Integrating social media applications into EFL students' classrooms: Iraqi EFL teachers' perceptions

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Along with the developments of the internet and digital technology, teachers can have better opportunities to apply technology to improve learning and teaching a second or foreign language. When opting for any kind of technology, educational authorities should consider different aspects of employing technological tools in the process of learning and teaching. This study set out to explore the attitudes of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers toward the educational use of *Skype* and its integration into the EFL classroom. The participants were five university professors who had experienced *Skype*-based instruction at Mustansiriya University in Iraq. A qualitative methodology, involving semi-structured interviews, was adopted for data collection. The findings indicated that there was a general positive tendency towards *Skype*-based instruction in higher education. Moreover, the results showed that teachers' beliefs, intentions, and perspectives on technology are significant factors which can determine how technology is integrated into the classroom. The teachers who had traditional views of language teaching and learning preferred blended instruction (in favor of more traditional methods). Those who held more constructivist conceptions of teaching and learning desired dominant technology-based EFL classrooms. The findings of this study may shed some light on how educational authorities can facilitate the integration of social media into EFL contexts.

Keywords: EFL Context; Iraq; *Skype*; Teachers' Attitudes; Technology Integration

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, technology has revolutionized the way teachers teach and learners learn since technology can improve the student's learning experience

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and enhance teachers' teaching practices (Glover et al., 2016; Rahman et al., 2019). In the field of education, technological tools have had great effects on technology integration (Sulaimani et al, 2017). The possibility of having access to a great variety of resources, which have been provided as a consequence of using the computer and the Internet, has led to the creation of new methods, strategies, and technological tools in the field of second and foreign language education. Information technology is expected (1) to revolutionize the outdated educational practices of the past and (2) to make students ready for what they are going to face in the 21st century. It has crested swift transformations and prepared the ground for sharing a rich source of information. This situation has caused some changes in educational contexts, especially in higher education, in all fields (Tang & Austin, 2009). One of these changes is considering social media as a significant tool for communication (Al-Rahmi & Othman, 2013).

The term 'social media' is broadly used to refer to technological systems which are connected to community and collaboration (Joosten, 2012). According to Carr and Hayes (2015), 'social media' is defined as "internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others" (p. 50). Social media (also known as social networking sites) including *Facebook*, *Skype*, *YouTube*, *Wiki*, *Twitter*, *MySpace*, *Flickr*, blogs, and *Delicious and Second Life*, are extensively utilized to make online social connections, gather and disseminate information, and learn via cooperation (Cao et al, 2013). Social media are frequently employed by many people the majority of whom are students (Dahlstrom et al., 2011). Their significance for students has motivated many researchers (e.g., Bate, 2010; Sholeh & Talebinejad, 2022) to explore the value and significance of social media in education, including its potential to create possibilities (a) for teachers to share their ideas with colleagues and students, (b) for teachers and students to collaborate. Social media have also made it easy for teachers to facilitate obtaining knowledge (Al-Khalifa & Garcia, 2013).

Although social media have been used as educational tools in many academic contexts (Al-Rahmi et al., 2014; Chugh & Ruhi, 2018; Peters et al., 2019) and the available studies conducted on social media use in education put emphasis on the pedagogical uses of particular channels and applications, there are still many teachers who cannot accept employing social media in the classroom (Selwyn, 2010). What seems to be disappointing for these teachers is the tension between possible educational uses of social media and the tempting distraction that the technology can have for students (Rosen et al., 2013).

Hew and Brush (2007) have recognized six types of obstacles to technology integration which include (1) resources, (2) knowledge and skills, (3) institutional features, (4) beliefs and perspectives, (5) assessment, and (6) subject culture. Some of these barriers cannot be controlled by teachers per se (e.g., institutional features and resources). However, some of these factors—for example, perspectives and attitudes, and knowledge and skills—are intrinsic to teachers and can be controlled or changed by them (Unger, 2012).

The existing literature indicates that teachers' readiness to employ technology is one of the most crucial steps toward technology integration (cf., Groth et al., 2007; Salmani Nodoushan, 2009, 2018a, 2020a). This has to do with teachers' perception and attitudes. As such, exploring teachers' perspectives and attitudes is necessary for any learning and teaching context because their opinions can be significantly effective in the learning and teaching process (Koç, 2014). Teachers' attitudes toward technology can predict the success of technology integration in an educational context (Gill & Dalgarno, 2008; Yusop, 2015).

