Covid-19-Prompted Emergency Distance English Language Education from EFL Students' Perspective: A Scoping Review on Challenges and Responses

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Abstract

The profound and permanent impact of the Covid-19 pandemic caused a global closure of universities and schools by transforming physical classrooms into online/distance settings. Such a sudden shift resulted in uncertainty in the educational context. During the pandemic, the only way to sustain education was to benefit from distance education, which is defined as Emergency Distance Education. Specifically focusing on English language education in these emergency circumstances, such a distance education might be defined as Emergency Distance English Language Education (EDELE). In such a rush, both challenges and opportunities have been experienced in EDELE. Therefore, recent studies focus on how to respond to those challenges to improve the conditions of EDELE. Thus, this scoping review study aims to first identify (a) challenges experienced during EDELE, and then (b) responses for those challenges during EDELE from the perspectives of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Via NVivo 11 Plus, the scoped studies focusing on EFL students were inductively and thematically analysed. The results revealed the challenges during EDELE centred around five main actions: *changed*, *caused*, *revealed, increased,* and *decreased*. Additionally, thematic analyses of the responses were organized around the implementations or recommendations by three stakeholders: *teachers*, *students,* and *institutions*. The current study contributes to EFL settings in improving distance education circumstances.

Keywords: Emergency Distance English Language Education (EDELE), Scoping Review, Covid-19, NVivo

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Introduction

The unexpected Covid-19 pandemic which began at the end of 2019 impacted every territory of our world. As a response to the pandemic within educational contexts, some measures were taken quickly and numerous related phrases have been carved into our minds such as "closure of institutions, schools and colleges", "temporary solutions", "going into lockdowns", "online education" and "shifting to emergency remote teaching".

Transition emerged to be the major keyword among all those, and this shifting process required a transition in the following facets:

a) from face-to-face education to online/distance education,

b) from learning in groups to more individualized learning,

c) from slow motion to quick-paced actions,

d) from old/outdated technologies to new/latest technologies,

e) from lecture-based/teacher-centred lessons to interactive/student-based

 lessons,

f) from focus on the content to more towards the implementation, and

g) from teacher-student dyad to teacher-student-parent (family/immediate

 environment) triad.

All of those transitions led to the rebuilding of the concept of education. They were somewhat necessary in such a threatening situation to enhance the educational contexts, yet how all these transitions were realized in different contexts is open to discussion, of course – depending on the conditions each country, each institution, each teacher and student has.

Literature Review

The Covid-19 crisis has led most schools and institutions to benefit from various computer-based education modalities as a strategy to overcome interruptions of the pandemic to coursework. In fact, distance education and online education are among the buzzwords defining the education during the Covid-19 pandemic. Both of these strategies include students working on computers or other technological devices to receive education. However, in online education students and teachers can be together in the classroom for digital lessons and assessments, while in distance education, students and teachers can work digitally at various locations like at home (Stauffer, 2020). Considering the fact

that during the pandemic most of the students and teachers have had to study online at home to go beyond the problems having aroused in this crisis, 'distance education' is preferred to use in the rest of this study.

Distance education is not a new term; in fact, it was also overwhelmingly used in the pre-Covid world. It is related to "the effort of providing access to learning for those who are geographically distant" (Moore et al., 2011, p. 129). However, distance education due to the Covid-19 crisis is unique when compared with the traditional distance education practices. Al Lily et al. (2020) state the differences of distance education with six main headings: its suddenness, internationalisation, popularity, expansion, imposition and medical emergencies. Those differences show that this abrupt and disruptive nature of distance education in the pandemic ruptured normal practices in education and caused changes in the routines of the regular education. This means, education is experiencing the greatest disruption, and this distance education procedure is defined as Emergency Distance Education (EDE) and Emergency Remote Education (ERE).

During EDE especially in lockdown procedure, teachers and schools sought to ensure sustainability of learning and education at home, with a range of actions documented in various studies (Bond, 2021; Bozkurt et al., 2020; Karataş & Tuncer, 2020). Nowadays, despite the possibility of other waves and mutations of the virus it is hoped that the pandemic would soon come to an end. However, it is possible to say that 'normal' schooling is not as in the pre-Covid world. In fact, within this emergency context, the need for an appropriate and effective transformation process to distance education in the 21st century is still considered a bone to pick in the world. That is why, "practitioners and researchers around the world have been trying to understand how ERE has been implemented, seeking to identify ways of effectively engaging students in learning whilst at home during this incredibly difficult time" (Bond, 2021, p. 192). In educational contexts, this crisis caused disruption for the stakeholders such as students, teachers, school leaders and parents due to the sudden migration from face-to-face education to distance education all around the world (Hodges et al., 2020). Thus, to overcome emergency actions to implement distance education, it is crucial to explore the problems and also the benefits experienced by aforementioned stakeholders (Andrew et al., 2020; Bond, 2021).

Regarding English Language Education (ELE) and English Language Teaching (ELT) in this emergency context, "the need to improve the quality of ELT experiences becomes a requirement due to Covid-19, which might continue or the fact that other emergencies could occur anytime" (Hazaea et al, 2021, p. 203). Therefore, this study makes use of Emergency Distance English Language Education (EDELE) to describe the rapid and unexpected transition from face-to-face education to distance education in ELE and ELT contexts amid the Covid pandemic. EDELE includes some various research studies highlighting teaching of English as a second or foreign language via distance education during the Covid-19 crisis. Those studies are mainly organised around some various aspects

