



Research article

Potential pitfalls of online foreign language teaching from the perspective of the university teachers

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ABSTRACT

In the past two years during the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly all universities had to conduct the courses online, including foreign language learning (FLL) classes. Pre-COVID-19 research into the possibilities of digital FLL seemed very optimistic and promising; however, when real life brought the challenges of online classes, the situation was different. This research focuses on the experience of university foreign language teachers from the Czech Republic and Iraq with their online foreign language classes during the past two years. It attempts to analyse their experience and brings together all major issues and concerns they were able to realise. The methodology is qualitative and the number of participants was 42 university teachers from two countries where guided semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data. The results clearly show that despite the overoptimistic earlier research – the respondents in both countries were very dissatisfied with the way the classes were conducted for various reasons, such as the lack of adequate training, insufficient methodologies for FLL, the lack of motivation in students, dramatically increased screen time of both students and teachers, etc. The most important suggestions call for an adequate methodology for online foreign language learning and necessary professional training so that the instructors are able to keep pace with unprecedentedly fast development in information technology used in various forms of digital learning.

1. Introduction

In the recent years of the global pandemic of COVID-19, the majority of educational institutions shuttered against the outside threat and relocated entirely online, forcing students and their professors to adopt new teaching methods as almost all classes, not only FLL, were conducted online. Many educators had to begin teaching online for the first time as a result of the globally inevitable scenario when technology and the Internet were employed to transfer information from teachers to students and vice versa [1]. In higher education, basically all courses were taught online with only a few exceptions. Social media were widely implemented platforms used on a daily basis and various mobile apps were also in massive use at the time. Due to the lack of previous experience and in-hands expertise, the situation was difficult for everyone; it was a time of fear and worry for both academics and decision-makers. Also the students were put in a very complicated situation never experienced before despite the fact that they belong to a technologically savvy generation, i.e., Gen Z or Millennials. Educational institutions tried to adopt well-known methods or even create novel ones to provide educational programs reflecting the current online education needs [2–4] in order not to lose the chance of keeping up educational

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institutions in light of the possibility of being unable to resume in-person instruction again [5,6].

In certain instances, online education is maintained by distance and reflection, which prevents student engagement [7]. Due to the lack of in-person interactions with teachers, online education may prove to be less effective than the in-person form of education. Moreover, since exams are typically conducted via an online platform, there is a small chance of preventing illegal actions like plagiarism and cheating [8,9]. The most obvious disadvantage of online education is the lack of basic personal interactions, both between instructors and students as well as among peers [10,11], which seems to be a particularly important aspect for FLL. Moreover, Hettiarachchi et al. [12] and Gilbert [13] showed that the majority of students prefer to work independently in order to avoid having to engage with their classmates during online classes.

As part of the potential pitfalls of online teaching, many problems and challenges, in relation to students' performance and online class environment in online education, were mentioned repeatedly by some authors, such as the lack of communication channels between teachers and students [14,15], little or no group work or social tasks [16,17], increasing the loads on students such as homework and different online activities and tasks [18], the lack of humanistic learning elements [19], related health and psychological problems [7], long time of screen exposure [17,20], negative effects on speaking skill [21], encouraging cheating among students [9], how to deal with critical pedagogy aspects [22], and finally, low technological literacy of students or even teachers [23]. The total image of how many issues there are related to the online FLL are not clear yet since not much light is shed on the topic. That is why it seems necessary to investigate the problems and challenges from the teachers' perspective as well.

It was also established that the most significant precondition of online course satisfaction was the environment chosen for online learning. Pikhart et al. in a recent study [22], demonstrated that students' subjective satisfaction with the online learning process, the overall usefulness of language, the roles of the teachers, and the factors that generally have an impact on the teaching and learning process all received good evaluation. While the questions that were related to students' subjective satisfaction with their language abilities, digitally-based reading, superiority of online education to face-to-face instruction, and interacting with peers and teachers on social media all received negative evaluation. The environment of online learning emphasises students' interactions with the teacher, provides the structure of the course, and enables communication with fellow students [21]. It goes without saying that the role of the teacher as a main constituent in the educational process is indispensable, specifically in online FLL [24].