Although the literature has shown that social media can be used as beneficial educational tools since they have the potential to improve the learning and teaching experience (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018; Hamid et al., 2015; Rahman et al., 2019; Smith, 2016), there are not many studies on teachers' perceptions of social media use in the learning environment, especially in the university context. As sad as it may seem, no study has sought to probe the kind of teaching teachers' prefer—at least in Iraq—when it comes to teaching in the age of technology.

Nevertheless, some applications and social networks are commonly employed by teachers and students in Iraq. One of the applications used in the field of education is synchronous computer-mediated communication tools such as *Skype*. Taking the points mentioned above into consideration, this study draws on social media, risk, and technology acceptance literature to explore the perspectives of higher education teachers on using social media and their impacts on the way teachers approach their teaching practices. The current study is, nevertheless, limited to the effects of *Skype* as an educational tool at Mustansiriya University in Iraq.

As Kember (1997) and Lee and Tsai (2011) state, teaching conceptions are the teachers' perceptions and reflections on their teaching experiences during the process of instruction (cf., Salmani Nodoushan, 2018b, 2020b, 2021). To recap, to the best of our knowledge, little research is available on whether the use of social media by Iraqi EFL teachers in higher education improves their understanding of teaching via *Skype*. To fill this gap, the present study

explores how Iraqi teachers' perceptions of *Skype*-based integration can make a difference in their classroom practices.

2. Background

Social media consist of social networking sites, applications, and mobile and smartphone technologies which can be optionally and simply controlled (Dahlstrom 2012). Due to their different features—including interactivity, openness, and sociability—social media can be considered as a significant driver of change in the process of learning and teaching (Manca & Ranieri, 2016). Their major roles in education are related to their potential for sharing ideas and improving cooperation between teachers and students (Al-Khalifa & Garcia, 2013). As Cao et al. (2013) have noted in this connection, pedagogical and technology adoption theories have provided the basis for social media use in learning and teaching contexts. Pedagogical theories support using this kind of technology in improving students' learning experiences (Taylor et al., 2012), and technology adoption theories explicate teachers' intention to adopt and use social media to be able to make improvements in the learning experience of their student (Giannakos & Vlamos, 2012).

As pedagogical tools, social media have the potential to engage students both within and outside the class. This may result in (a) an enhanced learning experience for students, (b) more opportunities for teachers to connect with their colleagues and students, and (c) better educational gains (Al-Bahrani et al., 2015; Redecker et al., 2010). If they are selected based on students' cognitive levels and their learning styles, social media can (a) transfer knowledge to others, (b) highlight different aspects of learning, and (c) provide learners with fast access to information. Consequently, social media—including *Skype*—can collectively be used as a new generation of information technology by students and teachers to achieve their educational goals (Mahdioun et al., 2019).

As a common type of social media used in education, *Skype* allows teachers to interact with learners in such a way as to provide opportunities for learners to receive comprehensible input necessary for second language acquisition (Milojković, 2019)—a lá Krashen (1994). Synchronous communication service in *Skype* can help learners to engage in meaningful activities and negotiate for meaning. This is crucial for learners, taking into consideration Long's interaction hypothesis (cf., Long, 1985) since these activities increase input comprehensibility and improve SLA (Milojković, 2019). Furthermore, according to Swain's (1995) comprehensible output hypothesis, the output produced by learners is significant since it (1) can improve fluency, (2) contributes to the awareness of language knowledge gaps, and (3) gives

learners appropriate opportunities to practice language forms (Milojković, 2019).

In a *Skype* class, immediate feedback and scaffolds can be provided by teachers for the learners. This can (a) make the process of learning easier for the learners (Bonk & Dennen, 2003), (b) personalize lessons to be appropriate for the learners' needs, (c) establish student-centered contexts, and (d) support active learning (Milojković, 2019). It also enables the instructor to arrange student-teacher interaction via feedback. Immediate provision of feedback provided through *Skype* creates a situation in which the learners can correct themselves and reinforce their learning (Chen et al., 2005).

Feedback in *Skype* is done in a personalized manner and through various textual, visual, and/or auditory means (Reinders & Hubbard, 2013). This service makes the teacher able to consider the learners' individual needs and manners while giving real-time feedback (Milojković, 2019). Moreover, in a *Skype* class, the teachers are enabled to employ a vast repository of potential online learning materials and manage the classroom by considering each learner's needs (Milojković, 2019). As Park and Bonk (2007) state, dynamic interaction is a key advantage of *Skype*. This feature helps teachers to provide students with feedback and scaffolding and assists them to motivate learners to improve their communication skills. As a result, a better learning context is provided for the learners concerning affective factors (Milojković, 2019).