such as students, teachers, preparedness of teachers, teaching practices, distance education design, modes and modality of English language teaching, challenges and remedies experienced in ELE and ELT contexts, used devices, digital learning and teaching platforms, technological resources, and the teaching of language skills (see, for example, Ağçam et al., 2021; Alzamil, 2021; Amin & Sundari, 2020; Bailey, 2021; Bozavli, 2021; Cahapay & Labrador, 2021; Ghounane, 2020; Hazaea et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2021; Kamisli & Akinlar, 2022; Karataş & Tuncer, 2020; Mahyoob, 2020; Rigo & Mikuš, 2021; Taşçı, 2021; Tuncer & Karataş, 2022; Yundayani et al., 2021). The findings of those studies show that in such a rush, some various challenges but also opportunities have been experienced about distance education in ELE and ELT contexts during the crisis. Thus, the current direction of the studies focuses on the best way to improve the quality of EDELE. Within this emergency context, to improve the quality of those practices, the necessity is to go beyond emergency online practices. To do so, as Kim (2021) states "[w]hile prompt action is required, there also needs to be considered reflection on what has been done in the past and what should be done in the future" (p. 45). Knowing that students are among the vulnerable group of stakeholders who have been afflicted by the pandemic in English Language Education, by a scoping review of studies focusing on students' perspectives, this study aims to uncover the challenges experienced during EDELE, and responses that were given to those challenges either by actual implementations or recommendations.

Methodology

Design of the Study

This study is a scoping review which aims "to map rapidly the key concepts underpinning a research area and the main sources and types of evidence available and can be undertaken as stand-alone projects in their own right, especially where an area is complex or has not been reviewed comprehensively before" (Mays et al., 2001, p. 194). Based on Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) methodology for a scoping review, this study followed the stages given below:

Stage 1: Identifying the research question,

Stage 2: Identifying relevant studies,

Stage 3: Study selection,

Stage 4: Charting the data, and

Stage 5: Collating, summarizing and reporting the results.

Data Collection and Analysis

Stage 1. Identifying the Research Questions

This scoping review study was driven by the following two research questions:

1- What are the challenges experienced by EFL students within the Covid-19-prompted EDELE context?

2- What are the responses (both implemented actually and recommended) to the challenges experienced within the Covid-19-prompted EDELE context?

Stage 2: Identifying Relevant Studies

Thus, prior to conducting the literature review, one guiding question had to be established before deciding on the inclusion criteria: What is known from the existing literature on EDELE about challenges and responses?

In line with this question, the publications included in the review addressed the following issues:

- Challenges experienced within EDELE context.

- Responses to the challenges experienced during EDELE.

Stage 3: Study Selection

After determining the relevant literature for the scoping review, the researchers established eligibility and exclusion criteria to apply to the relevant sources. Table 1 describes the eligibility criteria in terms of various criteria such as database, year of publication, participant, keywords and so forth.

Table 1. Eligibility criteria for the scoping review

Criterion	Accepted value
Databases	Scopus, Web of Science (SSCI and ESCI)
Type of studies	Empirical
Category of publication	Journal articles
Year of publication	Between 2020 and April 2021
Language of publication	English
Context	EFL education at tertiary/postgraduate level during the Covid-19 pandemic
Participants	EFL learners and Postgraduate students
Keywords	Covid-19 (pandemic), EFL (students), online/distance/digital learning (e-learning), emergency distance/remote education/teaching.

This review did not aim at any specific author name, country, instrument type, or data analysis method. Thus, all eligible studies regardless of the aforementioned factors were taken into consideration. Sources other than journal articles such as book chapters, blogs, institutional reports, white/green/blue/yellow papers, press releases, online posts and informative websites were excluded. Journal articles were excluded if they did not fit into the contextual framework of the study, or if they did not include implications for EFL education. Papers which focused on very specific topics in EFL such as storytelling or formative assessment were also excluded.

According to the eligibility criteria depicted in Table 1, the researchers searched via the databases of Scopus and Web of Science (SSCI and ESCI). Additionally, all searches conducted in the scope of this study were based on the studies written in English. Keywords for the search were Covid-19 (pandemic), EFL (students), online/distance/digital learning (e-learning), and emergency distance/remote education/teaching. Since it was infeasible to include all potential keywords in one study, by using a number of various combinations of all those keywords, studies conducted during the pandemic and published between 2020 and April 2021 were collected. After the exclusion of the irrelevant papers, search resulted in 10 journal articles to be reviewed (which were marked with asterisk "*" in the reference list).

This scoping review is based on a total of 10 publications in the literature of EDELE. Each study included in this review based on EDELE contexts from EFL students' perspectives in higher education during the Covid-19 pandemic. Those reviewed studies were conducted in seven different countries: the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (2 publications), Indonesia (2 publications), Türkiye (2 publications), South Korea, Algeria, China, and Slovakia. The length of texts ranged from nine to 34 pages.

Stages 4 and 5: Charting the Data/Collating, Summarizing and Reporting the Results

In the last two stages of scoping review, thematic analysis (TA) was used. Via NVivo 11 Plus, the selected studies covered in this scoping review were inductively and thematically analysed by two researchers together to reduce the data into workable main themes and sub-themes related to each of two research questions. The researchers held online meetings via Google Meet more than 10 times, and each meeting lasted more than two hours.

The content of the publications was analysed in six phases based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) methodology for TA:

Phase 1: familiarization with data

Phase 2: generating initial codes

Phase 3: searching for themes

Phase 4: reviewing themes

Phase 5: defining and naming themes

Phase 6: producing the report.

In order to generate the initial codes, phrases/sentences/paragraphs within an article were highlighted for a specific challenge and/or response and then they were converted into single initial

codes as nodes in NVivo. Those individual nodes were then examined again in order to classify them according to their similarities and to find a suitable and inclusive theme. During this phase, some nodes were grouped under a single theme. These phases were repeated for each article via repeated reclassifications because of constant re-evaluation of the themes in the light of the next article. At the end of analysing 10 articles with the same method, the final classification of nodes as themes was reviewed by the researchers twice with the aim of establishing a reliable and a sound TA. After the theme generation procedure, the researchers prepared the visual representation of the themes by using the concept map function of NVivo. The main aim at this stage was to visualise themes and connections among them.