Moreover, teachers are aware of the importance of emotional intelligence aspects in an online teaching environment as they utilize various emotional strategies in their online classes, whether intentionally or unintentionally [25]. Therefore, it is essential to work on addressing the factors that may have some effect on hindering the continuity and development of the online teaching process directly or indirectly.

In the past two years, university teachers were forced to use various digital tools in the form of hybrid learning or eLearning during the COVID-19 pandemic and their reflection has already been documented in scarce research findings. Nowadays, it seems important to focus on their reflection after these two years of the implementation of digital tools and platforms to investigate what they consider useful, but mainly, what they consider to be disadvantageous or even dangerous in the area of online FLL. These findings could be important for policymakers and future decisions related to university FLL strategy and development. According to Avsheniuk et al. [26], studies that focus on exploring teachers' perspectives of online learning during the COVID-19 epidemic are unusual and scarce because the majority of research is done to characterize students' views and attitudes regarding online learning. In order to confirm or refute the current findings and to offer specific recommendations for addressing teachers' requirements in digital media FLL instruction, the goal of this study is to investigate teachers' subjective satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the use of online FLL. More specifically, the aim of this paper is to draw attention to the potential pitfalls that could be related to various areas of digital university FLL from the perspective of teachers. It tries to identify the most relevant challenges and problems the instructors could face in online FLL and then suggest several ideas that could lead to the improvement of the current situation in online FLL.

Two culturally and geographically different contexts were investigated, namely, the Czech Republic in the European Union and Iraq as a Muslim country in the Near East, providing a wider geographical perspective that could be thus transferrable into the more global context. This follows the idea that it is recommended to understand social, organizational, instructional, and personal factors in a more global context [27].

1.1. Research questions

1. What is the level of satisfaction with the use of technology in FLL university teachers?
2. What is FLL teachers' subjective evaluation of the use of technology in FLL regarding its efficiency?
3. What are FLL teachers' opinions on limitations and recommendations on how to improve the use of technology in the university FLL?

To answer these research questions, the following methodology was devised.

2. Literature review

The implementation of technology has recently seen an unprecedented rise and all educational processes are significantly influenced by it in a way never experienced before and university FLL is not an exception. It must be noted that this inevitable trend is not always seen as a potential but rather as a threat. Some scholars and practitioners are certain that there are many difficulties with organising and conducting lessons online. For example, the failure and retention of online learners tend to be significantly hampered by negative emotions, particularly anxiety [28]. According to Strong et al. [29], it is reported that students' satisfaction with their

online learning is highly impacted by their social status and the learning environment used for the classes. In addition, a lack of interest and desire as well as inadequate online learning preparation and peer isolation may contribute to a greater dropout rate. The most frequently reported drawbacks were the lack of courses, reduced interaction and communication, no internet access, poor teaching quality, incapacity to teach relevant fields, and other technological issues [5]. The drawbacks of distant learning also include the misuse of technology, the conversion of effective technology-based training into effective teaching methods, and poor management of the assessment and evaluation process [30]. Thus, it is essential to investigate the characteristics and motivating factors of teaching and learning that underline the effectiveness or failure of online training [31].

The number of articles focusing on the benefits of digital education has recently reached a significant number; however, there is not much research available into the potential pitfalls of digital technologies in foreign language learning (FLL) as they could be perceived by the instructors, i.e., the university teachers, despite the fact that many researchers are intuitively aware of the fact that digital technology can create very serious barriers or even cause problems that disable a proper learning process. This can be even more true about FLL as languages are very much related to human communication that happens in personal interactions. As a primary fact, we have to be aware that distance learning cannot fully supplement and ensure successful learning, learning persistence, or effectiveness of FLL [5]. The success of online learning has been studied mostly from the perspective of the learner and the viewpoint of the teachers has been neglected. Learning satisfaction with the course focuses on students' perceptions of their experiences and it is seen as a crucial element which necessarily needs more investigation [32]; however, the perspective of the teachers is also needed as they are present in the initial position in the whole learning process.

