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Remote Teaching amid the Covid-19 Pandemic in Vietnam: Primary School EFL Teachers' Practices and Perceptions

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Abstract

The massive school closures worldwide due to the Covid-19 pandemic have resulted in a surge of remote teaching. This study investigated teachers' practices and perceptions on teaching English remotely to primary school students in the school lockdowns in Vietnam. A mixed-methods design was employed to collect data from different primary public schools in Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong and Dong Nai provinces. Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted, and a questionnaire was used to collect data from 50 teachers. The majority of selected participants were those who practiced at least one form of remote teaching activities, either asynchronous or synchronous. The findings show that Zoom, Zalo, and YouTube were the three most popular platforms teachers used. Numerous challenges also emerged, such as more workload, more stress, technical issues, students' lack of learning devices, the requirement for parent's assistance, more interactions, and hands-on activities. Despite the obstacles, the majority of teachers showed their positive attitudes towards remote teaching. They learned new ICT tools and pedagogies and intended to continue using this approach after the pandemic. In order to improve the effectiveness of remote teaching, such suggestions as creativity and flexibility in designing lessons, parents' support, teacher's training, and upgraded ICT infrastructure are recommended.

Keywords: remote teaching, perceptions, challenges, primary school teachers, pandemic

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has created the worst crisis in education, where schools for over 168 million children worldwide have been suspended for roughly a year (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2021). As a majority of the world's schoolchildren, primary school students have accounted for the most among those who missed at least three-quarters of classroom instruction (UNICEF, 2021). School closures due to the Covid-19 have resulted in a dramatic change in education with the rapid growth of e-learning, in which teaching takes place remotely and via media platforms. As cited in UNICEF (2021), the data showed that more than 90% of education ministries around the world had introduced some types of remote learning through radio, television, or the Internet. The Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam (MOET), in particular, quickly guided

schools to implement remote learning via the Internet or on television in order to ensure the continuity of learning for students. In a virtual meeting with UNICEF's representatives in 2020, Minister Phung Xuan Nha emphasized that although remote teaching was a temporary action responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, this would be an opportunity for the acceleration of digital transition in the education sector (UNICEF Vietnam, 2020). As a result, it is vital to understand what happened in the time when "teaching is moving online, on an untested and unprecedented scale" (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020) so that the education sector will be able to identify future directions and prepare for unavoidable situations.

In the world, there have been several studies on remote teaching of tertiary level during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, scant research has investigated this emergency remote teaching to the primary level, where students need more support from teachers and parents. An examination is especially necessary for teaching subjects like the English language, which requires more interactions between teachers and students or students and students. Therefore, there is an urgent need for research into teachers' attitudes towards teaching English remotely to primary school children, the obstacles they meet when delivering remote learning sessions, and what to do to improve this teaching approach to young learners**.** This study attempts to address the issues as mentioned above through an investigation with primary English teachers in Vietnam, where nationwide schools were closed twice in the academic year 2020 - 2021. The first closure was from February to April 2020, and the second time happened in February 2021.

2. Literature review

2.1 E-learning

Being considered as a modern tool to handle the issues occurring in the teaching and learning process (Agustina & Cahyono, 2017), e-learning (Electronic learning) has emerged as a new trend in education and is now widely regarded as the most significant learning paradigm, particularly in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak, when people are advised to avoid crowds and practice social distancing as pandemic prevention strategies (Mardiah, 2020). Arkorful and Abaidoo (2014) refer to e-learning as the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to allow access to online learning or teaching resources. Goyal (2012) also listed a number of terms used to define this form of teaching and learning, including online learning, virtual learning, distributed learning, network, and web-based learning. In this research, the term "e-learning" refers to any form of electronically supported learning, whether on the Internet or television, in which the student interacts with teachers, contents, and other students regardless of location or time (Kisanga, 2016).

In general, there are two types of e-learning activities: asynchronous and synchronous. The asynchronous events take place at any time through media platforms such as email and discussion boards, where students can learn at their own time and pace. Conversely, synchronous activities occur through live video conferencing and chat, in which teachers and learners interact with each other in real-time (Hrastinski, 2008). Table 1 is adapted from Kim, 2020.

Table 1. Asynchronous and synchronous learning

	Asynchronous	**Synchronous**
Timing	Logging in at own time Learning at own pace	Logging in at the same time
Communication	Posting responses to activities Reading and writing feedback	Live interactions Talking back or forth within a group
Examples of tools	E-mail, discussion board (ex. Google Docs, Blackboard, YouTube)	Video conference tools (e.g., Google Hangout, Blackboard Collaborate, Zoom Meeting)
Role of teachers	Setting up discussion boards Facilitator between students	Instructor Interacting with students

E-learning has been proven to bring learners, teachers, and educational organizations many benefits. In terms of cost-effectiveness, online courses efficiently dispense with numerous expenditures that are operating a brick-and-mortar class incurs such as space, classroom facilities, and staff, offering a large number of students in one class without many building space requirements (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2014; Kim 2020). In addition, e-learning eases time constraints and geographical boundaries where every student or teacher has options of choosing the location and time that is most convenient for him or her (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2014; Chitra & Raj, 2018). Material comprehension skills are also improved because students have more time to comprehend a message in asynchronous activities, which allow self-pacing among students (Hrastinski, 2008; Mardiah, 2020). To young learners, ICTs play an important role in their learning. Specifically, ICTs promote children's language development in language learning because most children enjoy the Internet, television, radio, YouTube videos, and mobile learning applications (Dewi, 2019). Dewi (2019) also confirmed the significant role of ICTs in eliciting students' creativity and proficiency in both local and international cultures.

Regarding the effectiveness of online learning, Montiel-Chamorro (2018) found that there are no statistically significant differences in the outcomes or overall scores of students when comparing two online classes with two face-to-face classes in his investigation at a university in Colombia. The finding is in line with that of Russell (1999), as cited in Nguyen (2015), when he compiled over 350 studies on distance and online education dating back from 1928. Students in online learning environments even performed modestly better than those receiving face-to-face training, according to the meta-analysis of the U.S. Department of Education (2010). Despite the positive results for the efficacy of online learning, it is uncertain if this holds true through investigations (Nguyen, 2015), and there was no evidence that online learning is a superior learning approach when it lacks vital personal interactions (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2014). Especially, the findings may not be generalizable to K-12 settings where there are still few thorough studies (Nguyen, 2015).

