EVALUATION OF AN ENGLISH COURSE IN A DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAM

BİR UZAKTAN EĞİTİM PROGRAMINDAKİ İNGİLİZCE DERSİNİN DEĞERLENDİRİLMESİ

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Abstract: This paper aimed to gather the opinions of distance education program students on the effectiveness of a synchronous online English course. Since evaluations are necessary for the improvement of courses, the researcher, as the course teacher, expected to enrich the course in this way. As a mixed methods study, the opinions of students (N=60) studying in this program were gathered through a questionnaire consisting of open and closed-ended questions. The data collected were analysed with descriptive statistics and content analysis. The findings revealed that students generally preferred this distance education program because of its flexibility and adaptability. The advantages stated by the participants included distance education's independence of time and place. The students were generally content with the practices of the course teacher with some exceptions, yet they indicated that it is hard for them to learn English effectively through distance education. The underlying reasons and disadvantages were specified by the students as lack of interaction with their friends, lack of practice, lack of motivation, and lack of socialization. In sum, the study indicated that although distance education students enjoy the flexibility of the program, the course teacher needs to make improvements in order to fill in the gaps that were specified by the students.

Keywords: distance education, distance programs, English language, foreign language education, online education

Özet: Bu makale, bir uzaktan eğitim programında okuyan öğrencilerin eşzamanlı olarak aldıkları İngilizce dersinin etkililiğine ilişkin görüşlerini toplamayı amaçlamaktadır. Derslerin iyileştirilmesi için değerlendirme yapılması gerektiğinden, araştırmacının ders öğretmeni olarak dersi bu şekilde zenginleştirmesi beklenmektedir. Karma yöntem araştırması olarak, bu programda öğrenim gören öğrencilerin (N=60) görüşleri açık ve kapalı uçlu sorulardan oluşan bir anket aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Toplanan veriler, tanımlayıcı istatistikler ve içerik analizi ile analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, öğrencilerin genellikle esnek ve uyarlanabilir olması nedeniyle bu uzaktan eğitim programını tercih ettiğini ortaya koymuştur. Katılımcıların ifade ettiği avantajlar uzaktan eğitimin zamandan ve mekândan bağımsız olmasıdır. Öğrenciler, bazı istisnalar dışında genel olarak ders öğretmeninin uygulamalarından memnun kaldıklarını, ancak uzaktan eğitimle İngilizceyi etkili bir şekilde öğrenmenin kendileri için zor olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Bunun altında yatan nedenler ve dezavantajlar arkadaşları ile etkileşim eksikliği, uygulama eksikliği, motivasyon eksikliği ve sosyalleşme eksikliği olarak öğrenciler tarafından belirtilmiştir. Özetle bu çalışmada, uzaktan eğitim öğrencilerinin programın esnekliğini sevmelerine rağmen, ders öğretmeninin öğrenciler tarafından belirlenen boşlukları doldurmak için iyileştirmeler yapması gerektiği ortaya konmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: uzaktan eğitim, uzaktan programlar, İngilizce, yabancı dil eğitimi, çevrimiçi eğitim

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Introduction

With the developments in technology, computers have taken their place rapidly in educational environments. Computers, which were initially included into the classrooms to diversify teaching/learning activities, replaced the concept of the classroom in time, leading to the advancement of distance education. Although having a long history even before the computer technology, distance education has gained new dimensions thanks to the computers and the Internet.

Distance education, in its simplest definition, is "education where students are not physically present at school" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2016, p. 442). It is also known as e-learning and online learning, but it essentially refers to the learning environments where students and teachers are able to attend classes through the computers and the Internet. Distance education is also expressed as the form of effective communication between teachers and students, residing in separate environments, kilometres away from each other, yet are able to communicate both visually and audibly with each other (Kırık, 2014). As the definitions reveal, teachers and students, while outside the class, communicate through the image and sound provided by the technology. Although the benefits of a distance education are obvious, namely, flexibility (anywhere, anyplace and anytime), and lifelong and life-wide learning (i.e., learning whatever you want) (Ryan, 1999); its effectiveness for learning English is still the subject of many studies. Researchers aiming to enrich distance education for students have been working on this issue for years, however, the dropout rate in distance education is still higher than face-to-face education (Aydın, Öztürk, Büyükküse, Er, & Sönmez, 2019; Bawa, 2016; Christensen & Spackman, 2017; Curless, 2004; Radovan, 2019). In this regard, new studies are needed to make distance education lessons more effective.

Literature Review

Although various courses are delivered through distance education, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses are the main concern of this study. The effectiveness of learning English through distance education, and the ways to deliver English lessons more efficiently have been the concern of studies conducted worldwide. A group of studies focused on the views of students (e.g., Pepeler, Özbek & Adanır, 2018; Şirin & Tekdal, 2015; Zhang & Cui, 2010), whereas others investigated the opinions of academics delivering English courses via distance education platforms (e.g., Brown, Lewin, & Shikongo, 2014; Lewis et al., 2016; Ng, 2006). While investigating the views of students,

some of the studies focused on the course content and effectiveness of language skills (e.g., Ekmekçi, 2015), some others asked students to compare distance education to traditional face-to-face education (e.g., Şirin & Tekdal, 2015).