The other advantage of a *Skype* class is that in such classrooms multimedia are accessible. The major reason for employing social media is that they offer multiple directions, formats, and communication channels that can eventually contribute to enhancing the student learning experience and educational outcomes (Cao et al., 2013). Multimedia instruction which is varied and has interactive nature can (a) make learning language skills—especially listening, speaking, and reading—enjoyable and engaging, and (b) improve vocabulary acquisition among L2 learners (Timpson, 1999). Moreover, multimedia instruction puts focus on learning styles and learner preferences, hence the learners can control the learning process better (Reinders & Hubbard, 2013).

One valuable benefit of synchronous interaction provided through *Skype* is that it multiplies student motivation and satisfaction (Cao et al., 2013), and this can positively affect the process of learning. In a *Skype* video call, the receiver's reaction to a message can be seen by the other participants. This interaction can increase learners' motivation (Hrastinski, 2006), enhance interpersonal connections between them, and engage learners in two-way synchronous discussions (Chou, 2002). A social media setting emphasizes dynamic vertical (teacher-student) and horizontal (student-student)

interactions. Active student learning, the student's satisfaction, and better learning gains are highlighted in this setting (Redecker et al., 2010).

Research has generally shown that social media offer more advantages in comparison to conventional methods (e.g., face-to-face communications and lectures) and contain new possibilities for creativity (Cao et al., 2013). The final significant point about *Skype* which may not seem to be noteworthy is that it logs calls and chats and records the collaboration which has occurred. This storage and retrieval of learning records can later be used to monitor the learning progress (Reinders & Hubbard, 2013).

During the past few years, many educators and researchers have explored the impacts of social media on learners' performance in educational contexts. Generally, research has shown that employing social media in a learning context improves learners' engagement in learning and their academic performance (Alshuaibi et al., 2018). As an example, Mahdioun et al. (2019) examined the effect of *Telegram* on graduate Iranian university students' academic engagement and performance. Their results showed a positive and significant relationship between using *Telegram* as an educational tool and the engagement of students. Furthermore, students engagement had a significant relationship with their academic performance. It served as a mediating variable in the relationship between the educational use of *Telegram* and the students' academic performance.

Although many studies have shown the positive impact of social media on learning and teaching, it is not an indication that social media and networks will positively affect students' learning in all contexts. There are studies (e.g., Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010) in the literature which have shown their negative impacts on students' academic performance—including their becoming addicted to social media (Mahdioun et al., 2019).

Numerous studies have been conducted in different locations to investigate the impacts of having a positive attitude toward using social media in education on (a) learning, (b) student participation, and (c) student interaction (e.g., Al-Rahmi & Othman, 2013; Cao et al., 2013; Gikas & Grant, 2013; May & Elder, 2018). In these studies, the researchers have investigated the use of social networks and social media websites and their applications where learners learned about their interesting topics (Hall & Smith, 2011).

Most of the studies conducted on perceptions and attitudes toward using social media (e.g. *Skype*) in higher education settings have considered students' views, but not those of teachers. That is, although there are many studies on exploring students' perspectives and attitudes toward social media or online instruction in various educational contexts (e.g., Allen et al., 2002; Chenoweth & Murday, 2003; Thurmond et al, 2002), research on teachers'

perceptions on this issue is not extensive. Rahman et al.'s (2019) work can be mentioned as an example of studies which examined students' attitudes toward social media. The study investigated students' perspectives on the use of social media in higher education and their effects on student satisfaction. The findings showed the positive effects of perceived usefulness of social media on learning and students' satisfaction levels. When students considered social media as a helpful educational tool, they were willing to employ it for learning, and their satisfaction of learning improved. Moreover, the findings indicated that the perceived risks of social media had discouraging effects on students, and that they preferred not to use such tools. If students felt social media were fraught with different risks, they did not show any tendency to employ social media for their own learning objectives.

