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FLOW EXPERIENCES OF TERTIARY LEVEL TURKISH EFL STUDENTS IN ONLINE LANGUAGE CLASSES DURING COVID-19 OUTBREAK

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to investigate the flow experiences of foreign language (EFL) learners in online classes during Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. The participants were 84 university students as EFL learners. Data were collected from a perception survey, a background questionnaire and open-ended questions to provide triangulation. The results showed that participants had flow experiences with different levels of different categories of flow. The results also showed that there was no significant difference in terms of gender. Additionally, the findings proved that participants' flow experiences were partially interrupted by some problems they faced during their online classes.

Key Words: foreign language learning, flow experience, optimal engagement, online language learning

COVID-19 SALGINI ZAMANINDA YABANCI DİL OLARAK İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRENEN LİSANS SEVİYESİNDEKİ TÜRK ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN ÇEVRİMİÇİ DİL DERSLERİNDEKİ AKIŞ DENEYİMLERİ

Öz: Bu çalışmanın amacı Covid-19 pandemi sürecinde yabancı dil öğrenimi gören öğrencilerin canlı derslerde akış deneyimlerini araştırmaktır. Katılımcılar üniversite derecesinde İngiliz dili öğrenimi gören 84 öğrencidir. Veriler, çeşitleme sağlamak için Likert tipi algı ölçeği, özgeçmiş anketi ve açık uçlu sorulardan elde edilmiştir. Araştırmanın bulguları, katılımcıların farklı bileşenlerde ve seviyede akış deneyimi yaşadığını göstermiştir. Sonuçlar, akışı deneyimlemede cinsiyet bakımından anlamlı bir farklılık olmadığını da ortaya çıkarmıştır. Ayrıca, katılımcıların akış deneyimlerinin canlı ders esnasında karşılaştıkları bazı sorunlar nedeniyle kısmen sekteye uğradığı ortaya çıkmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: yabancı dil öğrenimi, akış deneyimi, ideal katılım, çevrimiçi dil öğrenimi

Introduction

Online learning has been an indispensable part of education, especially during the COVID-19 outbreak. A positive quality of online learning and distance learning is to allow instructors to reach as many students as possible without the hindrance of students physically being in the classroom. As students can access the knowledge of their teachers with the comfort and the safety of their homes, it can be a necessity to organize online classes in such a way that the students are not bored and try to entertain themselves with other applications found in their computers or smartphones. This should not, however, be understood as applications and games in computers or smartphones cannot be used as educational material or as enhancing agents. On the contrary, there are various studies indicating that the use of technology and its applications may bring academic success to students (Aşıksoy, 2018; Annamalai, 2019; Dickey, 2011; Forte, Gomes, Nogueira & Cavaltente de Almeida, 2011; Lee, 2019; Warni, Tian & Febriawan, 2018).

Turkey started its online learning on 23 March 2020 by means of EBA TV (Educational Information Network) where elementary, middle and high school students could listen to teachers, have recess periods and continue their classes. This structure was to help students feel in a classroom environment as well as to reduce psychologically bad impacts of COVID-19. Also, university students benefited from online learning

systems according to the schedules their universities prepared. Using various online communication tools, the students were able to continue their classes in a virtual environment. According to Similar Web (2020) data, as of July 2020, there have been 9,72 million students visiting the EBA site in the last six months. Therefore, EBA is listed as the 2,734th website worldwide, 63th website in Turkey and 44th education website which has been used in the world.

The impacts of online learning, students' experiences during this process and the opinion towards whether online education is effective for learning have been issues of concern recently. Expectedly in this critical period, the feelings/thoughts and experiences of students during the online classes are significant matters to be dealt with to measure their effectiveness and to sustain continuity of online education platforms. Apart from these issues, flow experience of students needs more specific observation due to its giving opportunity to closely examine their experiences such as engagement, intense concentration, enjoyment, self-control and cognitive competence in online learning during COVID-19, impacts of which are concrete on the institutions of education. Basically, flow theory or flow concept was first named by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi in the early 1990s and the theory itself has been applied to many areas of science and learning since then. He explains flow as "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it" (Csíkszentmihályi, 2008). In line with this explanation, language teachers using 21st century skills in online education are expected to make students experience flow in the course of classes. The concept of flow is also significant since it enables students to lower anxiety and increase comfortable atmosphere during online classes in such a way to see how they adapt themselves in a new learning environment. Although several people have given explanations to this concept, their explanations do not vary on a large scale, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) describes flow in nine categories below:

1. Goals presented by instructors are clear.

2. Feedbacks are unambiguous.

3- Challenge of tasks and learners' skills are balanced.

