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Examining teachers' readiness and perception on distance EFL learning in Taiwanese secondary education

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study assessed the readiness and perceptions of 215 secondary school teachers in Taiwan regarding distance English as a foreign language (EFL) learning. Data collection encompassed survey questionnaires, which were refined based on a pilot study. The responses underwent analysis using descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA, and the Pearson correlation coefficient in the most recent iteration of SPSS. In addition, content analysis was conducted on follow-up interviews. The findings indicated a noteworthy degree of readiness among teachers for distance EFL learning, nonetheless the challenges arising from the abrupt transition to distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic. While teachers exhibited confidence in their ability to navigate EFL distance learning, they also accentuated the necessity for specialized training and institutional support to effectively manage its demands. Despite their preference for traditional in-person classes, teachers acknowledged the importance of ongoing support and training to enhance the quality of instruction in digital EFL learning contexts, emphasizing the need for continuous development in this newly developed teaching trend to align with evolving educational landscapes.

INTRODUCTION

The multifaceted nature of distance education, encompassing various modes and channels of interaction, has been recognized among scholars. Researchers have accentuated that when approached correctly, online instruction can prove equally effective as traditional in-person teaching (Driscoll et al., 2012). This assertion is emphasized by the advent of the coronavirus pandemic in 2019, which catalyzed a transformative shift in education. This crisis prompted a widespread embrace of distance learning to ensure the uninterrupted pursuit of students' education. This profound alteration not only reshaped the educational landscape but has also mandated the digitalization of teaching methods, compelling educators and learners to adapt to the necessity of maintaining social distance. In response to this emergency, institutions previously unexperienced in distance learning swiftly initiated the development and implementation of this novel mode, presenting educators with the immediate challenge of adjusting to this emergent educational paradigm (Oliveira et al., 2021). However, uncertainties emerged regarding teachers' readiness, and their perceptions of distance learning remained largely unexplored.

Since incorporating technology into traditional classrooms was not prevail, a significant number of middle school educators, unfamiliar with technological intricacies and still building their technological confidence, faced considerable anxiety when attempting to seamlessly integrate distance learning approaches (Pressley & Ha, 2022). For them, the rapid transition to the distance learning paradigm, often without sufficient time for proper training and adjustment, presented a substantial challenge. The introduction of distance learning brought forth a host of challenges for teachers, particularly in the realm of instructional methods. One challenge involved teachers struggling with integration of new synchronous and asynchronous technological

tools to support their teaching efforts (Moser et al., 2021). Additional significant challenges included the demanding task of keeping track of attendance and actively overseeing students' participation in their courses. This situation led to complexities in addressing issues related to absence and formulating effective strategies to enhance students' educational experiences (Rapanta et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the notable differences in resources for distance learning among students' families and the various work situations of parents make it difficult to ensure the timely and adequate provision of technology support and schedule coordination. There is also a crucial need for diverse and real-time assessments in maintaining the quality of education (Andarwulan et al., 2021). Developing fair and effective approaches to evaluate students' learning outcomes in such unprecedented circumstances presented a substantial challenge. This convergence of factors created a significant barrier, impeding the equitable and timely access to the technological prerequisites essential for successful online classes. Taken together, these challenges highlight the multifaceted nature of the obstacles faced by educators as they navigate the landscape of distance learning.

Research findings have indicated that foreign language acquisition poses a significant challenge in distance education, particularly in online settings during the COVID-19 pandemic (Gacs et al., 2020). Effectiveness in language learning within this context has been deemed comparatively unsatisfactory, especially at the secondary education levels (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Lin et al., 2017). This observed phenomenon becomes more apparent when contrasted with higher education. Despite this challenge, there is limited research exploring the underlying reasons for these disparities. Hence, this study focused on investigating the readiness and perception of secondary school teachers in distance EFL teaching, aiming to address relevant issues faced during the implementation of distance EFL learning and providing specific recommendations for future development.

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on distance EFL learning, prompting scholars to develop and implement digital learning methodologies (Al-Jarf, 2022; Escobar Fandiño et al., 2019; Hazaymeh, 2021; Kara, 2021). Studies have also been conducted to explore the advantages and disadvantages of distance English learning (Gunes, 2019). However, there remains a gap in extensive research on issues related to teachers' readiness and perception in distance EFL learning, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. While one study by Zou et al. (2021) investigated the readiness university students and English teachers in Wuhan, China during the pandemic, focusing on a limited scope, the broader context of secondary school teachers' perspectives has been largely unexplored. As for research on teachers' perception of distance learning, only one study by Winanti (2021) that used a qualitative research design to explore high school English teachers' perception of distance learning. Teachers' perceptions significantly impact the success of distance learning, yet the majority of research has primarily concentrated on students' perspectives, leaving teachers' viewpoints relatively unexamined.