Regarding teachers' attitudes toward online instruction, the limited available literature (e.g., Bijeikiené et al., 2011; Hampel & Hauck, 2004; Murday et al., 2008; Shin & Son, 2007) has shown teachers' general positive perspectives on implementing online instruction. In a recent study, Milojković (2019) investigated the attitudes and perceptions of 68 experienced online English language teachers who had experienced *Skype* instruction in Serbia. Based on their opinions, Milojković (2019) aimed to examine the potentials and drawbacks of using *Skype* in one-on-one English language classrooms. The participants in Milojković's study had great practical experiences with *Skype* classes and confirmed that *Skype* instruction was beneficial for teaching the English language. However, the participating teachers also indicated some limitations, including (a) the necessity of teacher's familiarity with student's cultural background and (b) the partial difficulty to develop multimedia materials.

In the 21st century, it is expected that teachers be familiar with appropriate ways to employ technology for effective learning and teaching purposes (Tweed, 2013). The important point for the effective use of technology in the classrooms is that teachers should have positive attitudes in this regard. Their self-efficacy beliefs about incorporating technology into the classrooms can predict their plans and intentions to employ technological tools in education (Wang et al., 2004). Moreover, teachers' perspectives on this issue are influential in students' learning. As such, researchers like Koç (2014) stated that paying attention to teachers' attitudes is vital to the improvement of learner performance and teaching practice (Utami & Palacios Hidalgo, 2020).

Generally, using any piece of modern technology effectively depends on its acceptance on the part of the individual user. The user's intentions and motivations affect technology use (Huffman & Huffman, 2012). In the classroom context, teachers' personal beliefs and perspectives play important roles in their decision to utilize technology (Sugar et al., 2004). As the existing

literature suggests, teachers' attitudes toward technology and using it in their classroom are as important as are the quantity and quality of technology used by students. Teachers' confidence to be successful in using technology and their desire and ability to integrate it in their classrooms—besides other factors such as knowledge, skills, and pedagogy—are significantly related to the effective integration of technology (Chen & Chang, 2006; Gialamas & Nikolopoulou, 2010; Han & Wang, 2010; Li & Ni, 2011). Dong (2018) also believes that an important obstacle for young language learners to learn a language through technology is that their teachers are not quite certain about its use in the classrooms.

All in all, the existing literature has addressed English language teachers' attitudes toward using social media. Nevertheless, there are very few comprehensive studies that have explored teachers' motivation to utilize social media in EFL classroom contexts at university level. This points to a gap in research on how university instructors might consider and perceive using social media technology in pedagogical contexts in higher education. To the best of our knowledge, there has been limited research involving EFL university students in the Iraqi context in relation to the implementation of *Skype*-based instruction in language classroom; little discussion about teachers' perceptions of the implementation of this type of social media in university classrooms exists. As such, the current study has brought the literature on the acceptance and risks of technology to bear on a qualitative investigation of *Skype*-based EFL instruction in universities in Iraq; it provides insights into language teachers' perspectives on the implementation of *Skype* instruction in EFL university courses in Iraq.

This paper, therefore, aims to evaluate the attitudes of five EFL teachers toward using *Skype* for teaching in the Iraqi context. To gain insight into how these teachers perceive the issue of technology-enhanced instruction in an era of globalization, the present study employs semi-structured interviews to obtain detailed accounts of teacher perceptions and motivation. The participating teachers have all experienced *Skype*-based instruction during two semesters. All in all, the study has sought to explore Iraqi EFL teachers' perspectives on the integration of *Skype* technology in language teaching. In this investigation, attempts have been made to clarify the factors that can either directly or indirectly affect *Skype* integration into language teaching practices. The following research question led the: What are the attitudes of Iraqi EFL teachers toward *Skype* integration into language teaching?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

This research focuses on Iraqi EFL teachers' perspectives on teaching via

Skype. To this end, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with five EFL teachers at Mustansiriya University in Iraq. In terms of participant selection, a convenience sample was used. The researcher sent e-mails to all of the five participating teachers and invited them to join the study. All of these teachers, who were familiar with the interviewer, were provided with detailed information about the aims of research, and they agreed to participate. They were then contacted by phone or email.

The interviews with the participants (1 female and 4 male teachers) were conducted between March and June 2020. Their age ranged from 32 to 49 years (Mean age: 40.4). The length of their teaching experience varied between 10 to 21 years. Three teachers were teaching English just in the university, and two were teaching both in the university and in language institutes. Table 1 presents the demographic details of the participants; to guarantee complete confidentiality, symbols T1 to T5 have been used instead of the participating teachers' real names.