Maintaining motivation in an online course is another drawback for online learners. In comparison to their peers who are motivated, students who lack independence and motivation had lower success rates [33]. In order to maintain momentum during the entire course, students must be able to realise and evaluate their motivational reasons. Moreover, students who lack motivation will easily lose sight of their original goals, quickly become lost in the course material, and eventually drop out [34]. Al Shlowiy, Al-Hoorie and Alharbi [9] list some negative issues in relation to online education that were evaluated by students and teachers. The results showed that teachers thought students needed more instruction in using learning management systems, they did not take online instruction seriously, and that emergency remote teaching increased cheating among students. Another important point was hit by Pikhart, Al-Obaydi, and Abdur Rehman [20] who claim students typically use their computers and/or smartphones for a variety of activities, including social media, communication, gaming, and many others, but none of these activities has a set amount of time allotted for them which only led to an increased screen-time without any significant benefit for the students. So, there was serious discontent among the students as a result of their excessive time in front of screens, which seems as a crucial issue that must be taken into consideration very seriously but previous research ignored this topic whatsoever.

These findings demonstrate the importance of finding main weaknesses and to show the degree of teachers' satisfaction with the instruction of English in academic settings like high schools and universities. The current study is different from earlier ones in because it looks at online English classrooms in two culturally different contexts, Iraq and the Czech Republic, and it thus opposed to other studies that focused on only a single cultural context. But primarily, the present study tries to report college teachers' viewpoints after two years of online education and after coming back to their physical teaching in the classrooms.

3. Methodology

The research conducted was qualitative with the aim of identifying and analysing a subjective evaluation of the potential pitfalls of online FLL provided by experienced university teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

3.1. Context of the study

The research was conducted in two countries, the Czech Republic and Iraq, with university teachers as respondents. In order to gain a broader viewpoint that could be applied to a more universal context, two extremely culturally and geographically distinct contexts—the Czech Republic in the European Union and Iraq as a Muslim country in the Near East—were explored.

3.2. Instrument

The data were collected through guided semi-structured interviews conducted with the instructors of foreign languages (particularly EFL college teachers) in the two mentioned countries. The data collection process was conducted in August 2022, i.e., after two years of intensive and extensive utilization of various digital devices and tools in the university FLL context. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 min. The research sample consisted of randomly chosen teachers from two universities, namely the University of Diyala in Iraq and the University of Hradec Kralove in the Czech Republic, who have more than five years of experience with teaching EFL and also had two-year experience teaching EFL online.

The researchers used semi-structured interviews focusing on several interrelated topics, such as computer literacy, possible technology shortage, FLL methodology, data privacy and protection of data, the anxiety of the students and their motivation, and the possible limitations of eLearning as they are perceived by the tutors, and the last, open-ended, question allowed the respondents to express their opinion about the topic. The questions and the summary of the answers are listed in the Results section. All questions of the interview were meant to be just a guide for the researchers and the respondents, and the respondents could freely express their opinions, experiences and subjectively perceived issues that arose during their hands-on experience with online teaching in the past two years. The specific items of the interview were chosen based on the most crucial challenges and issues of EFL teachers all over the

world as they are described by relevant and recent sources described in the introduction. The interview consisted of eight items altogether and they are listed in the results section with their appropriate answers. As the aim of the research was to gather also some recommendations from practitioners, the final part of the interview focused on gaining these ideas from the respondents.

The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Hradec Kralove No. 2/2021. No personal data were collected, and no names or addresses or other personal information were obtained from the respondents. They all agreed with their participation in the survey and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) as it is set by the European Union was fully followed.

3.3. Participants

The total number of Czech (CZ) respondents was 20 and 22 Iraqi teachers, which is 42 respondents altogether. They were randomly chosen from two universities in the Czech Republic and Iraq. The age of the participants was between 29 and 61 (CZ) and 30 to 60 (Iraq). Male participants accounted for 10 (CZ) and 5 (Iraq), while female accounted for 10 (CZ) and 17 (Iraq). All of them were experienced teachers of English as a second language in the university context in both countries with more than five years of teaching EFL experience (see Table 1) and all of them had online classes in the past two years during the COVID-19 lockdowns in these countries. The researchers told the participants about the aim and the idea of the study before beginning the interviews in order to gain their consent. Their participation was voluntary and they did not need to answer any question from the interview.