In her study, for instance, Altunay (2019) investigated the opinions of EFL university students on distance education of English. The study was conducted with 62 participants from a state university in Turkey, and the opinions of participants were collected through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. At the end of the study, the findings from the questionnaire and interviews were found to be contradictory. In other words, although in the questionnaire, participant students preferred face-to-face education over distance education, in the interviews they stated the opposite and remarked their contentment with the distance education of English. In the light of these findings, Altunay posited that students have confusing ideas towards distance education of English.

İlin (2019) also gathered the views of university students and examined the lifelong learning potential of a distance English course at a state university in Turkey. The study was conducted with 143 university students, and to collect the data of the study a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were utilized. The findings revealed that students had positive attitudes towards learning English online; however, they highlighted the importance of the presence of a teacher.

Ekmekçi (2015) also investigated the opinions of freshman students about the distance education of English using a questionnaire. He found that although students were content with the way some skills were taught, they were not satisfied especially with speaking, listening and writing activities. This indicated that the development of some skills, particularly productive skills, might be problematic in distance education.

In their study, Zhang and Cui (2010) examined the beliefs of EFL students on distance education of English and revealed that students generally found their communication with their teachers and peers insufficient. Moreover, the researchers compared the views of experienced and inexperienced distance education students and concluded that experienced students believe in the necessity of autonomous learning in distance education and feel less anxious and less frustrated than the inexperienced students.

Hemmati and Mojarrad (2016) conducted their research in a distance education university with distance education EFL students and their teachers. Their findings demonstrated flexibility as the best part of distance education for the students. The problematic issues stated by the students were the learning management system, lack of interaction (between the students and their teachers), and insufficient web-based materials. Teachers, on the other hand, stated that distance education is a good way of reaching many people, yet there are some problems to be resolved such as crowded classes, low quality of teacher training courses, and low quality of materials.

The study of Yüce (2019), on the other hand, centred upon the opinions of 30 teachers about the possible problems of distance FL education. The results indicated that with regard to language skills and language areas, participants supported distance education; however, they stated that classroom management is problematic.

As the previous studies indicated, generally both teachers and students believe in the necessity and applicability of distance English courses; however, nearly each study presented some problematic parts to be handled carefully. Students expect the course to be more interactive (Altunay, 2019; Hemmati & Mojarrad, 2016; İlin, 2019; Zhang & Cui, 2010), and teachers expect the quality of teaching system and materials to be raised (Hemmati & Mojarrad, 2016). Moreover, manageable classes (Hemmati & Mojarrad, 2016; Yüce, 2019) and training of the teachers (Hemmati & Mojarrad, 2016) are also issues raised by the teachers.

The present study, therefore, focused on the general attitudes of students towards distance English education, their satisfaction about classroom interactions (teacher-student and student-student), their contentment about the efficacy of the way the lesson is conducted, and their awareness about the effective study techniques regarding distance English lesson. By investigating participant students' views about English language lessons that they took during their first year of associate degree education, I intended to improve the course for the following years. The study, in this respect, addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the opinions of participants on distance education of EFL?

      -their general attitudes to distance education of English

      -their views on the sufficiency of student-teacher and student-student interaction

-their ideas about the efficacy of the teaching process

-their awareness about the effective study techniques

RQ2: What are the ideas of students on the advantages and disadvantages of distance education of English?

Method

Research Design

This study is a mixed methods study since the data of the study were collected with a questionnaire including both open and closed-ended questions. Mixing methods has five purposes: "triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation, and expansion" (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989, p. 259). In the current paper, the aim of mixing both qualitative and quantitative methods was expansion which "seeks to extend the breadth and range of inquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components" (Greene et al., 1989, p. 259).

Participants and Setting

The study group of the research consisted of 69 students enrolled in the distance computer programming department of a vocational school of a university in Turkey. Sixty of the students volunteered to participate in the study. The demographic part of the questionnaire indicated that most of the participants of the distance computer programming program were males (55 males and 5 females). Moreover, their age ranged between 17 to 47. The distribution of their age range and gender is given in Table 1.

Table 1.

The Distribution of Participants According to Age and Gender

		Age				
		17-24	25-32	33-40	41-47	Total
Gender	Female	3	2	0	0	5
	Male	14	14	22	5	55
Total		17	16	22	5	60

Computer programming is generally chosen by males in Turkey and this situation is the same even in distance education programs. The variety in participants' age indicates that distance education is preferred by people of different ages. As is observed in Table 1, there are both adults and young adults enrolled in the program.

In the demographic part of the questionnaire they were asked to state their reasons for choosing this distance education program. Their answers mostly revolved around "because I work", "I wanted to get a university certificate related to my job", "to get a university certificate", "because this is my second university". It seems that distance education programs are generally preferred by people who already have a job and want to advance their knowledge about an area. Besides, when their answers were examined in detail, it was revealed that the ones who were between the ages 17-24 mostly preferred this program because they already are a student at a formal education program. On the other hand, the participants who were between the ages 25-47 mostly stated that they preferred this program because they work at a job.

