



Exploring the Components of Online Classroom Observation: insights from document analysis and EFL teacher observers' perspectives

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Abstract

To identify the effectiveness of online observation for teaching, this study explored teachers' conceptions of online classroom observation, focusing on the key components, instructional design considerations, and delivery strategies in virtual teaching environments. More particularly, in this multi-method qualitative research design study, the researchers did document analysis of a number of available classroom observation sheets to derive some themes and sub-themes regarding the components of online classroom observation. Subsequently, based on the derived themes, semi-structured interview items were composed. Through purposive sampling, eight Iranian experienced online classroom observers were selected to be interviewed. Using MAXQDA to do content and thematic analysis, the researchers found the eight components of *instructional design and delivery*, *technology integration*, *student engagement and interaction*, *professional development and support*, *feedback provision*, *assessment of students' learning and achievement*, *inclusive practices*, and *instructor presence and support* in the data. Moreover, it was found that the integration of technology was highlighted to optimize observation experiences, student engagement, and instructional support. These findings have implications for professional development programs, re-evaluation of assessment practices, instructor presence, and technology integration in online learning contexts, all of which are crucial for equipping EFL instructors with the skills and knowledge necessary for effective online teaching.

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Introduction

Classroom observation is one of the pivotal ways that can be used in educational systems to monitor and evaluate the classroom performance of teachers and learning of students with the aim of finding and suggesting ways to enhance teachers' instructional effectiveness (Kim et al., 2024). Previous scholars have admitted the importance of teachers' being observed in classroom as it can ameliorate teachers' professional development, pedagogical effectiveness, and teaching quality (Allright, 1988; Barrogo, 2020; Klette, 2023). Therefore, training about classroom observation can be considered an important element of both pre-service and in-service teacher training courses. As Gebhard (1999) notes, observation is a "non-judgmental" description of what occurs in a classroom that may be evaluated and interpreted (p.35). Typically, as the observer is engaged in observing the performance of the teacher, he/she documents some notes or complete an observation sheet about the teacher's classroom activities and practices (Maingay, 1988; Žefran & Pirih, 2021).

Despite the significance of classroom observation in general, researchers and practitioners have mainly focused on its investigation and implementation in face-to-face classes, and online classroom observation has been studied and practiced much less. One potential reason for this negligence may be the online mode of learning and teaching had itself received little welcome and use before the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019. Since the spread of Covid-19, significant changes happened to the nature of teaching and learning. In response to this emergency, most classes shifted online (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021; Rusmiati et al., 2020). This crisis-prompted change in the mode of education from physical to virtual in recent years have increased teachers' and students' tendency to participate in online classes (Khazaenezhad & Yasari Zare, 2024). Even today that the pandemic is over, many teachers and learners have continued using online forms of communication and instruction. Although online and face-to-face classes each have some distinct features, the role of teacher quality performance matters equally in both modes of education. Therefore, online classroom observation is as much important as it is to ensure teacher effectiveness in in-person classes.

According to Dyke et al. (2008), online course observation is a relatively new concept and refers to the act of observing a teacher's performance in an online learning environment where the instructor, observer, and learners are all present. Recent developments in online classroom observation research have revealed its remarkably positive effects on developing educational stakeholders' (particularly teachers') understanding of teaching and learning processes (Fischer & Neumann, 2012; Hiebert et al., 2003, Janík & Seidel, 2009). The act of classroom observation is typically accompanied by observation sheets that the observer completes during or after observing a class of a teacher. The sheet allows the observer to evaluate the observed teacher across different classroom performance criteria (Sheal, 1989; Williams, 1989). A rich observation of classroom demands the observer to apply a thorough framework of such criteria.

There exist frameworks for enacting classroom observation in EFL classes, designed based on empirical evidence mainly, if not solely, gathered by previous researchers from face-to-face instructional settings (e.g., Akbari & Ghafar Samar, 2010; Devos, 2014). The few recent attempts to construct frameworks and criteria for observing online classes have been mainly

done in non-L2 education contexts (e.g., Horvitz et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2024; Simbulan, 2021). Additionally, the study of Žefran and Pirih (2021) which attempted to develop a model guiding observation of online classes run for young EFL learners was conducted in a cultural context different from that of the present study. Although there may be some similarities among various frameworks developed worldwide, these frameworks are usually designed based on an understanding of the particularities, needs, circumstances, and rules of a specific cultural and national context of instruction. Thus, existing context-specific frameworks cannot be blindly adopted for use in another country or context.

Since there has been a less comprehensive framework identifying the components of EFL online classroom observation in Iran, in this qualitative research endeavor, the researchers adopted document analysis and semi-structured interview instruments to respectively scrutinize existing classroom observation sheets employed in different private language institutes in Iran and explore views of a group of expert Iranian online classroom observers with the aim of identifying the components underlying the online classroom observation framework in the Iranian virtual EFL instructional context.

Literature Review

Classroom Observation: Theoretical and Empirical Backgrounds

Conducting live classroom observations is of high significance in terms of supervisory work in educational systems, and classroom observation has been used as a prominent assessment, monitoring, and evaluation tool in many educational contexts worldwide (O’Leary et al., 2023). Through this tool, observers and institutions can help identify teachers’ strengths and weaknesses and consequently result in recommending strategies to ameliorate teachers’ professional quality and practice (Tarusha & Bushi, 2024). Classroom observation involves monitoring specific cases in the classroom (Wajnryb, 1992). The main responsibility of classroom observers is to sit in the class and evaluate the performance of the teacher in class against the desired and targeted objectives of the course (Wallace, 1991). The observer engaged in documenting pedagogical procedures and practices to evaluate what contents are chosen for teaching and how they are organized and taught in the classroom (Spada, 2019).