4. Results

The respondents were asked to freely express their opinions on the potential seven issues regarding the use of technologies in online FLL. The respondents were asked the given questions as follows and the interviews were recorded, transcribed and later analyzed by the researchers. The results of the two geographical contexts, i.e., the Czech Republic and Iraq, are arranged separately as follows.

1. The lack of knowledge of technology (computer literacy): How much it is essential for you to have some training or a course about using online applications in teaching? Have you received any particular training for online classes?

Iraq: All respondents agreed on the necessity of providing college teachers with training courses, even if they have some intuitive knowledge, but unfortunately only some of them (15 teachers) attended such courses. These courses attended were usually formal and prepared by the college or informal which were often provided by private foundations or websites. The replies varied among respondents, while some of them expressed their urgent need for such kinds of training courses, specifically those that deal with the online assessment, some of them would just welcome fresh ideas that could improve their teaching online. Using technology is still a real problem especially for older teachers, while some younger teachers mentioned that “it was easy to access online teaching applications and discover the way each app works”. One of the interviewed teachers commented that “actually I have received a lot of online training courses about using online applications in teaching. Besides that, I feel I need to do more research about other courses since acquiring new skills deemed useful in the aftermath of the health emergency”.

Czech Republic: Basically, all of the Czech respondents expressed their lack of technical skills and expertise that could help them to facilitate the teaching process. Despite the fact that many of them had had some technical training before the COVID-19 pandemic, when they were exposed to real-life scenarios that needed their personal involvement in the teaching process online, they realised that the situation was rather complicated and not straightforward as they would have expected. Many of them, after some reflection, would welcome any kind of systematic training that could help them when they could be exposed to the same or similar situation in the future. It is interesting that the age difference did not mean any significant discrepancy in the answers, i.e., even the younger instructors expressed very serious concerns they had when they were actually forced to conduct all their FLL classes online.

All the results are summarized in Table 2.

Iraq: The replies varied among respondents, some said this may affect the process of teaching, but all of them agree that it is teachers' responsibility to gain a computer or smartphone. The same goes for students as their parents are responsible for providing them with suitable tools; no economic governmental support was mentioned either for teachers or for students. This issue leads to losing control of the process of unifying the kind of application used in teaching online, specifically for secondary and intermediate students. However, in university studies, the process becomes more systematic as the applications used for online teaching were unified although the devices may differ. The problem of the internet connection was also present. One of the teachers commented that “the lack of adequate preparation, making them ready, among teachers and students in technology development, this may make a lot of

Table 1
Research sample.

Demographic Characteristics	Iraq	%	CZ	%
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	5	22.7%	10	50%
Female	17	77.3%	10	50%
<i>Age</i>				
25–35	4	18%	2	10%
35–45	9	41%	5	25%
45+	9	41%	13	65%

Table 2

Teachers' responses to question 1.

2. Technology shortage: Do you think that teachers suffer from the lack of devices, which may disable you to teach online? How about the students?

Country	N.	Teachers who agree with the existence of lack of knowledge of technology	The percentage	The number of teachers who gained training courses	The approximate number of courses attended by each teacher
<i>Iraq</i>	22	22	100%	15	2
Czech Republic	20	20	100%	17	3

Table 3

Teachers' responses to question 2.

3. Methodology: Do think that online teaching may require new methods of teaching that are differing from those of face-to-face ones? What are the limitations of online teaching and various methodologies of FLL?

Country	N.	Teachers who agree with the existence of technology shortage	Percentage	Problems mentioned
<i>Iraq</i>	22	12	55%	It is the teachers' responsibility to gain a computer or smartphone and the same case for the students. The problem of the internet connection is also found sometimes.
Czech Republic	20	0	0%	Some minor issues with the internet connection.

challenges in front of them. Furthermore, the situation requires essential dedication from teachers to improve their skills as well as their student's skills".

Czech Republic: The Czech respondents did not generally feel any kind of technology shortage. They were all well-equipped after a few weeks of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic by the university and they did not have any serious issues related to that except for some minor issues with the internet connection. The other situation was perceived by them on the side of the students who very often did not have stable and reliable internet connection or access to hardware necessary for their online classes, which meant they could not take part in some, if not all, classes.