As for the lessons conducted, the participants took English I (A1-A2 level) and English II (A2-B1 level) lessons synchronously every week in both fall and spring semesters of the 2019-2020 academic year. Each synchronous English lesson lasted nearly 1,5 hours without a break. In line with the needs of the department, in every lesson, the teacher focused on the vocabulary, grammar, and/or reading skills. The platform that was used to deliver the English course was the one arranged by the university called ALMS, a kind of teaching management system developed by a firm named 'Advancity'. Although it is an asynchronous software, it has integration with synchronous live class applications. During the lessons students did not speak, they were just allowed to write if they had any questions or if the teacher asked questions related to the course. The teacher used both Turkish and English during the lessons. The course was conducted once in a week at around 5 pm. The absentee participants had the chance to watch the lessons afterwards, yet when they had questions, they only had the option to send emails to the course teacher either via the distance education system or via personal email account of the teacher.

After the lesson, the documents studied during the synchronous lesson and additional study materials were uploaded to the system, which is called asynchronous education. During the first seven weeks of the course, lessons were conducted synchronously, and the 8th week of each semester was allocated for midterm exams. Students also took their midterms via the distance

education platform. Final exam of the fall term was held in a face-to-face environment, yet the final exam of the spring term was again conducted online because of school closures around the world as a result of Covid-19 pandemic.

Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

In order to collect the data, a questionnaire was developed by the researcher according to the research aims and literature review conducted. The questionnaire involved both closed and open-ended questions. The first section of the questionnaire included 5 point Likert-type items, and the statements ranged from 'I strongly disagree' (1) to 'I strongly agree' (5). To find answers to the first research question and its sub-questions, closed-ended questions were composed of four sections as attitude (questions 1-5), student-teacher and student-student interactions (questions 6-12), the efficacy of the teaching process (questions 13-21), and students' awareness about the effective study techniques (22-27). The second part of the questionnaire was composed of open-ended questions. These questions interrogated students' views about the advantages and disadvantages of distance education, and aimed to answer the second research question.

After giving the final form to the questionnaire, the researcher applied to the Ethics Committee of Kırklareli University. The ethics committee approval of the study was obtained from Kırklareli University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Board (Approval Number: 35523585-199-E.10659). After obtaining the necessary approval, the questionnaire was created through Google Forms, necessary explanations and instructions were included, and sent to the students taking the English course.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Validity and reliability tests of the questionnaire were also conducted. In order to ensure content validity and face validity, the researcher consulted two experts. Before this procedure, there were 27 items in the questionnaire. As a result of the exchange of ideas with the experts, the wording of some items in the questionnaire was changed. For instance, an item was measuring two different things, and this item was made to measure only one in line with the expert opinion. Moreover, the experts suggested using the same terms (such as distance education not distance learning or online learning etc.) throughout the questionnaire which then applied to the items.

In order to measure the construct validity, the sources in the literature were scanned which guided the creation of the survey items. In order to test the reliability of the questionnaire, the questionnaire was applied to another distance education group (N = 51), and the internal consistency of the questionnaire was calculated. As a result of the reliability tests, the Cronbach Alpha score of the questionnaire was found to be α = .85 for 27 items, and the reliability of each item was over α =.80 indicating that the internal consistency of the items of the questionnaire is high, and it is reliable.

Data Analysis

SPSS v.25 was used to analyse the quantitative data of the research. Frequency and arithmetic averages (descriptive statistics) were calculated for the items of the first section.

The two open-ended questions of the second section were about the advantages and disadvantages of distance education of English lessons. The answers given to these two questions were first read through from the first to the last participant's comments. Then during the second reading, the answers were grouped into meaningful categories such as advantages: 'time independency', 'place independency'; disadvantages: 'lack of interaction', 'lack of motivation'. The reading and coding of the answers for this section were repeated several times until all the answers of the participants were placed under the relevant category.

Findings

General Attitude towards Distance EFL Courses

First five questions of the questionnaire assessed participants' general attitudes towards distance English education. Items 4 and 5 were negative, therefore they were reverse-coded while entering into the SPSS program. The findings are given in Table 2.

Table 2.

Students' Attitudes towards Distance English Education

	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
It is nice to learn English lesson through distance education.	60	2.00	5.00	4.30	0.78
It is fun to learn English lesson through distance education.	60	2.00	5.00	4.26	0.82

It is enjoyable to listen English lesson during distance education lessons.	60	2.00	5.00	4.18	0.89
It is hard to learn English lesson through distance education.	60	3.00	5.00	4.03	0.71
I think English cannot be learned through distance education.	60	1.00	5.00	3.88	1.04

According to Table 2, distance education computer programming students indicated that it is nice and fun to learn English through synchronous distance courses. Besides, they stated that listening to online English lessons is enjoyable. On the other hand, they also stated that it is hard to learn English through distance education, and most even believed that it cannot be learned in this way. Therefore, it can be concluded that students like to have synchronous English lessons, yet, they believe that learning English in this way is to some extent hard.

The Sufficiency of Student-Teacher and Student-Student Interactions

In a distance education, interactions among all participants is limited when compared to in-class traditional education. Therefore, it is hard, yet necessary, to provide a classroom atmosphere where students share their ideas with each other and with the teacher over distance education. For this reason, the ideas of the participant students on the sufficiency of interactions were also queried. Table 3 demonstrates their ideas on the efficacy of student-student and student-teacher interactions provided during distance English lessons.