2.2 Implementation of E-learning in primary schools in Vietnam

According to Austrade (2020) in the Vietnam Edtech Scoping Study Report, e-learning was introduced in Vietnam in 2007, and the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has worked relentlessly in order to completely bring the Internet to the sector and boost the implementation of ICTs in management, teaching and learning activities. To this end, a number of measures to increase the use of ICT in the classroom have been implemented, such as developing ICT facilities, training ICT skills for teachers, and adjusting pedagogical curriculum (Peeraer & Petegem, 2011 and Pham, 2014, as cited in Pham and Lee, 2019), and looking for sponsorship from private sectors and partnerships such as Microsoft and Viettel (Truong, 2020). As a result, all areas of education are projected to implement ICT in their curriculum, pedagogical, and training activities (Truong & Qalati, 2020). Regarding primary education in Vietnam, computer science, as a selective subject, is embedded in the curriculum of grades 4 and 5. Therefore, students have opportunities to be exposed to ICT in class. However, according to Nguyen et al. (2017), students mainly access the Internet from home because the Internet penetration is increasing rapidly due to the proliferation of smartphones and 3G subscriptions in households. There is still a big difference in pedagogical practice and teaching resources between rural and urban areas due to the current infrastructure and teaching competency, in which just 17% of students in remote mountainous areas have access to the Internet (Truong, 2020). Moreover, teachers in urban areas have opportunities to attend numerous training workshops while their counterparts receive less (Nguyen et al., 2017).

Although access to ICT is not a barrier anymore and teachers have good basic ICT skills, the majority of primary English teachers in Vietnam are low-level users (Huynh & Pham, 2018). Teachers still lack confidence in applying ICT in teaching, and they mostly use ICT as a replacement for their teaching activities (Peeraer & Petegem, 2011). Many researchers also claimed that Vietnamese teachers usually use common applications like word processors, PowerPoint presentations, search engines, images, audio, and the use of more advanced applications which engage students in learning is low (Peeraer & Petegem; 2011; Dang, 2013, Huynh & Pham, 2018). When choosing the ICT tools for teaching, teachers consider the lesson objectives, the availability, and accessibility of the tool, the learners' needs, and the level of familiarity (Truong & Qalati, 2020).

In connection with teachers' perceptions on applying ICT in English language teaching to young learners in Vietnam, teachers recognize a variety of benefits such as getting more comfortable in teaching, increasing critical thinking, promoting teaching and learning, and facilitating problem-solving while they also admit this is a time-consuming approach (Truong & Qalati, 2020). A number of factors that hinder teachers in ICT implementation include the absence of collaboration among teachers and students, inadequate technological knowledge, lack of leaders' support and a shortage of qualified teachers (Truong & Qalati, 2020), lack of ICT facilities, time, and money, too much content curriculum, oversized classes, lack of support from colleagues, technical staff and leaders, low internet connection **(**Huynh & Pham, 2018; Pham, Tan and Lee, 2019). To tackle these problems, Pham, Tan, and Lee (2019) emphasized the significant role of MOET in providing training for teachers and efficiently allocating budget for supply and maintenance of ICT infrastructure in schools, allowing a lighter and more flexible curriculum and encouraging teachers to share ideas and experience to others. Nguyen et al. (2017) also highlighted the urgent need for MOET and educators in the country to upgrade ICT facilities in classrooms and revise school curriculum and improve

teachers' ICT skills. Truong and Qalati (2020) again indicated the government's role in organizing online and offline training workshops for new teachers.

2.3 Challenges in the emergency remote teaching due to the Covid-19 pandemic

Hodges et al. (2020) defined emergency remote teaching as "a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery model due to crisis circumstances". Responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, the education sector witnessed frustrations arising from a lack of knowledge about what to do and how to cope with situations that educators or teachers had never encountered before (Kim, 2020). Due to the pandemic, the quick switching to online teaching meant that several teachers were simply trying to survive by turning what had been planned for a normal face-to-face class into an online format Todd (2020). Mardiah (2020) found that this shifting is not effective in actual practices. This conclusion was in line with Rahayu and Wirza (2020) when they indicated online learning is not practical.

Many obstacles plagued remote teaching emergencies. Teachers expressed their rational worries about the Internet and technology, which did not always function when teaching or learning remotely (Hoang & Le, 2021; Cardullo et al., 2021). Unstable internet connection not only had a major impact on students' listening process (Ha & Ngo, 2021) but also consumed much time in handling the logging in and out of students or uploading teaching materials (Hoang & Le, 2021). Teachers also worried about the difficulties of equity and their concerns about social engagement and peer relations (Cardullo et al., 2021). In terms of teachers' ICT competence, Hoang and Le (2021) found that the majority of teachers in their study were not confident in technology skills. Teachers' fear of ICT in remote teaching resulted in an unwillingness to employ complicated platforms (Ly et al., 2021). In addition, Yi and Jang (2020) argued that remote teaching in the pandemic had changed teaching practices and experiences, which require teachers to be more creative and collaborative in instructions and to perform more roles such as video makers in designing lesson plans. Hoang and Le (2021) also disclosed that re-designing teaching and learning activities, preparing online learning resources, and supporting students brought teachers heavy workload during the pandemic. Yang (2020) added the inability of students to apply self-study skills, the difficulty in managing students' progress, and lack of interactions as factors affecting online learning.

Teaching remotely is more challenging when working with young students. When exploring the practices of the *School from Home* program designed for primary teachers in Indonesia during the pandemic, Rasmitadila et al. (2020) divided difficulties teachers faced into four subcategories including technical obstacles, student's conditioning, the participation of students, and online teaching experience. As technical issues are concerned, not all parents have smartphones or laptops, and the Internet signals are poor, especially in the rural areas. Consequently, students cannot follow the lessons and delay doing assignments. In addition, the process of studying at home for students is distracted by internal factors such as interference from family members and external factors such as the fact that students talk to each other on different topics. Another challenge is that participation is limited due to low data packages, the ownership of smartphones or laptops, and losing motivation which demands teachers to find ways to maintain student's enthusiasm in virtual classes. In addition, teachers who have no experience in teaching online or who are not tech-savvy will find it difficult to run online learning because the *School from Home* program requires them to master a number of applications such as WhatsApp, Google Forms, Worksheets, YouTube, Zoom, Google Classroom and PowToon. According to Kim (2020), limitations of online

learning vary depending on the technological ability of teachers and students to access the Internet or to use computers. Especially more efforts have to be put on working with young learners who require adult availability and involvement in supervising or assisting them with technical skills (Kim, 2020; Cardullo et al., 2021). Misirli and Ergulec (2021) also found that parents of young learners (pre-school and primary school) joined the learning process as a technical assistant and a class participant as well. Moreover, online learning can easily lose children's focus because they need more interaction and hands-on activities (Kim, 2020). Rhayu and Wirza (2020) added that some teachers struggled with using ICT, creating engaging content, explaining it as well as giving feedback and assessment. Besides, Cardullo et al. (2021) were also concerned about the vast disparities among children from the rich and underprivileged families.