All the results are summarized in [Table 3](#).

Iraq: The answers to this question are rather pessimistic as they went in two directions: the first one is that all interviewees agreed on the necessity of using new methods of teaching that are designed specifically for online education. They all confirmed that it was useless to utilize the traditional methods that are specially designed for face-to-face teaching. The second is that several teachers (12) showed their desperate feelings stating that "it is really difficult to find an online method that could attract students' full attention". Moreover, the teachers stated that the main limitations are a bad network connection, the lack of communication between teachers and students, the lack of teamwork, and the lack of previous training for teachers and students. Therefore, they all agreed that a proper methodology for online FLL would be very beneficial but it is currently almost impossible to find it in books and academic journals.

Czech Republic: Basically, all respondents were not sure how to teach online when all the classes had to be conducted merely online without any face-to-face meetings to clarify more complicated issues. Regarding the methodology, they realised that it was not easy or straightforward to choose the proper methodology that could be used for FLL when it is conducted online. Despite the fact that many of

Table 4

Teachers' responses to question 3.

4. The insecurity and data privacy: Do you suffer from insecurity issues when teaching online? Do you think there could be serious issues regarding data privacy?

Country	N.	Teachers who agree with the existence of lack of new methodologies	Percentage	The number of teachers who gained training courses about methodology	The limitations of online teaching and various methodologies of FLL
<i>Iraq</i>	22	22	100%	8	Bad network connection. Lack of communication between teachers and students. Lack of teamwork. Lack of training of the new methodologies in teaching. Using the same methods of traditional face-to-face teaching.
Czech Republic	20	20	100%	7	Using the same methods of traditional face-to-face teaching. It is not easy or straightforward to choose the proper methodology that could be used for FLL when it is conducted online. Need for a clear methodology that could help teachers with practical issues of their teaching foreign languages. Lack of training in the new methodologies in teaching.

Table 5

Teachers' responses to question 4.

5. Anxiety and stress (technophobia): Do you feel anxious when teaching online, and why? What could help not to have these feelings?

Country	N.	Teachers who agree with the existence of a serious problem of insecurity and data privacy	Percentage	Problems mentioned
Iraq	22	15 (9 of them above fifty)	68%	The existence of danger in relation to data privacy and hackers. We can't speak freely to my students
Czech Republic	20	5	23%	Some teachers did not like the idea that the classes were conducted in their homes and the students could see their private space. The problem of cheating during tests and evaluation of the students

them had had some kind of previous training but when the situation came they were not able to implement these ideas into practice, or only with serious difficulties. Their subjective evaluation of the situation was not very positive as they generally considered it very difficult to teach a foreign language online. They would all welcome a clear methodology that could help them with practical issues while teaching foreign languages. They also mentioned that during their university studies, they did not have any course that would focus on digital methodologies for FLL, and this was mentioned by the younger teachers who studied EFL methodology just several years ago.

All the results are summarized in [Table 4](#).

Iraq: Insecurity and data privacy represented a real challenge for teachers specifically for older teachers as they lack experience in using online apps and modern technological devices. Several older teachers (9) expressed their worries concerning the existence of danger in relation to data privacy and hackers. Some other teachers (who were less than forty years old) varied in their viewpoints. Some of them (6 teachers) also insisted on the existence of the insecurity issues in teaching online that may be just "simple things" as they mentioned for instance "I can't speak freely to my students". The other teachers did not pay much attention to this point stating that "no, I did not suffer from that because many programs protect the privacy of teachers as well as students".

Czech Republic: None of the respondents expressed serious concern regarding data privacy and personal security. Some of them, however, did not like the idea that the classes were conducted in their homes and the students could see their private space, and the same applied vice versa as the teachers and other students could see the private space of the students. Due to the fact that in the European Union the General Data Protection Regulation is strictly followed, there are not very many serious issues related to this topic. The only issue that seemed serious was the question of cheating during tests and evaluation of the students and the almost all respondents did not know how to solve the issue so they generally ignored it and did not try to solve it as it seemed impossible to them.

All the results are summarized in [Table 5](#).