Table 3.

Students' Views on the Sufficiency of Student-Teacher and Student-Student Interaction

	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
I think the written communication I have with my teacher in synchronous lessons is sufficient.	60	2.00	5.00	4.16	0.92
Although I communicate remotely with my classmates, I feel like I am part of a community.	60	2.00	5.00	4.15	0.87
I would like to have a verbal communication as well as written communication with my teacher.	60	1.00	5.00	3.90	1.13
I would like to communicate more with the English teacher during the synchronous lessons.	60	2.00	5.00	3.83	0.94
I think I can also socialize by writing in synchronous English lessons.	60	1.00	5.00	3.81	0.94
I think the written communication that I establish with my friends during the synchronous lessons is enough.	60	1.00	5.00	3.50	1.04
I think it is necessary to communicate with the teacher and friends face-to-face in order to learn English.	60	1.00	5.00	2.86	1.33

Table 3 shows that students generally found their written interactions with the teacher enough and stated that they feel like a part of a community even if they attend distance education. Moreover, although not supported strongly, they stated that they would like to have verbal communication during the lessons. On the other hand, even if students believed that their written communication with the teacher was sufficient, they indicated that they had less communication with their friends during the lessons. Lastly, the participants indicated that communicating with the teacher and friends face-to-face is not necessary to learn English because this item had the lowest score in this category of the questionnaire.

The Efficacy of the English Teaching Process Through Synchronous Online Lessons

In the questionnaire, the efficacy of the distance English lesson was also questioned by adding relevant items that query if the participants found the course effective. The aim was to question the teaching process of the teacher, which was expected to be helpful in redesigning the course for future practices. Table 4 indicates students' ideas about the efficacy of the teaching process.

Table 4.

Students' Ideas about the Efficacy of the Teaching Process

	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
I think I get enough answers when I ask questions to the teacher during synchronous English lessons.	60	3.00	5.00	4.65	0.57
I think the way of teaching of English teacher during the synchronous lesson is understandable.	60	3.00	5.00	4.43	0.59
I think the questions asked by the teacher during synchronous English lessons are sufficient.	60	3.00	5.00	4.35	0.57
I think the questions asked by the teacher during synchronous English lessons are understandable.	60	3.00	5.00	4.25	0.54
I think the time given by the teacher to answer the questions during English lessons is sufficient.	60	3.00	5.00	4.15	0.54
I think the duration of the English course is sufficient for me to understand.	60	2.00	5.00	3.71	0.94
I prefer to use English as the language of communication in the English class.	60	1.00	5.00	3.25	1.22
I prefer to use Turkish as the language of communication in the English class.	60	1.00	5.00	3.10	1.24
I would like the English teacher to give more homework for the English lesson.	60	1.00	5.00	2.65	1.14

The item "I think I get enough answers when I ask questions to the teacher during synchronous English lessons" got the highest score in this part of the questionnaire. In other words, they believed that their English teacher's answers to their questions were enough. Moreover, they stated that the

teacher's way of teaching was understandable for them, and the questions that the teacher asked during the synchronous lessons were both understandable and sufficient, and the time allocated for them to answer was sufficient. On the other hand, the participants were not sure about the duration of the lesson and which language to be used while the teacher delivers the course since both Turkish and English were chosen nearly at the same rates. Lastly, homework was not preferred by the students.

Awareness about the Effective Study Techniques

The last part of the questionnaire was about the ideas of students on English learning techniques. It aimed to question their awareness about the most effective ways of learning English, because in distance education programs, students need to have self-management. Most of the time they are required to manage their own learning. Table 5 indicates their preferences.

Table 5.

Students' Ideas about the Most Beneficial Study Techniques

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
I can learn English lesson when I study regularly after class	60	2.00	5.00	4.08	0.80
The study notes given by the teacher after the synchronous lessons are sufficient for me to repeat/learn the lesson.	60	3.00	5.00	4.05	0.72
Listening to the English lesson in synchronous lessons is enough for me to learn.	60	2.00	5.00	3.66	0.95
I learn English by studying with friends.	60	1.00	5.00	3.21	1.10
I can learn English only by studying exam weeks.	60	1.00	5.00	2.63	1.11
I think I can do the English lesson without studying.	60	1.00	4.00	2.21	0.95

According to Table 5, the participants generally stated that studying the lesson regularly would be beneficial for them in learning English, and the notes/documents uploaded by the course teacher were sufficient in this respect. They were aware that just attending the lesson would not be enough in learning, and studying with friends was not a strong option for them because they do not have the chance to come together with their classmates. Moreover, they suggested that just studying during the exam weeks or being successful without studying is not enough. In sum, their choices demonstrated that they were aware of the most beneficial ways of learning English.

