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Iranian EFL Learners' Narratives in a Pandemic Pedagogy: Appreciative Inquiry-Based Approach

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Abstract

There is dearth of research on disclosing the ethos of Appreciative Inquiry (AI)-based pedagogy application in language education settings (Johnson, 2014), especially amid the Covid-19 pandemic era. To disclose the ethos in AI-based pedagogy as an appropriate pandemic pedagogy, the present study attempts to uncover the Iranian EFL learners' narratives on their lived experiences of a pedagogical shift in an English language school in northern Iran when dealing with an online class during the pandemic. Embedded in 4-D ethos of AI-based pedagogy, namely Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny, this study utilizes data from observational field notes and interviews in shaping narratives. It was shown that the online language lesson agenda is a dynamic resource that emerges from content development and can be planned to confirm the learner's knowledge. More creative ways of learners' assessment are also yearned for to neutralize cheating possibilities. In addition, new modes of meaning in language education are envisaged to be designed. Learners position themselves as enriched multimodal text repertoires in a dynamic not static language community of practice. The current study has some implications for online language practice, especially in periods of crisis such as a pandemic.

Keywords: appreciative inquiry, Covid 19, narrative inquiry, online learning, pandemic pedagogy

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1. Introduction

The 2020-2021 academic year was challenging for language schools around the globe, and English language schools are not an exception. The challenge was triggered by the suspension of face-to-face classes in mid-January 2019-2020 owing to the rapid spread of COVID-19 (Derakhshan et al., 2021) in Iranian schooling systems as well. As a result of the pandemic, many educational settings including language schools in Iran decided to temporarily hold online classes and then extended that decision to the whole academic year. Since the language classes were designed for face-to-face instruction before covid-19, this change urged them to opt for alternative emerging learner-centered pedagogies and evaluation methods in the time of crisis.

The main concern of many emerging pedagogies is the ongoing evaluation of students' efforts and contribution to the learning process (Ross, 2005) as a pedagogical shift occurs from testing the outcome to evaluating the learning process (Altinay, 2017; Sheridan, 2007). Evaluation is thus viewed as part of teaching and learning not as its end-result (Hamade et al., 2007). In the realm of education, to evaluate a course we frequently look for problems and attempt to find ways to fix or lessen those problems (Johnson, 2014; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003).

However, in the pandemic era, when the discourse of despair is embedded, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003), as an emerging alternative pedagogy, suggests practitioners should thus be encouraged to find the benchmarks which help them to succeed in their route to overcome the pandemic challenges in educational matters. Such a shift in perception, focusing on the bright side of praxis, needs to be further reinforced in a crisis like the pandemic. In such a situation, a rapid pedagogical transition to innovative online teaching methods should not be seen as a sign of despair, but a discourse of hope, as the existing face-to-face teaching methods are accelerated by recent technological advances to maintain the status quo of education. As an alternative to the conventional pedagogy, Appreciative Inquiry (AI)-based pedagogy can share how the positive experiences of practitioners in educational and organizational settings play a significant and effective role in sustaining education (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004).

Kung et al. (2013) defined AI as “a strengths-based research approach that was developed by Cooperrider in the late 80s as an alternative approach to traditional organizational development models” (p. 1). It uses an affirmative co-evolutionary

constructive approach to discover and bring out the best in people and community of practices by means of “discovery of what gives life to a system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable” (Cooperrider et al., 2003, p. 319). In this approach, participants are thus encouraged to share their peak experiences so that common themes can be extracted. The themes are then utilized to replicate or construct the peak experience in the newly emerged context (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). As Judy and Hammond (2006) and Harrison & Hasan (2013) state, AI motivates students for inquiry about, learning from, and building on what is helpful and hopeful, instead of fixing problems or focusing on what goes wrong. The present study was thus carried out to fill in the following research gaps: First, there is a dearth of research on disclosing AI-based pedagogy ethos when manifested in academic settings (Johnson, 2014), especially amid the pandemic era. Second, in most previous studies, the received feedback on a course has been based on linear quantitative satisfaction surveys aimed at measuring generic pedagogical assessment, and curriculum dimensions of a course (Zander & Zander, 2000) rather than unveiling the complex ethos embedded in the emerged condition like a pandemic crisis.

The present study thus attempts to provide researchers with a virgin context both theoretically and empirically in the face of a crisis, by introducing ethos in AI-based pedagogy as an appropriate emerging pedagogy during the pandemic. This approach aims at lessening the dominant stress and anxiety reported by educational practitioners (Deng et al., 2021; Liu & Yuan, 2021; Rehman et al., 2021; Talidong & Toquero, 2020) rather than strengthening the negative prompts. The study is triggered by the fact that the scarcity of research calls for addressing a more in-depth analysis on the possible traits of the pandemic pedagogy (Parentela & Vargas, 2021; Zhu & Liu, 2020) when alluding to the *lived experiences* - a sense of life- of an English language course. A sense of life, as Kung et al. (2013) stated, refers to the life-centric moments in which students are at the peak of their performance when the learning experiences are working. In the era of the pandemic, no study has been done to investigate the different readings of the life experiences of learners of English as a foreign language. Such readings allow researchers to determine the ontological aspects of online English language teaching courses in English schools in the context of English as a foreign language based on the teaching spirit of AI. In order to bridge the gaps, this study probed into the traits of the online teaching course in the pandemic era based on the students' life-centric experiences.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Origin of Appreciative Inquiry

