in online settings, unlike as reported in the results by MacIntyre et al. (2020), Schipor and Duca (2021), and Shinan-Altman and Levkovich (2022). In fact, the educators C, D and F felt even more comfortable. C and F explained:

Extract 1

> *The feeling of being supervised or evaluated at all times has disappeared in particular when my camera was off. This helped me concentrate on the lesson more than traditional classes*.

Likewise, G reported that nearly every phase of the lesson was the same with an on-site teaching experience apart from some minor problems impeding them from fully getting to students and conveying the intended messages. Instructor E explicated as follows:

Extract 2

> *It is out of the question for me to forget the experience that I had once with one of my students. I must have tried to clarify how to use a structure in the target language until I was out of breath. Yet, it was in vain. I get the sense of talking to a brick wall in such cases, and I hate it!*

This can stem from the *technical difficulties*, such as network breaks, the lack of high-speed Internet, or the hesitancy of learners in turning on cameras and answering critical questions posed by teachers. Almost all of the interviewees complained about the demotivating impact of these technical issues and its correlation with their stress (Ghanbari & Nowroozi, 2022; Gregersen et al., 2021; Latif & Alhamad, 2023). Another source of perceived stress appeared to be *the fear of erroneous instruction*. Particularly, it was observed that B and H were observed self-questioned their e-teaching performances a lot, doubting whether they gave instructions that were too long or irrelevant to the subject or if the students misunderstood them. This could have originated from the lack of confidence or competence (Wieczorek, 2016) and the dearth of self-efficacy towards online and distance education (Fathi et al., 2021; Gregersen et al., 2021). B even stated:

Extract 3

> *I was always filled with apprehension about my pronunciation this is because when you misrepresent the articulation of a sound or lexical item, it will become improbable to modify it later; this is such a kind of proactive interference/inhibition of further learning as psychology says.*

F exemplified a similar occasion and reported to have experienced more stress in asynchronous lessons counter-intuitively, due to the fear of making a slip of the tongue, grammar mistakes, or pronunciation errors. He/she added that these errors or mistakes were not acceptable since the recordings could be retaken and rewound; hence, the synchronous lessons imposed a need for perfectionism. A also shared that unlike the other three skills, he/she felt stressed when speaking in English on the Internet. A furthered that perceived stress increased more when he/she faced *student-related problems*, such as learners' indifference to the courses (see Gregersen et al., 2021, and Latif & Alhamad, 2023 for further discussion of the learner engagement problem). This finding overlaps with the factor loadings of item 1 and 6 in the

statistical analysis in that the educators felt stressed by the sense of loss of control in class (see Table 2 and 5). He/she reported that a student once cursed in the e-lesson, unaware that the microphone was on, whereas another one accidentally shared a YouTube advertisement in the chat box. C reinforced A in that the rapport would matter when coping with stress and added:

Extract 4

> *A group of students from different classes attended my course with the passwords of friends in my class, and they sabotaged the lesson by drawing inconvenient shapes on the board. Though I had the authority of blocking and taking them out of the class, I left the platform quickly. At that moment, I did not know what to do; it was like I was defeated!*

In the same vein, H referred to an unforgettable moment and how he/she was annoyed, and became stressed in the end when trying to find a way out:

Extract 5

> *I could not foresee the reaction of one of my students while playing Kahoot in the lesson. he/she said that all the answers' being shared on the screen made him/her discomfort since he/she did not want the mistakes to be seen by others.*

Research question 2 (RQ2): *Were there any differences between the perceived stressors of English language teachers and the instructors?*

As for the differences between MoE and HE contexts in terms of the stressors, a marked difference could not be noted after painstaking investigations. A, C and E were from MoE and the others were instructors working in foreign language units of the university. As is pointed out in the above paragraphs, while C and E's reasons for minor stress were in correlation with D, F and G. Furthermore, similar to A, B and H also mentioned technical problems, class management troubles, and the callousness of learners towards online English lessons. Taken together, the motives of perceived teacher stress did not differ between the two contexts.

Research question 3 (RQ3): *What were the solutions of English language teachers and instructors in overcoming the challenges of speaking in online English lessons at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic?*

To examine this question in-depth, the analyses of two data collection instruments must be collated well with each other at this point. To begin with, being different from the other participants, G discussed the challenge of teaching learners at low proficiency levels in online settings during the interview. This statement indicates a strong liaison with the answers in the questionnaire as well. For instance, item 4 in Table 2 signalizes that Turkish words suddenly came to minds of educators and led to disruptions in L2 instructions. This signifies that initially, they must have felt obliged to find synonyms or antonyms of the words to clarify their instructions

due to the low proficiency levels of students. However, when learners did not comprehend the instructions at all despite the efforts, it seems that the participants took alarm, searched for an immediate solution, and then turned to giving explanations in the L1 (Turkish). This result is totally in line with the analysis of the interviews which revealed the educators created a 'complimentary strategy' by referring to the L1 to compensate for the student's shortcomings resulting in their perceived stress. Evidently, C described:

Extract 6

> *I always remind learners that we, teachers are not native speakers of the English language. Thus, when panicked, we may appeal to L1 to explain to you the terms, phrases, or some declarations much better. Otherwise, I am afraid to refer you to mistakes that are difficult or impossible to compensate for.*

Likewise, E commented on having similar reactions when he/she regarded himself/herself at a dead end during a lesson.