Table 1
Demographic Details of the Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Years of teaching English	Education
T1	Male	32	10	M.A.
T2	Female	39	13	PhD
T3	Male	40	15	PhD candidate
T4	Male	42	17	PhD candidate
T5	Male	49	21	PhD

The researcher followed ethics approval based upon informed consent procedures and informed the participants (a) that they are invited to participate voluntarily and (b) that they could withdraw at any time they liked. They were also assured that their recorded information would remain strictly confidential.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

Given the complex nature of the research question, a qualitative approach was adopted for this study. Each participant had one face-to-face or virtual 70- to a 90-minute semi-structured interview covering the research questions. The interviews revolved around (a) the teachers' conceptions of teaching, (b) the way these conceptions could affect their teaching practices, and (c) their feelings, hopes, and desires related to teaching English via social media. To check the clarity of the interview questions, they were initially piloted with one language teacher from the target population. This resulted in some modifications in the wordings of the interview questions—aimed to resolve

all ambiguities. To be sure about the validity of the interview, the researcher asked for the critical judgments of three experts. Besides, the reliability and response consistency were enhanced by asking similar questions in different forms during the interview.

The participants were asked whether they preferred to be interviewed in English or Arabic; all of them preferred English. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis. They took place individually and were conducted either face-to-face in a quiet room at the university venue or virtually via *Skype*. The researcher not only asked a set of prepared questions but also paid attention to the participants' questions and comments. The interviewees were allowed to add their comments freely during the interviews. Eventually, original transcripts of the interviews were sent to the interviewees for member checking and inclusion of further possible comments.

Data analysis started during the interview process via the researcher' continuing reflection on analytical points in the interviewees' responses. The researcher used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The scripts were coded for units of meaning. Coding allowed the researcher to recognize the key categories. The researcher initially recognized and analyzed recurring themes across individual interviews. Some relevant themes emerged out of the data. During the interview process, the themes were identified through reflecting on the interviewees' recurrent accounts in what they said. These themes were refined through a repeated reading and coding process during data analysis. The researcher conducted data analysis independently and discussed the findings collectively until consensus was reached. The identified major themes—including (a) traditional-oriented teaching beliefs and (b) preference for blended instruction and constructivist teaching beliefs, and (c) preference for dominant technology-based instruction—were also shared with the participants (1) to validate the data analyses and (2) to get more insights from them via sharing comments on the interpretation of the data. Some examples of the teachers' statements have been included in the results section below.

The interviewer—being a university professor—was considered as an insider by the participants, and this was effective because they could share their perspectives and experiences easily. During the interview, each of the participants was regarded as an active participant (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003) whose comments could be effective for the betterment of the language education system.

The interviewer facilitated the semi-structured interviews with minimum personal interjections to ensure that the interviewees could express their opinions in a relaxing situation. Throughout the process of interview, new

meanings were extracted from the participants' stories as a result of the cooperation between the interviewer and interviewees (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Hence, the interviewer was not just a bystander who recorded responses but was greatly effective in the process of the interview when he listened and responded in a way to direct and redirect responses by involving himself in the process of the interview (Talmy, 2011).

4. Results and discussion

Individual interviews were conducted with the participating teachers to elicit their experiences of *Skype*-based instruction in EFL classrooms in Iraq. The collected data afforded insights into the Iraqi EFL teachers' beliefs about this type of instruction. Responses to the research question of the study are presented below in accordance with the two main themes found in the data: (1) traditional teaching beliefs and preference for blended instruction, and (2) constructivist teaching beliefs and preference for dominant technology-based instruction.

In their responses to the question of what they generally thought of *Skype* integration into EFL instruction, the interviewees indicated that in the language education system of Iraq, the grammar-translation method (GTM) and the audio-lingual method (ALM) are the two main methods often used for teaching, and that language classrooms in Iraq are not communication-based. Hence, even those learners who have been learning for many years cannot use English for communicative purposes properly. The interviewees believed that GTM and ALM are considered to be traditional ways of teaching. On the one hand, in these methods the learners do not improve in their learning professionally. On the other hand, these methods do not match the communication-based frameworks of current educational technologies.

Although all of the interviewees were completely aware that the often-used EFL teaching methods in Iraq could not satisfy their desires to educate learners in the best possible way, some of them still believed that it is still not the right time to completely rely on technology—especially on social media— for teaching. Excerpt 1 by T4 expresses this point.