Based on their evaluations of teacher performance, classroom observers can provide constructive feedback to teachers about how to enhance their pedagogical practice and more effectively interact with students or to make judgements about students (Acheson, 2003). Classroom observations are frequently complemented by conversations; as a result, when incorporated into the larger framework of teaching practice, they can serve a significant role in teacher development (Reños & Pontillas, 2024). The discussion sessions accompanying observation sessions are typically favorably regarded by teachers and focus on sharing information and allowing the EFL teachers to contribute to their own personal development (Glickman et al., 2009). The findings of Barrogo (2020) also supported that employment of a standardized classroom observation instrument can assist in assessment of teachers’ performance and making plans for teachers’ professional preparation and enhancement.

Furthermore, studies on remote classroom observation or observation of online classes has begun to draw the attention of educational researchers mainly after the Covid-19 outbreak (e.g.,

Khazaeenezhad & Yasari Zare, 2024; McLean et al., 2024). For instance, in a study conducted in an online language education setting, Inceçay and Dikilitas (2022) conducted a collective case study to examine how an online peer observation treatment impacted six English language instructors' pedagogical practices. Thematic analysis of experience sharing day colloquiums, pre- and post-observation meeting recordings, and reflective diaries revealed the effectiveness of the intervention as it promoted the teachers to engage in telecollaboration, carefully inspecting their virtual classes, find solutions to their instructional problems, test the solutions in their actual classes, and reflect on what happens in their class as a whole.

Course observation scales and measures typically consist of various components designed to assess different aspects of teaching (Fish & Dane, 2000). Having reviewed the existing studies in the domain of (online) classroom observation in both L2 and non-L2 education contexts (e.g., Bell et al., 2019; Dobbelaer, 2019; Horvitz et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2024; Marte & Quines, 2023; PAASCU, 2021; Simbulan, 2021; Taghizadeh & Zafarpour, 2022; Žefran & Pirih, 2021), the present study researchers arrived at some components guiding the design of various classroom observation frameworks in different educational contexts: 1. *Lesson Content*: This component evaluates the relevance, organization, and clarity of the lesson content presented by the instructor. It assesses whether the content aligns with learning objectives and is effectively communicated to students. 2. *Instructional Strategies*: This component focuses on the instructional techniques used by the instructor to engage students, promote active learning, and facilitate understanding. It may include strategies such as questioning techniques, use of multimedia resources, and collaborative activities. 3. *Classroom Management*: This component evaluates the instructor's ability to create a positive learning environment, manage student behavior, and promote a sense of inclusivity and respect in the classroom. 4. *Assessment and Feedback*: This component assesses how the instructor evaluates student learning, provides constructive feedback, and supports student progress. It includes aspects such as the variety of assessment methods used and the quality of feedback provided to students. 5. *Engagement and Interaction*: This component examines the level of student engagement and interaction in the classroom. It assesses the opportunities for student participation, group work, and interaction with the instructor. 6. *Differentiation and Inclusivity*: This component focuses on the instructor's ability to differentiate instruction to meet the diverse needs of students and create an inclusive learning environment that supports all learners. 7. *Use of Technology*: This component evaluates the integration of technology in teaching and learning. It assesses how effectively the instructor incorporates technology tools and resources to enhance instruction and student engagement. 8. *Professionalism and Communication*: This component examines the instructor's professionalism, communication skills, and rapport with students. It includes factors such as punctuality, preparedness, communication clarity, and responsiveness to student inquiries.

Although review of the literature presented above revealed some shared components among the existing classroom observation models and scales, as Horvitz et al. (2024) posit, there is a shortage of comprehensive models of classroom observation components specifically designed for use in online classes. Furthermore, as Bell et al. (2019) note, observation systems vary remarkably, and appropriate decisions need to be made about which one to use in order to meet the demands and conditions of an observation situation. Therefore, as a well-established,

evidence-based framework for online classroom observation in the Iranian EFL context was required, the present study attempted to explore the essential complements of such a framework. To achieve this objective, the researchers drew on document analysis and interview in order to respectively analyze the existing observation sheets employed in some private language institutes in Iran and unravel the perspectives of a group of expert classroom observers in this instructional context. To this respect, the following research question was put forward in this study:

RQ: What are the essential components of an online classroom observation framework developed for use in the Iranian EFL instructional context?

Methodology

Research Design

A multi-method qualitative research design was deployed, embodying the integration of document analysis and interview. This design exploits multiple methods or perspectives (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), significantly enhancing the depth and richness of the researcher's understanding of a topic and offering a more nuanced perspective compared to a single-method research design (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

More specifically, this research unfolded in two distinct phases. The first phase involved a thorough document analysis of six classroom observation sheets used in private language institutes in Iran. The researchers meticulously examined each sheet to derive the shared components underlying them. Findings of this phase helped the present study researchers to identify commonalities among the observation scales used in the Iranian context and design interview items for use in the second phase of the study. The aim of the second phase was to unravel to what extent the components generated from the analysis of the mentioned sheets were reflected in the Iranian expert classroom observers' perspectives interviewed at this phase.

Participants

The participants were eight experienced EFL teachers who were actively involved in observing online and in-person classes in various institutes in Iran. In line with criterion sampling, they were chosen based on their expertise regarding the phenomenon under investigation in this research (i.e., online classroom observation) and their willingness to participate. More specifically, the participant inclusion criteria included: (1) having a minimum of five years of EFL teaching experience, (2) having received formal training on classroom observation, (3) having sufficient experience of observing online classes, (4) being familiar with online teaching platforms, (5) having the experience of doing research undertaking in the domain of online education. The demographic information of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic background of the participants

Demographic Information	Frequency
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	5
Male	3
<i>Age</i>	
34-40	5

40-45	2
+45	1
Major	
TEFL	4
English Translation	3
English Literature	1
Non-TEFL	1
Years of teaching experience	
7-10	2
10-15	4
+15	2
Years of classroom observation experience	
0-5	6
5-10	2
Level of Education	
M.A	5
PhD	3

As shown in Table 1, the sample showed diversity in terms of age (ranging from 34 to 56), gender (both male, 37.5%, and female, 62.5%), educational background (i.e., level and major), and years of experience (i.e., teaching and classroom observation).