4- Action and awareness emerge.

5- Consciousness is cleared from distractions.

6- Failure is not a source of anxiety.

7- Learner loses sense of self-consciousness.

8- Learner loses sense of time.

9- Experience becomes autotelic.

Regarding these elements, it will be noteworthy to address the differences between the flow in face-to-face learning and in online learning. Considering the literature, while engagement (cognitive-behavioural-emotional) is more related to flow state in classroom environment (Cox, 2014; Cox & Montgomery, 2019), self-efficacy affecting flow comes into prominence in online learning (Hong, Hwang, Tai & Lin, 2017). Further, difficult tasks and authentic materials make students experience more flow in classroom environment (Egbert, 2003; Kirchhoff, 2013, Cho, 2018), the competence of technology usage catalyses flow in online learning environment (Nguyen, 2011; Hong et al, 2017). Exploring the flow experiences of students during online language classes needs a further literature review in the field.

Literature Review

Empirical Studies on Flow Experience in Language Learning

The theory of 'flow' coined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has been an interesting field to be investigated in foreign countries. Particularly, for several researchers, it has been a crucial point to be addressed in language learning. In connection with this, there are several studies carried out on flow experience in face-to-face language learning (Deweale & MacIntyre 2017; Cox & Montgomery, 2019; Kirchhoff, 2013). They mostly address to the question whether students experience flow (Cox, 2104) and the factors causing this state (Cho, 2018). Besides these, there are other studies done on flow experience in game-based language learning (Hong et al., 2017; Hsu, 2017). They investigate the impacts of games on flow experience (Li et al., 2019) and whether games lead to flow (Hsu, 2017). However, there are a few studies investigating flow experience in online language learning in terms of its impact on learning process (Nguyen, 2011; Ebrahimzadeh & Alavi, 2016).

Flow experience in face-to-face language learning: In 2003, Egbert aimed to examine the relationship between language learning and flow experiences as well as finding out whether flow takes place in foreign language classrooms. The findings obtained from 13 Spanish language learners revealed that the students experienced flow in language learning classrooms. It was also suggested that teachers who present tasks leading students to flow state can catalyse flow experience in the classroom. In addition, despite the difference of students' opinions towards flow, its patterns in the tasks presented were comparatively similar.

Regarding perceptions of flow in speaking activities, Şentürk (2012) investigated teachers' and students' perception of flow experience. There were 163 participants, and the data were collected as qualitative and quantitative. The result of the study showed that flow existed in speaking classes; however, there was a significant difference in each task regarding the perception towards flow. Besides this, there was a significantly visible relationship between the kind of activity and engagement as to students' perception of task control, challenge and intense concentration. The findings

also put forward that teachers were able to facilitate the flow experience for students through development of certain tasks.

In the following years, Kirchhoff (2013) examined flow experience of Japanese learners in extensive English reading classes. In addition, other objectives of this study were to learn the conditions causing flow and whether flow experience affects students' motivation in extensive reading. The findings obtained from 74 students by means of several questionnaires indicated that students experienced flow as well as high concentration in their reading classes. However, the conditions leading to flow were presented as a variety of books at the levels of readers and peaceful environment for reading.

21st century skills in foreign language learning, which provides source for several studies, drew the attention of Cox (2014) aiming to find out the relationship between 21st century skills in language learning and engagement level of students as well as the degree to reach flow. The study, findings of which were obtained from two sections of low-intermediate Spanish foreign language learners, indicated that the students experienced flow, but they felt different amounts of engagement in different categories of flow. Further, a positive relationship was found between cognitive-emotional-behavioural engagement and 21st century skills.

Deweale and MacIntyre (2017) explored the frequency of experiencing positive flow and anti-flow in Spanish FL classrooms. 232 Spanish FL learners from around the world provided data about flow experience by means of questionnaire. The study indicated that participants experienced considerably more flow than anti-flow. As a result of the participants' responses, a sense of complete engagement in both an individual and collective task, high concentration and enjoyment led to time distortions and attachment to other learners in the class.