Extract 7

> *When he/she said that he/she could not understand in my 8th explanation, my only solution left was to use L1. Other students were getting bored, I was out of energy and stressed. I had no alternative to keep my well-being and flow the lesson.*

G supported E and further expressed that normally he/she recognized the learners well with their general profiles, needs, levels, expectations, and previous learning experiences. Nevertheless, in e-lessons, lecturing turned out to be more demanding. Moreover, when he/she could not elicit answers to questions, he/she felt the level of input was higher than the current proficiency of learners. Though he/she might attempt to elucidate the subject a couple of times, he/she automatically resorted to Turkish to ensure that everything was clear enough. Similar to those educators, A and B expressed that as sometimes they cannot manage the stress of online speaking practices, they directly thought of L1 as a life buoy. Overall, these participants confessed that they used L1 as a *behavioural disengagement strategy* when they experienced perceived stress occasionally on online education platforms.

Table 5

Analysis according to the brief COPE model

Category	Sub-category	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Approach strategies	Acceptance	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
	Emotional support								
	Positive reframing	√		√	√	√	√	√	√
	Active coping				√	√			
	Instrumental support								
	Planning				√	√	√		
Avoidant strategies	Behavioural Disengagement	√	√	√		√		√	

Category	Sub-category	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	Denial								
	Self-distraction								
	Self-blaming		√						√
	Substance use								
	Venting								
Neither approach nor avoidant strategies	Humour	√							
	Religion								

This strategy also goes hand in hand with item 2 in Table 4 in that the educators were apparently annoyed when they failed to recall some words in L2 during their speech. This is because, after a while, they must have ceased thinking in the target language and concentrated mainly on the students' better understanding of the subject, which caused disruptions or pauses in speaking, and a sense of stress in the end.

Interestingly, another solution for teachers to overcome their stress was providing *communication support* to the student with web tools. For instance, H phrased the following:

Extract 8

> *We also use WhatsApp; I mean our lessons continue through the learning management system of our university, but in some cases, the students can also text me on WhatsApp during the course. For example, they have reported their modem malfunctioned, or they were disconnected from the net.*

Ghanbari and Nowroozi (2022), and Klapproth et al. (2020) had already mentioned the advantages of these tools in the language success and contentment of learners, and their impact on teachers' well-being in that students and educators are like a pendulum that comes back and forth between one another. Therefore, when teachers bolster students throughout the language learning process not only pedagogically, but also technologically, its positive effects would echo and be observed in teacher performances.

D, E, and F addressed *planning* and its importance in inducing flexibility in their L2 speech, hence, revealing its inverse effect on the sense of stress (see Table 5), which is also outlined by the high factor loadings of items 3 and 5 (see Table 4). D especially detailed as follows:

Extract 9

> *It is of importance to master the lessons beforehand. I know the course-book well, I always prepare supplementary materials, and I am qualified in the subject that I will teach since I have already lectured similar courses before. As the points I would deal with or highlight in the lessons were in mind, I was not so worried or stressed about what to do then and there. Honestly, I am really disciplined; that is even if I have full knowledge of the subject, I still take a glance the day before the course to assure not miss a point.*