Instruments

Document Analysis

Documents are potential sources for analysis and are frequently used as a form of data in qualitative research inquiries (Patton, 2015). In this study, for doing document analysis, the researchers gathered and scrutinized six classroom observation sheets employed in private language institutes in Iran [names of the institutes are not mentioned for the sake of confidentiality and ethical considerations]. The researchers used convenience method of sampling to select these institutes and chose them as they agreed to share their observation sheets with them. As these sheets are considered as private documents for any institutes, their willingness to share and their permission is essential to be used in the study. These sheets were used by the targeted institutes' supervisors and teachers to observe teachers' classes of adult EFL learners. Appendix A illustrate these sheets.

Semi-Structured Interview

In this research, a detailed semi-structured interview was conducted with eight classroom observers one by one. The construction of the interview items was guided by the results of document analysis performed at the first phase of the study (Appendix B). The interview sessions were held with the aim of eliciting the participants' perspectives toward the essential components of the online observation process suitable to be applied in the Iranian virtual EFL instructional context.

To ensure content validity of the interview items, three expert classroom observers evaluated the items regarding relevance and clarity using a scale of 1 to 4 (i.e., for clarity: (1) *not clear*; (2) *item needs some revision*; (3) *clear but needs minor revision*; (4) *very clear*; and for relevance: (1) *not relevant*; (2) *item needs some revision*; (3) *relevant but needs some minor*

revision; (4) very relevant). The content validity index (CVI) was calculated through dividing the number of experts who evaluated the item as clear or relevant (rating 3 or 4) by the total number of experts. CVI values range from 0 to 1: A value greater than 0.79 indicates that the item is clear or relevant. When the CVI value is between .70 and .79, the item requires revision, and when the CVI value is smaller than .70, it is better to exclude the item (Rodrigues et al., 2017). As all the three experts gave a rating of 3 or 4 to the twenty questions of the interview, the calculated content validity indices for each item were found to be 100%, showing that the items were clear and relevant, and thus, could be maintained.

Data Collection Procedure

Each interview took about 30 to 45 minutes; some of them were held face-to-face while some others were online, using Google Meet and Skype platforms. The sessions were recorded using a voice recorder and were subsequently transcribed in Microsoft Word. Before collecting any data, the researchers explained the rationale of the study, the phenomenon under investigation (i.e., online classroom observation in Iran), and the rights of the interviewees to withdraw at any stage of interview to the potential participants. Furthermore, the researchers obtained the consent of the participants about their voice being recorded and anonymous report of their data in this study.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data of this study was done in MAXQDA 2024. The two sets of data (i.e., six observation sheets and eight interview transcripts) were analyzed separately.

At the first stage, the documents were analyzed inductively. In other words, the researchers created open codes after reading the observation sheets carefully several times. This process resulted in the creation of 41 code units, with an aggregate code frequency of 190. Next, the analyst put those codes which were pertinent regarding their content under a separate sub-theme or category. This resulted in the creation of six sub-themes in total (see Table 2 and Figure 3). Trustworthiness of the generated codes and categories was ensured as the researchers, who completely scrutinized the data analysis process and outcomes against the six observation sheets, confirmed their accuracy. As another strategy to ensure credibility of these findings, the researchers asked two expert online classroom observers with adequate qualitative research literacy and experience to check alignment of the obtained codes and categories with the observation sheets. They both agreed with all created codes and categories.

At the second stage, the interview transcripts were analyzed through an interactive approach involving both deductive and inductive content analyses. In other words, since the interview items reflected the sub-themes attained from analysis of the six observation sheets (Table 2), the analyst coded the interview data based on them (i.e., deductive). Nevertheless, to capture any new insights raised by the interviewees, she also created new codes (i.e., inductive) if she could not find any pertinent code for a piece of interview data from Table 2. As Table 3 and Figure 4 present, although the interview findings overlap in some aspects with the findings of document analysis, they also reveal some novel aspects from the interviewees' perspectives which had not been taken into consideration in the observation sheets designed and used in the six targeted institutes.

Careful reading of the interview transcripts by the researchers resulted in the generation of eight code units, with an aggregate code frequency of 509. Member checking was applied to ensure credibility of these findings as two of the interviewees were asked to check the obtained codes against the eight interview transcripts. Both participants confirmed that the findings well reflected all interviewees' accounts. Furthermore, the researchers as well as two adept qualitative researchers in L2 education scrutinized the interview data and findings and approved the data-findings agreement.

Figures 1 and 2 are snapshots of the analysis of our data in MAXQDA.