The Advantages and Disadvantages of Distance Education of English

In order to answer the second research question, students were asked about the advantages and disadvantages of distance education in the second section of the questionnaire. Their answers about the advantages of distance education can be grouped into two: time and place. They stated that they could attend the lessons at any time they wanted because the lessons were recorded during synchronous lessons, and then uploaded to the platform for the ones who could not manage to attend. Besides, students could also watch the same lesson whenever they want or need which is not possible in traditional face-to-face classes. As stated before, most of the students work during the day, so the synchronous lessons were conducted at nights generally after 5 pm. Therefore, they stated that they could attend the lessons easily after work. Except for time management, the second stated advantage of distance education was place. Most of the participants stated that they attended the lessons in a quiet and comfortable environment. They also indicated that they attended the lessons even if they were at work. It is, therefore, evident that distance education is also appropriate to the students who want to stay away from the noisy classroom environment. The two example answers are given below:

I can listen to the lesson without being disturbed by the other students around. [P43]

I don't like crowded places and classrooms are always crowded, so listening to the lesson on my own is the best for me. [P57]

As for the disadvantages, lack of interaction, lack of practice, lack of motivation and lack of socialization are the categories that emerged. The most common answer was lack of interaction. Students stated that when they had questions after the lesson, they were expected to ask the teacher via emails, which they found difficult. Besides, their interaction was limited to the duration of the lesson; however, in a formal learning environment they can ask questions to the teachers whenever they are at school. Because of lack of interaction, their chances of learning from their classmates were also eliminated. Another disadvantage was lack of practice. They stated that in a formal learning environment they have lots of opportunities for practice, and these opportunities were limited in online learning because of the time constraints of synchronous lessons. Students also stated that distance education leads them to laziness which results in lack of motivation. Even if they attended the synchronous lessons and knew that they can learn English by practising after the

lesson, most of the time they did not do so because they did not have an obligation until the exams. Last disadvantage stated by the participants was lack of socialization. It is, of course, not expected for distance education environments to be social, since students do not come together to share anything except for synchronous lessons. For this reason, during such lessons the socialization opportunity was very limited. In our case, they only had a chance to come together and socialize during the examination weeks.

Discussion

This paper aimed to gather the opinions of distance education program students on the effectiveness of a synchronous online English course. Since course evaluation studies are beneficial in providing feedback to the course teachers in the first place, the results of the current study were expected to be helpful to the course teacher in redesigning the course in accordance with the opinions of students. Moreover, the study aimed to present suggestions to the English teachers of other distance education programs having similar problems.

The findings of the first research question revealed that general views of students about distance English course were not totally negative, although there were some problematic issues to be solved as concluded in several studies (e.g., Doğan, 2020; Göçmez, 2014; İlin, 2019; Şirin, 2015; Yavuz, 2016). This finding contradicts with the findings of a few studies conducted in Turkey, which reported negative opinions and attitudes of students regarding distance English education (e.g., Doğan, 2020; Eroğlu & Kalaycı, 2020; Gürleyik & Akdemir, 2018; Pepeler, et al., 2018; Şen-Ersoy, 2015). The participants also found the English course fun and enjoyable, yet they stated that it was hard to learn English through distance education. There might be many reasons for this. For instance, when they attend the lesson, they may understand the content and enjoy it; however, when they fail to attend the synchronous lessons, it might be difficult for them to study and learn the language on their own. In addition, if they had a question to ask while studying on their own, they were required to send an email to the course teacher, which they believed was time consuming. As a result, they generally avoided asking questions to the teacher. At this point, several researchers suggest teachers to benefit from 'contact sessions' (Mampane, 2017; Tsagari, 2014). During these contact sessions teachers provide opportunities to the students to interact with their peers, inform students on how to benefit from the distance education and how to use the materials, and guide students about self-management of their learning (Mampane, 2017; Simpson, 2002; Tsagari, 2014).

These contact sessions are generally conducted regularly in face-to-face environments. Nevertheless, if it is not possible for distance education students to come together regularly in contact sessions, teachers can benefit from online discussion forums (Oliver, 2016). These online discussion forums can be organized periodically or after each lesson.

As for the interaction issue of the first research question, the findings ascertained that the interaction was a problem in distance English lessons. Although students stated that their interaction with the course teacher was enough, they indicated that their communication with their peers was limited because during the lessons they only had the chance to write to each other and to the teacher. And even then, they generally did not have so much time to write while listening to the course and trying to answer the teacher's questions. This finding is in line with the study of İlin (2020) which concluded that students are in need of more interactive activities. Altunay (2019), on the other hand, remarked that lacking necessary appliances like ear-phones or connecting to the lessons via mobile phones make it impossible for the students to have verbal interactions with their peers or with the teacher. Although it would be unrealistic to expect an interaction similar to traditional classes, synchronous lessons can be conducted in a more interactional way. Even if it is not possible to have a verbal communication for the students during synchronous lessons, English teachers can benefit from the flipped learning method. In this method, lecturing and homework change their place (Abeysekera & Dawson, 2014). Before the lesson, students study the topic, and then when they come to the class, they have more chances to practice the topic and work collaboratively. To provide such a practice in our case and in similar situations, distance foreign language educators can share their documents beforehand, and during the synchronous lessons, students can be provided practice activities to learn the topic. Moreover, crowded classes present problems in most cases (Hemmati & Mojarrad, 2016). If the class size is crowded, students taking the course can be divided into several groups to conduct the lesson more interactively. By this means, verbal communication, which is not applicable in crowded classes, can also be possible. To increase the interaction among students, teachers can also assign group work to them that lead them to come together every week over a platform like Zoom or Google Meet, and thus they may have the chance to collaborate and learn together. Such an approach may also contribute to students' self-management skills.