Taken from positive psychology, AI is grounded on the work of Cooperrider, a doctoral student in Case Western Reserve University in 1980, who aimed to investigate leadership and management in one of the most important medical centers in USA. Having asked medical students to tell the story of their successes and failures, he was surprised by the active collaboration, innovation, and egalitarian spirit as the reasons for their success. In conceptualizing this discovery, he made a decision to carefully study only the data which define the leadership and organization of physicians when they are most effective or at their best. The findings of his work “created such a powerful positive stir that the board requested this [Appreciative Inquiry] method be used at all levels of the 8000-person organization to facilitate change” (Cooperrider, et al., 2003, p. xxiv).

The quest of positive psychology is in sharp contradiction with the problem-solving approach in that it emphasizes the evaluation of the positive aspects of the phenomenon under investigation. As Judy and Hammond (2006) put it, "Appreciative Inquiry (AI) encourages groups to inquire about, learn from, and build on what is working when they are at their best, rather than focusing on what has gone wrong and fixing problems" (p. 1).

As McArthur-Blair and Cockell (2012) posit, an appreciative facilitator will always seek for the resource to say *everything is there, nothing is missing* in order to put in place a process to facilitate the emergence of everything available. A resource here is defined as everything available to the person, either in the past (what the person has already done and which has been effective to be reused) or in the present (the driving force of people on a project, their relevant aspirations, etc.), or in the future (pleasant or distressing and pejorative images of the future). Appreciative Inquiry can be wrongly perceived, either as just one technique among many (although sometimes being the case), or as something superficial, reduced in its scope and practice to a simple *positive attitude*. Auspiciously, it is much richer and deeper. Appreciative inquiry can enjoy, as Van Tiem and Rosenzweig (2006) argue, specific assumptions, namely a) in all societies, organizations, or groups, something works b) what is focused on turns into a part of reality; c) reality is constructed in the moment, and there exist multiple realities; d) posing questions acts as a praxis for community of practice or group to influence the group in some

way; e) people have more comfort and confidence to travel to the future (the unidentified) when they move forward parts of the past (the identified); f) if we move parts of the past forward, they should be what is best on the past; g) it is of importance to value the possible discrepancies; and h) the language we utilize constructs our reality.

As Buchanan (2014) argues, the ultimate goal of this process is nothing but the development of action plans that serves the interests of those engaged in the community to prosper afterwards.

As Judy and Hammond (2006) argue, in the long run, focusing on positive experience is likely to be more useful than putting an emphasis on the problems, inadequacies, repudiation, and unconstructive denunciation. AI does not advocate mindless happy talk, nonetheless. Nor does it overlook problems. Rather, it emphasizes that we needed to achieve them from the other side. In short, AI breaks with supporting change methods via problem solving. It draws attention by grounding change on the triumphs, achievements and crucial success dynamics.

2.2 Appreciative Inquiry in Language Education

Although the literature on the use of AI in education has been scarce, some studies have represented its potential (Buchanan, 2014). Appreciative inquiry (AI) has recently been proposed as a method for evaluating practice within educational contexts. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) define AI as investigating what energizes human systems when they perform at their best. This approach to personal and structural transformation is centered on questioning and making dialogue on strengths, realizations, tenets, hopes, and dreams that are themselves transformational. AI proposes that the concept of humanism and change, at its best, is a relational inquiry process, based on assertion and appreciation.

2.3. Theoretical Underpinning

The main intervention model on appreciative inquiry is the 4-D cycle (Cooperrider et al., 2003). The cycle elaborates the practice principle of AI described. It begins with discovery (discovering "what is", identifying and appreciating the best successes, the best moments), then going onto dream (imagining what could be, the desired future and the possibilities offered), which is succeeded by design

(determining what should be, planning and prioritizing projects and actions on what will work well), and then delivery (creating what will be, implementing transformation and selected actions). Based on these cycles, we frame our analysis to look for extracting the Iranian EFL learners' life-centric experiences as interpreted within the online language course in the pandemic.

The review of the related literature gives rise to the research question for this qualitative study: How are Iranian EFL learners' life-centric experiences interpreted within the online teaching course in the pandemic era based on appreciative inquiry-based approach?

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

Methodologically embedded in a narrative inquiry, the current study is fairly comprehensive which captures personal aspects of experience or reading over time, and reports the interaction between cultural context and individual experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). Narrative inquiry enables researchers to withdraw the lived experiences and readings on the phenomenon under investigation (i.e. participants' stories on their lived experiences on the appreciative inquiry-based teaching in the pandemic era). Narrative inquiry can therefore act as a proper design as it is created through stories, and meanings on lived experiences. It helps researchers to understand the ambiguity and complexity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004) on participants' lives on ethos of the appreciative inquiry-based teaching in the pandemic era.