Still, from teachers' perspectives, they were willing to support and motivate students, trying to create learning opportunities for the good of learners in these unprecedented situations (Cardullo et al., 2021). Despite a number of challenges emerging, several studies found teachers' positive attitudes towards online teaching, and these teachers looked for support where necessary and tried to apply various methods (Todd, 2020; Rahayu & Wirza, 2020; and Hoang & Le, 2021). Many teachers admitted that the technical skills of both students and teachers were improved from teaching and learning online (Cardullo et al., 2021; Tunmibi, Aregbesola, Adejobi, and Ibrahim, 2015). Irene van der et al. (2020) also found teachers' intention in integrating ICT in their teaching more often once they get back to a normal face-to-face class. The fact that the teachers' intention to implement technology in teaching and their pretty high involvement in it indicate their awareness of the importance of technology in online teaching (Rahayu & Wirza, 2020).

2.4 Research Questions

In order to get concrete results, this study is guided by the following questions:

1. What tools or platforms do teachers use to operate teaching and learning during the school closures?
2. What obstacles do teachers face when delivering remote lessons?
3. What are teachers' perceptions on facilitating remote teaching to primary school students?

3. Methods

3.1 Pedagogical Setting & Participants

In order to investigate the practices and the perceptions of teachers on the sudden shift to teaching English remotely due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this study targeted at different primary public schools in Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong and Dong Nai provinces, where various types of remote teaching were implemented during the school lockdowns in the academic year 2020-2021. The majority of selected participants were those who used at least one form of asynchronous or synchronous remote instruction. A questionnaire was sent to the participants via Google Forms with 50 valid answers collected, and 10 semi-structured interviews were also conducted via phones at the same time. The teachers who participated in

the interviews were randomly selected from six different schools, and they were also among those who answered the questionnaire.

39 (78%) survey respondents are young teachers aged 22-34, 9 (18%) aged 35-42 and 2 (4%) aged 43-59. Interestingly, 21 (42%) teachers have experience in conducting remote teaching activities for less than 1 year, the same number as those who have from 1 to 3 years. No one has more than three years of remote teaching, and the number of teachers who have not conducted any remote teaching event is only 8 (16%).

3.2 Design of the Study

This study employed a mixed-methods design to gather, analyze and combine both quantitative and qualitative data in order to better comprehend the research questions than using either approach alone (Cresswell, 2012). The reasons for combining methods are that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are adequate to catch the tendencies and facts of a situation on their own (Ivankova, 2007). In this study, a questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data and ten semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data. The quantitative scores on the questionnaire from a larger population compensated for the shortcomings of the qualitative data of a few interviews (Cresswell, 2012). On the other hand, the qualitative data gave more detailed information about the interview setting and an in-depth understanding of the research problems.

Based on the design types of Cresswell (2012), the convergent parallel design was applied in the study, in which data of both quantitative and qualitative methods was simultaneously collected, analyzed separately, then compared and interpreted.

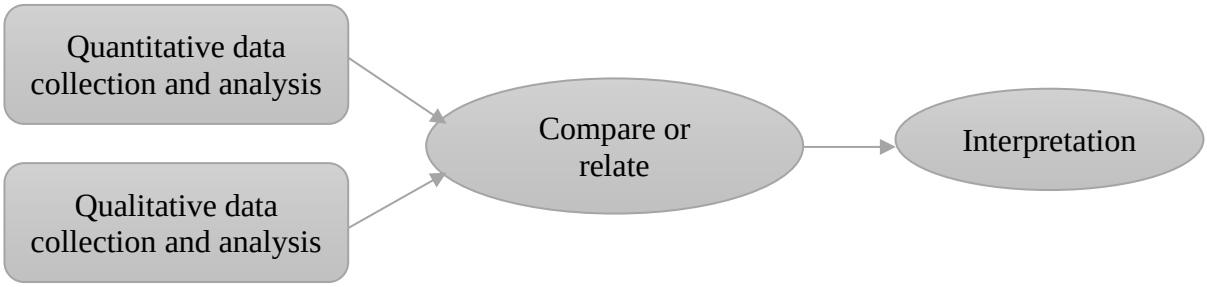

Figure 1. The convergent parallel design, adapted from Cresswell, 2012

3.3 Data collection & analysis

The data was collected by two instruments: a survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview, both in the Vietnamese language. The questionnaire, which was adapted from Vu et al. (2020) and Cardullo et al. (2021), comprised items of two different formats: the multiple-choice and the questions of 5-point Likert scale from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree". The questionnaire contained thirty questions divided into two main sections. The first section asked for teachers' demographic information such as gender, ages, online teaching experience, and one item of ICT tools for teaching was also included in this part. The second section measured teachers' perceptions on conducting remote teaching activities during the Covid-19 school closures. The second section was also divided into five subsections to fully answer the research questions: (1) teachers' perceived challenges in their

remote teaching practices, (2) reasons for not conducting online classes, (3) teachers' perceived ICT competence, (4) teachers' suggestions to improve remote teaching, and (5) teachers' intentions to remote teaching after the pandemic. After collecting data, the author used the software SPSS 20. to conduct a reliability test for the variables in the questionnaire, including six items of "perceived challenges", four items of "reasons not conducting online teaching", six items of "ICT competence", four items of "suggestions" and three items of "intentions" variables. According to Wim et al. (2008), as cited in Hajjar (2018), a value of Cronbach's alpha between 0.6 and 0.8 is acceptable. The results showed that most variables satisfied this value range, except the value of variable "perceived challenges" with only 0.442. Consequently, the item "Students enjoy learning" was removed from "perceived challenges" so that Cronbach's value of these variables reached 0.698. As the questionnaire was considered as well constructed, descriptive statistics were used to describe the teachers' opinions on the measurements.

The interview questions consisted of nine open-ended questions relating to teachers' overall perceptions on remote teaching to primary school students, how they facilitated remote teaching activities during the school closures, the effectiveness of these activities, challenges they faced, recommendations and future intentions to remote teaching and learning practices. The ten participants were coded from T1 to T10, and the data were categorized and put in a matrix format for easy analysis.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Tools/ platforms used for remote teaching and learning.