At the end of TA, for the challenges researchers believed that using actions/verbs as main themes for covering the sub-themes might highlight EDELE as an active agent during the pandemic. Thus, they went one step further and used five verbs which entail the challenges: *changed*, *caused*, *revealed, increased* and *decreased.* Accordingly, the labels of the themes were slightly changed. For instance, 'less motivated students' was changed into 'decreased/motivation of the students' (see Figure 1). Thus, 28 sub-themes categorized under five main themes emerged as challenges of EDELE. Regarding the second research question focusing on responses given to challenges, the implemented or recommended responses were grouped around three main themes which were the following stakeholders of EDELE: *teachers*, *students,* and *institutions.* 12 actions as sub-themes were depicted under the related themes.

Reliability and Validity

For considerations of how reliability and validity was ensured in this study, the selection process was given in a detailed way as to the eligibility and exclusion criteria of the current review. In addition, the researchers excluded the studies that focused on EFL students together with other departments' students or teachers because data in them were analysed mixed with the ones from students of other departments or teachers. For instance, the study by Shim and Lee (2020) included findings from College of Education students together with many other different colleges, and it was not apparent whether EFL learners were included in College of Education so that study was excluded. Nevertheless, Ghounane's study (2020) was included in the review because it analysed and presented the data gathered from novice teachers and EFL students separately, so it was easy to follow the findings based only on EFL students on the topic in question.

Findings and Discussion

Findings of the scoping review are discussed below in relation to the two research questions previously presented. The first research question focuses on the challenges while the second one is about the responses to those challenges.

Research Question 1: What are the challenges experienced by EFL students within the Covid-19- prompted EDELE context?

In order to describe what Covid-19-prompted EDELE did as challenges for EFL context, the researchers read and extracted the challenges from those ten journal articles. Then, instead of reflecting them as themes only, they thought that focusing on what EDELE caused through actions/verbs would be much clearer to give the whole picture of the related context. Thus, challenges during EDELE were demonstrated through five main actions as main themes, and those are: *changed*, *caused*, *revealed, increased* and *decreased* (see Figure 1).
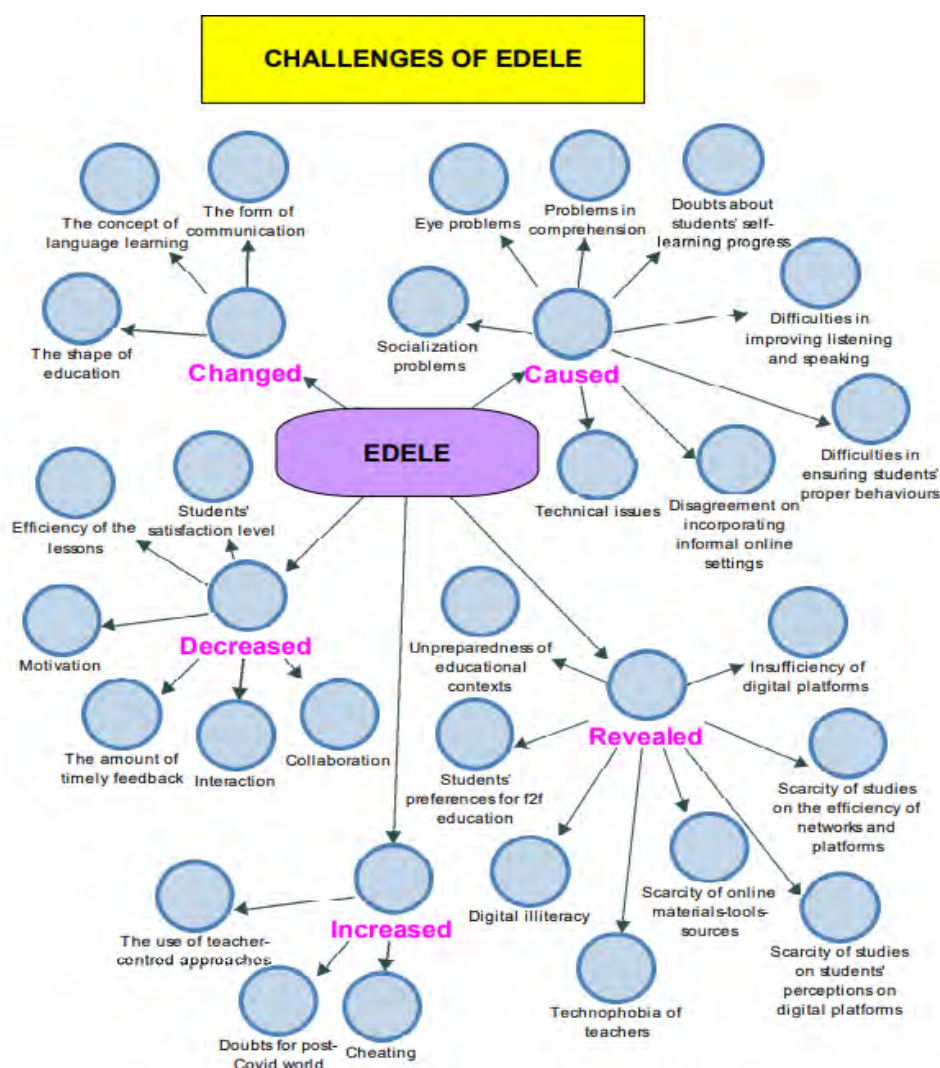

Figure 1. Concept map of the challenges experienced during EDELE

Figure 1 shows that EDELE *changed* three things: a) *the shape of education (learning and teaching)*, b) *the concept of language learning within the confines of school*, and c) *the form of communication between students and teachers*. These interrelated things are all observable in the other educational contexts as well because with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, "almost all

countries ended education in schools at all levels" (Bozavli, 2021, p. 6). This event created a huge impact on *the shape of education (learning and teaching)*. To reduce the dissemination of the virus, education was carried out without physically being within the borders of school structures, which led to the second sub-theme i.e. *the concept of language learning within the confines of school*. This was a challenging situation because some students "think that foreign language education is impossible without school" (Bozavli, 2021, p. 10). Thus, digital devices changed traditional face to face communication in the classroom. "Face-to-face learning was replaced by online learning" (Alzamil, 2021, p. 20), all of which altered *the form of communication between students and teachers*. To'ifah and Sari's (2022) study which explored the challenges EFL students faced in learning English also supported this sub-theme. In their study, they found that due to technological and environmental problems during the pandemic without the Internet access, it was not so possible to find the chance of maintaining the communication between students and teachers. Thus, "[i]n order for the process of online English teaching-learning to run smoothly, communication between the teacher and students needs adequate internet access" (p. 115). Such a need seems to result in change in *the form of communication between students and teachers*.