3.2. Participants

Realizing that narrative inquiry is most useful for obtaining the detailed life experiences or stories of participants, we purposefully chose one male teacher of English holding an M.A degree, with above 10 years of teaching experience in different language schools and eight male and female learners in the age range of 15 to 45. Half of the participants were Turkmen and Azari multilingual learners. Three of them were Persian native speakers. The teacher and the learners took part in a conversation class in an English language school in Gonbad Kavous, Iran. The learners, whose names are pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality, were of different socioeconomic classes from low to high. In the narrative inquiry, the participants,

both the researchers and the researched, are actively engaged in the study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). It is a process based on which the participants learn from and transform their minds (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006). The first researcher invested a lot of time in online context with the participants accumulating their stories, or field texts on the new experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004).

3.3. Procedure

Having signed the informed consent forms and comforting the participants on the ethicality and confidentiality issues (Stutchbury & Fox, 2009), the individual semi-structured interviews which took 30 to 45 minutes, were administered by WhatsApp. Before each interview session, the researchers informed the participants about the main intentions of the study. The interviews were administered online due to the Covid-19 pandemic to comply with the health protocols. Due to the nature of narrative inquiry, a number of semi-structured interviews as the main data source were also administered to two groups including eight females and males. The researchers utilized the prepared interview questions with some follow-up items as required based on the interview protocol defined (see appendix). In order to ascertain the content validity of the items before administering the interview, the questions were shared with a couple of faculty members with expertise in educational psychology who were also familiar with the field of AI. Taking into account their comments, some amendments were made to the content and number of the items.

Due to students' insufficient English competency, the interview questions were given in their mother tongue or national language (i.e. Persian) to enable the participants to verbalize their perceptions much more easily. The English translation of the Persian interview questions were prepared by one of the researchers whose academic background was in English translation studies. All the interviews were recorded, and the oral data elicited from the interviewees were transcribed verbatim for further narrative analysis. The data, which were first provided in Persian, were first transcribed in Persian and then back translated into English. In the interviews, the students were asked to narrate their experience on possibilities of an online English language class, focusing the 4-D dimensions of AI-based pedagogy, i.e., Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. Focusing the 4-D dimensions helped the researchers to encourage students for inquiry about, learning from, and building on what is helpful and hopeful, rather than focusing on either what goes wrong or

merely addressing problems. This process went on as long as the data was saturated and nothing important was left unsaid.

More specifically, the interaction between the teacher and students' readings was revealed by accumulating data from double chief sources i.e., the teacher and the learners' narratives on their experiences in the shape of focus group and individual interviews and also observational field notes of practices in the classroom context whenever possible in terms of what is read by the participants.

As for the 'Discovery phase', the participants interviewed one another in pairs, collecting stories related to the class as a community of practice at its best, collecting beliefs about the community's most valuable resources, and collecting information on their desirable future. In the 'Dream phase', the participants imagined their desirable future and gave it shape. A dream might be in the shape of a spoken vision of the future. In the 'Design phase', working toward the direction implied in the Dream, the participants were interviewed to express the ideals, values, and methods of change and growth that would help them obtain those dreams. The dreams were narrated in the shape of provocative propositions or bold statements narrated in the present tense that challenged the group to give form to its dreams. In the 'Delivery stage', the participants, or properly delegated sub-focus groups, made specific, real-time plans in order to realize the Design elements defined in the previous step.

To motivate the interviewees (i.e., the teacher and his learners) to verbalize their readings on their experience of the class, qualitative data was obtained by means of such interview questions as what applied teaching strategies and learning experiences cause a greater sense of "life and hope" within the online language teaching course in the pandemic? What is your opinion about how to improve the course? What is your vantage point on merits in the course and how do you position your learning/teaching in comparison to conventional face-to-face classes? (see appendix for more details). Other questions were raised to clarify the participants' viewpoints. In addition, because some readings were subconscious and were beyond verbalization, the participants' interactions in-class were also taken into account whenever possible. The participants' implicit readings were brought to the surface by showing curiosity and interest as the teacher in collaboration with them resorted to an online English class in the pandemic era.

3.4. Data Analysis

Our narrative analysis was grounded on the concepts extracted from the data sources to what is usually referred to as *analysis of narratives* (Bleakley, 2005). Analyzing classroom members' stories helped us to obtain deeply hidden assumptions about the new experience (i.e. AI-based classes in the pandemic era). The weight was on co-construction of meaning between the researchers and participants. Overall, for the purpose of data analysis, in line with the coding schemes of underpinning theory, the researchers developed concepts from the data sources (i.e., the participants' verbalization (interviews) and the researchers' possible observational field notes by a) obtaining the participants' informed consent; b) keeping a record of their stories; c) transcribing them; d) springing concepts from the stories and integrating observation notes; e) conceptualizing the participants' experience; and f) presenting them as the final conceptualization for verification and any required modification (Aghaei, et al., 2020).