Later, Cho (2018) investigated the impacts of modality (writing/speaking) and task complexity on the perception of students towards task difficulty/skill and learners' task experience. The researcher also examined whether difficulty–skill balance has prediction towards flow experience. In the study, 141 learners of English performed 4 tasks consisting of task complexity and modality before responding to a questionnaire about their perception towards task difficulty, their skills and experiences. The study concluded that only modality had impact on perceived skill and flow. Considering the difficulty–skill balance and flow, writing led to more preferable experiences. Further, difficulty–skill balance was found to predict flow experience.

In the mixed-methods study of Cox and Montgomery (2019), flow experience was called 'optimal engagement'. The study aimed at investigating whether students experienced intense flow in a process in which they were subjected to 30- minute interview with a Spanish native-speaker. The data collected from 34 undergraduate students at the same Spanish language course demonstrated that flow did not exist during the

course, but it occurred in certain tasks. However, authentic tasks and activities leading students to benefit from 21st century skills in an effective way catalyse all three types of engagement: behavioural, cognitive and emotional. In other words, to apply for 21st century skills, which contributed to personal development as well, possibly created more student engagement.

Flow experience in online language learning: In the context of language learning, Nguyen (2011) examined the perceptions of Vietnamese learners towards the application of computer-assisted communication into collaborative learning and the outcomes of this process. The qualitative research carried out with 30 students studying to become English teachers demonstrated that most of the students favoured the technology-mediated class and they shared such an opinion that the course assisted them in developing their technological skills and collaborative learning. However, the study presented they remained suspicious of their improvements in English skills.

Five years later, Ebrahimzadeh and Alavi (2016) investigated students' enjoyment in e-learning to find out whether it has predictions about vocabulary improvement of high school EFL students. In the quantitative research, it was found that e-learning enjoyment remarkably showed the variance in vocabulary learning with games. According to the result, enjoyment could enable students to continue long process of vocabulary learning as well as motivating them.

Flow experience in game-based language learning: In the study of Balçıkanlı (2012) the virtual 3D game Second Life was applied to understand whether it was an effective tool to learn a foreign language. The study obtained its data from 7 American students who learn Turkish at University of Florida and 8 Turkish students who learn English at Gazi University. After the students played the game, it was revealed that they felt less threatened in language learning. Also, in the light of flow experience, the study showed that the game captured the students' attention, arousing their curiosity during interaction processes.

Franciosi (2015) investigated the relationship between Task-Based Language Learning (TBLT) and Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL) as well as the features of games enhancing intrinsic motivation. Further, the study explored the impact of feedback, balance of skill/difficulty and goals in games and tasks. In the light of flow theory as a conceptual framework in this study, it is concluded that feedback should be taken into account as it increases flow in learning.

Hong et al. (2017) planned a Chinese radical learning game (CRLG) which was designed to practice Chinese radicals for non-native learners. Researchers used this game to investigate the intrinsic motivation of students related to online learning self-efficacy and flow experience to observe students' learning process. The data were collected from 73 questionnaires in total. At the end of the study, it was explored that intrinsic motivation, flow experience, self-efficacy in online learning, and learning progress were positively related.

Hsu (2017) designed two Augmented Reality (AR) educational game systems to enable third grade students to learn English as a foreign language in a comfortable learning context. In this study, the main objective was to examine flow experience, learning anxiety, cognitive load and effectiveness of learning of the students. The data were collected from 38 third graders by means of pre-test, post-test and questionnaires. The findings revealed that the students who used either task-based or self-directed AR educational game showed similarities in learning effectiveness. However, the students using self-directed game system showed higher flow experience.

Using digital game-based learning in language, Li et al. (2019) examined the impacts of flow experience on the perception of 291 Chinese EFL learners towards perceived learning. The findings obtained from 7-point Likert scale questionnaire survey revealed that difficulty/skill balance and clear goal positively affected concentration while feedback had a positive impact on motivation. Concentration and intrinsic motivation showed positive impact on satisfaction. However, enjoyment only affected perceived learning of the learners.

Considering the literature review mentioned above, most of the studies on face-to-face language learning have dealt with the issue of whether students experience flow during the class. According to these studies, the students mostly experienced flow in face-to-face language learning. While tasks given to the students during learning process showed significant impacts on flow (Cho, 2018, Cox & Montgomery, 2019; Egbert, 2012; Şentürk, 2012), 21st century skills were also found to be correlated with flow experiences of the students (Cox, 2014; Cox & Montgomery, 2019). In the studies on game-based language learning, it was revealed that in this way of language learning students experienced flow while certain factors such as clear goal, feedback and difficulty/skill balance led to this flow experience (Li et al., 2019). However, in the study of Franciosi (2015), feedback was mostly found to be significant for its impact on flow whereas difficulty/skill balance and goals did not affect flow experience. In the context of online language learning, Nguyen (2011) measured technological skills and collaborative learning of the students, concluding these two categories for language learning were improved while students' language skills did not show a significant difference. Compared to the study of Nguyen (2011), Ebrahimzadeh and Alavi (2016) directed their attention to the enjoyment in online language learning, suggesting that enjoyment could facilitate vocabulary learning of the students and increase their motivation.

Rationale

In the light of reviewed literature, although there is a growing attention to research flow experiences of language learners, there is still a lot to search about the field. Relevant literature has mostly dealt with the flow experience in face-to-face language learning (Cho, 2018; Cox & Montgomery, 2019) and in game-based language learning

(Hong et al., 2017; Hsu, 2017). The limited number of the studies on flow experience in online language learning (Ebrahimzadeh & Alavi, 2016; Nguyen, 2011) necessitates to study in this field. Therefore, holding a research in this field seems to be a need for future online education plans in foreign language teaching. The current study also investigates whether students enjoyed, and they were able to participate in the online language learning sessions and felt the flow as Csíkszentmihályi (1996) explains. This study conducted in Turkish context may enable educational professionals and teachers to plan more fluent and effective lessons in a way promoting flow experience during the process of online language learning. In line with this idea in mind, research questions are listed below:

Research questions

1. Do Turkish EFL students experience flow during the online language classes?
2. If so, in which categories of flow do they experience engagement most and least?
3. Does gender make a difference in the flow experience levels of the Turkish EFL learners?

Methodology

This study approaches the issue through a mixed-methods design research. According to Tashakkori and Creswell, (2007), a mixed method research contains two different data (numerical and textual) and data analysis procedures (statistics and thematic). In this study, data were triangulated by the help of a scale, open-ended questions and a background questionnaire to ensure more valid results to be able to contribute to the field effectively.

Participants

Participants were chosen from a public university's students as EFL learners in Turkey. The candidates were asked to participate in this research by e-mail and other digital platforms. Eighty- four of the candidates gave their consent to take part in this study by e-mail. After taking the permission of the participants, data collection tools were sent to the joiners via digital platforms.

Data Collection Tools

Numerical data were obtained by a perception survey including 32 items with a Likert scale prepared by Carolina Benito Cox in her MA thesis in 2014. She redesigned the perception survey based on the Flow State Scale by Jackson and Marsh (1996) for the sportsmen and athletes to search flow experience in a language class. This study uses the version of Carolina Benito Fox (2014). The researchers have the necessary permission to use her survey in this study. In the study, all the items of the original perception survey were translated into Turkish to provide a deeper understanding of the items for the participants. Next, the translated survey was sent to a colleague who

did not take part in the research to translate it back to English to ensure the message of the survey is not lost. Likert scale needed answers varying as "strongly agree-6", "agree-5", "somewhat agree-4", "somewhat disagree-3", "disagree-2" and "strongly disagree" in Part A of the survey.

To collect textual data, open-ended questions of the survey, placed in Part B, were prepared with the suggestion of an associate professor in the same field to collect wider information about online language education period of Covid-19 outbreak.

Participants also answered questions giving information about their gender and their education preferences among online, face to face and hybrid models in a background questionnaire.

All the data were collected by e-mail and other social media platforms since the study was held right at the end of the academic year of 2019-2020 Spring term while the world was fighting with Covid-19 virus.

Data Analysis

Following the data collection process, data were classified as quantitative data and qualitative data. After that, the data were evaluated in detail. For the first and second research questions "1. Do students experience flow during the online language lessons?" and "2. If so, in which fields do they experience flow most and least?", descriptive statistics were conducted to explore the frequency and the mean values of the answers of the perception scale to evaluate the students' flow experience levels. For the third research question "3. Does gender make a difference in the levels of flow experience?", an independent sample t-test was conducted.

Open ended questions were applied both content and descriptive analysis to support the results of the descriptive statistics since quantitative data ensures a deeper understanding of the participants' opinions (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). The open ended questions sought answers for the questions "1. What kind of problems did you have while having online language lessons?, 2. Were you able to communicate with your teacher during online language lessons sufficiently? and 3. Do you think online language classes you had were too long and boring?"

The data obtained by background questionnaire were used to answer the 3rd research question "Does gender make a difference in the levels of flow experience?" and to determine the participants' education model preferences.

Results

1.1. Research question 1: Do Turkish EFL students have flow experience during the online education period?

This study tries to answer the first research question by the perception survey. The perception survey has 8 different categories. The categories are challenge-skill balance,

clear goals, unambiguous feedback, concentration on the task at hand, sense of control, loss of self-consciousness, transformation of time and autotelic experience. Each category has four statements, thus there are 32 statements totally. The perception survey was found to be reliable since Cronbach Alpha reliability test result was calculated as .935.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of perception survey values

Item No		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
	Challenge-skill balance			
1	I was challenged, but not overwhelmed (I believed my skills would allow me to meet the challenge).	84	4.1548	1.27529
2	The task felt not too easy, nor too hard.	84	3.8929	1.45634
3	I felt I was competent to meet the high demands of the situation.	84	3.6548	1.59437
4	The challenge and my skills were at an equally high level.	84	3.9762	1.41401
	Mean value for Challenge-Skill Balance	84	3.9196	1.13684
	Clear goals			
1	I knew the purpose of the activity.	84	4.8105	1.14947
2	I had a strong sense of what I wanted to do.	84	4.0476	1.30711
3	I knew what I wanted to achieve.	84	4.4762	1.24645
4	My goals were clearly defined.	84	4.2381	1.29521
	Mean value for clear goals	84	4.3988	1.05576
	Unambiguous feedback			
1	I received support when I needed it (from other students or the teacher).	84	4.3214	1.79128
2	I was aware of how well I was performing.	84	4.4286	1.49123
3	I often experienced a feeling of success / boredom /frustration.	84	4.1071	1.57555
4	I could tell by the way I was performing how well I was doing.	84	4.0476	1.37888
	Mean value for unambiguous feedback	84	4.2659	1.23836
	Concentration on the task at hand			
1	My attention was focused entirely on what I was doing.	84	3.2381	1.49392
2	It was no effort to keep my mind on what was happening.	84	3.2500	1.56679
3	I was absorbed in what I was doing.	84	3.0952	1.31368
4	I was completely focused on the task at hand.	84	3.5119	1.45200
	Mean value for concentration at hand	84	3.2738	1.17813
	Sense of control			
1	I felt like I had control over important elements of my task.	84	3.7143	1.40199

2	I felt like I was given choices.	84	4.5595	1.43410
3	I felt I could make my own decisions.	84	4.4167	1.47435
4	I had a sense of freedom, in that my group and I were in charge of our work.	84	4.2500	1.44685
	Mean value for sense of control	84	4.2351	1.22742
	Loss of self-consciousness			
1	I felt safe and comfortable during the realization of the task.	84	4.0714	1.51924
2	I was not concerned with what others may have been thinking of me.	84	4.2381	1.61782
3	I felt I could be myself.	84	3.8571	1.52207
4	I was not worried about my performance during the task.	84	3.5952	1.66552
	Mean value for loss of self-consciousness	84	3.9405	1.33738
	Transformation of time			
1	Time seemed to alter (either slow down or speed up)	84	4.2619	1.32737
2	The way time passed seemed to be different from normal.	84	4.2500	1.36103
3	Time seemed to stop while I was in the process.	84	3.3452	1.58680
4	At times, it almost seemed like things were happening in slow motion.	84	3.5833	1.65164
	Mean value for transformation of time	84	3.8601	1.16897
	Autotelic experience			
1	I enjoyed the experience.	84	3.4405	1.65995
2	I loved the feeling during the task and would like to experience it again.	84	2.9762	1.72142
3	The experience left me feeling great.	84	3.0000	1.74245
4	This task was fun for me.	84	3.1310	1.67029
	Mean value for autotelic experience	84	3.1369	1.57130
	Overall mean value for online language learning flow experience	84	3.8788	.90000

Table 1 shows that students believe that the lessons were challenging but not that, they could succeed to a large extent since the mean value of 3.9196 challenge-skill balance is close to 4 (somewhat agree). Their skills were sufficient to handle the challenge of the lessons.

As indicated in Table 1, students knew the purpose of the activities they did in the classes. Overall mean value of clear goals category is placed somewhere between 4 (somewhat agree) and 5 (agree) with the value of 4.3988. That students knew the goals of the lessons may have provided them with a high sense of control with the mean value of 4.2351. It can be understood from the Table 1 that learners took the control over their

tasks and became autonomous learners partly. Additionally, students agreed partly on having been absorbed by the tasks during the lessons with a mean value of 3.9405 for the loss of self-consciousness item.

Table 1 proves that students agree with the "Time seemed to alter (either slow down or speed up)" and "The way time passed seemed to be different from normal." items with their mean values upper than 4 (somewhat agree). However, items "Time seemed to stop while I was in the process." and "At times, it almost seemed like things were happening in slow motion." have relatively lower mean values than 4, which means students were close to state 3 (somewhat disagree). They do not consider the lessons were too long and boring. According to them, lessons started and finished quickly, time passed fast. When looked at the mean value of transformation of time (3.8601), it can be said that students found the lessons fluent and interesting. One of the participants answered the open-ended question "Do you think online language classes you had were too long and boring?" as,

> *"Düşünüyorum da hayır, uzun ve sıkıcı değildi. Hatta daha da uzun sürebilir çok akıcı."* (open-ended question 3, student 18)

> *"I think no, lessons weren't long and boring. Lessons can last longer, they are very fluent."* (open-ended question 3, student 18)

As given in Table 1, it can be inferred that most of the students are pleased with the item "I received support when I needed it (from other students or the teacher)" in unambiguous feedback part with the mean value of 4.2659. Students also supported this result with their statements in the open-ended questions part. Many learners noted that they could have sufficient connection with and take support from their teachers when they needed either during lessons or after via telephone and mail. Below is the statement of student 22 to the open-ended question 2 "Were you able to interact with your teacher during online lessons sufficiently?"

> *"Evet, konuşmak isteyen ve sorusu olan herkes için açık bir platformdu. Öğretmenlerimiz çok özveriliydi. Ders dışında kurduğumuz whatsapp gruplarından ne kafamıza takıldıysa sorabildik"* (open-ended question 2, student 22)

> *"Yes, it was a platform open to everyone who wanted to speak or ask anything. Our teachers were quite self-sacrificing. We were able to ask any thing we wanted to learn via whatsapp groups after lessons."* (open-ended question 2, student 22)

Table 1 also illustrates the determination of the students for concentration on the task at hand category with the mean value of 3.2738 which is one of the lowest values among all the categories. Students seem to have puzzled about concentration since there are several reasons of demotivation problem according to the answers in the open-ended questions. Learners had some problems during their online language les-

sons. For instance, a student answered the question 1, "What kind of problems did you have while having online language lessons?" as,

> *"Dikkatimi dağıtan en büyük etkenlerden biri internetin kopması diyebilirim. Tekrar bağlanamazsam diyerek motivasyonumu kendi kendime de düşürüyorum elimde olmadan malesef. Problem kısa süreli olsa da dağılmış hissediyorum kendimi ve tekrar konsantre olmam zaman alıyor"* (open-ended question 1, student 75)

> *"I can say one of the biggest factors distracting my attention is internet outage. Unfortunately, I cannot help but distract my motivation by myself thinking what if I cannot connect again. Even the problem lasts for a short time, I feel messed up and need a long time to concentrate again."* (open-ended question 1, student 75)

Student 78 stated about the same question,

> *"Ev ortamında uygun ders çalışma ve dinleme yoktu ne yazık ki. Odaklanma problemleri ve tembellik ortaya çıktı*." (open-ended question 1, student 78)

> *"Unfortunately, there was no suitable study or listening environment at home. Concentration problems and laziness emerged."* (open-ended question 1, student 78)

Student 23 answered as,

> *"Bağlantı kopabiliyor, kapı çalabiliyor, sürekli konuşmalar duyabiliyorsunuz evde yaşayan diğer insanlara evden çık diyemiyorsunuz. Dikkatim birçok kez dağıldı bu sebeplerden."* (open-ended question 1, student 23)

> *"Internet connection can go any time, doorbell can be rung, you can hear conversations at home but you cannot kick the people out of the house. I was distracted because of these reasons so many times."* (open-ended question 1, student 23)

The answers for the question "What kind of problems did you have while having online language lessons?" were analysed and a table showing the problems students had during the online lessons was formed below. Table 2 demonstrates the main flaws learners had during online language classes.