According to Figure 1, the second theme depicting challenges of EDELE during the pandemic is *caused* that is associated with eight sub-themes. In other words, EDELE *caused* a) *socialization problems*, b) *eye problems*, c) *problems in comprehension for students to understand the contents of conveyed teaching materials*, d) *doubts about students' self-learning progress*, e) *difficulties in improving listening and speaking skills*, f) *difficulties in ensuring students' proper behaviours*, g) *disagreement on incorporating informal online settings such as Social Networking Sites (SNS)*, and h) *technical issues*. Because of the suspension of schools students had to experience *socialization problems* which caused some students to think that "distance teaching harms their socialization" (Bozavli, 2021, p. 11). In addition to this social distancing, the abrupt transition into distance education led students into spending long hours on digital devices, which caused the appearance of some health complications such as *eye problems* (Karataş & Tuncer, 2020). One another sub-theme EDELE caused is *problems in comprehension for students to understand the contents of conveyed teaching materials*. It is possible to state that distance education requires students' cognitive engagement with the efforts to utilize their metacognitive strategies in order to cope with the requirements of EDELE (Yundayani et al., 2021). Thus, the absence of those strategies might increase the possibility of not understanding teachers' explanations and related contents of conveyed teaching materials in an efficient way. Moreover, considering the nature of distance education during this crisis, in addition to metacognitive strategies the sense of learner autonomy was expected from students to have. In other words, regulating and taking the responsibility of their own learning by questioning, interpreting, making and implementing decisions were among the prerequisite actions to take for learner autonomy. These false assumptions and the lack or insufficient learner autonomy

caused *doubts about students' self-learning progress* in monitoring and then regulating their new learning procedures accordingly (Bozavli, 2021; Huang et al., 2021). In line with this finding, Irgatoğlu et al. (2022) found that "before the COVID-19 pandemic, the level of autonomy was higher" (p. 10).

According to the review, the other challenge experienced by the students during EDELE is *difficulties in improving listening and speaking skills* which refer to two core components of spoken language and foreign language proficiency (Richards, 2008). In real world, listening and speaking skills can be seen complementary not in isolated segments. In an authentic context which exists outside of classroom, an interlocutor is both speaker and listener at the same time. This means that "the listener occupies an 'interactional' role and is involved in an exchange-of-information where listening and speaking are reciprocal" (Burns & Siegel, 2018, p. 5). Since the participation of the students are very low during distance education the opportunity to listen to their peers has decreased. Considering the nature of interaction in online classes, unfortunately students in most cases can only have the option to hear the voice of teachers. Bozavli (2021) also supports this sub-theme as most of the participants in his study think that "these skills can only be developed at school" (p. 10).

Additionally, EDELE also caused *difficulties in ensuring students' proper behaviours* such as completion of tasks and duties on time and display of proper behaviours during online classes (Huang et al., 2021, Mahyoob, 2020). In most distance education, students do not have to open their cameras, which might challenge teachers to control and monitor students' behaviours. In such a circumstance, the degree of students' concentration might decrease, which might also raise some classroom management problems for teachers.

The other sub-theme is *disagreement on incorporating informal online settings such as Social Networking Sites (SNS)*. While students hold the opinion to incorporate informal online settings like Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp into their distance education, teachers are apprehensive about the inclusion of such settings into their formal educational online contexts (Ghounane, 2020). As SNS has become "second nature to our students" (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012, p. 93), they are willing to receive education through those social networks. Nevertheless, administration and teachers are so cautious about the integration of SNS into formal online settings. This situation might be caused by the possible dangers in terms of security and privacy concerns and /or the lack of necessary digital skills or literacies.

The last sub-theme of *caused* is *technical issues* that students experienced during EDELE such as internet connection problems in accessing and downloading online lessons/ materials/exams. Because of the multitude of problems that might take place during distance education, creating the list of all technical issues is a very tiring job. However, some of those that can be added to the list are

"unstable internet connection, crashing hard drives, dying batteries or even the lack of technological equipment to conduct this form of distance learning" (Rigo and Mikuš, 2021, p. 92).

The third main theme Figure 1 demonstrates is *revealed* related to following eight sub-themes as challenges of EDELE: a) *insufficiency of digital platforms for unprecedented situations*, b) *scarcity of studies on the efficiency of networks and platforms*, c) *scarcity of studies on students' perceptions on digital platforms*, d) *scarcity of online materials/tools/sources*, e) *technophobia of teachers*, f) *digital illiteracy of students and teachers*, g) *students' preferences for f2f education*, and h) *unpreparedness of educational contexts in taking immediate actions in extraordinary circumstances*.

The first sub-theme is *insufficiency of digital platforms for unprecedented situations*, which refers to the unplanned and insufficient use of digital platforms for full virtual distance education during the emergency crisis. Though digital platforms have already been used in pre-Covid world, "none of them is to facilitate remote teaching on the unprecedented situation, such as the Covid-19 pandemic where teachers and students are forced to move from face-to-face mode to full virtual remote teaching system unplanned" (Amin & Sundari, 2020, p. 366). This challenge came to surface especially in asynchronous-only settings where students find less opportunities for genuine interaction, which caused many students to think of distance education as less preferable and less satisfactory (Amin & Sundari, 2020; Bailey et al., 2020).