While detailing the data collection and analysis processes and explaining the extracted narratives via sample evidence in the participants' quotes forms, the researchers made steps toward enhancing results dependability and consistency (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The principle of dependability requires elaborate documenting in each phase of the study, so that other researchers could make a similar interpretation if they reviewed the data sources (Nassaji, 2020). Likewise, in order to meet the transferability principle, the researchers tried to provide a more detailed explanation on research steps in the current study. As Nassaji (2020) argues, the researchers also tried to provide a rather thick description to make the research findings and interpretations transferable to other similar contexts.

4. Results: Narratives on Online Appreciated-based Inquiry EFL Class

The coding schemes of the narratives supplied the researchers with derived building blocks of the participants' reading on their experience of an online Appreciated-based inquiry class in the EFL context. What follows ground the participants' readings as the chief constructed themes and sub-themes:

4.1. Teacher's Narrative on the Early Stage of the Pandemic

Mr. Ataei (pseudonym), a 40-year-old Persian speaking man, has been a teacher of

English for more than 10 years. He holds a master's degree in ELT. As a seasoned teacher, he attends many teacher training workshops. He always welcomes applying new pedagogies in his classroom. Alluding to his voice, he has always been struggling with how to keep his students engaged in the pandemic era classroom. In this regard, he says:

"Firstly, when the pandemic began, we were asked to close the language school. We firstly thought this circumstance would be lasting for a short period of time. Yet, we got gradually informed that we need to adapt to the new situation."

He goes on:

"Our language school manager firstly decided to stop teaching English for a two-month period to reevaluate the status quo. Our community of teachers was wondering if we stop teaching at this juncture of time, our earlier attempts made to promote language education will be spoiled due to the gap".

In an urgently demanded online forum through WhatsApp, the teachers asked the language school educational policy makers for continuing language teaching in online platforms such as Skype or Skyroom in any way possible. In clarifying all his concerns, he goes on *"However, we knew this new experience would certainly be embedded with lots of both resilience and rigidity." Our pandemic pedagogy in language teaching was similar to a journey with lots of unexpected events"*. He adds. Following IT team' attempts in the language school to technically launch and support the online classes, some early concerns could be removed on behalf of teachers, learners and their families.

4.2. The Students' Narratives on the Pandemic Pedagogy

In order to provide more in-depth narratives of the main participants i.e., learners on appreciative inquiry-based ethos constructed in the pandemic pedagogy, table 1 below provides a schematic map on the main findings.

Table 1

Appreciative Inquiry-based Ethos in an Online EFL Class in Pandemic

Discovery Facet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emerging an Innovative Integrated Curriculum in Language Learning Program Prospect • Ascertaining Learners' Knowledge Resource Mobility in Content Development
Dream Facet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desiring to Transforming Online Class to Awareness Raising Venue

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yearning for More Creative Ways of Learners' Assessment
Design Facet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Re)designing & Replacing Newly Emerged Supplementary Materials in Language Education • Developing Infrastructures in Keeping with More Efficient Online Classes
Delivery Facet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positioning Learners as Enriched Multimodal Text Repertoires • Redefining Class as Dynamic not Static Language Community of Practice

4.2.1. The Students' Narratives on Discovery Facet

A) Emerging an Innovative Integrated Curriculum in Language Learning Prospect

Some participants narrate the new online class as a new and different experience embedded with some best moments. In their readings, such a new experience with all its building blocks can be scrutinized more precisely to become a part of future English language curriculum. In this regard, Ahmad, who was not keen on technology in the past, transforms his mind following the new experience saying:

In the past, I had a kind of phobia on technology usage. I mean I resisted applying it in different aspects of my life. I do not know, this may be due to my age. You know I am older than my classmates and much weaker at technology application in my daily or academic life. This evolution in way of teaching acted as a practical maneuver at least for those like me. It is useful for all kinds of things, for example, we learned about the advantages and even disadvantages of online courses in the COVID19 era.

Describing his own and his classmates' success stories on how to cope with the new circumstance, Ahmad also highlights the necessity of integrating the innovations achieved by the shift in pedagogy from face to-face to online pedagogy. He states:

In the future, if language schools welcome shift in their way of teaching, I mean, from mere face-to face to a mixture of online and face-to- face, it can result in more success, I think.

In keeping with his stance/take, Altin also tries to accentuate the necessity of integrating online classroom in future language course in the school when she couples her success and best moments with the high level of engagement in the new experience. She also tries to point out that such a change can provide a more dynamic setting for the classroom participants more than before. In this regard, she believes:

In the past, I was a shy girl who resisted any classroom participation. But, in this class, I think I could participate more actively. When the class is held at home, I mean in online settings, I felt more relaxed to show all my language capabilities much more actively than before. Holding class in online platforms could make me less embarrassed and feel more tempted to learn language. You know, it is really fun and enthusiastic to me. I really recommend this way for the new generation like us.

Altin and some of her peers' emerged sense of belonging to online classes necessitates a revisit to language curriculum programs to go beyond face-to face classes and become an integrated one where there exist a high potentiality of participation for those ones who cannot cope with traditional classes. The curriculum integration in a broad community of practice might increase educational development. Although many educational practitioners are still at various phases of technology adoption, their outlooks to technology interrelates with their pedagogical use of it (Mishra & Koehler 2006). Therefore, participation in the community of practice by prompting their attitudes may help their professional development among the classroom participants as narrated in the class.