Excerpt 1: Skype, an instrument for transferring knowledge

> I know technology has made it easy for instructors to teach. But, I cannot have complete trust in it. I think learners are used to having a teacher. The teacher should help them in all of the educational aspects. Can you have such an expectation from a *Skype* class? Based on my two-semester long experience of teaching with *Skype*, I can say that *Skype* can just help language teachers to transfer their knowledge more widely, I mean at any time.

T4's response in Excerpt 1 indicates that *Skype* has the affordance to extend teaching hours. As he stated, "*Skype* could help me to design activities for students so that they could practice what they had learned inside the class." As T4 expressed, teachers can use this affordance of *Skype* to overcome the limited teaching hours available.

T5, the oldest interviewee, had the first experience of using *Skype* in teaching. He believed that *Skype* helped him to check the progress of learning among his students much better in comparison to the situation where he did not have any other way to communicate with his students except inside the classroom. In his view, this capability of *Skype* was influential in the improvement of the students. Here is what he said.

Excerpt 2: Skype, a useful instrument to check the learners' progress

> Although I do not consider *Skype*, or any other kind of educational technology, to be reliable for teaching, I think *Skype* is a helpful application for language teachers to check the learners' progress from this week to another week. This checking helped me to know their problems in my course. The next session they came to the class completely ready. This was the main positive point of *Skype* for me.

As T5 stated, *Skype* allowed him to answer the students' questions outside the class. In his view, this provided him with an opportunity to attract the students to study more since they knew the teacher would check on them outside the class. In fact, for T5, the teaching process was not restricted to the face-to-face classroom context. Although T5 referred to one very positive advantage of using *Skype* for teachers, he did not consider it as the only instrument to be used for holding a classroom. T5 saw *Skype* as an important tool for knowledge transmission outside the class. As he stated, if he did not have any access to *Skype*, he could not answer many of his students' questions and had to answer them inside the class the next session. *Skype* could assist him in saving time for the next session.

Both T4 and T5 believed that *Skype* is a technological aid in their teaching. In their view, this visual-verbal technology helped them receive feedback from their students. As T5 expressed, "through visual and verbal facilities of *Skype*, which could simulate a face-to-face class, we could receive the students' feedback regarding what they had learned from this session and become aware of the points they had not learned before the next session." T4, who continuously stated that he did not believe in the complete technology-based language classroom, admitted that the different affordances of *Skype*, especially its visual and verbal capacities, were technological aids which

helped him to have an occasional mini-session with his students. This point was reflected in Excerpt 3 from T4's responses in the interview.

Excerpt 3: Skype, a technological aid

> After one session when I had taught a very challenging issue, one of my students called me and asked some questions which were the questions of other students too. I answered these questions via *Skype*. I enjoyed the teaching media provided by this technology at that moment. *Skype* provides an asynchronous virtual environment through which language teachers can share the contents needed by the learners outside the class.

Both T4 and T5 were language teachers who still used traditional ways of language teaching (e.g., GTM and ALM). It was the first time they were using a social networking site for teaching. Although they had seen the advantages of using *Skype* in their teaching, they believed that in an EFL context like Iraq the face-to-face classroom is what is strongly emphasized, and that even the highest level of technology cannot replace the face-to-face environment of teaching. In their view, although *Skype* could provide opportunities for more practice with the students, the preferred system of education for them was a blended one. They highlighted that the major portion of this blended instruction should be done in the traditional face-to-face classroom through traditional ways of teaching. *Skype* could serve as a supplementary classroom through which they could share relevant content with their students.

As Tsai and Tsai (2018) state, traditional conceptions of teaching reflect teacher-centered views, and the teachers who hold these views consider technology integration into the classroom as a channel for transferring information. In line with Tsai and Tsai's research (2018), the present study also indicated that teachers with traditional views—e.g., belief in a teacher-centered class—saw *Skype* for two purposes: (1) knowledge transmission, and (2) technology support. For these teachers, *Skype* was aligned with the goals of the curriculum.

T4 and T5's preference for blended instruction is commensurate with previous studies on teachers' perspectives on technology integration (Bijeikiené et al., 2011; Dashtestani, 2014; Hampel & Hauck, 2004; Murday et al, 2008). As mentioned before, the quality of teaching with technology is contingent on accepting it. Traditional conceptions an attitudes on the part of teachers are an obstacle to complete reliance on technological tools in the classroom. In this study, T4 and T5 thought that since *Skype* and technology in general cannot have all the good qualities of a face-to-face teaching context, technology should be used along with the regular face-to-face classroom.