The next three sub-themes are closely related to each other: b) *scarcity of studies on the efficiency of networks and platforms*, c) *scarcity of studies on students' perceptions on digital platforms*, d) *scarcity of online materials/tools/sources*. Nevertheless, there are specific nuances among them, and also the researchers assumed that it would be better to display them as separate sub-themes rather than combining them under one label so that those crucial points would not go unnoticed. Due to the pandemic, social networking sites like Facebook and YouTube and online platforms like Zoom and Moodle were looked at from a new perspective, so the studies conducted on those in terms of distance education are relatively new and so few (Ghounane, 2020). In this respect, this situation has a direct impact on the scarcity of perception studies especially for the studies concentrating on students. In other words, "students' preferences during this crisis are still unknown and need to be explored" (Amin, 2020, p. 364). Additionally, Covid-19-prompted distance education practices and related tools were not well-planned as in usual online planned instructions due to being in a hurry to sustain education. Thus, *scarcity of online materials/tools/ sources* emerged as another challenge. This situation demonstrates the fact that those areas still need investigation, and only with the widespread use of those networks and platforms can the number of studies on platforms, student perceptions and online materials increase. Thus, this challenge seems to be present for at least a few more years to come.

The fifth sub-theme is *technophobia of teachers,* which was triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. Regardless of being an old or young teacher, this technophobia feeling was evoked due to uncertainties that might be experienced during distance education. What was expected from all teachers was "to cope with advancements that the field of teaching and learning imposes" (Ghounane, 2020, p. 36). This situation increased *technophobia of teachers*.

According to the scoping review, the other challenge is *digital illiteracy of students and teachers* which is about the inadequacy of students and teachers to "identify and use technology confidently, creatively and critically to meet the demands and challenges of life, learning and work in a digital society" (Coldwell-Neilson, 2022). With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the need to use technology and digital devices efficiently and effectively increased. However, it was observed that both students and teachers experienced problems due to the lack of digital literacy skills, which was also documented in the scoped studies (Amin & Sundari, 2020; Bozavli, 2021; Ghounane, 2020; Huang et al., 2021; Karataş & Tuncer, 2020; Mahyoob, 2020; Rigo & Mikuš, 2021). Thus, digital literacy skills have become essential for teachers and students more than ever to cope with the requirements of distance educational contexts and sustain education in this crisis. However, the main pitfall during this process was the assumption of teachers in thinking that so-called 'digital natives' - i.e. students- would easily adapt themselves into the technological realm of the situation. In reality, those students will not "learn the sophisticated skills they need to find and critically analyse information online, or to create and edit video and audio projects in a professional way. These skills and many others need to be taught and actively practiced in the classroom" (Halverson, 2018, p. 2). These ideas were supported by Polat's (2021) study which examined the relationship between 234 Turkish pre-service teachers' (studying at various departments in Faculty of Education) digital literacy levels and their views on distance education. Findings of his study showed that students felt that their digital literacy levels are at a medium level. What is more significant is that how their perception of distance education changes according to their digital literacy levels since "as the digital literacy scores of the pre-service teachers increase, they think that distance education is more personally suitable ($\sim$ 7%) and offers a more effective learning environment ($\sim$ 4%)" (p. 307).

All these challenges caused students to think about and compare f2f education and distance education which revealed *students' preferences for f2f education*. One such study in the review exemplified this preference in the following sentences "though the participants enjoyed learning using the digital platforms, they felt doubt to use it for future courses and face-to-face teaching systems may be more preferable because it was their first-time digital learning experiences in an unexpected learning situation" (Amin & Sundari, 2020, p. 371). The study by Dindar et al. (2022) also confirms this preference. Concentrating on the thematic analysis of Turkish higher education students' Twitter posts about online education during the pandemic, they found that students have a negative attitude

towards online education and they prefer f2f education. The immaturity and unsystematicity of Covid-19-prompted education revealed *unpreparedness of educational contexts in taking immediate actions in extraordinary circumstances* which displays that the adjustment to distance education is not smooth, not well designed and planned (Huang et al., 2021). The study conducted on the Emergency Remote Education perceptions of Thai university students also supported this sub-theme since written comments of those students showed that they wished their university had a clear policy about the lessons taught online or onsite, and the students also wanted to be notified of those things in advance (Raktham, 2022).

The fourth theme that EDELE was associated with is *increased* as seen in Figure 1. This action can be described by three sub-themes: a) *cheating instances of students*, b) *the use of teacher-centred approaches with rare opportunities for communication,* and c) *doubts for post-Covid world in relation to the future of language education*. The first sub-theme EDELE helped to increase is *cheating instances of students*. This cheating entails many various situations ranging from exams, homework, online participation and oral assessment etc. For instance, in Alzamil's (2021) study, when EFL students were directly given the statement "[o]nline learning helps students cheat", the majority of the students (61 %) agreed with the statement. Another problem traced during EDELE is the increase in the *use of teacher-centred approaches with rare opportunities for communication*, which is related to over-reliance on the teachers to sustain distance education. This means instead of asking students to be active in distance education, in some contexts students were unfortunately expected to be passive receivers of knowledge from teachers. The same challenge is also expressed in Kamisli and Akinlar's (2022) study by one participant teacher with those words "in a classroom environment we have eye contact with our students which is very crucial for communication. In our system, we had no chance like Zoom. We could not see our students' eyes. It was like a monolog, teaching to the walls" (p. 6). In fact, though the main purpose is to teach English via learner-centred methodologies to improve learners' English communicative abilities, during the Covid-19 pandemic this was not quite probable, which was also raised in Huang et al.'s (2021) study.

Within this chaotic atmosphere of the pandemic, students experienced quite a variety of feelings and *doubt for the future of language education in post-Covid world* is one of the dominant struggles. Whether they will go back face to face education soon, whether they will change the learning management system in the next term, whether online platforms will be used together with face to face education, and whether various methods and techniques will be used to combine distance education and face-to-face teaching as hybrid education are only some of the question marks on students' minds. One such doubt was expressed in Amin & Sundari's (2020) study with the following sentence: "though the participants enjoyed learning using the digital platforms, they felt doubt to use it for future courses and face-to-face teaching systems may be more preferable because it was their

first-time digital learning experiences in an unexpected learning situation" (p. 371). In line with this finding, Maican and Cocorádă (2021) found that overuse of e-learning platforms in the future was not supported. However, they added that "the use of the e-learning platform is appreciated by the participants as a sustainable resource during this crisis period, but blended learning is more appreciated than the exclusive use of e-learning platforms for the post-COVID period" (p. 14).