B) Ascertaining Learners' Knowledge Resource Mobility in Content Development

The analysis of individual and focus group interviews shows that many learners hold the view that online language classes agenda is to ascertain learners' knowledge as an emerging dynamic resource in content development. As evidence, Aylar alludes to the dynamism embedded in the project nature of online language class in which the learners can be considered as an enriched text repertoire. She is one of the most interested persons in this classroom who believes "the online setting could help teachers to make their students participate more flexibly and efficiently than before due to the project-oriented approach defined in this class". In keeping with this, Aylar puts an emphasis on the fact that projects became an inherent part of shift in the new way of teaching. She also describes teamwork or even individual work in the online class in the shift as "the delicious fruits" in which the learners are no longer viewed as empty receivers of knowledge as contrasted with the teachers. She goes on "*thanks to this shift, my presence and active participation was seen much more than before. I remember, an important part of classroom time was spent on my project. This made me very happy*". Sina interrupts Aylar's words, confirming her stance and says: "*In my point of view, if we are to have a real and effective change in our class, I think, projects as what I name feeding resource of*

the class should be included in our future language class". Faramarz also refers to how this class enriches his knowledge in different aspects of language when his peers share self-made podcasts or video clips thanks to different apps. In this regard, he states:

In the early days of our class, textbooks and teacher knowledge dominated, most of which came from the classroom. But in this class we understood, we can also play a crucial role in developing the content of our class. You know although this was highly demanding, it was a newly emerged challenge to us. I remember that at first some people, including myself, resisted. But little by little, we welcomed this task as part of the appeal of this new approach. I think this approach should become the model for many language courses in the future."

4.2.2. Students' Narratives on Dream Facet

A) Desiring to Transform Online Class to Awareness Raising Venue

Sara, a 19-year-old student, is another student who goes onto her dream on the online language class experience. She is among the few students who implicitly refers to her desire to enrich the classroom content via bringing different critical sources to the class. In her implicit reading, awareness raising leading to a change in attitude still seems to be a neglected fundamental factor in the new experience. Such a trait can be viewed as one of the main ones demanded by few students. She stresses:

We do not have a critical thinking practice. The teacher and our classmates do not care about it. What is important here is to learn how to speak in English in any way possible either by focusing the conversations in the textbook or what we do as our project."

Similarly, Ali's idea is that critical thinking practice as a skill is not perceived as the core of this class. In this regard, similar to his peer, Sara, Ali also discloses his reading on the tip saying:

"In this class we learned to talk about what our teacher and students as their knowledge bring to the class. This is not enough in this complex world. Our classes are still focused on how to recite the conversations or a bulk of words, grammar and pronunciation and presentation practice, stuff like that. In my view, there is still a long way to the route of learning in its real sense. I hope such deep practices get

included in the English language class.

Mina also believes that “this new method needs to be developed in such a way that goes beyond rote-learning in which a bulk of knowledge is transferred to our mind”. Apparently what these students try to implicitly and explicitly comment on is the importance of "constructing learners' agency" (Duff, 2012; Kern, 2014; Wiley & García, 2016) as a praxis aiming to achieve sustainable language learning (Aghaei, et al., 2012; Chesterton, et al., 2004), in these classes.

B) Yearning for More Creative Ways of Learners' Assessment

Many participants implicitly and sometimes explicitly expressed that the learner in the online language class expects to have more creative ways for learners' assessment. For example, we can refer to Maryam and Sina's vantage points as the students who explained why online assessment needs to be revisited. Sina was also among those students who really had a real challenge in assessment when he says “*I do not care about scores. Learning is more important in English language education, at least for me. However, many of my friends care about their scores a lot. In face to face classes, they believe, their scores were much more accurate than those existing in online classes. They wish they could see some changes in examinations and tests.*”

Repeating Sina's stances, Sara also accentuates: “*In my idea, our teachers should develop the tests much more wittingly so that nobody can cheat in the exams easily*”. He calls for a new approaches in online assessment saying: “*In the conventional exams, the learners' deep knowledge cannot be assessed because students may consult with each other when answering the exam questions so that the teacher maybe ignorant of the behind-scene scenarios*”. It seems that what he terms as “ignorance of the behind-scene scenarios” refers to “the possible cheating”, which is more prevalent in the online platforms than those in the traditional ways of assessing.

Shafa, one of the learners highly influenced by this way of assessing, talks about her great tendency to share her dreams on the possible future online assessment manners:

If I were in my teachers' shoes, I would make some changes in our exams methods. Of course I do not want to say that the exams are not rich in its assessment content, they cannot examine our knowledge in its real sense.”

In Yashar's vantage point, we can also hear her concern on revisit on the existing

assessment methods in online language classes: *"In online classes, many students share answers in social media. Therefore, exams in its traditional manner cannot meet all educational purposes in its real sense"*.