In light of numerous applications or platforms available in the market for remote teaching, and some of them are free, some are premium, the participants were asked to mention the tools they used to facilitate their remote teaching during the school closures. Figure 2 depicts the results from the survey.

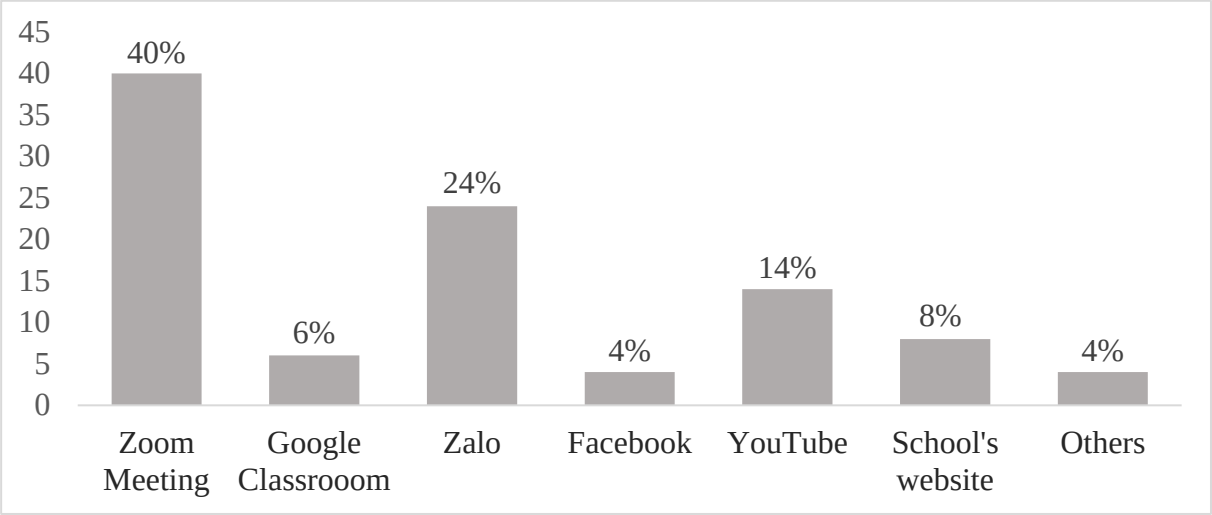

Figure 2. Tools/platforms used in teaching during the Covid-19 school closures

As evident in figure 2, Zoom Meeting was the most common tool for remote teaching in Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong and Dong Nai provinces (40% of users), followed by Zalo (24%),

and YouTube (14%). Just a few teachers used Google Classroom, Facebook, and the school's website, and nobody used television for their teaching activities.

Similarly, in the interviews, Zoom Meeting, Zalo, and YouTube were also the three most popular platforms that teachers mentioned to organize their remote teaching in the Covid-19 pandemic. These applications are free, and Zalo, which is used widely in Vietnamese households (Chapman, 2019) is considered as the best way to connect with students. Many teachers organized asynchronous teaching activities in which they recorded their video lessons and later shared them with their students via YouTube or Zalo groups. T3 had his video lessons posted on the school's website. In addition, a few teachers used other platforms such as Google Meet and Facebook to create remote learning activities. Noticeably, teachers employed engaging applications such as Google Forms, Quizizz, and Kahoot to motivate students as well as check their understanding.

4.2. Teachers' perceived challenges in teaching English remotely to primary school students

In this part of the questionnaire, teachers were asked to rate their agreement on the obstacles they got when organizing remote teaching activities. As mentioned in the methodology part, the item "*Students enjoy learning*" was removed from this group of variables to make the questionnaire more reliable. Figure 3 below shows retained variables.

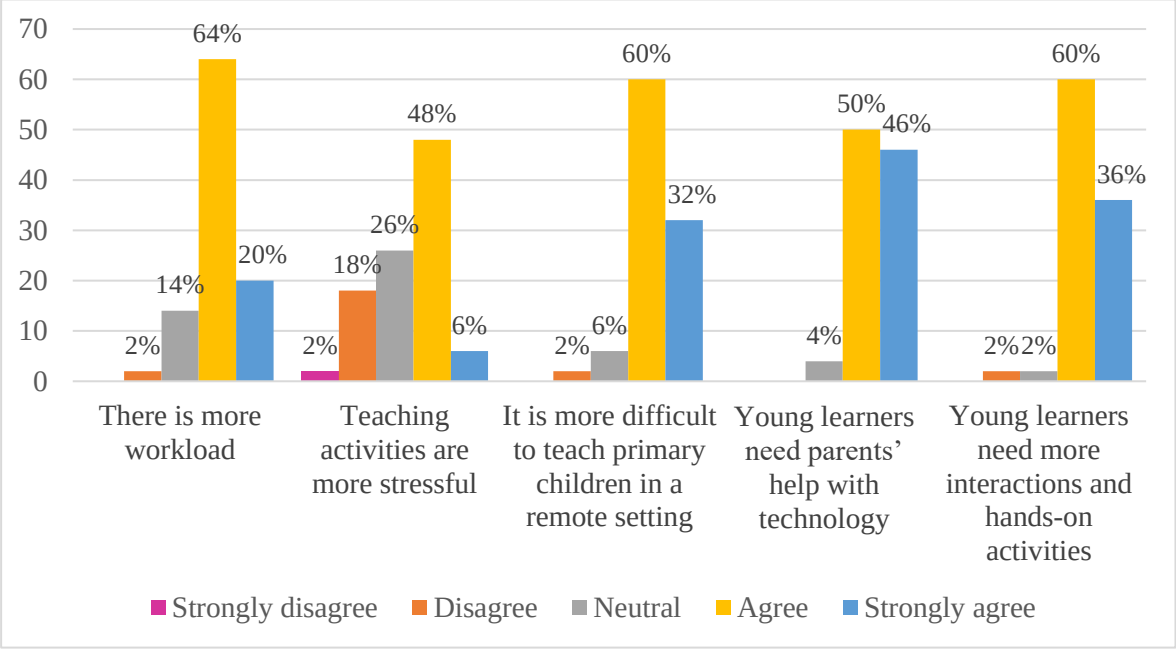

Figure 3. Teachers' perceived challenges

The results show that the majority of teachers agreed with the obstacle statements in the questionnaire with high rates. The two biggest problems were that young learners need parents' help with technology and young learners need more interactions and hands-on activities (96% of the agreement for each). These findings were consistent with those of Kim (2020) when the teachers in her study stated that they needed to create more interacting and hands-on activities such as singing, dancing, cutting, drawing, and creating patterns. 92% of teachers also agreed that it is more difficult to teach primary children in a remote setting

compared to older students. In line with the finding of Hoang and Le (2021), teachers in this study revealed that there is more workload (84%), and teaching activities are more stressful (54%).