Thus, he/she also declared his/her digital literacy and belief in managing an online course with a well-planned e-practicum, as also highlighted in the studies by Ahn et al. (2022), MacIntyre et al. (2020) and Shinan-Altman and Levkovich (2022). F took the planning issue one step further and touched upon the toughness of preparing meticulous plans for asynchronous lessons, unlike synchronous courses. Similarly, Ghanbari and Nowroozi (2022) underlined their delicate balance in the curriculum as it would affect teacher stress. Finally, we can mark the overwhelming weight of *(auto) self-suggestion* depending on the strategies of acceptance and positive reframing (see Table 5). Intrinsic values must have been featured as pathways leading to struggle with stress and finding tactics to break teaching barriers (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Teacher A brought it to such a point that he/she could make fun of his/her own mistakes in class, which reveals his/her self-efficacy in online communication (Anderson et al., 2021). As he/she regarded himself/herself confident to carry out the lessons, it exerted a positive influence on the perceptions of stress regarding e-teaching (Ahn et al., 2022; Gkonou et al., 2020; Latif & Alhamad, 2023). It was noted that the ones who failed to manage it tended to resort to self-blaming (see Table 5). For example, the stressors as phrased by B and H were recorded as attributing almost every potential mistake to themselves, excessively questioning their own behaviours and showing fear of providing faulty input in e-teaching and being ashamed of it later. Hence, with regards to the above results of self-blaming and behavioural disengagement issues, we can report that avoidant strategies tend to trigger evasive behaviours and stress-related emotions, and negatively influence the positive perceptions of teachers towards conducting a fruitful online lesson (Hobfoll, 2011; Klapproth et al., 2020; MacIntyre et al., 2020; Nazari et al., 2022; Schipor & Duca, 2021; Xu et al., 2023). In other words, considering the damaging impact of avoidant strategies on stress, it is safe to claim herein that not all coping strategies are invaluable or worth being recommended to achieve successful coping.

Table 5, taken together, displays that teachers mostly adopted approach strategies, as is also highlighted in the factor loading values in SPSS (see Table 4). This was completely consistent with the claim by Klapproth et al. (2020) who emphasized functional coping strategies to overcome stress. The result was also in line with MacIntyre et al. (2020) who correlated active and positive coping strategies with approach-oriented perspectives and teaching outcomes. This finding then leads us to the fact that the educators literally acknowledged the reality of COVID-19, and adopted the notion that they had to maintain language teaching, abiding by the new normal conditions. Consecutively, they generated reasonable and decisive perspectives or plans in parallel to the study by Gregersen et al. (2021), who also pointed out that with a refocus on planning, more time, energy and strategic organizations of each phase of an online lesson, it would drive teachers to certain approach strategies.

To delve deeper into the details and discover the strategies through the lens of two basic items systematically, the researcher reconsidered the categories in Carver's (1997) model according to the analyses of leading scholars in the field (Chametzky, 2019; Kralova & Tirpakova, 2019; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Litman, 2006; Roth & Cohen, 1986, to name a few).

Table 6

Cognitive and behavioural strategies

Category	Sub-category	Cognitive (N: 5) or Behavioural (N: 5) Type of strategy
Approach Strategies	Acceptance (N: 8)	Cognitive
	Emotional Support (N: 0)	Behavioural
	Positive Reframing (N: 7)	Cognitive
	Active Coping (N: 2)	Behavioural
	Instrumental Support (N: 0)	Behavioural
	Planning (N: 3)	Cognitive
Avoidant Strategies	Behavioural Disengagement (N: 5)	Behavioural
	Denial (N: 0)	Cognitive
	Self-Distraction (N: 0)	Cognitive
	Self-Blaming (N: 2)	Cognitive
	Substance Use (N: 0)	Behavioural
	Venting (N: 0)	Behavioural
Neither Approach nor Avoidant Strategies*		

Note: It was not included in the last phase of the analysis since there was almost no participants (N: 1) choosing either of the categories.

Table 6 displays that cognitive and behavioural types covered in the list were equal with five strategies in each category. More specifically, cognitive strategies (N: 20) were more activated than the behavioural ones (N: 7) by the participant educators in this study, similar to what was reported by Garnefski et al. (2002) and Schipor and Duca (2021). The most apparent way of describing the deficiency of behavioural strategy use was taking no support from the colleagues, counselling centres, the faculty, academic staff via online meetings, or administrators (see Ghanbari & Nowroozi, 2022).

Research question 4 (RQ4): *Were the strategies associated with the teaching experiences of the English language teachers and instructors in any way?*

The table below, which depicts the possible relationship between the solutions of teachers in overcoming stress and their seniority, confirmed that similar to the findings by Pham and Phan (2023), the length of service and prior experience of the teachers did not considerably influence how they approached online lessons.

Table 7

Perceived stress, seniority and coping strategies

Participant	Seniority	Coping	Their views about the significance of teaching experience	Further explanations
A	15 years	Neutral	It matters	No prior digital experience
B	8 years	Non-functional	x	Young and netizen, but stressful, and nervous in adapting the pedagogy to e-settings
C	11 years	Practical	It matters	Netizen
D	25 years	Practical a lot	It matters	Experienced from different education levels, strong educational background
E	12 years	Practical	x	Netizen
F	7 years	Practical a lot	Digital experience matters	Teaching experience in distance education, netizen
G	6 years	Practical	It matters	Good academic standing and netizen
H	12 years	Non-functional	x	Young and netizen, but stressful, and nervous in adapting the pedagogy to e-settings

Table 7 also shows that a possible association between the two foregoing variables cannot be generalized with traditional and face-to-face teaching experiences. That is, digital experiences of teachers would have already come into play at this point as Ahn et al. (2022) had affirmed in their investigations. Finally, we can conclude the discussion with a declaration by F who underlined it as a foresight during the interview.