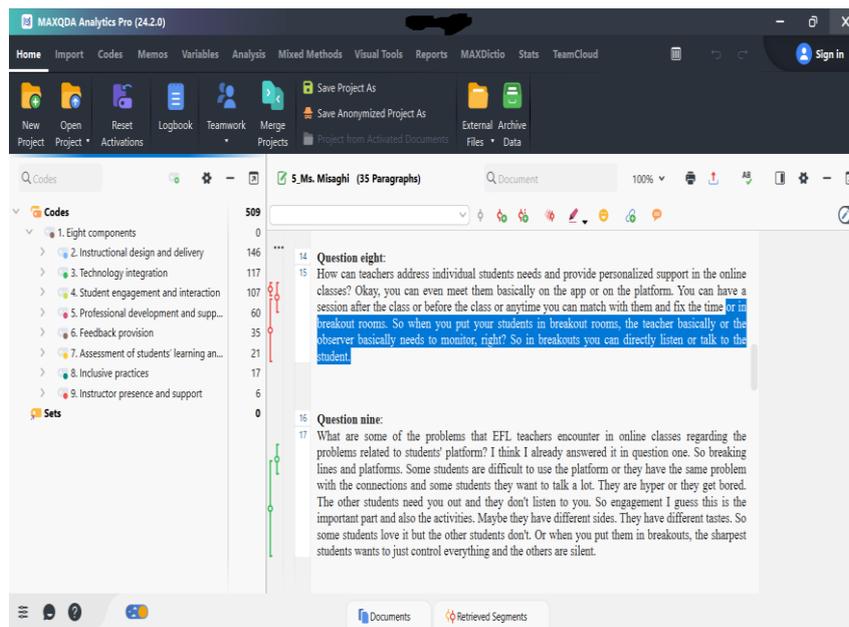


Figure 1. The Present Study Coding Process in MAXQDA

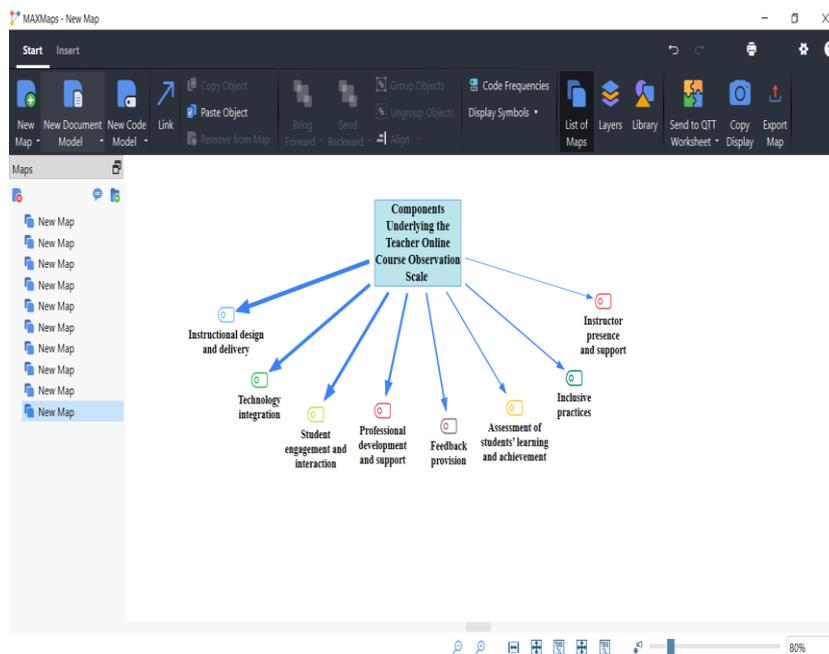


Figure 2. The Present Study Findings in MAXMAP Properties

Findings

To answer the research question of the study, two sources of data were elicited and analyzed as explained in separate sections below.

Document Analysis Findings

To unravel the components underlying the classroom observation sheets used in language institutes in Iran, six sheets (Appendix A) were targeted and analyzed in this study. Table 2 and Figure 3 presents the codes and sub-themes generated from the analysis of these documents.

Table 2. *Sub-themes (i.e., categories) and codes derived from document analysis of the six observation sheets*

Sub-themes and their underlying codes	Code frequency	Code percentage (%)
Teachers' Digital Literacy		
Effective use of camera/microphone	6	100
Master in using digital board	6	100
Competent in using online platforms	6	100
Dealing with technical issues	5	84
Presenting technology-rich activities	3	50
Apply technology to create a meaningful learning environment	1	17
Information literacy	1	17
Syllabus Adherence		
Following the curriculum	6	100
To-the-point lesson plan	6	100
Organized relevant material	5	84
Syllabus adaptation (if needed)	5	84
Problem predictability	5	84
Flexibility in activities	3	50
Management skills		
Time management	6	100
Punctuality	6	100
Pace of the class	6	100
Class management	6	100
How to deal with problematic students	6	100
Skillful enough to lead role-play conversations	2	34
Controlling distractions	2	34
Engaging students through gamification	1	17
Emotional Regulations		
Establishing rapport based on mutual respect	6	100
Paying equal attention and time to all the students	6	100
Attitude encouragement	6	100
Dealing with inactive students	6	100

Creativity	6	100
Adequate reinforcement	5	84
Encouraging autonomy and engagement in students	5	84
Adequate technology uses to motivate team and group work	1	17
Teachers' professional quality		
Teacher's command of English (proficiency and accuracy)	6	100
Preparation	6	100
Comprehensible input	5	84
Sufficient mastery of content	5	84
Clear instruction	5	84
Well-stated directions	2	34
Assigning sufficient assignments	2	34
Feedback and assessment		
Peer correction and self-correction	6	100
Appropriate corrections	6	100
Appropriate corrective feedback	5	84
Meaningful identification-check questions	5	84
Method of homework checking	3	50

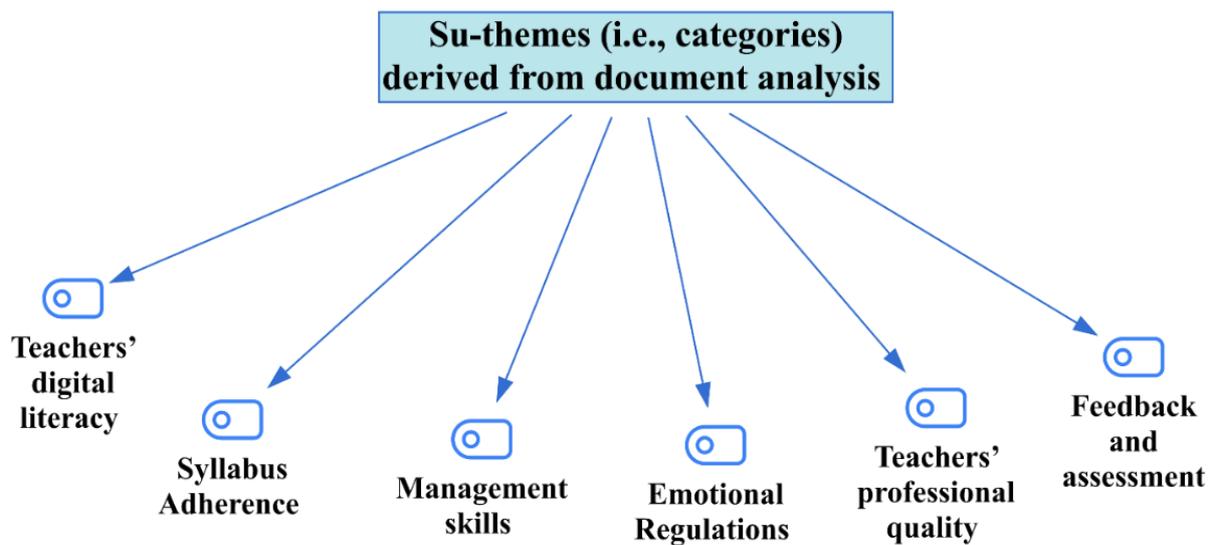


Figure 3. Sub-themes (i.e., categories) and codes derived from document analysis of the six observation sheets