4.2.3. Students' Narratives on Design Facet

A) (Re)designing and Replacing Newly Emerged Supplementary Materials in Language Education

One of the most interesting characteristics of the online learning classroom in Saman's idea is that the textbook in its traditional meaning is no longer seen as the core of class. In this regard, similarly to other peers, he talks about his take/stance on the trait: *"In this class we learnt that the textbook is not sacred at all. We learned how the students, the parents and the teacher can make an educational club to let language learning go on in COVID 19 era"*. Highlighting collaboration emerged among these educational stakeholders based on which the members of the community do their best, Saman also puts an emphasis on the importance of new supplementary materials as the result of this process. Specifically, he states *"Embedded in a team work, members learn how to develop multifaceted texts by newly developed apps"*.

Mina accompanies Saman saying:

"Online classes could make many people more literate to use technology in designing kinds of text. In the past, doing these activities were meaningless. They were of no place at least in English language classes. However, due to the pandemic, with all its tough moments, some materials were designed by the students and their parents' scaffolding which can be a good archive of our class language learning".

What is read in-between a network of relations is that both the teacher and the parents are viewed one of the key figures scaffolding students to develop some accompanying educational material. Reza, an 18 year-old student whose mother tongue is Persian, also finds this new class very interesting. He reflects how this class could enhance his own interest in learning English, referring to sustainable and durable learning nature of this class coming from what he defines as so-called *"new pattern of language learning"*. In this regard, he, as a technology freak, specifically mentions:

"What I liked about his way of teaching was that the students were asked to post

their designed video clips or voice with the aid of their peers, parents. In fact, the classroom concepts were sustainable in our mind."

Alireza, who is 19 years old, views this pedagogy as completely new experience and makes relationships among engagement, cooperation and sustainability saying:

"Presence in its real sense became more meaningful for some who find the traditional classes tedious. In this new experience, when students are asked to their own material for every skill or sub-skill, collaboration here goes into surface beside any support".

He indeed tries to conceptualize the fruit of such a network as *"what enhances not only participation but also what becomes a sweet memory in language learning."* With a pause in his dialogue with the researchers, he goes on:

"I mean we never forget this new experience. Sometimes, our creative teacher made a profile of our memories, our online drafts, developed video clips. He then posted them in different social media like her Instagram as a favorite social media among the youth to promote her students' language learning victory. I think this is a successful route in language learning. Surely such work will be remained in our minds forever".

This study supports Van den Branden's (2016) and Aghaei et.al (2020)'s readings on the engaging tasks, although demanding at first glance, they need to be closely matched to the students' needs in the current century. According to this point of view, it can be said that students should participate in tasks of high relevance that can be completed with support, and they feel that they are largely satisfied with students in student-centered teaching methods.

B) Developing Infrastructures in Keeping with More Efficient Online Classes

One of the main aspects which is figured out in the students' narratives is the necessity of developing infrastructures aiming at perpetuating more efficient online English language classes. In their eyes, if language educational policy makers and language school principals really tend to bridge the existing gaps in implementing English language online classes, they need to invest more on boosting infrastructures. This cannot be achieved if a precise planning in language learning reforms is not made.

As evidence, Saman says:

We are in the early stages of online English language classes in our language schools. In my view, it is more like maneuver. We are learning from the shortcomings besides all its possibilities.

What Saman calls learning from shortcomings or what he terms as "maneuver" indeed alludes to the necessity of making a more comprehensive program on how to boost online language classes as a replaceable or supplementary method of teaching and learning based on AI principles in language schools. To clarify his take in this regard, he adds:

Sometimes, the class with its all benefits was on our nerves when we got disconnected due to internet low speed or technical issues or some technical literacies. A team of technicians was almost always active to support us and keep the class with high quality. It is, we know, very demanding, but needs to be planned to lead to a language learning class with higher quality.

Mahmoud also adds that: *"In fact, we learned how online classes can be challenging when many of us are not equipped in their related infrastructure."* with an emphatic tone of speech, he states *"Now, the infrastructures need to be more invested by those responsible, either the institutes in charge, charities or the state."*

Some challenges like investment in infrastructure to develop the online language classes and infrastructure inadequacy are also delineated in the learners' voices. This in turn made the online class more demanding and impenetrable in the eyes of participants. This is in line with some findings in Aghaei et al. (2020) and McLaughlin et al. (2016)'s works, contending that technology, time, and support are more more likely to be essential and a prerequisite to successfully plan and implement technology-driven classes, especially in EFL developing contexts.

4.2.4. Students' Narratives on Delivery Facet

A) Positioning Learners as Enriched Multimodal Text Repertoires

In the eyes of some participants, it is the online language learning courses that will lead to a movement that positions students as a source of rich, multi-modal text repertoire. More precisely, resorting to a contrastive analysis between the conventional pedagogy and the new pedagogy created by the crisis, the participants seem to try to draw our attention to the point that this class has made a lot of changes among them as compared to the early stages of language learning not only within the pandemic but also after the pandemic. For example, Yashar accentuates:

In the past, we underestimated our role as someone who can share something. As a result of this class, attitudes have changed. We understand that we have the intellectual potential to make language learning unique.