Investigating the readiness and perception of secondary school teachers toward distance EFL learning, particularly amid the threat of pandemic outbreaks and the possibility of abrupt school closures, can yield valuable data for policymakers to enhance distance education and its effective implementation in schools. Adopting effective technology-based teaching methods not only proves beneficial during global pandemics but also aligns with future trends in teaching development. The results of this research have the potential to significantly benefit English language teaching in secondary schools in Taiwan and worldwide, providing valuable references for teachers to improve instructional strategies and enhance students' English learning outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Distance Learning in EFL

Distance learning, which involves the temporal and spatial separation of teachers and learners, has gained significant attention in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction (Hazaymeh, 2021). The history of distance learning in EFL can be traced back to the early adoption of correspondence courses. Traditional methods of teaching have been supplemented and, in some cases, replaced by innovative digital tools and platforms. This shift has not only expanded the reach of EFL education but has also transformed

the ways in which it is delivered and accessed. As a result, educators and learners alike have had to adapt to these changes, navigating a landscape, where technology plays a central role in the teaching and learning process (Haleem et al., 2022; Kirange et al., 2021). These advancements have underscored the essential role of technology in shaping pedagogical methodologies. Moreover, empirical inquiries have shed light on numerous advantages associated with EFL distance learning. These include heightened flexibility, tailor-made learning pathways, and access to authentic language resources (Moorhouse & Wong, 2022). Furthermore, studies have probed into the influence of distance learning on learners' linguistic and communicative proficiencies, alongside their attitudes toward language acquisition (Hazaymeh, 2021; Moorhouse & Wong, 2022).

Currently, there is a growing interest in the seamless integration of technology tools into EFL curricula with researchers focusing on examining their impact on learner motivation, engagement levels, and overall language proficiency (Lamb & Arisandy, 2020). This area of inquiry is crucial for understanding how best to leverage technology in EFL education to enhance the learning experience and outcomes for students. For example, Amin and Paiman (2022) explored how digital disruptions have impacted higher education, leading educators to rely on digital platforms for online teaching. The study focused on university English language teachers in Malaysia and their use of digital platforms for online teaching. Findings highlight the popularity of online web meeting platforms, learning management systems, and instant messaging applications for teaching, especially in mitigating issues related to students' internet accessibility. The paper concluded with recommendations for effectively leveraging these platforms in university settings. In the aspect of designing and implementing distance teaching methods, Bahari (2022) investigated the effectiveness of game-based collaborative vocabulary learning (GBCVL) in developing vocabulary size and depth among 95 EFL intermediate learners in a distance learning setting. Results highlighted a significant relationship between playing vocabulary games and enhancing vocabulary, emphasizing GBCVL's potential in fostering individual motivation in computer-assisted language learning.

Furthermore, in distance EFL learning, motivation plays a pivotal role in distance instruction, as learners show enthusiasm towards the benefits of self-directed learning, which can reduce learning anxiety and frustration. Escobar Fandiño et al. (2019) conducted a study to investigate the motivational factors affecting university students involved in distance English learning. They used qualitative semi-structured individual interviews as their research method. The findings indicated that external factors, such as teaching methodologies and aspects related to the teacher, significantly influenced students' motivation levels in the context of distance English learning. To address the challenges posed by limited interaction and communication between instructors and learners in the context of distance education, Hazaymeh (2021) conducted an extensive exploration of students' perspectives on utilizing distance learning for English language acquisition during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students acknowledged the potential of distance English learning in fostering language proficiency, yet they pinpointed technical glitches and a dearth of interaction as areas necessitating enhancement. Consequently, they advocated for teachers to grasp the significance of digital technology and seamlessly incorporate it into their pedagogical approaches.

Teachers' Readiness for Distance EFL Learning

Teachers' readiness for distance learning refers to the level of preparedness and competence that educators possess in effectively delivering education through remote or online methods (Andarwulan et al., 2021). It encompasses a range of skills, attitudes, and resources required to successfully transition from traditional in-person teaching to virtual or distance learning. This readiness involves not only technical proficiency but also a grasp of online pedagogical strategies, the ability to engage and support students remotely, and the capacity to adapt to the challenges and opportunities presented by digital learning environments (Ragan et al., 2023). With abundant internet and technological resources at their disposal, teachers can enhance their teaching effectiveness, while educational institutions can significantly reduce costs by integrating teaching manpower and sharing resources, fostering healthy competition, and providing exceptional learning channels. However, it has been observed that teachers face several instructional challenges due to inadequate preparedness. These challenges encompass various aspects such as difficulties in preparing lesson, utilizing technology tool, uncertainties in assessment, managing classrooms in virtual

settings, concerns regarding the quality of distance learning, communication barriers with students, and resistance to embracing change (Abuhammad, 2020).

Yet, EFL distance learning presents distinctive challenges, encompassing aspects like digital literacy hurdles, technology accessibility limitations, fostering meaningful teacher-student interaction, and ensuring the authenticity of assessments (Aldossari & Altalhab, 2022). Researchers have investigated these challenges and proposed strategies to mitigate them, emphasizing the importance of pedagogical adaptation and learner support (Bachiri & Sahli, 2020; Marco & Daniel, 2021). Regarding teachers specifically, when the pandemic struck, governments worldwide had to swiftly implement policy changes in education, leading to temporary mandates to suspend in-person classes. However, most teachers were not adequately trained in distance learning, and they struggled with this sudden change. They found it difficult to manage student attendance, execute classroom activities, and inadvertently increase their workload and burden (Rannastu-Avalos & Siiman, 2020). Shifting abruptly from in-person to online learning, whether synchronously or asynchronously, presents significant differences from traditional in-person learning.

Owing to the unique nature of remote instructional settings, teachers may face challenges in promptly identifying and addressing student issues during class discussions, potentially resulting in reduced interaction and a perception of limited learning opportunities among students (Shotsberger, 2000). The difficulty also lies in effectively involving students in the process of learning EFL when they are not physically situated in the same physical space as the teacher or their peers. This challenge stems from the need to establish meaningful connections, maintain student motivation, and create a conducive learning environment despite the physical separation inherent in distance education (Luan et al., 2023). Conventional teaching methods such as group discussions and hands-on activities, typically employed in traditional classrooms, present challenges in the context of distance learning. This demands teachers to modify their instructional strategies and adapt educational materials to better align with the requirements of remote learning environments (Rannastu-Avalos & Siiman, 2020). In addition to overcoming technological challenges, teachers have realized the importance of assessing their proficiency in operational knowledge and techniques, as well as their capacity to utilize suitable teaching materials and methods for remote instruction. Consequently, there is a critical need for further investigation into the readiness of teachers for distance learning.

Perceptions Toward Distance EFL Learning

Teachers' perceptions of their own distance teaching encompass a comprehensive sense of attitude and experience, which are also influenced by factors such as personal characteristics, background, and culture (Hung, 2016). With the implementation of enhanced attendance systems and classroom management tools, teachers are no longer required to expend effort managing disruptive students in the classroom. This enables a more focused teaching approach, allowing teachers to dedicate their attention to adapting to the new mode of instruction. Consequently, in the long run, this approach has the potential to cultivate lifelong learning habits among students (Arrosagaray et al., 2019). However, teachers may still feel troubled by disruptions caused by factors like network outages or equipment malfunctions, leading to interruptions in the course and directly impacting teaching quality and learning outcomes.

In addition, evaluating teaching effectiveness through online assessments can present pitfalls; completely preventing cheating is difficult, and ensuring stable equipment and internet connectivity to facilitate smooth assessments can be a challenge. In fact, many studies analyzed the pros and cons of EFL distance learning have found that hardware limitations are the primary source of issues (Efriana, 2021; Kundu & Betal, 2022; Wahab & Iskandar, 2020). These limitations encompass aspects such as power stability, network fluidity, inherent computer problems, and unfamiliarity with remote teaching platforms or software. Students, in particular, consider audio transmission to be crucial, prompting teachers to pay attention to the quality of audio transmission to ensure students can clearly hear the content being taught (Abuhammad, 2020).

Over time, scholars have dedicated their efforts to studying EFL teachers' perceptions regarding various aspects of teaching resources and tools, instructional strategies, and learning assessment within the unique context of remote instruction. Comparisons of these perceptions with those of EFL students have revealed differences in how teachers and students perceive distance learning (Farnia & Mohammadi, 2021). This discrepancy is particularly evident in the diversification of resources, the variety of activities, and the encouragement of participatory learning activities and projects (Silva & Sousa, 2020). Other researchers have

directed their attention toward investigating teachers' perceptions of implementing distance learning. For example, Mouaziz and El Biadi (2021) digging deeply into their satisfaction levels and the factors influencing the experiences of Moroccan high school teachers. Results indicated that most teachers encountered numerous challenges while conducting distance learning, including student disinterest and communication issues, leading to many teachers feeling discouraged due to low attendance rates. Another study explored teachers' perceptions of distance learning implementing distance learning highlighted the primary obstacle hindering their distance teaching efforts as the absence of adequate technical training and support (Kulal & Nayak, 2020).

Furthermore, scholars have argued that middle school students are particularly affected by distance learning. Therefore, a study was conducted to investigate middle school teachers' perceptions of distance learning, leading to the identification of four key themes: efficiency, accessibility, contextualization, and social networks. The results indicated that distance learning facilitated lifelong learning, emphasizing the significance of exploring novel learning pathway (Alvarez et al., 2020). In the Taiwanese context, scholarly attention has been directed towards the crucial roles of teacher-student interaction and teachers' perceptions in distance learning, although research in this area remains limited. This emphasis is juxtaposed with the significant experience of university teachers in online teaching, contrasting with the supplementary role digital teaching plays in primary and secondary education (Wu, 2021). While there is no shortage of student perception studies on EFL distance learning, particularly in the context of English learning, relevant literature focusing on teachers is quite limited.

METHOD

Participants

The study comprised 215 EFL teachers at the secondary school level from various regions across Taiwan. Among the participants, the majority were female (n=163, 75.8%). Regarding age distribution, most fell within the 40-49 years age category (49.3%), followed by the 50 to 59-year-old (25.1%). In terms of professional roles, 47.1% held the position of lecturer, 23.4% were assistant professors, 18.3% were associate professors, and 10.9% were full professors. Notably, a significant proportion of participants had more than 16-20 years of teaching experience (28.8%). The majority worked as high school teachers (n=127, 59.1%). Geographically, 40.9% of participants were from the central area of Taiwan, followed by the northern region at 34.9%, the southern region at 19.5%, and a smaller contingent of only 4.7% originating from the eastern area.

Instrument

The draft of the survey questionnaire was prepared based on relevant literature and divided into two main sections: background variables and issues related to distance EFL learning. The first part consists of respondent background variables with the aim of understanding teacher demographic information, including gender, age, educational background, grade levels taught and school location. The second part, addressing issues related to distance EFL learning, is further subdivided into two major categories: readiness of distance EFL learning and perceptions of distance EFL learning.

Readiness of distance EFL learning refers to the overall preparedness level of teachers for distance EFL learning. This includes specific pedagogical and psychological preparations and is divided into three components: technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) and distance teaching presence (DTP). TPACK implies that teachers can effectively use various information technologies and teaching knowledge while understanding the degree to which appropriate use of information technology can alter teaching methods and strategies. DTP assesses whether teachers can genuinely convey the experience of face-to-face teaching through technology-mediated distance learning.

Perceptions of distance English language learning is divided into personal and pedagogic perspectives. Personal perspective encompasses individual beliefs and expectations regarding distance English language learning, as well as opinions formed through personal experiences, thoughts, and exploration. This perspective includes value judgments, opinions on tools and methods, or moral considerations regarding

Table 1. Reported readiness of distance EFL learning

Domain/subcategory	Number of survey items	Mean	Standard deviation
TPACK	20	4.38	.948
TCK	4	4.66	.901
TPK	5	4.56	.922
TPACK	4	4.36	1.080
TK	7	4.11	1.087
DTP	20	4.42	.768
CI	4	4.66	.970
CA	6	4.53	.873
SFA	3	4.50	.902
IS	7	4.15	1.044
Total	40	4.40	.790

Note. TPACK: Technological pedagogical content knowledge; TCK: Technological content knowledge; TK: Technological knowledge; DTP: Distance teaching presence; CI: Clarity of instruction r; CA: Cognitive activation; SFA: Student feedback & assessment; & IS: Institutional support

tools or methods. The pedagogic perspective considers the nature of the subject matter and teaching quality in distance EFL learning, as well as factors such as teacher-student relationships and the role of teachers.

All the questionnaire items are designed in a format that employs a five-point Likert scale and open-ended questions. The content of the five-point Likert scale questions focused on the readiness and perceptions of the respondents regarding distance English language learning, with the aim of identifying potential preliminary questionnaire items in detail. A pilot study was carried out to improve, rationalize, and finalize the survey items, involving 30 teachers who were not part of the main research samples. The reliability analyses were performed on both sections with Cronbach's alpha scores of .977 and .942 for TPACK and TP, respectively. In addition, the survey's validity was evaluated, yielding Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin validity scores of .941 and .877, indicating a high level of validity. It was then modified to fit the purposes of this study. The final questionnaire consisted of 82 questions, encompassing five items related to demographics, 40 items pertaining to participants' readiness for distance EFL learning, and 37 items focusing on participants' perceptions of distance English learning (see **Appendix A**). Then it was administered to a random sample of teachers from different areas of Taiwan.

Research Procedures & Data Analysis

The data collection for this study extended over a period of ten months. First, a description of the study was emailed to the participants and a link to the survey site was provided for the participants to complete in their convenient time. The participants were informed of the purpose of the survey. The privacy of participants and the confidentiality of data was offered. The data collected in this study were only use for study purposes and will only keep for three years. Following a thorough examination of all completed surveys, the questionnaires were coded for statistical analysis, enabling comparisons and insights to be drawn regarding the study topics. The data underwent analysis using descriptive statistical procedures, one-way ANOVA, and the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient to determine if teachers' readiness and their perceptions toward distance EFL learning are related. Then, the results of follow-up interviews were analyzed using content analysis method.

RESULTS

Readiness of Distance EFL Learning

Table 1 indicated the results of distance EFL learning as perceived by secondary school teachers. The responses related to two key aspects of distance EFL learning readiness were accessed: TPACK and DTP. The mean scores for individual readiness items varied between 4.75 (highest) and 3.63 (lowest), resulting in an overall mean of 4.40. These findings indicate to a high level of readiness for integrating distance EFL learning. It is evident that the majority of EFL teachers are adequately prepared and competent in facilitating effective distance EFL learning.

Table 2. Reported perceptions of distance EFL learning

Subcategory	Number of survey items	Mean	Standard deviation
PP	16	3.97	.585
PV	21	3.99	.775
Total	37	3.98	.639

Note. PP: Personal perspective & PV: Pedagogical view

Table 3. ANOVA results

			SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Gender	Readiness	BG	.588	1	.588	.941	.335
		WG	57.519	92	.625		
	Perception	BG	.802	1	.802	1.974	.161
		WG	86.561	213	.406		
Age	Readiness	BG	1.719	4	.430	.678	.609
		WG	56.388	89	.634		
	Perception	BG	7.007	4	1.752	4.578	.001*
		WG	80.356	210	.383		
Years of teaching experience	Readiness	BG	5.506	5	1.101	1.842	.113
		WG	52.601	88	.598		
	Perception	BG	4.874	5	.975	2.470	.034*
		WG	82.490	209	.395		
Department	Readiness	BG	.037	1	.037	.059	.809
		WG	58.070	92	.631		
	Perception	BG	.168	1	.168	.411	.522
		WG	87.195	213	.409		
Area	Readiness	BG	1.271	2	.636	1.018	.366
		WG	56.836	91	.625		
	Perception	BG	2.346	3	.782	1.949	.123
		WG	84.273	210	.401		

Note. Sig.: Significance; *p<.05; BG: Between group; & WG: Within group

Furthermore, the results showed that teachers' DTP, with a mean score of 4.42, exceeded their TPACK, which had a mean score of 4.38. Despite exhibiting proficiency in the utilization of digital tools, the slightly lower TPACK score implies that teachers may encounter difficulties in the seamless integration of technology into their pedagogical methodologies. This discrepancy suggests that while teachers demonstrate comfort and competence in operating digital tools, they may encounter challenges in employing these tools in manners that are closely aligned with their pedagogical objectives and the specific requirements of the content being taught. Consequently, these findings may indicate a necessity for additional professional development initiatives aimed at narrowing the discrepancy between DTP and TPACK. Such initiatives could encompass targeted training and support programs designed to assist teachers integrate technology more effectively into their teaching practices.

Perceptions of Distance EFL Learning

Table 2 presented the results of EFL teachers' perceptions regarding distance EFL learning. Teachers' responses were analyzed within the context of two recognized perspectives: PP and PV. PP pertains to the subjective perceptions and experiences of individual teachers regarding distance EFL learning, while PV refers to the teacher's professional or pedagogical perspectives on the effectiveness of distance EFL learning methods. The overall mean of 3.98 suggests that the respondents had a moderately positive perception toward distance EFL learning. Moreover, the analysis revealed a noteworthy similarity in the ratings assigned to the personal perspective (mean [M]=3.97) and pedagogical view (M=3.99). This implies a high degree of alignment in how the respondents evaluated these perspectives. There was little difference in how they viewed these two perspectives in the context of distance EFL learning.

Variability in Teachers' Characteristics

As shown in **Table 3**, the results of the one-way ANOVA revealed no significant differences among teachers in relation to gender, department, or geographic area. This suggests that both male and female teachers, as well as those from junior and high school levels, and various geographic regions, reported similar levels of

Table 4. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient results of subcategory of distance EFL learning readiness & perception

	Perception	PP	PV
Readiness	.525**	.502**	.461**
TPACK	.502**	.444**	.494**
TCK	.457**	.418**	.439**
TPK	.459**	.405**	.454**
TPACK	.410**	.356**	.410**
TK	.523**	.461**	.516**
TP	.461**	.405**	.457**
CI	.442**	.391**	.437**
CA	.298**	.249*	.305**
SFA	.354**	.312**	.350**
IS	.390**	.351**	.380**

Note. *p<0.05 & **p<0.01

readiness and perceptions. However, there were significant differences on perceptions among teachers in terms of age (F[4, 210]=4.578, p=0.001). Subsequent post hoc analyses indicated that teachers aged 30 to 39 exhibited the highest level of perception toward distance EFL learning, while those aged over 60 demonstrated the lowest level of perception (p=0.02, 95% confidence interval [CI]=-.7208, .2977). Similarly, significant differences were observed in teachers' perceptions based on their years of teaching experience (F[5, 209]=2.470, p=0.034). Specifically, teachers with less than five years of teaching experience displayed the highest level of perception toward distance EFL learning, whereas those with more than 26 years of teaching experience demonstrated the lowest level of perception (p=.172, 95% CI=-.0899, .9320).

Relationship of Readiness & Perceptions of Distance EFL Learning

As indicated in **Table 4**, the findings from the analysis using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient demonstrated a positive correlation between teachers' readiness and their perception, encompassing all its various subcategories. It suggests that teachers who exhibit a higher level of readiness are likely to have a more favorable perception when it comes to the implementation of distance EEL learning. In other words, the more prepared teachers are, the more positively they tend to view and engage with distance EEL learning.

Interview Results

Distance learning emerged as a crucial lifeline for sustaining academic pursuits during the unprecedented COVID-19 lockdown. However, this abrupt shift forced educators into a challenging terrain, one they had to navigate without the requisite training and support. As a result, when asked about their experiences with emergency distance learning, the majority of interview participants shared sentiments of considerable stress stemming from the demands of implementing this educational paradigm during the pandemic.

A recurring theme among these teachers was the arduous nature of preparing for virtual classes. They recounted spending substantial amounts of time meticulously planning and organizing their online lessons to ensure their students' engagement and comprehension. This added workload, combined with the unpredictability of internet connectivity, posed substantial challenges. Teachers frequently complained the instability of their internet connections, a factor that undermined the smooth execution of lessons, leading to disruptions and frustration for both educators and students.

Another significant challenge highlighted by the teachers was the steep learning curve associated with adopting various technology tools for distance learning. The rapid transition necessitated mastering new platforms and applications, a process that the teachers found demanding and time-consuming. Furthermore, maintaining students' attention in an online environment emerged as a formidable task, with the teachers expressing the difficulties they encountered in keeping their students focused during virtual classes. Technical obstacles were also a significant concern, with unstable internet connections and a shortage of digital devices being the most commonly identified issues. These challenges hindered the seamless delivery of instruction, exacerbating the strain on educators attempting to maintain continuity in learning.

Moreover, the teachers emphasized the disparities in managing a distance learning classroom compared to traditional face-to-face instruction. The absence of physical presence made it challenging to monitor student engagement and address behavioral issues effectively. The transition to online teaching highlighted the need for specialized training and support from educational institutions to equip educators with the skills and resources necessary to overcome these challenges.

DISCUSSION

The findings presented in **Table 2** shed light on the readiness of secondary school teachers for distance EFL learning, focusing on their perceptions of two critical aspects: TPACK and DTP. These results provide valuable insights into the readiness and perceptions of educators regarding the challenges and opportunities associated with distance EFL learning. One of the most remarkable insights from this study is the high level of readiness exhibited by the participating teachers for integrating distance EFL learning into their instructional practices. These findings strongly suggested that the majority of EFL teachers are not only prepared but also fully capable of effectively conducting distance EFL learning. Such a high level of readiness bodes well for the successful implementation of distance EFL education and highlights the commitment of educators to adapt to evolving teaching modalities.

Another noteworthy insight is that teachers' self-assessment of their DTP surpasses their evaluation of their TPACK. This implies that while teachers may perceive the rapid evolution of distance teaching technology as challenging and not always user-friendly, they have a strong sense of confidence in their ability to navigate these technological tools effectively and to assist students in their EFL distance learning journeys. This demonstrates a commendable resilience and adaptability among teachers in the face of evolving educational technology.

The study also illuminates the challenges associated with distance EFL learning. Teachers pointed out that students face difficulties in self-management and maintaining focus, factors that contribute to insufficient learning outcomes. While distance learning offers the significant advantage of saving commuting time, it is also susceptible to technical issues stemming from unstable internet connections and may lack the tangible presence of a teacher.

Nevertheless, teachers recognized the potential benefits of distance learning, such as the ability to record, preserve, and review various teaching elements and the learning journey.

One intriguing finding is that teachers expressed a clear preference for in-person classes over distance learning, a sentiment they believed was shared by their students as well. This preference likely reflects the intrinsic value of face-to-face interactions and the challenges of replicating the richness of in-person instruction in a virtual setting. The analysis using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, as presented in **Table 4**, further enriches the understanding of the relationship between teacher readiness and their perception of distance EFL learning. The positive correlation observed across all subcategories implies that educators who are well-prepared are more likely to view and engage with distance EFL learning in a positive light.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the results of this study emphasize the overall high level of readiness among secondary school teachers for distance EFL learning, showcasing their preparedness to embrace this evolving educational modality. Despite the challenges posed by rapidly evolving technology and the perceived drawbacks of distance learning, teachers express confidence in their abilities to guide students effectively in EFL distance education. While recognizing the benefits of distance learning, teachers continue to value the traditional in-person classroom experience.

Furthermore, the positive correlation observed between teacher readiness and their perception of distance EFL learning highlights the crucial role of preparation and professional development in fostering a more positive engagement with this innovative learning. These findings emphasize the importance of ongoing support and training for educators as they navigate the dynamic landscape of distance EFL education, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of instructional quality in the digital age. The study presented

substantial evidence and implications for teaching practices, curriculum design, and potential directions for further research. Ultimately, the research endeavors to aid in the advancement of distance EFL learning and its effective implementation in both current and future educational settings.

Ethics declaration: The author declared that the highest ethical practices were followed during the study. Written informed consents were obtained from the participants. Participation to the study was strictly voluntary. Any information that may reveal the identity of the participants was anonymized.

Declaration of interest: The author declares no competing interest.

Data availability: Data generated or analyzed during this study are available from the author on request.

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APPENDIX A

Table A1. Questionnaire items

D/S	Item
TPACK	
TCK 01	I have a good understanding of technological tools that can assist students in their EFL distance learning.
TCK 02	I have a good understanding of technological tools available for supporting my own EFL distance learning.
TCK 03	I know how to select the suitable technological tools for conducting distance EFL learning.
TCK 04	I am proficient in utilizing distance learning technology tools to effectively guide students in their English learning journey.
TPK 01	I have expertise to select distance learning technology tools that can maximize students' English learning outcomes.
TPK 02	I am knowledgeable in selecting distance learning technology tools that can improve the effectiveness of English instruction.
TPK 03	I am able to apply the technology tools I have learned to different distance EFL learning activities.
TPK 04	I am able to engage in critical thinking regarding the effective utilization of distance learning technology tools in the classroom setting.
TPK 05	I have the ability to integrate distance learning technology tools with the instructional methods I employ in the classroom.
TPACK 01	I can design distance EFL courses that integrate technology tools and instructional methods.
TPACK 02	During instruction, I have the ability to effectively integrate distance teaching technology tools and instructional methods.
TPACK 03	I can integrate teaching strategies, technology tools, & instructional methods into distance EFL courses.
TPACK 04	I know which technology tools to choose in order to enhance my distance EFL teaching content.
TK 01	Learning distance EFL teaching technology tools is easy and effortless.
TK 02	I can keep up with the major remote English teaching technology tools.
TK 03	I regularly try to utilize distance EFL teaching technology tools.
TK 04	I possess the knowledge to troubleshoot technological issues that arise in my distance EFL teaching.
TK 05	I am familiar with a variety of distance EFL teaching technologies.
TK 06	I have the ability to utilize distance EFL teaching technology effectively.
TK 07	I have plenty of opportunities to utilize diverse distance EFL teaching technologies.
DTP	
CI 01	I can clearly articulate the key objectives of distance EFL courses.
CI 02	I can provide clear explanations of all the intended objectives of distance EFL courses.
CI 03	I can provide clear instructions on how to engage in course learning activities.
CI 04	I can clearly convey the essential schedule of various learning activities.
CA01	I can determine which course topics are beneficial for students' learning.
CA02	I can guide the entire class to comprehend course topics and help students clarify their thoughts.
CA03	I try to keep students engaged and focused on their learning during class.
CA04	I assist students in completing learning tasks to enhance their learning.
CA05	I would encourage students to explore new knowledge within the curriculum.
CA06	In my course, the discussion activities were used to facilitate students' understanding and learning of the core subjects in the curriculum.
SFA 01	I provide real-time learning feedback.
SFA 02	Learning feedback I provide can help students understand their strengths & weaknesses in their studies.
SFA 03	The learning feedback I provide can assist students in enhancing their learning effectiveness.
IS 01	My school has a clear vision for distance EFL learning.
IS 02	My school has clear objectives for distance EFL learning.
IS 03	My school supports the professional development of distance EFL learning.
IS 04	When implementing distance EFL learning, the school carefully considers the existing technological tools and infrastructure in its planning.
IS 05	The school closely monitors the transition process as teachers shift from conducting in-person classes to distance EFL learning.
IS 06	There are avenues for professional development and the exchange of teaching strategies among teachers in the field of distance EFL learning.
IS07	Teachers shared information on professional development and teaching strategies of distance EFL learning among themselves.
PP	
PP01	In distance EFL learning, it's essential to employ a variety of teaching strategies.
PP02	Distance EFL learning allows me to easily complete the course instruction.

Table A1 (Continued). Questionnaire items

D/S	Item
PV03	Distance EFL learning provides diverse and abundant learning resources.
PP04	Distance EFL learning save my commuting time.
PP05	Distance EFL learning increases my lesson preparation time.
PP06	Distance EFL learning presents challenges in terms of learning assessments.
PP07	Distance EFL learning is prone to technical issues related to unstable internet connections.
PP08	During distance EFL learning, it's challenging for students to autonomously manage and stay focused on their learning.
PP09	Compared to in-person classes, I prefer distance learning.
PP10	I have noticed that students tend to enjoy classes more in distance learning.
PP11	Distance learning makes students more willing to invest extra time in learning English.
PP12	Distance EFL learning lacks the feeling of teacher presence.
PP13	My fellow teachers prefer using distance EFL teaching for instruction.
PP14	I find teaching EFL courses using distance learning to be enjoyable.
PP15	I feel that students are more willing to express their opinions and participate in classroom discussions through distance EFL learning.
PP16	I feel that students are more willing to continue learning English during their free time through distance learning.
PV	
PV01	Distance EFL learning breaks through constraints of time and space, offering high flexibility in learning.
PV02	Distance EFL learning reduces the learning stress for students.
PV03	Distance EFL learning provides diverse and abundant learning resources.
PV04	Distance learning improves students' efficiency in EFL learning.
PV05	Distance learning enhances students' English language skills.
PV06	I feel that utilizing distance EFL learning helps to boost teachers' motivation in teaching.
PV07	Distance learning allows students to practice a wide range of English skills thoroughly.
PV08	Distance EFL learning can disrupt the coherence of students' learning.
PV09	Distance EFL learning makes it easier for students to cheat during exams.
PV10	Distance EFL learning encourages shy students to gain more confidence in speaking up.
PV11	The variety in distance EFL learning makes it an appealing learning method.
PV12	Distance EFL learning can achieve student-centered learning.
PV13	Distance EFL learning can break down age barriers and promote lifelong learning.
PV14	When engaging in communication through distance EFL learning, students are more inclined to seek assistance from others.
PV15	The use of distance English learning has reduced opportunities for group or collaborative learning.
PV16	Distance EFL learning has made classroom management methods and approaches more systematic.
PV17	Distance EFL learning facilitates fast and convenient information transmission.
PV18	The teaching process (materials, interactions between teachers and students, the learning journey, etc.) can all be recorded, saved, and reviewed in distance EFL learning.
PV19	The teaching platform records the complete learning journey and outcomes, allowing learners or instructors to review the learning process and effectiveness.
PV20	Distance EFL learning can provide individualized learning.
PV21	In the secondary school English curriculum, implementing distance learning is feasible.

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