As shown in Table 2 and Figure 3, the six essential components derived from thematic analysis of the six observation checklists employed in language institutes in Iran include: Teachers' digital literacy, syllabus adherence, management skills, emotional regulations, teacher's professional quality, and feedback and assessment were found based on the data. For clarity, descriptions of these components are presented below:

1. **Teachers' Digital Literacy:** This component includes the teacher's knowledge of technological domains, effective use of technological devices in classes, the ability to

address technological problems, competency in using online platforms for teaching, and effective application of technology to create meaningful learning environments.

2. **Syllabus Adherence:** This component focuses on the extent to which the teacher follows the curriculum in classes, organizes relevant materials for sessions, is flexible in activities based on the class potential, does syllabus adaptation if required, predict problems, and designs appropriate lesson plans.
3. **Management Skills:** This component focuses mainly on the teacher's time management, leading role-plays effectively, punctuality, keeping pace of the class, classroom management, and dealing with problematic students during sessions.
4. **Emotional Regulation:** This component deals with the teacher's establishing good rapport based on mutual respect, paying equal attention to everyone, allocating equal time to all students, encouraging autonomy and engagement in students, adequately using technology to motivate both teamwork and group work, dealing with inactive students, being creative, and adequately reinforcing and encouraging students.
5. **Teachers' Professional Quality:** This component deals with the teacher's command of English language proficiency (both accuracy and fluency), preparation, giving comprehensible input to the students, sufficient mastery of content, giving clear instructions and directions, and asking meaningful identification-check questions from students.
6. **Feedback and Assessment:** This component is related to the teacher's giving appropriate corrective feedback to students in classes, correcting their mistakes suitably and effectively, assigning sufficient assignments, and identifying a suitable way to check their homework effectively.

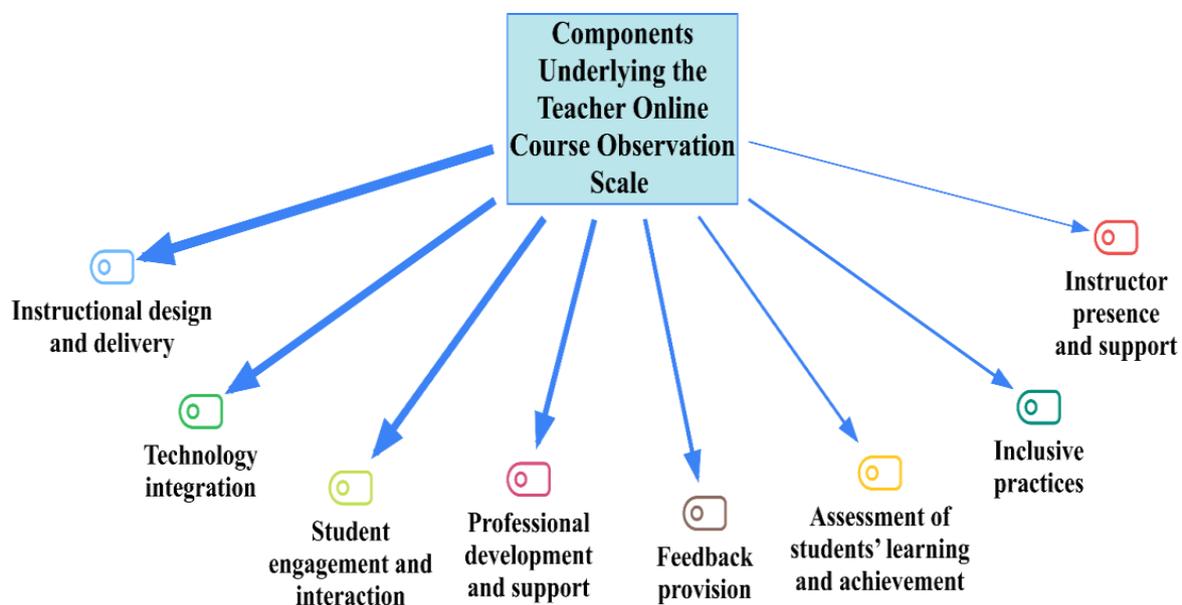
Analysis of the six observation sheets in this study allowed us to identify the underlying components shared among the scales the observers of the six targeted institutes use to evaluate performance and effectiveness of EFL teachers in the Iranian context. Since these scales were all developed for evaluating in-person classes, and there was a shortage of scales for observation of online classes in this context, at the second phase of this study, we conducted interview with eight expert observers from the same context to explore their perspectives toward the essential elements of an online classroom observation measure. Below, findings from the interviews are presented.

Interview Findings

The interview items were constructed based on the six components obtained at the document analysis phase of this study. Interestingly, analysis of the interviewees' accounts revealed some new components not found in the analyzed observation sheets, presenting some essential and unique criteria for the observation of online classes (See Table 3 and Figure 4).

Table 3. Components derived from analysis of the interview data

Code System	Code frequency
Instructional design and delivery	146
Technology integration	117
Student engagement and interaction	107
Professional development and support	60
Feedback provision	35
Assessment of students' learning and achievement	21
Inclusive practices	17
Instructor presence and support	6

**Figure 4.** Components derived from analysis of the interview data

As illustrated in Table 3 and Figure 4, the interview data revealed there are eight essential criteria for observation of online EFL classes in the Iranian instructional context. For transparency, these components are defined below:

1. Instructional Design and Delivery

This component focuses on the organization, structuring, and (time) management of the online course. It also emphasizes lesson planning, clarity of learning objectives, comprehensible input, multimedia resources and innovative practices, and effectiveness of instructional delivery methods in online classes. Some excerpts from the participants associated with this component include:

Observer 1: "I appreciate those teachers who create a waiting lobby before the classic stars."