In Figure 1, the last theme depicting the challenges of EDELE is *decreased* since it decreased possibility of the following six sub-themes: a) *collaboration opportunities and practices*, b) *interaction (student-student and student-teacher)*, c) *the amount of timely feedback*, d) *motivation of students*, e) *efficiency of the lessons*, and f) *students' satisfaction level for language education*. *Collaboration opportunities and practices* i.e. collaborative communication is a significant factor for language learning. However, "collaboration did not appear on the agenda of the emergency remote teaching in spite of the affordability of online platforms" (Huang et al., 2021, p. 412). Since all the related stakeholders of EDELE were trying to fulfil the essential needs of the educational contexts, realization of collaborative instances seemed to be one step further and thus far from reality, which challenged *collaboration opportunities and practices*.

In addition to absence of collaborative communication, another challenge is decrease in *interaction (student-student and student-teacher)* which is raised by the lack of an f2f classroom environment in distance education. This sub-theme refers to the absence of genuine interaction between student and student and also between students and teacher. This means because students used to be within physical classroom settings by making eye contact and feeling the belongingness to a group, students had some difficulties to cope with new types of interaction required in various modes of learning in distance education: synchronous and asynchronous learning. Although the majority of these interaction problems were associated with asynchronous learning due to its delayed interaction nature, there is evidence that students criticized synchronous learning as well. It is because of "possible unpredictable work schedule of the learners and technical difficulties like unstable internet connection, crashing hard drives, dying batteries or even the lack of technological equipment to conduct this form of distance learning" (Rigo & Mikuš, 2021, p. 92). Regardless of both of the modes of learning, enhancing the genuine interaction in distance education can be associated with "teacher's role as an active participant" (Ghounane, 2020, p. 38).

The decrease in student- teacher interaction affected *the amount of timely feedback* in a negative way. Most of the students during EDELE received no or insufficient timely feedback about their learning progress. The criticism also rested upon the timing of the feedback provided by the teachers (Karataş & Tuncer, 2020; Rigo & Mikus, 2021). This situation might stem from the heavy workload of teachers; they were already trying hard to adjust to new online settings and thus evaluating the progress of their students and giving them necessary feedback might not be at the top

of their to-do list. *Motivation of students* has experienced a sharp decrease during EDELE, too. However hard teachers tried to draw students' attention into distance education, they had some difficulties to ensure students' motivational engagement into online settings. Students as participants in some studies accepted that they went through a challenging process in which they had motivational problems which might even lead into students' attrition (Bozavli, 2021; Ghounane, 2020; Huang et al., 2021). It is because "during the pandemic, the students' level of willingness, self-confidence, and motivation were lower than before" (Irgatoğlu et al., 2022, p. 10).

EDELE decreased the *efficiency of the lessons* as well (Alzamil, 2021; Bozavli, 2021). Newly formed lessons did not leave a positive effect on the learners; thus, they felt that online lessons were not as efficient as face to face lessons. The last sub-theme is that EDELE decreased *students' satisfaction level for language education*. Amidst of all those challenges described above, it was inevitable for students to find themselves surrounded by the feeling of dissatisfaction about distance education, which was documented in some studies (Bailey, 2020; Hamdan et al., 2021; Mahyoob, 2020) scrutinizing the satisfaction level of EDELE learners. This sub-theme was also highlighted in the study by Mahyoob (2020) with this statement "students are not happy with distance education" (p. 360). In Kamisli and Akinlar's (2022) study, this dissatisfaction was also mentioned since students "were most unhappy about the less favourable features of distance education such as lack of interaction and eye contact, limited socialization with friends on campus, lack of concentration at home, too artificial and boring atmosphere, and lack of an efficient academic environment and interactive activities" (p. 8). In line with this statement, Bali and Liu's study (2018) which compared traditional courses with online courses also proved that the traditional in-class courses have a higher level of satisfaction and interaction.

Among all those challenges, interaction appears to be the most fundamental factor having an influential effect on the other challenges as well. Bernard et al. (2009) highlight the importance of three types of interaction in distance and online-learning: instructor-students, students-students and student-content interaction. The first two emerged in the current study as *decreased interaction* (student-student and student-teacher) and the third type as *caused problems in comprehension*. As it can be seen, EFL learners also pinpointed the importance of those three types of interactions for a better distance education context.

Research Question 2: What are the responses to the challenges experienced within the Covid-19-prompted EDELE context?

The thematic analyses of the responses in the reviewed studies revealed the actual implementations or recommendations around three stakeholders: *teachers*, *students,* and *institutions.* All three agents as main themes and related actions as sub-themes are depicted in Figure 2. The