Table 2. Flaws students faced during online language lessons

	f	%
Internet outage, power failure	48	57.14
Technological infrastructure (not having a computer, not having internet access)	35	41.66
Ideal study environment (noise made by family members, family unrest, not having a study room)	32	38.09
Online instruction platform (system failure)	8	9.52

According to Table 2 above, 57.14% of the students had internet outage problem during the lessons. 41.66% of the students had technological infrastructural problems like not having a computer, not having internet access and internet subscription. Some of these students had to pay for mobile internet packages for about 2.5 months until the end of the academic year. One of the students replied the same question as,

> "*Ev ortamı her an derse girmenize müsaade etmiyor maalesef. Bundan daha büyük ve ciddi olan problemse kesinlikle motivasyon kaybı. Ayrıca internet bağlantımın olmayışı yüzünden 2 ay bounca sürekli operatör üzerinden internet paketi satın almak zorunda kaldım. Bunu şu an sorun etmiyorum, ama uzun vadede bu kesinlikle bir problem*." (open-ended question 1, student 79).

> "*Home conditions may not be suitable for you to have lessons any time unfortunately. Except this, the bigger and more serious problem is certainly loss of motivation. In addition, I had to purchase mobile internet service regularly for 2 months because I did not have internet access at home. It is not a problem for now. However, this is a serious problem in the long run."* (open-ended question 1, student 79).

Another student wrote,

> *"Ev ortamında derse adapte olmak zor oluyor özelliklerde üç tane küçük erkek kardeşiniz varsa."* (open-ended question 1, student 42)

> *"It is hard to concentrate on lessons at home, especially if you have three little brothers."* (open-ended question 1, student 42)

Student 67 stated,

> *"İnternet bağlantısı problemleri, bilgisayarımın olmaması, aile evindeki gürültüler ve küçük kardeşimin beni rahatsız etmesi."* (open-ended question 1, student 67)

"Internet connection problems, not having a computer, noise at home and my little disturbing brother." (open-ended question 1, student 67)

Another learner responded,

"İnternetimin olmadığı zamanlar olduğu için bazı derslere katılamadığım oldu." (open-ended question 1, student 65)

"There were times when I could not attend the lessons because I did not have internet access." (open-ended question 1, student 65)

"Etkili bir eğitim olduğunu düşünmüyorum. Öğrenmede fırsat eşitliği yoktu, kimi arkadaşların bilgisayarı ya da internet bile yoktu. Bilgisayar teknolojileri hakkında bilgili olan öğrenciler daha aktif olabildiler. Olağanüstü durumlar olmadıkça yüzyüze eğitim modelini hem sosyalleşmek hem de fırsat eşitliği açısından doğru buluyorum." (open-ended question 1, student 32)

"There wasn't equality of opportunity in education, some of my friends do not have a computer or even internet access. Students who know more about computer technologies behaved more actively. I think face to face education model is more effective in terms of socializing and equality of opportunities unless there is an emergency in the country." (open-ended question 1, student 32)

38.09% of the students did not have an ideal study environment at their homes. They were sometimes interrupted during the lessons by the noise made by their sisters, brothers or parents. Some students did not have a private room to study.

Finally, online instruction platforms which students get online education had system failures from time to time. 9.52% of the students stated that they could not attend the lessons when the system failed. They reported that they cannot concentrate on their lessons when they had such kind of problems and they had difficulty in feeling the flow.

Although general flow experience seems moderate, students appear to agree on the idea that online education is not their common preference since overall mean value of autotelic experience was calculated as 3.1369 (somewhat disagree) with the standard deviation of 1.57130. The educational preferences of the students can be seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Educational preferences of students

Education type	f	%
Face to face education	60	71.42
Online education	9	10.71
Hybrid education (partly face to face partly online)	15	17.85
Total	84	100.0

As can be seen in Table 3, a considerable 71.42% of the students stated that they prefer face to face education. The flaws (see Table 4) may have caused the students to prefer face to face education. The lowest portion belongs to the online education choice (9%). Therefore, the main reason of preferring face-to-face education in the classrooms by participants seems to be the result of the problems they faced during their online education experiences shown in Table 3.

1.2. Research question 2: If so (if the students experience flow during online language lessons), in which categories of flow do they experience engagement most and least?

Students were proved to feel the flow during online language classes in the first research question. Next, descriptive statistics of categories were used to see in which categories of flow students experience engagement most and least.