Observer 2: “For example, you should work on your time management because maybe there are some distractions and you cannot handle these distractions and you may lose a lot of time.”

Observer 2: “Yes, there are many differences between a lesson plan designed for an online class and a lesson plan designed for an in-person one because, you know, the environment is different and you should predict some problems.”

Observer 7: “I think online instructions need to be clearer and with the presence of more visual cues.”

2. Student Engagement and Interaction

This component assesses the teacher’s ability to create rapport and good relationship with students, deal with problematic students, encourage participation/collaboration in discussions/group activities, and engagement students in online classes. As pertained to this component, for instance, some observers mentioned:

Observer 6: “So the teacher is really responsible for just making some jokes, you know, making students laugh sometimes, or sometimes communicate out of the framework of what they are doing. Trying maybe to, with regard to the topic of the lesson, maybe asking some personal questions and trying to involve the student.”

Observer 4: “I guess the only thing that the teacher can do regarding the students who do not pay enough attention while they are in class is getting them involved by calling their names and having them answer questions.”

Observer 2: “The teacher should ask students to do some activities which are fun and which are appropriate for them.”

Observer 4: “Teachers can keep students engaged and involved by telling them that it is very important in online classes to be active.”

3. Feedback Provision

This component encompasses the quality and timeliness of feedback provided to students. It involves evaluation of various types of feedback employed in the classroom such as oral, written, individualized, video, immediate, self-correction, delayed, and reinforcing feedback types, among others. Regarding feedback provision in online classes, some observers, for instance, noted:

Observer 2: “There is a difference in feedback provision. In regular classes, you can address the student directly, talk to him or her directly, and talk about their strengths or their weak points. But in online classes, you know, maybe it's not good to address the students in front of the others. Thus, it's better to talk to them in person.”

Observer 4: “In online classes, most of the feedback is given orally.”

Observer 7: “If the whole instruction is online, the feedback can be personalized in the form of office hours that are virtual.”

4. Technology Integration

This component evaluates the integration of technological tools and platforms in the online teaching environment, including the usability, effectiveness, and challenges of the learning management system and other digital resources and how these technological challenges are handled in online classes. For instance, some observers stated:

Observer 1: "Cheating in online tests is another source of worrying for teachers."

Observer 2: "The best way to encounter and solve problems in online classes is to predict them in advance."

Observer 1: "Teachers can use the virtual whiteboard a lot."

5. Instructor Presence and Support

This component focuses on the instructor's availability, responsiveness to student inquiries, and the provision of academic and technical support to students. In this respect, Observer 1, for example, mentioned:

"If students need more attention and help, teacher can stay after the class. Some teachers have online groups on social media; they can keep in contact with students outside the classroom."

6. Assessment of Students' Learning and Achievement

This component reflects the ways that teachers assess students' learning outcomes and achievements in online classes. Some excerpts from the observers relating to this component include:

Observer 5: "Ask students creative questions to help them think, basically WH questions."

Observer 7: "Teachers can use interactive polls or quizzes that are available online and which can be made easily."

7. Inclusive Practices

This component examines the inclusivity and accessibility of the online course, including the accommodation of diverse learning needs and the promotion of an inclusive learning environment. In this respect, some observers, for example, emphasized:

Observer 2: "It's really important to know students' differences."

Observer 6: "If teachers notice students in person before start of the online course, they can address students' needs better."

8. Professional Development and Support

This component evaluates the availability and effectiveness of professional development opportunities for online instructors, the support provided by the institution or department to teachers, as well as teachers' engagement in self-professional development activities. For instance, observer 2 highlighted:

“I think we should train teachers how to use new technology. There may be some videos, clips, instructions, and workshops to train teachers to use technology. We can encourage the teachers to have peer observations, which can help them a lot.”

In sum, comparison of the two observation models, one derived from document analysis and the other from interview data, reveals that while they share some commonalities, the latter is more comprehensive and captures the intricacies and unique features of online education. Furthermore, while in the former model, classroom observation is mainly done with reference to teacher performance, the latter model, in addition to focusing on evaluation of teacher performance, allows evaluation of factors external to the teacher which might positively or negatively affect teacher performance, thus enabling the observer to make a more comprehensive and fair evaluation of teacher effectiveness in a particular instructional context. For instance, although both models highlight the role of teacher technological literacy, the model derived from the interview data also address potential challenges of the learning management system and other digital resources that might be commonly encountered by many teachers. Likewise, while the examined observation sheets focused on assessing teachers' level of professional quality, the interviewees' accounts revealed the significance of observers' paying attention evaluating the amount of support and professional development opportunities provided to teachers in a particular institute.

Discussion

The present study aimed to explore the components underlying classroom online observation in the Iranian EFL instructional context. To this aim, data were gathered and analyzed at two phases. Initially, six classroom observation sheets developed and used in language institutes in Iran were analyzed meticulously. The findings of document analysis reveal six underlying components of teachers' digital literacy, syllabus adherence, management skills, emotional regulation, teachers' professional quality, and feedback and assessment. At the second phase, interview items were developed based on the components found from document analysis. Analysis of the interview data presented eight classroom observers' perspectives against categories under eight components of instructional design and delivery, technology integration, student engagement and interaction, professional development and support, feedback provision, assessment of students' learning and achievement, inclusive practices, and instructor presence and support.

Overall, the components identified in this study are to a large degree in congruence with the course observation elements identified in studies in the domain of (online) classroom observation in both L2 and non-L2 education contexts (e.g., Bell et al., 2019; Dobbelaer, 2019; Horvitz et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2024; Marte & Quines, 2023; PAASCU, 2021; Simbulan, 2021; Taghizadeh & Zafarpour, 2022; Žefran & Pirih, 2021). The main components found in the existing literature were lesson content, instructional strategies, classroom management, assessment feedback, engagement and interaction, differentiation and inclusivity, use of technology, and professionalism and communication. Our findings, when compared to the previous studies, imply that many elements essential to classroom observation seem to be universally shared, irrespective of context.