Another issue examined under the first research question was the efficacy of the English teaching process through synchronous online lessons. Although, the study of Eroğlu and Kalaycı (2020) revealed that the students were not content with the way English lessons conducted, in our study participants generally stated that they were content with the way the lesson was delivered. They were only not sure about which language to be used while the teacher delivers the course. In fact, this might result from the variety in students' levels. As concluded in many studies, students with a high level of English prefer the teacher to use English during the lesson, while low-level students prefer their mother tongue to be used (e.g., Al Sharaeai, 2012; Asif, Bashir, & Zafar; 2018). A group of studies support the use of only English, yet others report that when necessary, especially with low level students, teachers can take the advantage of L1 (Macaro, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Therefore, in a distance English course, when necessary, teachers can benefit from the advantages of using L1 of students, particularly during the explanation of complex structures. Moreover, it was also revealed that students do not want to have homework. Since the participants of this study were generally between the ages 25 and 47 and had a professional life, it is normal for them not to choose homework. However, in their study, Karabatak, Alanoğlu, and Karabatak (2020) revealed that homework supported distance education is more beneficial for the academic achievement of the students. Therefore, teachers can make homework more fun, or they might compensate for homework by including more in-class activities to synchronous lessons.

As for the effective study techniques, which was the last sub-topic of the first research question, the answers of the students indicated that they are aware of the most beneficial ways of learning and practicing English, yet whether they apply them or not is still unknown. However, in order to increase students' self-management and learner autonomy, they can be educated on how to benefit more from the distance education courses because students generally do not attend the courses regularly and try to watch the recorded lesson videos or read the documents just before the exam. A prior training, generally at the beginning of the academic term, on how to benefit more from distance education courses would be helpful in getting the maximum benefit from the courses they take. The study of Pepeler et al., (2018) also concluded that students need a prior informing session about the usage of distance education courses.

The findings of the second research question revealed that the advantages of distance education of English for the participants include independence of time and place, which are the most common

advantages remarked by researchers (Cowan, 1995; Keremidchieva & Yankov, 2001). Other studies also revealed that an advantage of distance education is students' having the freedom to study at their own pace (Cowan, 1995), which was not focused by the participants of this study. However, when educators give students an idea of managing their study time and show them exemplary study programs, it would be possible for students to learn how to self-manage their learning. In fact, students should be made aware that in a distance education, the responsibility of students is equal to the teachers. In a way, distance education is student-centred and teachers are guides, so students should be made aware that they are responsible for their own learning. This is possible with the help of the course teachers because most students are used to traditional classroom practices and not so much aware of the requirements of distance education.

The disadvantages stated by the participants for the second research question are lack of interaction, lack of practice, lack of motivation, and lack of socialization. Lack of interaction is also accepted as a barrier in the study of Zhang and Cui (2010) and Hemmati and Mojarrad (2016). Since interaction issues were also handled in the first research question of the study, the recommendations on this issue are listed above.

As for lack of practice, the courses in distance education are generally crowded, so it is not possible for the teachers to provide many practice opportunities to the students. However, dividing a crowded class into a few groups and conducting the lesson in this way may yield better practice opportunities for the students. Since English learning requires practice, it would be impossible to provide speaking opportunities to the students in crowded classes. The findings of Ekmekçi (2015) also supports our finding as his study revealed that students were not content with the speaking and writing activities. The key to providing an interactive course and giving students practice opportunities is decreasing the number of students in an online class.

Lack of motivation is also a common problem since students do not have to come to the school and participate in lessons in-person. In traditional classrooms, students and teachers have the chance to crack a joke and change the atmosphere when students get bored. However, this is not possible in distance education because teachers do not have the chance to observe students during the lesson, so they may not understand whether they need a change of subject. As a solution to lack of motivation, Robb and Sutton (2014) suggest sending motivational emails to the students. In this way, the researchers expect students to perform better because sometimes people need the support

of others. Curless (2004), on the other hand, suggests the ARCS model of Keller, which is the acronym of attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction. Accordingly, the researcher offers distance education teachers to grab the attention of the students by activating their curiosity. After gathering the attention of students, he suggests relating the topic to their everyday life and showing them how to use this piece of knowledge in their real life. Moreover, in order to increase students' confidence, the researcher recommended the teachers to ask students to share their personal profiles in the discussion area, which is expected to help them in introducing themselves and getting to know their classmates. Lastly, Curless suggested that to ensure satisfaction, teachers can provide extrinsic rewards such sending a message by using students' first name, or opening conversation with a positive message like 'Thanks for your assignment'. All of these can be used to motivate students and prevent drop outs or failures due to lack of motivation.

One last disadvantage emerged in the current study is lack of socialization. Although participants of the distance education program were aware that distance education programs are not appropriate for socialization, still several of them stated that socialization is important in learning. To overcome lack of socialization, English teachers can benefit from web-based discussion forums (Asfaranjan et al., 2013) where students come together and share something related to the English course, and this may give them a chance to practice their English. Besides, students can be encouraged to come together at video conference platforms both in the presence of the teacher and in their peer groups. In this way, they may feel that they belong to a community which in return may increase their motivation, socialization, and interaction.

Conclusion

In conclusion, distance English courses have both advantages and disadvantages. However, it is possible to conduct them in a way that students do feel the support of the teacher. To do so, teachers need to implement various methods ranging from online discussion forums to video conference platforms. Although distance education is in a way student-centred, and students are required to self-manage their learning, English teachers need to provide a learning environment that engages the attention of the students, motivates them during the process, and guides them in learning and managing their own learning. As a result, both teachers and students should be aware that distance education courses are different from traditional classrooms, and such courses should be enhanced

and handled according to their own norms. The suggestions given in the current study are expected to be helpful to the distance education teachers and other stakeholders.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Tarihi çok eskilere dayanan, günümüzde uzaktan eğitim olarak adlandırılan sınıftan bağımsız olarak bilgisayarlar ve internet vasıtasıyla yürütülen eğitim uygulamalarının günümüzdeki biçimine evirilmesi bilgisayarlar sayesindedir. Bilgisayarlar aracılığıyla uzaktan eğitim derslerine istedikleri yerde, zamanda ve mekândan bağımsız olarak ulaşabilen öğrenciler ise çağın getirdiği nimetlerden faydalanmak istemektedir. Sayıları önceden az olan uzaktan eğitim uygulamaları da gerek toplumdan gelen talep gerekse de çağın getirdiği zorunluluklarla birlikte gitgide yaygınlaşmaya başlamıştır. Önceleri üniversitelerde örgün eğitimdeki derslerin bazıları uzaktan eğitim yoluyla verilmekteyken günümüzde uzaktan eğitim programları açılmıştır. Dolayısıyla etkililiği ve verimliliği de sürekli tartışmalara konu olan ve nasıl daha başarılı bir şekilde yürütebiliriz konusunda araştırmalarla gündemde duran uzaktan eğitim derslerine bir de tamamen uzaktan eğitim yoluyla yürütülen uzaktan eğitim programları eklendiğinde bu konudaki araştırmalarda artış olması kaçınılmazdır. İngilizce dersi de uzaktan eğitim yoluyla yürütülen derslerden biridir ve çeşitli araştırmalara konu olmuştur. Bu çalışmanın amacı da bir uzaktan eğitim programında okuyan öğrencilerin aldıkları İngilizce dersinin etkililiğine ilişkin görüşlerini öğrenmek ve bu doğrultuda dersi düzenlemek ve daha verimli hale getirmektir. Dahası elde edilen bulgular ışığında uzaktan eğitimle İngilizce dersini veren diğer öğretmenlere de yol gösterici olmak amaçlanmıştır.

Bu bağlamda, çalışma aşağıdaki araştırma sorularını cevaplamayı amaçlamaktadır.

1. Uzaktan eğitim öğrencilerinin yabancı dil olarak İngilizcenin uzaktan eğitimine karşı düşünceleri nelerdir?

- uzaktan İngilizce eğitimine karşı genel tutumları

-öğrenci-öğretmen ve öğrenci-öğrenci etkileşiminin yeterliliği konusundaki görüşleri

-öğretme sürecinin etkililiği ile ilgili fikirleri

-etkili çalışma teknikleri konusundaki farkındalıkları

2. Öğrencilerin uzaktan İngilizce eğitiminin avantajları ve dezavantajları hakkındaki fikirleri nelerdir?

Karma araştırma deseninde düzenlenmiş bu çalışmada, araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen ve hem kapalı uçlu hem de açık uçlu sorulardan oluşan bir anket kullanılmıştır. Ölçek dört faktörden oluşmaktadır: tutum, öğrenci-öğretmen ve öğrenci-öğrenci etkileşimi, öğretim süreci ve öğrencilerin etkili çalışma teknikleri konusundaki farkındalıkları. Ayrıca ölçekte uzaktan eğitimin olumlu ve olumsuz yanlarını sorgulayan iki adet açık uçlu soru da yer almaktadır. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu bir üniversitenin meslek yüksekokulunun uzaktan bilgisayar programcılığı bölümüne kayıtlı 69 öğrenci oluşturmaktadır. Bu öğrencilerden 60 tanesi çalışmaya gönüllü olarak katılmıştır. Ölçekte yer alan kapalı uçlu sorular tanımlayıcı istatistiklerle analiz edilmiş, açık uçlu sorular ise içerik analiziyle incelenmiştir.

2019-2020 eğitim-öğretim yılının her iki döneminde katılımcılar her hafta eş zamanlı olarak İngilizce I (A1-A2 seviyesi) ve İngilizce II (A2-B1 seviyesi) derslerini almışlardır. Her eşzamanlı ders aralıksız yaklaşık 1-1,5 saat sürmüş ve her derste bölümün ihtiyacı doğrultusunda kelime bilgisi, gramer ve okuma becerilerine önem verilmiştir. Dersler sırasında öğrenciler konuşmamış, sadece soruları olduğunda veya öğretmen dersle ilgili sorular sorduğunda yazmalarına izin verilmiştir. Öğretmen derslerde hem Türkçe hem de İngilizce kullanmış ve dersler akşam saat 17:00dan itibaren işlenmiştir. Devam zorunluluğu olmayan bu derste katılımcılara dersleri diledikleri zaman izleme şansı verilmiştir. Ancak dersle ilgili soruları olduğunda, dersin öğretmenine kullanılan sistem üzerinden ya da kişisel e-posta hesabı aracılığıyla e-posta gönderme seçeneği sunulmuştur.