Iraq: The results of this question demonstrated contrasted, yet justifiable, findings. Older teachers specifically, those who are more than 40 years old, showed high degrees of anxiety when teaching online. The reason may be due to their limited experience with the applications used in online education. One of those teachers commented, "it is not a matter of knowledge or confidence; it is a matter of dealing extensively with technology and using new devices most of the time". Other interviewees, who were less than 40 years varied in their responses. Some of them confirmed being anxious when teaching online, while others did not deal with any fear or anxiety. One of them commented that "I feel that teaching online is not very much different from teaching in classes so I do not feel anxious".

Czech Republic: All respondents (20) did not like the classes online as they felt insecure in the class when they had to broadcast their classes, very often to black screens as their students did not want to, or could not, use their web cameras. The respondents did not like the idea that all their classes were recorded as it was requested by the university to have recordings for the students who could not participate in online classes. All respondents expressed their grave dissatisfaction with online classes when they could choose face-to-face but all of them would definitely prefer them. Their level of subjective anxiety decreased during the course of the year with their experience but their level of dissatisfaction rose proportionately with time. This is their reflection after two years of their teaching online; none of them would like to continue this way and just the idea of that seems to many of them demotivating and causing anxiety or frustration.

All the results are summarized in [Table 6](#).

Iraq: All the interviewees agreed on being sometimes demotivated when dealing with online education. The reasons they showed varied between technophobia and computer literacy. One of them commented saying "yes, I sometimes suffer from being demotivated as most students didn't take this new trend of teaching seriously". Another teacher commented that "it is a natural matter to be demotivated or to lose students' engagement in an online class because there is not any direct connection between teacher and student. The motivation decreases in online courses since there is no face-to-face teaching". Unsurprisingly, no teacher showed an agreement on the increased motivation and engagement in online classes as previous research indicated, the only exception was with more talented students who still seemed motivated.

Czech Republic: All respondents could feel that they were not able to motivate their students sufficiently and adequately as in their face-to-face classes. The majority of them did not know what tools to use to motivate them but it gradually improved with time. However, some of them noted (8) that they were aware of the students' increased screen time and they did not know how to teach efficiently not to increase their screen time dramatically. The question of motivation seems very relevant for all of the respondents as they found it very difficult, or even impossible, to motivate the students, which is also in contradiction with previous research.

All the results are summarized in [Table 7](#).

Iraq: Three teachers only said that they don't see any limitation of this way of foreign language teaching. The answers to this

Table 6

Teachers' responses to question 5.

6. Engagement and motivation: Do you suffer from being demotivated or can you see some problems related to student engagement? How difficult it is to motivate students online?

Country	N.	Teachers who agree with the existence of Anxiety and stress (technophobia)	Percentage	Problems mentioned
Iraq	22	18	82%	Limited experience with the applications used in online education. Dealing extensively with technology and using new devices most of the time.
Czech Republic	20	20	100%	Some teachers feel insecure in the class when they had to broadcast their classes, very often to black screens as their students did not want to, or could not, use their web cameras. All the respondents expressed their grave dissatisfaction and anxiety with online classes when they could choose face-to-face.

Table 7

Teachers' responses to question 6.

7. Do you see any dangers and limitations of online EFL?

Country	N.	Teachers who agree with the existence of Engagement and motivation	Percentage	Problems mentioned
Iraq	22	22	100%	The reasons they showed varied between technophobia and computer literacy. No direct connection between teacher and student.
Czech Republic	20	20	100%	The majority of teachers did not know what tools to use to motivate students.

question varied among other interviewees and this is the summary of the issues mentioned by them.

- Lacking the ability to concentrate on screens. One of the biggest difficulties of online learning for many students is their inability to maintain their attention for longer periods of time.
- Unstable of bad Internet connectivity.
- Lack of self-discipline, low motivation, and distractions could be considered a danger for those teachers who are required to teach online.
- The rapid development in information technology is not paralleled by the rapid development of training courses.
- The biggest problem seems the students' engagement.
- There is a danger of cheating as online assessment encourages students to cheat.
- Reliable apps that could be used for fair exams are rare or difficult to find.

Czech Republic: These were the major concerns expressed by the participants. None of them was generally satisfied with online classes and all of them expressed some, or even grave, concerns. They can be summarized as follows.