actions in Figure 2 were either taken as responses or suggested as recommendations to overcome those challenges experienced during EDELE.
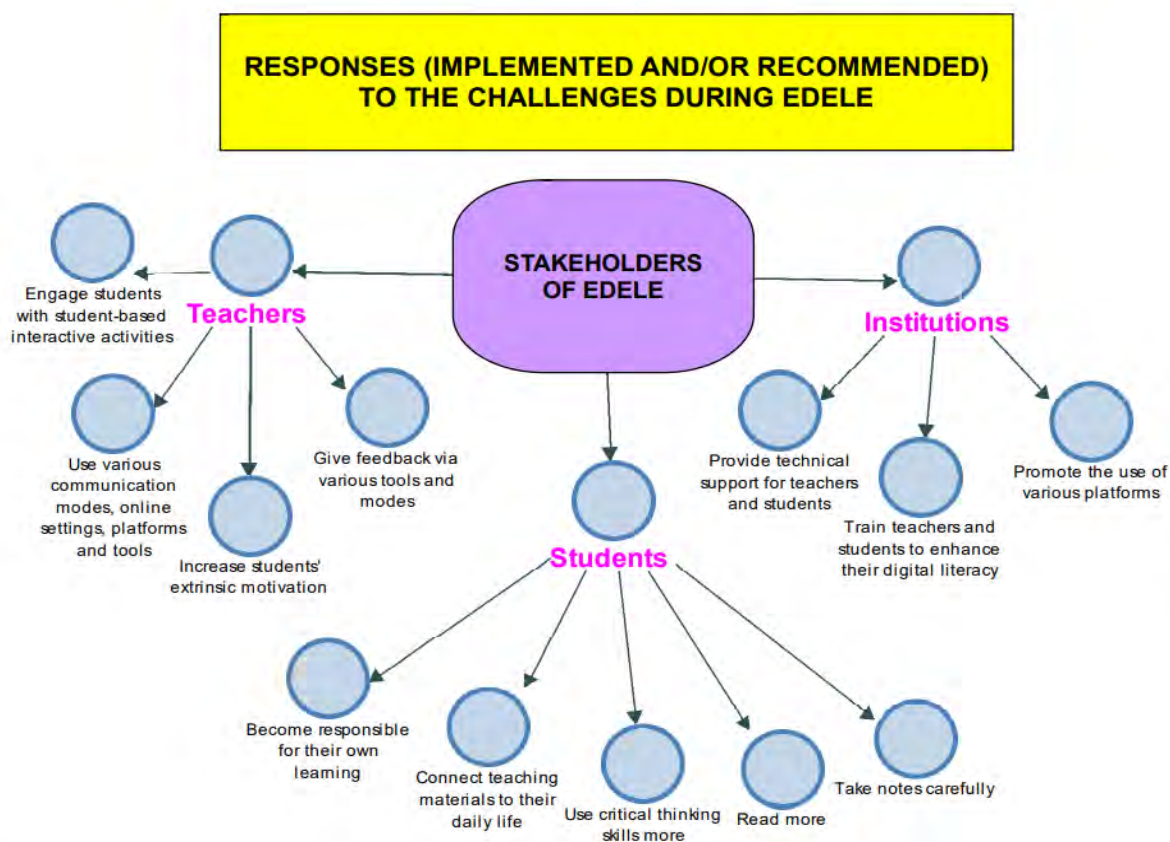

Figure 2. Concept map of the responses to the challenges during EDELE

In Figure 2, the first group of stakeholders responding to those challenges was *teachers*. According to the results of the scoping review four sub-themes were generated as responses or recommendations to overcome some challenges experienced during EDELE. Those actions are: *engage students with interactive activities*, *use various communication modes/online settings/platforms/tools, increase students' extrinsic motivation,* and *give feedback via various tools and modes.* It is possible to say that interactive moments in language classes construct one of the backbones of students' language development. For this reason, enhancing interaction in language classes is one of the main actions language teachers should realize both in f2f settings and in distance education. However, this interaction was put into jeopardy during the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, among the reviewed studies, *engage students with student-based interactive activities* emerged as the most frequent sub-theme and response. According to the scope, here are some actions expected from or implemented by teachers to establish and sustain interactive atmosphere in distance education: provide active learning atmospheres for students, use online discussion forums, use student-centred approach with various opportunities for communication and collaboration, establish genuine

interaction between instructor and students and students to students, use videotaping speaking tasks, and create online opportunities for students to practice English.

Under the light of those actions related to the sub-theme *engage students with student-based interactive activities*, in educational contexts interactive tools like online discussion forums can give students the chance to become a member of a community, "which allows knowledge construction to become a social activity. Within forum threads, active participants are constantly contributing content, negotiating meaning, creating output, and observing input" (Bailey et al., 2020, p. 2564). In order to maintain a constant interaction among the related agents, communication modes are quite crucial. For this reason, the scoped studies recommend teachers to *use various communication modes, online settings, platforms and tools*. This recommendation embodies the use of *more than one platform, formal and informal settings together*, and *both synchronous and asynchronous communication modes*.

During EDELE, students might have various needs and expectations to sustain interaction for their new learning procedures. A good response to those needs might be to "use more than one platform collaboratively to satisfy the students' needs on learning" (Amin & Sundari, 2020, p. 364). In most contexts, teachers are more inclined to use only formal settings and academic platforms like Moodle to conduct education during EDELE. This means that some teachers were hesitant in using informal settings; however, some studies demonstrated that "learners are eager to learn the language in an informal context more than the formal one. Social networks like Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp allow students in an international setting to meet and discuss different topics" (Ghounane, 2020, p. 23). In addition to the integration of formal and informal settings, the use of both synchronous and asynchronous communication modes together were also highlighted as another key response to improve the quality of distance education. Synchronous and asynchronous communication modes have various unique advantages for students who are in struggle to cope with their new learning procedures. In order to lead them to overcome this struggle during EDELE, combination of synchronous and asynchronous communication modes was recommended. For instance, in a study comparing synchronous (Google Meet) and asynchronous (Edmodo) communication modes, Rigo and Mikuš (2021) put forward the idea of combination of those modes.

According to the review results, the other sub-theme teachers are expected to do is to *increase students' extrinsic motivation*. One way to increase that is to provide game-based activities which is regarded as a learning strategy that combines entertainment and educational purposes (Berns et al., 2016). The support for this sub-theme comes from Huang et al.'s (2021) study in which "[g]ame-based activities were expected by some students who hoped to have a more interesting and enjoyable learning environment where all the students can participate" (p. 412). The last sub-theme expected from teachers is to *give feedback via various tools and modes*. For the scoped studies, receiving

immediate and direct feedback helps students to see where they are and what they need within their educational process. And thus, students can adjust themselves into EDELE situations more smoothly. One way to send feedback is via e-mails which was also stated in Alzamil's (2021) study. Though most of the students in his study preferred to get feedback in f2f settings instead of online ones, they appreciated the speed of e-mailed feedback and also "receiving the feedback by email allowed them potentially to keep their teacher's comments for future use" (p. 25). Receiving prompt feedback also increases the satisfaction of the students because of the positive relationship between the two (Gopal et al., 2021).