Furthermore, numerous challenges emerged from the interviews. In accordance with the findings of Rasmitadila et al. (2020), 70 % (seven teachers) had the similar comment that many students did not have their own computers, laptops or smartphones. These students had to use their parent's devices but their parents went to work all day without leaving their gadgets at home. This was a big problem for teachers when they had to depend on parents' schedules to organize the lessons for students. According to T8, "*teachers even have to schedule the same lesson two or three times a day for different groups of students whose parents work in different shifts in the factories*". Many teachers agreed that due to a lack of parents' time and assistance, the number of students joining online classes was not high. "*This causes a big gap in knowledge among students, and teachers have to review the lessons when students get back to face-to-face class*," as T5 revealed. "*Most parents are factory workers, they lack ICT ability to assist their children's learning*" (T1), "*they don't know how to sign in online learning platforms*" (T7). "*Some of the parents do not care about their children's study*" (T6).

Considering the difficulties arising from students, many teachers reported that primary school students were still too young. "*They do not know all the functions of the online learning apps so their performance is slow*" (T4). In addition, T8 said that "*children's self-learning ability is low*", similarly to Yang (2020)'s findings about the inability of students in self-study at home during the Covid-19 lockdowns. *"Young students easily lose their focus or fall asleep due to lack of interactions*" (T10). T8 also complained that many students chatted to each other about different topics.

Regarding teachers' limitations, a few teachers admitted that they were not proficient in some ICT tools which they learnt from the Internet, so they did not understand or fully exploited the functions (T8 &T10). This finding is consistent with that of Ly et al. (2021) when they found that some teachers had a fear of complicated ICT tools. A few teachers in this study felt pressured and embarrassed when making video lessons because they lacked confidence in front of the camera and making videos required more time, workload and creativity (T8, T9 & T10). This finding corroborates those of Yi and Jang (2020) when they confirmed that remote teaching requires teachers to be creative, collaborative and to perform more roles such as video makers.

4.3. Teachers' perceived reasons for not conducting synchronous online classes

In this part of the questionnaire, teachers were asked to give their reasons for not conducting synchronous online classes. These reasons are also considered as difficulties hindering teachers in organizing online teaching.

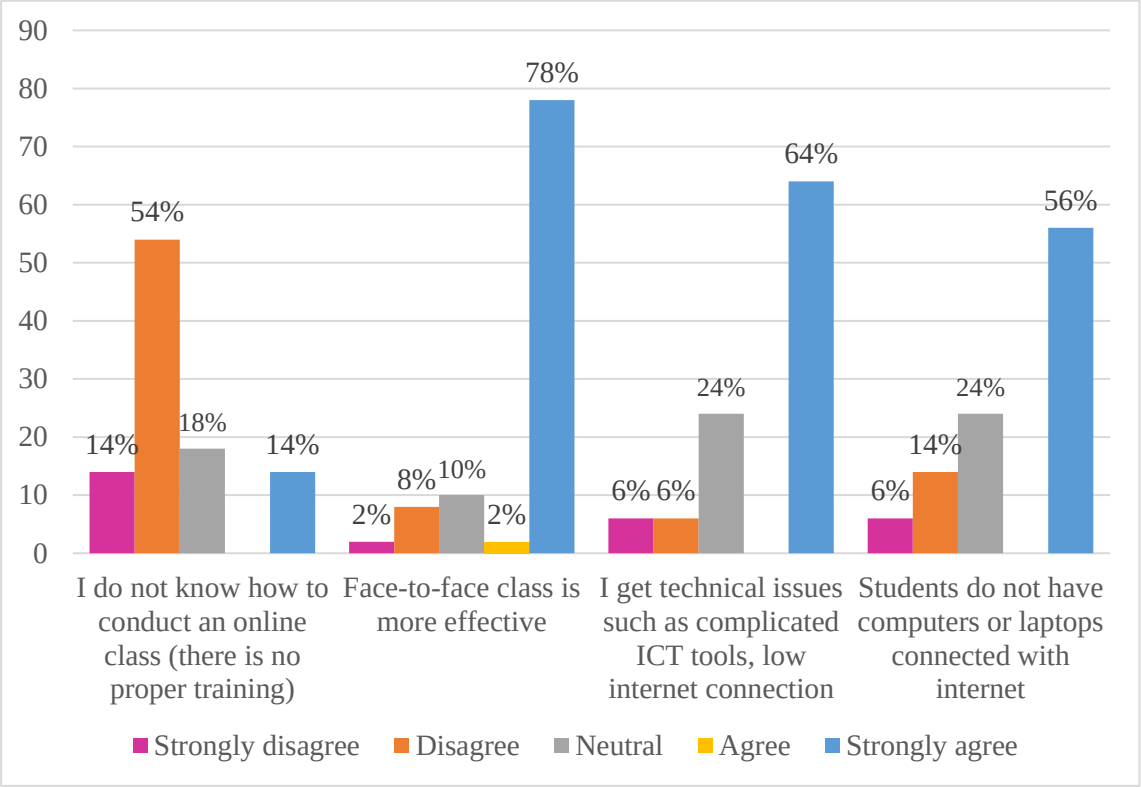

Figure 4. Teachers' perceived reasons for not conducting synchronous online classes

As revealed, the majority of teachers strongly believed that face-to-face class is more effective (80%). This result is in line with Mardiah (2020), Rahayu and Wirza (2020) when they concluded the shifting to online teaching was not effective in actual practices. In addition, 64% of teachers also strongly agreed that they had technical issues such as complicated ICT tools, low internet connection, limited time and participants for one application account. The finding supports evidence from the previous observations of Rasmitadila et al. (2020), Cardullo et al., (2021), Hoang & Le (2021), and Ha & Ngo (2021). Besides, the reason that students did not have computers or laptops connected with the Internet also accounts for 56% of agreement. However, many teachers did not agree with the statement "*I do not know how to conduct an online class (there is no proper training)*" with 68% of disagreement. A possible explanation for this result is that teachers received some types of training and guidelines for remote teaching. In the interviews, six teachers (60%) also admitted that they got at least one training on how to organize the remote teaching, either official training or sharing sessions. These findings are fairly different from those of Hoang & Le (2021) when only 49,3% of teachers in their study admitted that they got clear guidance of moving to remote teaching. Some teachers in this study argued that they did not receive any official training from the school, and they proactively learnt from the Internet or from sharing among their teaching team.