Extract 10

> *I have observed that the senior instructors in my institution have had tougher times in the pandemic and therefore they must have felt (over)stressed. In parallel, a professor must be more stressed than elementary school teachers who take online classes regularly if he/she hasn't e-lectured before or if he/she hasn't conducted a course on language skills, such as listening or speaking. Such kinds of educators can be classified as digital immigrants, and I presume the analysis of your research will also reveal that those with less digital experience would be more stressed.*

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that a vast majority of the educators in MoE and HE did not feel stressed while speaking in synchronous English lessons on online learning platforms. The minority group who did experience this severe trauma in both contexts expressed the stressors as stemming

from technical issues, the fear of erroneous instruction, and student-related problems, respectively. As technical difficulties were notably demotivating at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants were also noted to adopt the strategy of planning to mitigate disruptions in the course flow, and hence, their struggle with perceived stress. As for their concerns of misrepresentations, the attendees referred to the use of L1 as a behavioural disengagement strategy against the challenges presented mostly by low proficiency learners and their difficulty in comprehending the subject(s). Few teachers also showed a strong tendency for self-blaming upon encountering stress. Regarding the damaging effects of avoidant strategies on teachers' perceived stress, the motto 'avoid avoidance' (Boyce, 2013) can be highlighted as a caveat herein.

Finally, despite not being covered in Carver's (1997) model, communication support was listed as a coping strategy against student-related problems. By the same token, (auto) self-suggestion was discovered to be a strategy tackling student problems under the category of acceptance and positive reframing. The educators also employed cognitive strategies more so than behavioural ones, respecting the ratio of adopted approach and avoidant strategies in light of the brief COPE model. Nonetheless, an association cannot be discovered between the educational experiences of the English language teachers and instructors, and the ways of confronting stress. Instead, the digital experiences of the educators were found to be more rewarding in affecting their perceived stress.

To draw a set of implications for the educational policy, further studies should not overgeneralize that coping and stress represent the opposite ends of a seesaw since their liaison is really complicated. Though the research was implemented when the pandemic was unfolding at its peak, upcoming studies concentrating on the stress problem within the post-pandemic context would help to expand the literature.

As a suggestion note for future directions, the educators can be included in the research by assigning them new roles (e.g., mentors or co-learners) rather than purely investigating their teaching performances or outcomes, considering that they have been familiarizing themselves with virtual settings. In the same vein, principals and teacher trainers can be incorporated into the research to learn their opinions, ask for their advice, and find rational solutions by melting all their judgments in the same pot. Finally, the learning management systems of educators can be specified and covered in the study to investigate whether distinct platforms would trigger a sense of stress.

Concerning the limitations of this research, more items in the questionnaire can be included to lend further support to the findings. Moreover, the number of the teachers that partook in the interview can be increased by inviting more volunteers to the study. Last of all, the lesson recordings of the attendees could be procured to check their in-class behaviours, manners, reactions and ways of dealing with stress thoroughly aside from the gathered data.

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Appendix

The questionnaire

Part 1. Background information

1. The school context you work at
Ministry of Education …….. Higher Education……
2. English teaching experience with number of years

Education level		
Kindergarten	I do not have educational experience	
	1-3	
	4-7	
	8-10	
	11 or more	
Primary school	I do not have educational experience	
	1-5	
	6-10	
	11-15	
	16-20	
	21 or more	
Secondary school	I do not have educational experience	
	1-5	
	6-10	
	11-15	
	16-20	
	21 or more	
High school	I do not have educational experience	
	1-5	
	6-10	
	11-15	
	16-20	
	21 or more	
University (Associate degree)	I do not have educational experience	
	1-5	
	6-10	
	11-15	
	16-20	
	21 or more	
University (Bachelor degree)	I do not have educational experience	
	1-5	
	6-10	
	11-15	
	16-20	
	21 or more	

Part 2. Scale for online English-speaking stress

Statements	Alternatives				
	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	Neutral (N)	Agree (A)	Strongly Agree (SA)
1. It stresses me out when students notice that I have made a mistake while speaking English.					
2. It stresses me out when I cannot recall some words when I speak English in lessons.					
3. I feel stressed when I forget the activities I have included in the lesson plan.					
4. Sometimes words from Turkish "pop up" when I try to speak the English language and it makes me stressed.					
5. I start to panic and get stressed if students ask questions that I'm not prepared for in advance.					
6. I can feel my heart pounding when I know I am losing control of the class during my speech.					

As the last step of this study, I would like to invite you to attend the interview. If you are willing to volunteer, please type your e-mail address in the box below: