Shahid Rajaee
Teacher Training University

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Iranian EFL Teachers' Beliefs about the Barriers of Online Assessment during COVID-19 Pandemic

Vahid Rahmani Doqaruni
University of Gonabad
rahmani@gonabad.ac.ir

INTRODUCTION

In the last few years, there has been a growing interest in technology integration in the field of second/foreign language (L2) education in order to improve the quality of learning and teaching in L2 classrooms (Hafner & Miller, 2011; Mompean, 2010). The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic facilitated the integration of technology in different L2 contexts worldwide.

However, the rapid shift to online teaching gave rise to unparalleled challenges which have not been considered by L2 teachers before. More specifically, many L2 teachers faced several barriers with respect to the online assessment of their students. In other words, the outbreak of COVID-19 made L2 teachers move from the traditional classroom-based assessment to the virtual online assessment which had its own specific requirements.

So, investigating L2 teachers' beliefs about the barriers of online assessment during COVID-19 pandemic is considered important as such beliefs affect the teachers' practice regarding online assessment.

METHOD

The participants were 12 English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) teachers who were teaching at different branches of a private English language teaching institute in Mashhad, northeastern Iran. They were all male and were between 25 to 38 years old. Their teaching experience ranged from 3 to 15 years.

To shed a deeper light on teachers' beliefs about the barriers of online assessment in L2 education, a qualitative mode of inquiry was used. In this way, a semi-structured interview was conducted with each teacher to reveal their beliefs. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed for further analysis.

To analyze the interview data, qualitative content analysis was used. In this way, after several rounds of data analysis, the main themes in relation to the teachers' beliefs about the barriers of online assessment were identified.

RESULTS

The findings showed that the EFL teachers believed that barriers of the online assessment were either pedagogical or institutional.

Instances of the former included lack of feedback opportunities, the washback effect of the online assessment, and developing reliable and valid online exams.

The latter included barriers such as lack of clear guidelines for online assessment, lack of online training for the teachers on how to do online assessment, and lack of the financial support to provide the needed equipment for the teachers.

DISCUSSION

Considering the results, it is argued that, in order to improve the online assessment, pedagogical and institutional barriers should be taken into account (Bordbar, 2010; Hedayati & Marandi, 2014). Paying more attention to such barriers would result in more integration of the technology in the L2 pedagogical context.

It is then suggested that L2 pre-service and in-service teacher education programs design courses to develop teachers' knowledge and skills of using technology in their assessment. In addition, it is suggested that institutions provide the teachers with the needed technological facilities and knowledge in order to facilitate the online assessment.

The limitation of the present study is its narrow scope as it only focused on teachers' beliefs about the barriers of online assessment. Future studies should investigate the beliefs of other stakeholders about the barriers of online assessment, such as students, parents, and administrators.

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