Nevertheless, some teachers had constructivist teaching beliefs and preferences for dominant technology-based instruction. In contrast to T4 and T5, who held traditional conceptions of teaching, other teachers—that is, T1, T2, and T3—had constructivist-oriented views and believed that in the current technological world, the potential of educational technology, especially the tools which can create interaction, should be used at the utmost level. They stated that given the potential advantages of technology in learning such as flexibility of scheduling and saving time and money, a need for online teaching has become unavoidable.

T1, the youngest interviewee, believed that, through *Skype*, he had provided a stress-free environment. He thought that this application helped him to facilitate student learning. This was reflected in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 4: Skype, a facilitator of learning

> When I am teaching a complex issue inside the class and feel the students have problems with it, I turn to technology. During these two semesters, *Skype* was really helpful at these moments. I shared different files with students inside and outside the class to facilitate their learning of difficult issues. We even *Skyped* with native speakers inside the class. This brought the language to life and created a motivating and instructive learning context for all of them. I feel all of my students completely understood what I taught.

As T1 mentioned, *Skype* served as a facilitator in his class. He stated that through this application he could "improve the students' learning and make them more interested in learning." T2 had a similar experience.

Excerpt 5: Skype, a facilitator for making students active

> *Skype* helped me in making even passive students active inside and outside the class. This was their first experience of using an interaction-based application for language learning. I asked them to do activities which had to be shared with me and classmates through *Skype*. In this way, they could understand their own mistakes and others' and collaborated to solve the problems. They became teachers helping their classmates. Eventually, this process facilitated their learning of abstract or difficult issues.

As T2's response shows, *Skype,* in addition to being a facilitator of student learning, had another important role in her classroom. In her view, *Skype* had made the students so active that they acted as teachers for their classmates.

Another role considered for *Skype* by the interviewees was 'supporting student learning'. This point was mentioned by T3 who had previously experienced *Skype*-based instruction and had more online teaching experience in comparison to the other interviewees. He stated that this application could support the students' learning and this was not possible through a textbook.

Excerpt 6: Skype, a supporter of student learning

> Through *Skype*, not only could I create an interesting environment for all of my students inside the class, but also I could involve them in learning activities which helped them delve deeply into the contents. For example, to become familiar with different cultures, they *Skype*d an English speaker in another country to learn about the nonverbal aspects of the English language, e.g., gestures used by English speakers in the USA.

The points mentioned by T1 are the highest level of assistance which can be provided by an application like *Skype* in the language classroom. As it was pointed out, this teacher had more online teaching experience and believed that "traditional methods of language teaching are obsolete now. It is time for technology integration, especially the interaction-based ones, to provide more learning support." Concerning the final role of *Skype*, supporting students' learning, T3 said:

Excerpt 7: Skype, services directed toward supporting student learning

> I praise *Skype* since it has the potential to engage learners in real-life information exchange. Some other features, such as the availability of multimedia materials and a vast repository of teaching resources and lesson materials, the possibility of having one-on-one classes and private tutoring, the potential of creating a relaxing environment for learners since it can lower tension among students, are directed toward supporting the students' learning. Based on my experience of two-semester-long *Skype* classes, I can say that to gain the maximum level of support for students' learning through *Skype*, the teacher should preserve a balance between an enjoyable learning environment and a strict process of learning.

Needless to say, teachers with constructivist conceptions believe in student-centered classrooms and see using technology in the classroom as a way to assist students in constructing knowledge (Tsai & Tsai, 2018). The points mentioned by the interviewees in this study also reflected their interest in

holding a student-centered class where the students' learning is facilitated and supported through *Skype*. These conceptions have positive effects on enhancing all of the teachers' criteria of technology integration in the classroom (Tsai & Tsai, 2018). Generally, all of the five teachers who participated in this study showed their agreement on using *Skype* as an educational technology; since they held different conceptions of teaching, however, their views on technology integration differed. The findings obtained in this study which showed teachers' (complete or partial) acceptance of *Skype* are partly consistent with previous studies on teachers' perspectives on technology integration into teaching (e.g., Dashtestani, 2014; Milojković, 2019; Murday et al., 2008).