4.4. Teachers' perceived ICT competence

Figure 5 shows teachers' self-report about their capabilities to use ICT tools in teaching activities.

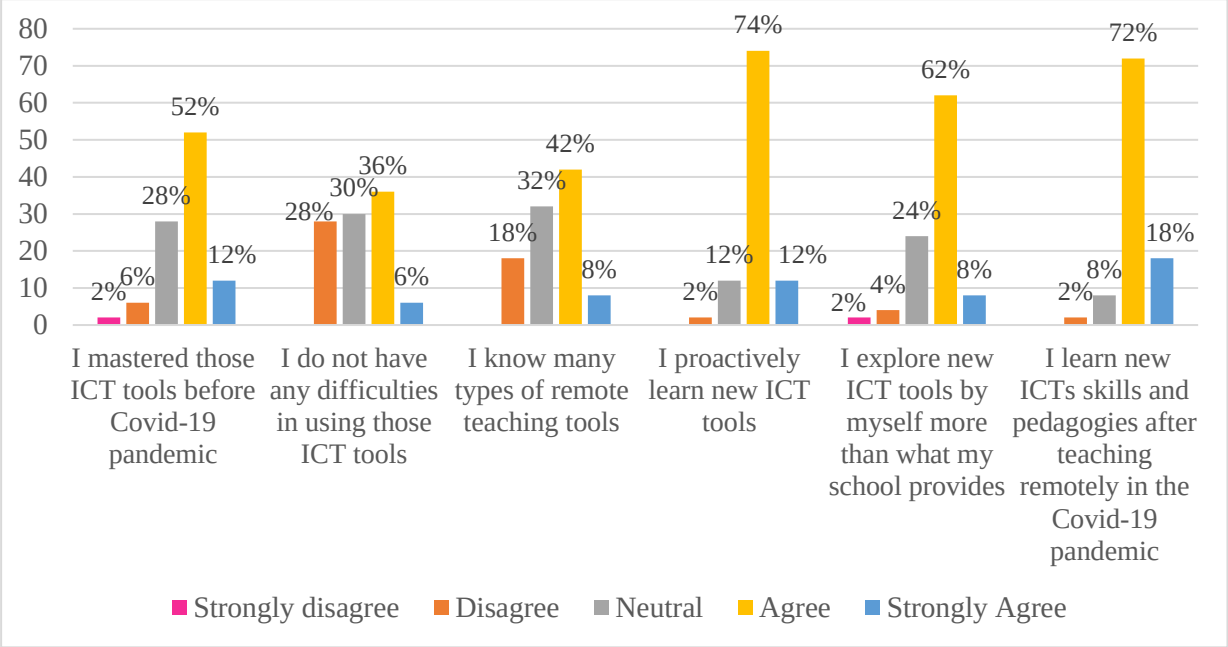

Figure 5. Teachers' perceived ICT competence

In contrast with the earlier findings of Peeraer and Petegem (2011) and Huynh and Pham (2018) when they found that Vietnamese primary English teachers were low users of ICT, it is obvious from figure 5 that teachers in the current study had high perceptions on their ICT ability. 64% agreed that they had mastered those ICT tools before Covid-19 pandemic. 50% knew many types of remote teaching tools. Their ICT implementation was no longer just using basic office applications in the computers, they used advanced applications to engage students such as Kahoot, Quizizz, Google Forms instead. This difference may be explained by the fact that the majority of participants in this study were young teachers aged 22-34 who are considered better at ICTs. Besides, 42% agreed that they did not have any difficulties in using those ICT tools while 30% had neutral opinions and 28% disagreed with the statement. Regarding learning ICT tools, most teachers admitted that they proactively learnt new ICT tools (86%), and they mainly explored new ICT tools by themselves more than what their school provided (70%). Noticeably, 90% of the teachers agreed that they learnt more new ICT skills and pedagogies after teaching remotely in the Covid-19 pandemic. This finding further supports the previous studies of Cardullo et al., (2021) and Tunmibi, Aregbesola, Adejobi, and Ibrahim (2015) who observed that technological skills of both teachers and students were improved after teaching and learning online.

4.5. Teachers' overall perceptions on remote teaching for primary school students

In the interviews with ten teachers from six different schools, teachers had different opinions about teaching English online to primary students. Supporting the evidence from the previous studies of Todd (2020), Rahayu & Wirza (2020), and Hoang & Le (2021), the majority of teachers in the interviews (70%) had positive attitudes towards this teaching approach. These teachers opined that "*remote teaching is a good way, especially in the pandemic, to ensure students' learning continuity and school's curriculum*". "*This is also a suitable method to help students review not only old knowledge but also practice self-study skills at home*" (T1). T10 added that "*teaching and learning online gives students and teachers opportunities to be exposed to ICTs and learning resources on the Internet*". According to T6 and T8, "*another advantage of remote teaching is that students can learn at any time and anywhere or re-watch the video lessons for better understanding*". This also accords with the observations of Hrastinski (2008) and Mardiah (2020) when they concluded that students' material comprehension skills were improved in asynchronous learning activities.

On the other hand, other teachers had mixed feelings about teaching online to primary children. Because it was a requirement of social distancing practice in the Covid-19 pandemic, remote teaching was a good choice to ensure students' learning continuity. In fact, remote teaching to young learners was not effective due to numerous difficulties (T6, T9 & T10). According to T8, "*primary school students are still too young to take the initiative in the study. It is hard for them to acquire knowledge through the screen because primary children are usually active and easy to lose concentration. Students of grades 3-5 are acceptable in online classes, but students of grades 1-2 get very low effectiveness. The reason is that students of grades 1-2 usually look around, not looking at the screen, not caring about what the teacher is saying, even getting out of the chair, running around*". Similarly, T8 and T9 said that learning via Zoom Meeting is suitable for grades 3-5. For grades 1-2, teachers can send links of lessons and exercises via Zalo for students to study with the assistance of their parents.

When evaluating the effectiveness of the remote teaching activities that the teachers had been operating, five teachers (T1, T3, T4, T6 & T7) reported that there were about 70-80% of student's participation in their online classes. The rest of teachers said that their online teaching practices were not as effective as they expected when the student's participation was just 50%. The other students did not participate in online learning because they did not have laptops, computers or smartphones, and their parents were too busy to support them.

4.6. Teachers' suggestions for improving remote teaching

In order to better remote teaching and learning practices, teachers were asked to rate their attitudes towards the suggestions provided in figure 6 below.

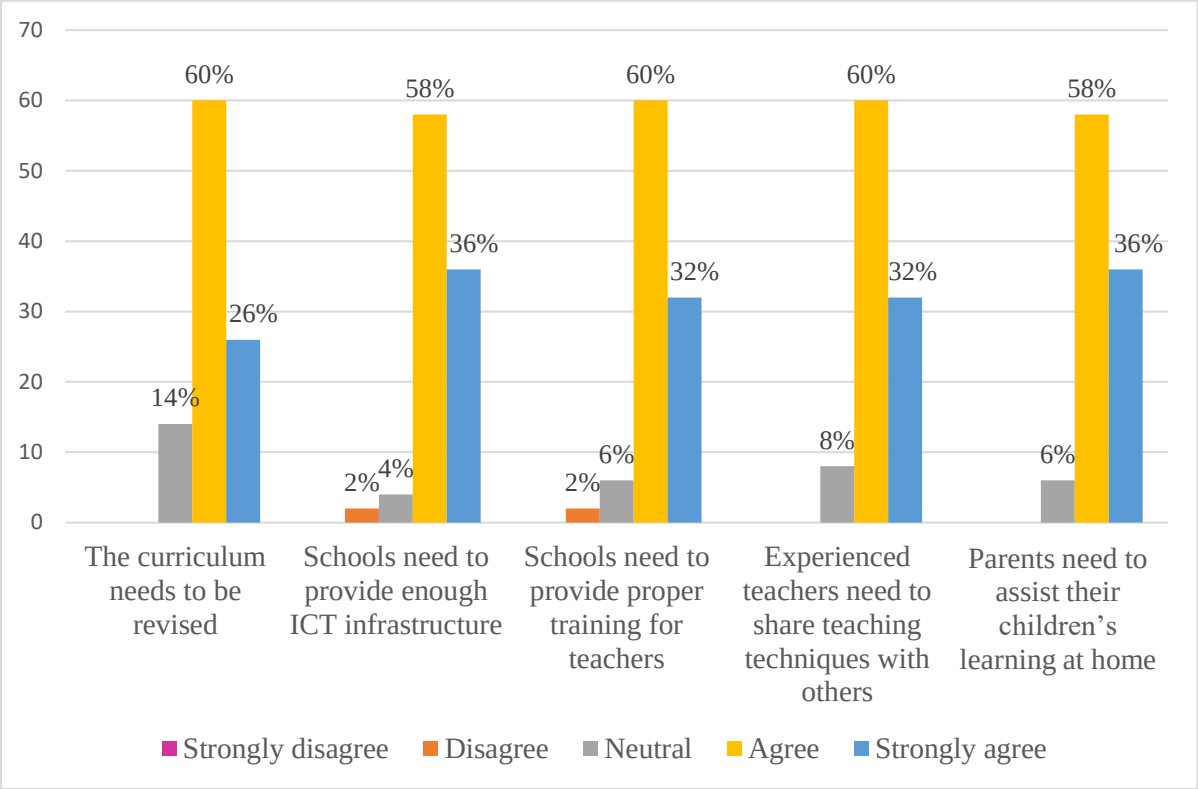

Figure 6. Teachers' suggestions to improve remote teaching

It can be seen from the results that teachers strongly agreed with all the statements with more than 90% of the agreement for each. The statement of "The curriculum needs to be revised" also got high agreement with 86%. These suggestions are in line with those of Nguyen et al. (2017), Pham, Tan and Lee (2019), and Truong and Qalati (2020) when they mentioned the roles of MOET in providing enough ICT facilities and training for teachers, and revising school curriculum in order to reduce the difficulties teachers were facing.

Similarly, from the interviews, parents' support was also highly required to make remote learning more effective. Parents can help their children by providing learning devices and assisting them with technology. Many other suggestions were also drawn such as sharing teaching materials among teachers, flexibility in time and place of organizing online classes (T1), shortening lessons or small amount of knowledge in each lesson to help students acquire and remember knowledge better (T4, T5), creating attractive lessons by inserting interactive games (T7), teachers' mastering in ICT tools to make creative lessons (T8), providing handouts for students who cannot join remote learning (T3), and combining many tools such as Zoom, Zalo and YouTube in delivering lessons to better remote teaching and to reduce limitations of only one tool (T10).

4.7. Teachers' perceived intentions to remote teaching and ICTs for young learners

Teachers' plans of using remote teaching and ICTs in teaching after the Covid-19 pandemic were rated as follows.