Sina also discloses the change in his attitude. In other words, when he tries to make a comparison between the new and old ways of learning:

Before the experience, I could not imagine I can make my own text in language learning. I mean the homework was routinized like what are common in our usual language classes. Homework in the past included reciting conversations, words, doing exercises embedded in a reading or listening texts. Now, the story has changed due to Corona virus. We can develop our texts, we have combination of skills and subskills using technology to share with the class. I believe this situation made me aware of new ways of language learning. Oftentimes by asking my daughter and the younger generation I do some homework which are multidimensional.

He goes on:

In this situation I learned how to make podcast and video clip on my own now. Surely, I learned how to combine some songs and images with a text. It is awesome to learn English like this. I never thought I can learn these issues and boost my English as well. I see language learning as more creative and attractive than what was taught us before.

Alluding to combining some songs and images to a text as a new multimodal learning experience (Aghaei & Gouglani, 2016) in the pandemic pedagogy by the learners in the new situation can reflect what changes can be implemented and what actions can be selected in the online language classes later to lead to *sustainable language learning* (Aghaei, 2012).

Sina and Yashar's words apparently echo what is central to Mewald's (2019) argument on *intercomprehension competence*. In Mewald's reading, intercomprehension involves engaging with input in less familiar languages [or new modes of meaning], and responding to it, by making use of all available resources. These resources might consist of existing linguistic knowledge, skills and strategies as alongside with contextual cues and knowledge of the world (Cazden et al., 1996). It can demonstrate both *the wealth of resources that multilingual learners can bring into the language classroom, and also the value of explicit engagement with them.*

B) Redefining Class as Dynamic not Static Language Community of Practice

Most students explicitly and implicitly try to present a new definition of the concept of the classroom in online language teaching setting. Mohsen is among those who refers to his attitude transformation by looking at dynamic nature of online classes. Interestingly, he points out how the class in the online setting goes beyond a close-ended and boundary-restricted setting to include a multifaceted real life open-ended boundaries in language learning based on which the learners can develop their language literacy. In this regard, he specifically states:

In the past, many of my classmates and I thought that learning English is merely restricted to the classroom setting. However, the pandemic and online language class developed our horizon of thinking. I tried to seize any language learning opportunity anytime, anywhere. For example, even when I am watching a movie with subtitle I find some dialogues interesting. Therefore, I focus on them and process the excerpts as an educational text. Later, I will share these excerpts with my classmates in Telegram, Instagram or WhatsApp. I think it was thanks to the new experience.

He puts the accent on this change in attitude saying:

We all try to make a club to help each other to boost our English. It was not very common to do such activities in the past. You know, learning English never stops now for me. I will do this way later and also prescribe it to my friends who are in the early or even advanced steps of language learning.

Interestingly, he refers to his commitment to "reproducing club" as one way to expand this way of learning, stating:

I am also a member of this group and try to reproduce clubs like this to help those interested in language learning.

These results resonate Rogers' (1983) findings on successful interpersonal relationships with learners which are perceived to be central to learning. Unconditional positive respect, authenticity, and all ingredients of a student-centered approach (Cornelius-White 2007; Rogers 1983) are important components of a positive learning environment since it enables learners' comfort to be exposed to learning. This experience of well-being with the facilitators supplied learners with courage as reflected in the learners' narratives (Cornelius-White 2007).

5. Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to determine AI-based pedagogy ethos, focusing students' experiences of an online EFL class in the pandemic era in an Iranian English language school. Indeed, the purpose of the study was to narrate the stories on the possible ethos constructed based on Appreciated Inquiry in an EFL online learning experience in the pandemic era as read by the Iranian students in an English language school. The overall findings showed that an EFL online learning experience embedded in the Appreciated Inquiry in the pandemic was highly situated in practice so that it could be read in differing ways in different educational contexts. Feasibly, some instances of constructed ethos on the (language) learning based on AI as the learners' readings reflected were consistent with the literature discussed. As evidence, the findings in the current study show that the pandemic pedagogy based on AI ethos can develop what is called *Intercomprehension Competence* (Doyé, 2004; Pinho, 2015). This can occur through engaging with, and responding to input in less familiar and new modes of meaning, here the language of the new platform developed due to the pandemic. More precisely, the students learn how to make use of all available resources, ranging from existing linguistic knowledge, skills and strategies, to contextual cues and knowledge of the world (Cazden et al., 1996).

Findings of the study display how the students' experiences of positive language learning on the pedagogical shift in the pandemic era can contribute to their behavioural, sociocognitive, and emotional changes during the global educational crisis. Indeed, the implementation of the facilitation pedagogies in the academic facilitation programme seems to yield treasured learner experiences. In other words, such experiences increase social and personal engagement in learning, develop and demand thought processes like higher orders and actions, and result in transformation on emotional and sociogonitivie levels. In agreement with Linnenbrink-Garcia et al.'s (2011) propositions, learners stress the dynamicity and cyclicity of the relationship between social engagement and affect.