Two interviewees in this study preferred blended teaching over complete online teaching. This preference may indicate that these teachers consider regular face-to-face instruction to be more interactive in comparison to online instruction. This results from their lack of experience with online instruction (Dashtestani, 2014). To overcome the lack of interactivity in online classrooms, some studies have shown that web conferencing tools such as *Skype* or *Go to Meeting* have the potential to enhance interactions among students and teachers (Mok & Li, 2007).

To include technology-dominant instruction in the EFL system of Iraq, long-term goals should be set. To this end, educational authorities should have positive attitudes toward online instruction. Programs should be implemented to pave the way for encouraging instructors to integrate online technologies into their teaching practices. Moreover, students should also adopt positive views to incorporating technology into the process of learning (Jones, 2001). What is crucial is that educational authorities must take the students' and teachers' needs and preferences into account and strive to meet their needs to have the best educational system.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the participating EFL teachers' perspectives on incorporating *Skype* into EFL classrooms. The findings indicated that the five EFL interviewees had two different conceptions of teaching: (1) traditional-oriented, and (2) constructivist-oriented. These views affected the types of instruction they preferred. Teachers with traditional-oriented conceptions desired blended instruction, and those with constructivist views preferred complete technology-based instruction. Moreover, the findings showed that the participating teachers' perceptions affected how they used *Skype* in their classrooms. Traditional-oriented teachers considered *Skype* as a tool to transfer knowledge and a technology support application, and constructivist teachers saw *Skype* as a facilitator and supporter of student learning.

Considering the point that traditional approaches are still used widely in the educational system of Iraq, to create some changes in this system and motivate both teachers and students to rely on technology and think positively about technology integration in their classrooms, much energy and time are needed. Implementing online instruction will soon be inevitable, and an educational system that cannot accept adjustments may become unsuccessful. The Successful use of technology in education depends on the positive perspectives of the teachers (Jones, 2001). Since teachers have key roles in the educational system, and they are the only agents who can motivate students to employ educational technology, their positive attitudes toward online instruction can make technology integration in the process of teaching and learning easy.

Currently, it seems that educational authorities have not paid much attention to improving online education in the EFL context of Iraq. All educational stakeholders in Iraq should set realistic goals and do their best to make adjustments to the system according to the technology improvements, and should also provide the prerequisites to this end. One of the primary requirements is to convince teachers that such changes are crucial in the educational system. Then, they should strive to enhance both the quantity and quality of facilities for online instruction so that teachers and students have enough motivation to have this type of instruction. In other words, educational authorities should take measures to improve both teachers' motivation to implement online instruction and the efficiency of this type of instruction. To include the skills necessary for online education in mainstream teacher education programs is an influential strategy aimed to develop teachers' confidence and their online skills (Hubbard, 2008).

As the first research on exploring Iraqi EFL teachers' perspectives on *Skype* integration in the classroom after they had experienced it, the present study has some shortcomings. The number of participants in this study was five which precludes the generalization of the results. Moreover, the study was conducted in Iraq, hence the results are restricted to an Iraqi sample in the university context. Further research in other countries or even other educational contexts within Iraq is necessary. In the present study, the students' attitudes toward integrating *Skype* into the EFL classroom were not at stake. Since learners are the other key agents in the classroom, investigating their perspectives is an issue worthy of great attention on the part of future researchers.

The present study did not explore the attitudes of Iraqi EFL authorities either. This is an issue which can be considered for future research. Their attitudes can shed some light on recognizing the challenges of technology integration in the educational system of Iraq. The present study was also qualitative. The

future researcher can develop a valid questionnaire or use the available valid ones and administer the questionnaire to a large number of participants. Another avenue for further research is to examine the students' improvement in language learning through *Skype*-based instruction or to consider its long-term effects. All in all, it should be restated that there is no doubt that the swift improvement of technology in the 21st century will result in a situation in which instruction with technological tools is inevitable (Hwang & Tsai, 2011). Hence, educational authorities, course designers, teachers, and even learners are invited to develop more advanced beliefs and perspectives, such as the constructivist conceptions that three of the participants held in this study.

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All of the co-authors of this paper confirm that they have discussed and conceived the article together. In addition to being involved in the initial conception of the topic for his PhD dissertation, Ali Hasan Dirjal adapted the dissertation—supervised by Dr Zargham Ghabanchi and read by Dr Behzad Ghonsooly—into the present paper. Dr Ghabanchi and Dr Ghonsooly were also involved in the initial conception of the topic and edited the paper.

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