- Difficult to motivate the students to be more active, or to be active at all.
- Difficult to assess the students' performance during the course and at the end of the semester. Cheating may be one of the major issues.
- Difficult to communicate with the students because it was necessary to process many emails and messages for the teachers which led to extra work that was almost impossible to handle.
- Difficult to conduct online courses without any systematic methodological training for the teachers.

All the results are summarized in [Table 8](#).

Iraq: As the replies of the teachers could represent a long list, these are the major concerns and recommendations as follows.

- The necessity of obligating teachers to join technical training courses in relation to teaching and assessment for their FLL online classes.
- Training courses should focus on developing new methods of teaching in relation to online education and the focus should not be only on teaching but also on psychological aspects, such as motivation and engagement.
- Working extensively on students' needs in an online learning system. Some need academic support; others, technology assistance. So, it is essential to pay more attention to this issue.
- Depending on using easy and intuitive apps in teaching and not overload teachers and students with complex technological issues.

Czech Republic: All the respondents very clearly expressed their ideas related to how the online classes could, and should, be conducted. The most important are summarized and listed as follows.

Table 8

Teachers' responses to question 7.

8. What are the aspects that could or should be different in online EFL? What are your recommendations for online FLL?

Country	N. Teachers who agree with the existence of dangers and limitations of online EFL	Percentage	Problems mentioned
Iraq	22 19	86%	Lacking the ability to concentrate on screens. One of the biggest difficulties of online learning for many students is their inability to maintain their attention for long periods of time. Unstable of bad Internet connectivity. Lack of self-discipline, low motivation, and distractions could be considered a danger for those teachers who are required to teach online. The rapid development in information technology is not paralleled by the rapid development of training courses. The biggest problem seems the students' engagement. There is a danger of cheating as online assessment encourages students to cheat as reliable apps that could be used for fair exams are rare or difficult to find.
Czech Republic	20 20	100%	Difficult to motivate the students to be more active, or to be active at all. Difficult to assess the students' performance during the course and at the end of the semester. Cheating may be one of the major issues. Difficult to communicate with the students because it was necessary to process many emails and messages for the teachers which led to extra work that was almost impossible to handle. Difficult to conduct online courses without any systematic methodological training for the teachers.

- It is absolutely necessary to create a clear methodology for online FLL that could be easily and readily applicable when a similar situation appears again.
- There should be more research into what the best methodologies could be in online FLL classes so that the instructors do not need to test these methodologies during their real classes.
- The students should be supported by the university or the government in case they do not have access to stable and reliable internet as it was very difficult for some of the students to take part in the classes.

5. Discussion

The study aimed at identifying the most relevant challenges and problems the instructors could face in online FLL. As the respondents were from two countries, the research could provide some important comparative results on a larger geographical scale. Generally, it is clear that there is an approximate agreement of the viewpoints of the participants in the two contexts in all challenges mentioned despite the cultural, technical and general educational differences. It seems that the most important was their univocal agreement on the necessity of preparing training courses for teachers in higher education as they suffered very much in this concern [30]. Teachers generally felt they were not qualified enough to cope with the rapid developments that occur in the communication technology used for online FLL classes. The problem of lacking devices is much more prominent in Iraq which may be a result of the difficult political and economic situation in this country where the teachers and students are responsible for preparing all technological devices they need for their classes. The situation was less sensitive with the Czech respondents as they did not generally feel any kind of technology shortage. This result shows that the effect of the context, both geographical and cultural, can create a dramatic contrast [35].

In relation to the method of teaching, all the respondents agreed on the need to find a new method of teaching or to revise the traditional ones, that could be utilized efficiently in online FLL education as the previous methods that had been used before were designed for traditional face-to-face teaching and they did not appear to be suitable for the new situation [36]. Surprisingly, there is not much research available and not many learning psychology theories created that could help teachers easily implement them into their teaching practice online. There was vast research on how online classes can be sufficient and effective [37–40] but when it came to real life scenarios the teachers were generally hopeless and did not know how to implement all these theories into their teaching practice. It is necessary to provide them with relatively easy solutions that could be utilized instantly when a similar situation appears again.