As seen in Figure 2, the second important group of stakeholders to whom some actions were attributed in some of the analysed studies was *students*. What those students did or what kind of recommendations were given to them were centred on five sub-themes depicted in Figure 2. The first action given as a response for the students to do is to *become responsible for their own learning* which is related to being aware of their strengths and weaknesses in their new learning process in order for their own cognitive engagement during EDELE. In fact, this finding can be associated with being autonomous learners who can take responsible for their own learning with the ability to "set learning goals, determine learning content and progress, choose learning techniques, monitor self-learning processes, and conduct self-assessments" (Holec, 1981, p. 3). In a similar vein, learner autonomy relates to take actions independently to decide why, what and how to learn (Teng, 2019). To sum up, what is expected from students is to put in efforts in order to adjust metacognitive strategies for the regulation of their own learning procedures (Yundayani et al., 2021). To do so, some closely related actions for students to take are defined in the next four sub-themes: *connect teaching materials to their daily lives*, *use critical thinking skills more*, *read more,* and *take notes carefully.*

The other stakeholder in EDELE is *institutions* that include higher education institutions, universities, governments, and profit and non-profit organizations. Totally, three sub-themes were expressed under this theme: *provide technical support for teachers and students*, *train teachers and students to enhance their digital literacy,* and *promote the use of various platforms.* Focusing on the first two sub-themes, it can be said that students and teachers who are the other stakeholders in EDELE are expected to get training and take technical support to handle technical problems. However, the responsible stakeholder for these actions are the institutions. Thus, the researchers categorized these two sub-themes under the stakeholder of *institutions.* One support comes from Ghounane's (2020) study through the following statement "[u]niversities should focus on training teachers and learners to use ICT in the classroom through seminars and workshops" (p. 39). Digital literacy is crucial for both teachers and students but especially for teachers. In the same vein, Sánchez-Cruzado et al.'s (2021) study revealed that "digital literacy is not a reality that has favoured the teaching–learning process and that a training program is urgently required for teachers to reach

optimal levels of digital skills, so as to undergo a true paradigm shift, ultimately combining methodology and educational strategies" (p. 1).

The third sub-theme is to *promote the use of various platforms*. In response to the challenges experienced during EDELE and as a result of the shift to distance education, institutions have started to use various online platforms and tools. Those platforms and tools in the scoped studies include Zoom, Google Classroom, Google Meet, Edmodo, Facebook, Blackboard, Cisco WebEx, Moodle, Quizlet application, WhatsApp, and YouTube. According to the results, moving to such online learning settings and the use of those online platforms and tools helped educational contexts to reverse aforementioned challenging aspects to an advantage. Those advantages are a) learning in comfortable atmosphere of home, b) deepening students learning, c) providing flexibility and independence, d) maintaining confidentiality, e) providing time and cost efficiency, f) demonstrating authenticity, g) providing enjoyment, and h) benefiting from practicality of using the digital platforms. With the help of online platforms/tools students sustain their education in the comfortable atmosphere of home.

Conclusion and Implications

The Covid-19 pandemic caused challenges but at the same time new avenues for improving educational contexts. Perceiving those challenges and problems, scholars conducted studies to overcome those challenges and get prepared for the future. With this context in mind, this study aimed at summarizing what was found in the related literature regarding the challenges of EDELE and the responses implemented and recommended to overcome those challenges during EDELE. To do so, the scoping review on 10 studies based on EDELE from the perspectives of EFL students was conducted. At the end, the findings and their discussion were presented in relation to the two research questions. The answer of the first research question revealed the challenges of EDELE, which centred around five main thematic actions: *changed*, *decreased*, *caused*, *increased* and *revealed*. Thematic analysis conducted for the second research question uncovered the implemented or recommended actions for the three stakeholders of EDELE: *teachers*, *students*, and *institutions*.

Via the findings and discussion conducted in this scoping review study and especially by checking the responses section for those challenges, it is hoped to demonstrate various crucial implications for English language education for both crisis moments and afterwards so as to improve the quality of distance education for future practices. Despite the fact that the findings of this study cannot be generalized, the challenges and responses reported in this review cover unique lived experiences from seven different countries and provide a wealth of information for those who want to comprehend and scrutinize EDELE contexts from an EFL perspective.

The EFL learners in 10 scoped studies highlighted some important points both in the challenges and in the responses to them. As a result of the thematic analyses on both challenges and responses, it was observed that all the concerned stakeholders -teachers, students, and institutions in this study- should collaboratively and cooperatively carry the burden of distance education during those chaotic processes. Thus, for a better distance education for English language teaching, the following considerations should be given a high priority:

- Realization of interaction by leading the students to take active role,

- The integration of synchronous and asynchronous communication modes,

- The use of more than one type of online settings/platforms/tools,

- Inclusion of enjoyable activities for students' extrinsic motivation,

- Provision of immediate and timely feedback via various tools and modes,

- Responsibility of students to regulate their own learning,

- Inclusion of opportunities requiring the use of critical thinking,

- Provision of technical support, and

- Training on digital literacy.

Documenting all these recent considerations will surely pave the way for facilitating English language education contexts. Considering the recommendations in this scoping review, the main objective should be to move beyond the emergency practices in EDELE to provide high quality distance education for English language education. In fact, it is not an easy task to change deeply rooted beliefs and attitudes held about the comparison of f2f and distance education. However, having a deep understanding of EFL students' perceptions is critical not only for shedding light on challenges and responses during EDELE but also for making a better sense of the concept of distance education in EFL contexts.

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Author 1 and Author 2: Conceptualization and Methodology, Scoping Review and its analysis, Writing- Original draft preparation, Visualization, Writing- Reviewing and Editing.

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