Table 4. Overall mean values of flow categories

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Clear Goals	84	4.3988	1.05576
Unambiguous Feedback	84	4.2659	1.23836
Sense of Control	84	4.2351	1.22742
Loss of Self Consciousness	84	3.9405	1.33738
Challenge-Skill Balance	84	3.9196	1.13684
Transformation of Time	84	3.8601	1.16897
Concentration on the Task at Hand	84	3.2738	1.17813
Autotelic Experience	84	3.1369	1.57130
Overall mean value of online education flow experience	84	3.8788	.9000

Table 4 provides mean values of each category of the flow experience. It shows that students experience flow in the clear goals category most with the mean value of 4.3988. Unambiguous feedback follows the clear goals category in the second with the mean value of 4.2659. It is highly likely that when they feel secure about their targets and have necessary feedback from their teachers, they were able to feel the flow more during the lessons. Table 3 also shows that the category autotelic experience has the least effect in students' flow experiences with the mean value of 3.1369. This result coincides with the answers to the one of the questions in the background questionnaire asking "What is your preference: online education, face to face education or a hybrid one (partly online partly face to face)?"

1.3. Research question 3: Does gender make a difference in the flow experience levels?

First, normality tests were applied to the necessary data. Shapiro Wilkinson Test value was .312 (p>.05) which meant that data was identified as normal for gender differences. Next, independent sample t-test was applied.

Table 5. Independent sample t-test for the difference between flow experience levels in genders

Groups	n	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Female	59	3.9225	.80451	.600	35.253	.553
Male	25	3.7758	1.10516			

As can be seen in Table 5, p was calculated as .553 (p>.05), which means that there is not a significant difference between the flow experience levels of females and males.

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to search for the flow experiences of students in online language classes during Covid-19 outbreak. Data were collected from different sources of a Likert-style scale, open-ended questions and a background questionnaire to provide triangulation. The first research question was about whether the students had flow or not during online language lessons. The results showed that students had flow experiences during online lessons as in several studies (e.g., Cho, 2018; Cox, 2014; Cox & Montgomery, 2019; Ebrahimzade & Alavi, 2016; Hong, Hwang, Tai & Lin, 2017; Kirchoff, 2013; Nguyen, 2011; Şentürk, 2012). The second research question was in which categories of flow students felt the flow most and least. The results depicted that the clear goals placed in the first rank and in the second rank unambiguous feedback given by their teachers made the participants feel more secure and triggered their motivations on study. Cox (2014) demonstrated that clear goals and unambiguous feed-

back categories occupy a significant place in flow in in-class training. In this way, the conditions of flow in online lessons in this study show similarity to the conditions in in-class training. The emergence of sense of control in the third rank was the result of the first two categories making them aware of what they were doing and why they were doing, which explains that they had cognitive engagement in the lessons. Students reported that lessons were fluent, the tasks were challenging but their skills were enough to overcome the difficulties as mentioned in the studies by Cox (2014), Cox and Montgomery (2019), Cho (2018) and Kirchoff (2013). Mean values of loss of self-consciousness and concentration on the tasks which Şentürk (2012) claimed that they played positive roles in promoting flow were relatively lower in this study; however, autotelic experience placed in the last rank with its lowest mean value whereas Ebrahimzade and Alavi (2016) found the enjoyment (autotelic experience) was the leading factor of flow in their study. Students found their teachers interested and thought that the lessons were not too long and boring. They also had various flaws during online lessons such as sudden problems of internet outage, power cut, absence of a computer, regular internet access and an appropriate study environment at home. These flaws led the students to have lack of concentration on the tasks according to the results of the scale and findings from the open-ended questions. Therefore, even though they had a general pleasure about the online language learning experience, they stated in the background questionnaire that they do not want to experience online language practice once more unless the country is not in a state of emergency.

The main limitation of this study is that data were collected from only university EFL learners at the tertiary level. Considering this limitation of this present study, it can be suggested that education professionals and teachers may design their online language classes in a blended form of face-to-face training and online teaching to keep students away from alienation to language learning. However, if they have to continue their language teaching process online, they may record the lessons and let their students watch and repeat the lessons to solidify the outcomes. A further suggestion for the educators may be to give learners more homework requiring audio-visual preparations such as voice recordings and video recordings to increase their self confidence in a foreign language. Such kind of studies by students may help the students feel more relaxed and feel the optimal engagement during the lessons since they will already be ready for the language practice online. One another suggestion for the learners which will help students experience flow is to turn on their camera during the lesson so that they can feel themselves closer to their friends and teachers like in a real classroom. To get a more valid result, this study may be replicated in a wider scale by collecting data from all the EFL learners of the public universities across Turkey. The study may be conducted for each educational level separately. Another suggestion for further research may be an investigation of flow in the acquisition of four skills particularly to get a deeper understanding.

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