By means of the present study, and in line with the literature (Cornelius-White 2007), we learn how a student-centered approach, here the pandemic pedagogy, may give voice to students' experiences to develop their own curriculum as they prefer. Furthermore, in line with arguments of Naude et al. (2014) on whatness of AI-based pedagogy, some narratives in this study also empirically show that some learners feel secure in a calm and non-judgmental learning context in which there is

responsiveness to both emotional and intellectual needs. This, we argue, may be due to the emerged positive atmosphere in the pandemic pedagogy when the intellectual and emotional components of learning are well-adjusted. More precisely, the learning setting here becomes the chief nexus in which an optimal atmosphere of transformation and learning is constructed. When learners have feeling of security in their learning contexts, they have more openness and willingness to embrace themselves in the process of learning. Based on a social constructivist view point, as Rogers (1969) argues, "When students' learning experiences meet their personal needs and moves students in the direction towards what they want to know, learning becomes development" (p. 104).

The current study, however, show the students' calls for more awareness raising practices to be embedded in as the new aspects of language learning based on AI in the pandemic. This, in turn, accords well with Dewey's progressive and constructivist approach in which the learner finds meaning vis-à-vis the embedded interaction between theory and experience. As a result, students are encouraged to use creative and critical thinking approaches to get more engaged with the work (Dewey, 1986).

Moreover, the pandemic language pedagogy boosted the learners' buy-in. Students in our study became more responsible and more dynamic in their own learning. In line with the findings of Davies et al. (2013) and Strayer (2012) on disclosing the ontological nature of the student-centered pedagogies, most students also reflect a positive developmental trend when they refer to the development of autonomy throughout the sessions from the early to final stages in the manifested pedagogy. Results of this study surprisingly also demonstrate that an outstanding discursive trend of hope and satisfaction in the learners as they narrate gradual engagement, confidence, progress and autonomy as enactment and manifestation amid this pedagogy. Students report that a learning atmosphere which elicits positive emotional experiences fosters personal involvement in learning, broadens thought processes and actions, and leads to change and development on cognitive, behavioural and emotional levels.

As embedded in the students' narratives, online language class agenda is positioned as planning on ascertaining learners' knowledge as an emerging dynamic resource in content development. More creative ways of learners' assessment are also yearned for in the narratives so that the students accentuate more precise inclusion on assessment to bridge in the possible gaps in evaluating the learners'

competence and performance in learning as the epistemic break in the crisis shaped. Likewise, new modes of meaning in language education are envisaged to be designed. In order to keep more efficient online classes in the pandemic or any crisis, more investment on infrastructures needs to be allocated to remove the possible challenges to be occurred when a pedagogical shift occurs. Findings also represent that learners can be positioned as enriched multimodal text repertoires. In keeping with, classroom can be viewed as dynamic not static and still language community of practice.

As the learners' narratives reflect, such a new experience with its all building blocks can be scrutinized more precisely to become a part of future English language curriculum milieu. More precisely, the findings of this study can make a foundation for suggesting learning ethos/ criteria for a curriculum development in critical status in the pandemic or similar status where a shift in pedagogy may occur. It, in turn, can provide the promise to offer educational stakeholders positive learning experiences towards deeper and more engaging learning. These ethos consist of creating a safe learning environment with enriched infrastructures, strengthening students' agency, autonomy and participation in the process of learning, revisiting assessment and providing authentic and inherently precious experiences of learning.

Last but not the least, this particular educational experience (containing learners in a unique pandemic pedagogy programme in the language school) may therefore not be generalizable in its traditional concept. Rather, we consider the idiographic generalizability (Fairweather & Rinne, 2012) of the results to language teaching programmes with similar contexts and cultures. In addition, we believe, the measures taken to raise trustworthiness, ascertain the transferability of the findings to various educational settings.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. What's your favourite memory of learning English here, especially in the pandemic era?
2. What makes this class a good setting to learn English language?
3. What do you like best about your class?
4. Can you tell me about the history of change in way of teaching in the pandemic in your school?
5. What first attracted you to attend and register in the online language class here?
6. Can you describe the work that your class does?
7. What part of your new learning experience in the pandemic era are you most proud of?
8. What part of your work do you think you and your classmates value most?
9. Which of your skills are you called on to use most often at your online class?
10. How do you know when you've done a good and efficient learning?
11. Can you tell me your favourite story about one of your sessions?
12. What do you think attracts you and your classmates to your class?
13. What makes your class special, or different from other ones that you know?
14. What do you think is at the heart of your class's success and the new experience?
15. Can you tell me about the groups or people that support your class and its work?
16. What makes your relationship with them work?
17. Can you tell me about the group or community that you find to be the most supportive of your online class in the new experience?
18. What makes your relationship with them special?
19. Can you tell me about situations in which your class and the government have worked well together?
20. If I came back to visit you in the two past years considering the different way of teaching and learning, what do you think your class would look like?

21. What strengths and resources will best help you to achieve these learning goals in the pandemic era?

22. If the director or teacher of an English language class that was just starting out wanted to learn from your experience, what's the best piece of advice that you could give them?



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