In relation to the insecurity and data privacy, Iraqi teachers, specifically aged teachers, showed their worry about the possibility of serious security issues in teaching online. The Czech teachers, on the other hand, did not suffer from serious concerns regarding data privacy but they expressed their dissatisfaction with the breach of their personal space in their homes. The issue of data security can, however, gain more attention in the world of hackers and data and privacy issues that appear much more often than before.

The issue of anxiety and stress (technophobia) is a real problem that has already been studied by many scholars and there is sufficient research into the topic already [28]. The problem was summarized by one of the Iraqi teachers when they stated that "it is not a matter of knowledge or confidence; it is a matter of dealing extensively with technology and using new devices most of the time". So, it is understandable that older Iraqi teachers suffered from technophobia, while it is much less prominent among younger teachers who are more technology savvy. The Czech respondents expressed the same level of dissatisfaction feeling towards teaching online and they showed much more anxiety and frustration, though these feelings might decrease with time as they slowly got used to the new way of teaching and they were aware of their accommodation to the situation.

Both groups agreed on being very often demotivated [33] when dealing with online education. Some respondents clearly admitted their frustration with the way they had to teach, mostly in the groups of Czech teachers. They were worried that their classes do not conform to the standards they had previously had. Basically, all respondents expressed their worry that they could not teach the students efficiently and they did not have tools to make them more engaged, which is in line with Islam, Beer and Slack [10] when the classes were conducted online and the students even did not turn on their web cameras. All these issues can have very serious consequences, such as drop out of the students and their inability to take part in all classes [34].

One of the main concerns mentioned by the majority of respondents was dramatically increased screen time [41], both for the students and the teachers. They also added that internet connectivity was a major issue along with students' motivation and engagement. Other aspects worth considering are the danger of cheating [9], the new, yet uninvestigated, ways of digital assessment [8], the lack of suitable and readily available methods for FLL and teaching, and the lack of previous and systematic training on how to conduct the online FLL classes efficiently.

The last question, which was related to the individual recommendations of teachers, brought many important ideas that should be considered as they brought a very deep insight from the practitioners who had to conduct the classes online. The recommendations included first and foremost the training that could help them instantly with fresh and functional ideas when they have to teach foreign languages online [30], the second idea mentioned was new (or modified) methods of teaching foreign languages online, helpful ideas on how to support the students, how to motivate them and how to make them more engaged [31]. Another very important idea mentioned was how to satisfy students' needs whether academically or technically, and the ways how they could gain governmental support (in the case of Iraqi students).

The results of the research clearly show that despite the extremely optimistic pre-COVID-19 research into how efficient digital learning (eLearning, online learning, hybrid learning, etc.) can be [42] but when it comes to real-life scenarios, it is not simple to implement all these overoptimistic findings into the harsh reality of online FLL. As early as their professional education at the university, the main recommendation for teachers could be to employ a systematic and intentional strategy to build teachers' experience at all levels. Their personal growth, including the emotional and cognitive facets, could be the main focus. The current research's findings indicate that a methodical approach to teacher training that will improve their online competence could be developed more to suit the real situation in universities all over the world.

The questions raised by this qualitative study can be crucial for the further development of online FLL strategies at universities as it clearly shows that the process of digital learning is not simple and straightforward as it had seemed earlier. Different cultural backgrounds may be the root of the relatively clear differences between the Czech Republic and Iraqi instructors. Additionally, their educational systems differ; therefore, it is not unexpected that the research results produced widely divergent conclusions. The two geographical contexts of the study were intentionally chosen to cover various viewpoints and to gain universal consensus concerning the use of online education.

Naturally, there are limitations to this study as the research sample was not very large, but sufficient for a qualitative study, however, it can be an impetus for further studies. It is very important to realise that the teachers of FLL were generally not satisfied and many of them were even very dissatisfied with online teaching for various reasons that were complex and combined, and that is why this research aims at motivating future research needed into the new ways and methodologies for online FLL that could be easily implemented into digital FLL in universities when it comes to online teaching again.

Author contribution statement

Marcel Pikhart; Liqaa Habeb: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

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Data availability statement

Data included in article/supplementary material/referenced in article.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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