For instance, the *Student Engagement and Interaction* component found in our study was in agreement with Anderson and Dron's (2011) study which argue for the evolution of distance education pedagogy and emphasizes the significance of fostering student engagement and interaction in online learning environments. Our findings can be also justified by reference to Smith and Ragan (2005), who discuss the importance of learner-centered design approaches that cater to individual learning styles and preferences and their essential role in making online classroom observations. Likewise, the importance of the *Feedback* component identified in our study reverberates Hattie and Timperley's (2007) emphasis on the crucial role of teachers' giving prompt, detailed, and helpful to enhance teaching and learning outcomes. Additionally, *Professional Development and Support* element identified in our findings adds further value to Guskey and Yoon's (2009) emphasis on provision of personalized support to teachers and teachers' engagement in continuous learning and professional development as strategies to boost effective practice among teachers.

It should be noted that what was novel in our findings was the interviewees' emphasis on integrating evaluation of facilities, support provided to teachers, challenges of online education, and other teacher-external factors, into classroom observation frameworks. The majority of existing classroom observation frameworks have put their focus on the teacher to the disregard of the direct or indirect role of factors enhancing or preventing teachers' quality practice. Therefore, our findings imply that the Iranian classroom observers took part in the present study who were also experienced teachers in the same context were sensitive to making a context-specific evaluation of teachers' classroom performance, not separated from the instructional milieu in which they work. It seems that having such a context-dependent observation is vital for optimizing online teaching practices.

Conclusion and Implication

The findings of the present study revealed an eight-component online classroom observation framework, derived from evidence gathered from the analysis of different observation sheets used in language institutes in Iran as well as analysis of some expert classroom observers in the same context. The current study findings shed light on the significance of coordinating observation frameworks with instructional goals, pedagogical beliefs, and technology affordances in order to improve student learning outcomes and teachers' professional growth. This is achieved by exploring the viewpoints of teachers themselves. The design and implementation of online classroom observation have been greatly influenced by teachers' perceptions of online course observation, which emphasize the importance of individualized, adaptable, and supportive methods that accommodate a range of teaching preferences and styles. Incorporating instructors' viewpoints into the observation process promotes a climate of reflective instruction, ongoing enhancement, and cooperative learning, which eventually helps educators and learners alike.

The research findings have significant implications for educational contexts. Educational institutions can utilize teachers' insights to tailor professional development programs that address specific needs related to observation practices in online teaching. By incorporating teachers' perspectives, institutions can promote continuous learning and growth among teachers. Understanding teachers' conceptions can inform the design of observation

frameworks that are responsive to individual teaching philosophies and instructional approaches. By aligning observation components with teachers' beliefs, institutions can create meaningful and impactful observation experiences. Teachers' conceptions can highlight the role of technology in enhancing online classroom observation practices. By leveraging digital tools and platforms to streamline data collection, facilitate real-time feedback, and promote interaction among teachers, institutions can optimize the observation experience and promote innovation in teaching practices. Last but not least, teachers' perspectives on delivery strategies can guide the implementation of observation processes in virtual classrooms, emphasizing the importance of transparent communication, collaborative feedback mechanisms, and supportive environments for reflective practices. Institutions can leverage this understanding to promote a culture of mentorship, collaboration, and professional support.

Overall, the insights garnered from teacher observers' conceptions of online classroom observation underscore the value of incorporating teacher perspectives in the design, implementation, and evaluation of observation processes. By prioritizing teacher input and fostering a culture of collaboration and support, educational institutions can enhance the quality of online teaching and promote effective professional development in the digital age. Most importantly, as educational institutions strive to foster effective online learning environments, the findings highlight the importance of targeted professional development, robust feedback mechanisms, and a commitment to continuous improvement, ultimately leading to enriched student engagement and learning outcomes.

Considering the qualitative nature of the study and lack of control over participant characteristics such as age, gender, socio-economic situations, and educational background, the findings of this study might not be applicable to all online classroom observers or educational contexts. The findings of this study may be limited in terms of generalizability due to the focus on a specific subset of teachers (i.e., teachers of adult learners). Thus, the explored conceptions and perspectives may not represent all teachers involved in online classroom observation. The sample size of teachers included in the study may be limited, potentially impacting the breadth and depth of perspectives analyzed. A more extensive and varied sample size might offer a more comprehensive comprehension of educators' perceptions of remote classroom observation. Contextual factors unique to the educational setting in which the research was conducted may have influenced the study's conclusions. The conclusions' applicability in different institutional frameworks, educational settings, or technology infrastructures may vary. Moreover, relying on self-reported data from teachers may introduce bias or social desirability effects. The validity of the results may be impacted if teachers' comments do not accurately reflect their true opinions or experiences.

Future researchers are encouraged to conduct a longitudinal study to track changes in teachers' conceptions of online classroom observation over time and investigate how experiences, professional development, and technological advancements influence their perspectives. This is because, even with all of the limitations and delimitations of this study, more comprehensive results can be reached. Additionally, in order to find differences in attitudes and practices, a comparative examination of teachers' views of online classroom observation across various educational levels (e.g., elementary, secondary, higher education)

or subject areas can be carried out. Another recommendation is to carry out in-depth qualitative research using focus group interviews or case studies to gain a nuanced knowledge of the underlying assumptions, motivations, and difficulties that influence instructors' perspectives of online classroom observation. Finally, researchers can investigate how cultural factors affect teachers' views of online classroom observation by performing a cross-cultural study and comparing practices and perceptions across various cultural contexts to uncover parallels and variations.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Appendix A. Classroom Observation Sheets

Sheet 1 for advanced-level classes

Teacher's Name: Observer's Name:
 Level: Class Code:
 Date: Session: Branch:.....

Approaching the Listening Topic (Unit)
Orientation (from : to.....)
Listening for It (from : to.....)
Listening Follow-Up (from : to.....)
Approaching the Reading Topic (Unit)
Warming Up (from : to.....)
Reading the Passage (from : to.....)
Discussing the Passage (from : to.....)