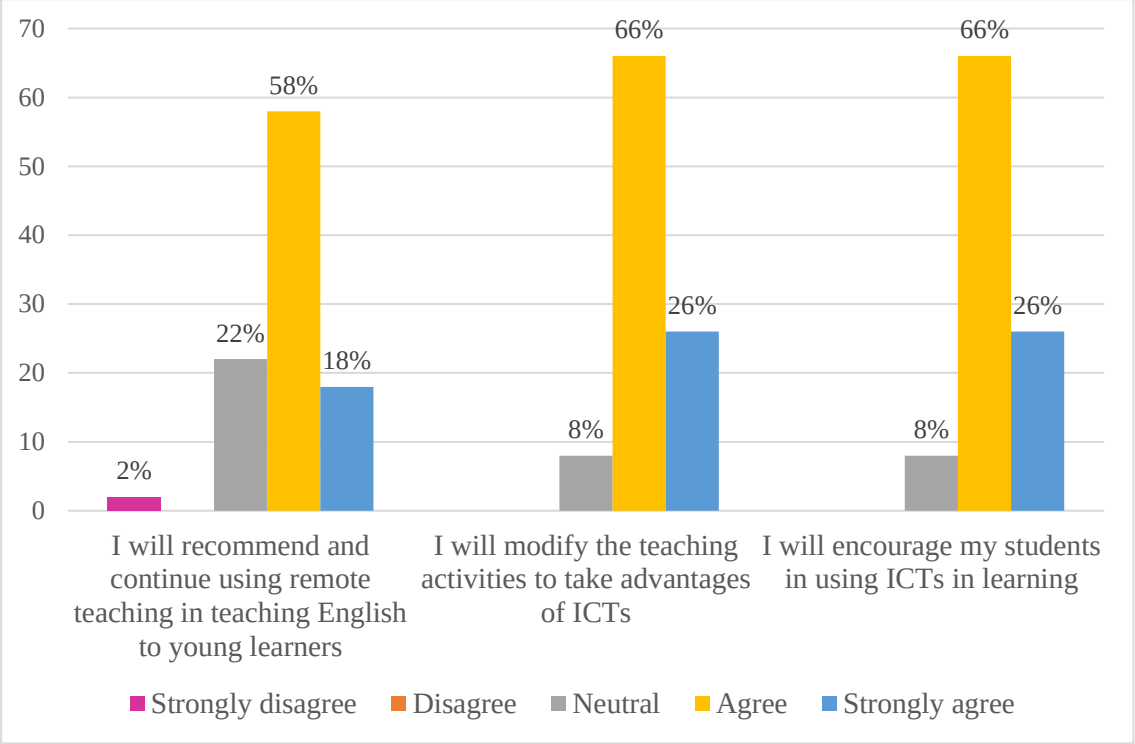

Figure 7. Teachers' intention in using remote teaching and ICTs

The results from figure 7 reveal that 76% of teachers had positive attitudes towards continuing remote teaching to young learners. 92% also agreed that they would modify the teaching activities to take advantage of ICTs, and they will encourage students to use ICTs in learning.

In the interviews, eight out of ten teachers showed their intentions to continue organizing remote teaching activities for primary school children after the Covid-19 pandemic. Two others said they would do remote teaching if their schools required them to do so (T2& T7). Most teachers agreed that a 35 minute-period in each class is too short, so it is a good idea to organize extra online classes to help students review knowledge and learn more advanced lessons. "*These lessons could be set up on weekends or before exams*" (T3 & T10). Four teachers (T4, T5, T6 &T8) confirmed that they would combine face-to-face teaching and remote teaching activities with helping students master the knowledge learned in school. Slower students could re-watch the lessons many times, and faster learners could acquire new knowledge from the extra lessons. Moreover, through short tests on Google Forms or language games, teachers can evaluate students' understanding so that they give feedback immediately. Understanding the benefits of remote teaching, all teachers agreed that they highly recommend this approach and are willing to share their knowledge and skills with other teachers.

It is encouraging to compare these findings with those of Rahayu and Wirza (2020) and Irene van der et al. (2020) when they found the high intention of teachers in implementing

technology in teaching after the pandemic. A possible explanation for this is teachers' awareness of the advantages of ICTs in teaching and learning.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Conclusion

Remote teaching is unavoidable in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic when school closures have happened massively in order to prevent the disease outbreak. This study strived to know how primary English teachers did to ensure students' learning continuity during the school lockdowns, the challenges they were facing and their views towards teaching English remotely to primary school students. The findings of the study are disclosed as follows.

Following the guidelines of the MOET and school management boards, teachers tried to choose ICT tools or platforms which were suitable for their students' circumstances to organize the remote teaching. Thanks to the free policy, Zoom Meeting, Zalo and YouTube were the most popular platforms that teachers used. Many teachers organized synchronous teaching activities via Zoom, and others made video lessons and posted on YouTube and Zalo for students' learning.

However, the sudden switch to remote teaching without any preparation or experience brought teachers plenteous obstacles. It is even more difficult when working with primary school students. One of the hardest problems was that primary school children need parents' involvement and assistance in their learning process. This also requires parents to provide their children with learning devices and support them with technology. Teachers are required to create more interactions and hands-on activities to keep students focused as well. In addition, the quick shift to remote teaching put lots of pressure on teachers when they had to perform new roles such as a video maker. Although many teachers admitted that they were good at the remote teaching tools, and they knew how to conduct an online class, remote teaching overloaded them and made them feel stressed when they tried to learn how to create an attractive video or a creative lesson. Some of them still felt unconfident in front of the camera. Furthermore, the problems that many students did not have computers, laptops and technical issues made their teaching practices ineffective. That may be the reason why they still believed face-to-face learning was more effective in comparison with remote learning.

When it comes to teachers' overall views on remote teaching to young learners, the majority of teachers expressed their positive attitudes towards this teaching paradigm. Despite the challenges, they believed that remote teaching was a good way to ensure students' learning progress and the school's curriculum, especially in the current situation of the Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers and students also had opportunities to be exposed to the abundant teaching and learning resources from the Internet. Through the asynchronous activities, students could learn at their own pace and time, so they understand the lessons better. Teachers revealed that they learnt new ICT tools and improved ICT skills after teaching remotely during the pandemic. Many intended to continue using the remote teaching approach after the pandemic as a way to give students extra lessons, even though their school does not require to do so.

In order to tackle the challenges in facilitating remote teaching, many suggestions are drawn in the study. Regarding the school's role, it's necessary to provide proper training for teachers

in using ICT tools and remote teaching pedagogies. Schools also need to upgrade ICT infrastructures and revise the curriculum to make it suitable for remote learning. Shortened lessons may help young students have time to comprehend the knowledge. Schools need to let teachers be flexible in choosing teaching materials, time, and place to organize their lessons so that they can meet their students' needs. In connection to the teacher's role, it is a must for them to master the ICT tools and platforms in order to create attractive lessons. It is suggested that teachers can combine different ICT tools, both synchronous and asynchronous approaches to make teaching activities more effective. Experienced teachers also need to share knowledge and skills with their colleagues. For the students who do not have conditions to join remote learning activities, teachers can make handouts for them, guide them to self-study, and review the lessons when they get to a face-to-face class. Additionally, parents play a crucial role in supporting their children's learning at home by giving them learning devices and assisting them with technology.

5.2. Limitations

Although this study may contribute to the current literature an insight into what happened during the school closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the EFL teachers' perspectives on remote teaching to primary school students, several limitations urge for further research on this topic. Firstly, the study was done with a small sample of teachers, so the results may not be generalizable to all academic settings, especially in the rural and remote areas where the conditions for remote learning are still inadequate. Secondly, the study mainly focused on teachers' views and practices without any investigations on those of other stakeholders such as students, parents, and schools. Finally, the effectiveness of remote teaching has not been thoroughly examined when the time-shifting to remote teaching was not long enough to evaluate. As a result, further studies can fulfill these limitations with investigations into perspectives of parents, students, and schools, broadening research to rural and remote areas, and evaluating the effectiveness of remote teaching activities.

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