Sheet 2 for Classes at basic & pre-intermediate levels

Teacher's Name: Observer's Name:
 Level: Class Code:
 Date: Session: Branch:.....

Checking the Dialog / Passage: (Unit ...) (from : to.....)
Teaching the Vocabulary: (Unit ...) (from : to.....)
Teaching the Grammar: (Unit ...) (from : to.....)
Teaching the Passage: (Unit ...) (from : to.....)
Teaching the Dialog: (Unit ...) (from : to.....)
Teacher's Professional Qualities

How to Deal with Listening: (Unit ...) (from : to.....)
Checking the Vocabulary: (Unit ...) (from : to.....)
Checking the Written Work: (Unit ...) (from : to.....)
Online Class Management
Observer's Overall Comments & Recommendations
Students' Behavior and Attitude
Thank you so much for having me in your class.

Sheet 3 for Intermediate Levels

Teacher's Name: Observer's Name:
 Level: Class Code:
 Date: Session: Branch:

How to Deal with Conversation (Unit)
Let's Get Started (from : to))
Teaching the Dialog (from : to))
Speak out (from : to))
How to Deal with Grammar (Unit) (from : to))
How to Deal with Listening (Unit)
Vocabulary Stop (from : to))

Listen to It (from : to))
Think and Talk (from : to))
Vocabulary Review (Unit) (from : to))
How to Deal with the Passage (Unit)
Before you read: (from : to))
The passage: (from : to))
How to Deal with Check It Out (Unit) (from : to))
How to Check the Assignments (Unit)
Checking the Dialog (from : to))
Checking the Passage (from : to))
Get Set (from : to))

Sheet 4 for High-Intermediate Levels

Teacher's Name: Observer's Name:
 Level: Class Code:
 Date: Session: Branch:

How to Deal with Grammar Presentation: (unit) (from : to))
How to Deal with Punctuation/ Writing Note: (unit) (from : to))
How to Deal with Grammar in Context: (unit) (from : to))
How to Check Grammar in Context: (unit) (from : to))
How to Check Focused Practice Exercises: (unit) (from : to))

The Communication Practice: (unit) (from : to))
A. Listening
B. Speaking

Teacher's Professional Qualities
Online Class Management
Students' Behavior and Attitude
Observer's Overall Comments & Recommendations

Sheet 5 for Start Levels

Teacher's Name:
 Level:
 Date:

Observer's Name:
 Class Code:
 Session: Branch:

Checking (Unit) (from : to.....)
Word Time (Unit) (from : to.....)
Use the Words (Unit) (from : to.....)
Action Word Time (Unit) (from : to.....)
Use the Action Words (Unit) (from : to.....)
The Alphabet (from : to.....)
Spelling Development (from : to.....)
Classroom Language (Unit) (from : to.....)
Grammar Box (Unit) (from : to.....)
Read Aloud (Unit) (from : to.....)
Let's Read and Write (Unit) (from : to.....)
Activities, Dictations, Games, Assignments (from : to.....)
Teacher's Professional Qualities
Online Class Management
Students' Behavior and Attitude
Observer's Overall Comments
Dear Thank you so much for having me in your class.

sheet 6

NO	Observation Sheet	POINTS
1	Following the methodology and syllabus of the Institute	
2	Effective presentation of the lesson based on the learners' comprehension of the lesson without using mother tongue	
3	Effective error- correction (10 points)	
4	Active participation of all the learners (10 points)	
5	Building a good rapport based on mutual respect (10 points)	
6	Good use of either teaching materials or online platform tools (10 points)	
7	Time- management (10 points)	
8	Inspiring and motivating students (10 points)	
9	Appropriate checking of the dialogue/ reading/ assignments (10 points)	
10	Teacher's language competence (10 points)	
Total		

Appendix B.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What are the challenges of conducting online classroom observations, and how have you addressed these challenges?
2. In your experience, what are the most effective methods for providing feedback and support to teachers based on online classroom observations?
3. Can you describe any technology tools or platforms that you find particularly useful for conducting online classroom observations and providing feedback to teachers?
4. What are some best practices or innovative approaches that you have observed in online teaching, and how do you encourage their implementation among EFL teachers?
5. Do the instructions given by EFL teachers differ in online and in-person classes? In other words, what is the role of comprehensible input? (Instructional Delivery)
6. Are there any differences between a lesson plan designed for an online class and a lesson plan designed for an in-person one? Can teachers manipulate their lesson plans for their online classes?
7. How important is the EFL teacher's creativity to design relevant tasks and activities for their online classes? Can the same materials and realia be used effectively in online classes as well as in-person ones?
8. How can teachers address individual student needs and provide personalized support in the online classroom setting?
9. What are some of the problems that EFL teachers encounter in online classes (regarding the problems related to students, platform, among others)?
10. What are the best ways for the teachers to deal with their -and their students'- technical problems in online classes?
11. To what extent should teachers be digitally literate to take online classes? In other words, how important is digital literacy for EFL teachers?
12. Regarding classroom management, what are some of the main differences between controlling an online class and in-person one?
13. What practices are considered as time-consuming activities in online classes and how can EFL teachers keep track of the time in online sessions effectively?
14. Regarding the problematic students (i.e., the naughty ones or the ones who keep getting absent or complain about the problems of online sessions), what effective steps must be taken by the teachers to deal with such students? (teacher-learner interaction)
15. By considering the nature of online classes and as they are not physically close to their students, how can EFL teachers create a good rapport and relationship with their students? (teacher-learner interaction)
16. What specific strategies or techniques can teachers use to effectively engage students in an online learning environment? How can they deal with inactive or demotivated students? (engagement)
17. How can teachers foster student participation and collaboration in online discussions and group activities?
18. How can teachers assess student understanding and learning progress during online lessons?
19. Is there a difference in feedback provision in online and in-person classes? What strategies do EFL teachers utilize to provide feedback in online classes? (Feedback)
20. What are some of the best ways for EFL teachers to prepare for teaching an online class? Is it necessary for EFL teachers to participate in courses related to technology before taking online classes? If yes, what instructions are necessary to be presented to them in advance? (PD)