Yılsonunda yürütülen mevcut araştırma sonucunda çözülmesi gereken bazı sorunlu konular olmasına rağmen öğrencilerin İngilizce dersine karşı görüşlerinin tamamen olumsuz olmadığı ortaya çıkmıştır. Katılımcılar İngilizce dersini eğlenceli ve zevkli bulduklarını, ancak uzaktan eğitimle İngilizce öğrenmenin zor olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Bunun pek çok nedeni olabilir; örneğin derse katıldıklarında içeriği anlayıp keyif alabilirler, ancak senkronize derslere katılmadıklarında kendi başlarına çalışıp öğrenmeleri zor olabilir.

Etkileşim konusunda ise öğrenciler, ders öğretmeni ile etkileşimlerinin yeterli olduğunu ifade etmelerine rağmen, akranlarıyla iletişimlerinin sınırlı olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Geleneksel sınıflara benzer bir etkileşim beklemek gerçekçi olmasa da eşzamanlı dersler daha etkileşimli bir şekilde yürütülebilir. Senkronize dersler sırasında öğrencilerle sesli iletişim kurmak mümkün olmasa da, öğretmen tersyüz öğrenme yönteminden yararlanabilir. Dersten önce öğrenciler konuyu inceleyebilir ve sınıfa geldiklerinde konuyu uygulama fırsatı bulabilirler. Böyle bir uygulama sağlamak için eğitimciler belgelerini önceden paylaşabilir ve senkronize derslere geldiklerinde öğrencilere konuyu öğrenmeleri için alıştırma etkinlikleri verebilirler.

Çalışmada incelenen bir diğer konu da İngilizce öğretim sürecinin etkililiğidir. Katılımcılar genellikle dersin işlenme şeklinden memnun olduklarını belirtmişlerdir. Bu konuda kararsız oldukları nokta dersi işlerken kullanılacak olan dildir ki bu durum öğrencilerin seviyelerindeki çeşitlilikten ya da dersin öğretmeninin uygulamalarından kaynaklanıyor olabilir. Yapılan çalışmalar da gerektiğinde öğrencinin anadilinin kullanılabileceğini desteklediğinden öğretmenler özellikle karmaşık yapıların açıklanması sırasında öğrencilerin anadilini kullanmanın avantajlarından yararlanabilirler. Öğrencilerin tercih etmediği bir diğer konu ise ödevdir. İncelenen programdaki öğrenciler genellikle 25-47 yaşları arasında olduğundan çoğunun çalışma hayatı içinde olması gün içinde derslerine çalışmak için zamanları olmadığını göstermektedir. Bu durumda, yukarıda önerildiği gibi, tersyüz öğrenme yöntemiyle ev ödevi yerine ödevi sınıfta yapabilirler. Böylelikle eş zamanlı derslerde hem konuyu öğrenip pratik yapabilirler hem de arkadaşlarıyla daha fazla işbirliği yapma fırsatları olur.

Etkili çalışma tekniklerine gelince, öğrencilerin cevapları, İngilizce öğrenmenin ve pratik yapmanın faydalı yollarının farkında olduklarını göstermiştir. Ancak, öğrenciler öz yönetimlerini ve öğrenen özerkliklerini artırmak için uzaktan eğitim kurslarından nasıl daha fazla yararlanabilecekleri konusunda eğitilebilirler. Eğitim döneminin başında yapılacak bir ön eğitim, aldıkları derslerden maksimum fayda sağlamalarına yardımcı olacaktır. Ya da düzenli aralıkla yürütülecek olan çevrimiçi tartışma ve bilgilendirme faaliyetleri sayesinde yaşadıkları zorlukların üstesinden gelmeleri için desteklenebilirler.

Son olarak, uzaktan İngilizce eğitiminin avantaj ve dezavantajları araştırılmıştır. Buna göre öğrencilerin belirttiği avantajlar zamandan ve mekândan bağımsız olmaktır. Uzaktan eğitimde öğrencilerin sorumluluğunun öğretmenlerle eşit olduğu konusunda öğrenciler bilinçlendirilmelidir

çünkü eşzamanlı derslere katılmadıklarında yeterli verimi alamayabilirler. Bir bakıma uzaktan eğitim öğrenci merkezlidir ve öğretmenler rehberdir. Bu nedenle öğrenciler kendi öğrenmelerinden kendilerinin sorumlu olduğu konusunda bilinçlendirilmelidir.

Katılımcılar tarafından belirtilen dezavantajlar etkileşim eksikliği, uygulama eksikliği, motivasyon eksikliği ve sosyalleşme eksikliğidir. Etkileşim eksikliği araştırmanın ilk sorusunda da yer almaktadır ve yukarıda incelenmiştir.

Uygulama eksikliği ise hâlihazırdaki sınıfların genel olarak kalabalık olmasından kaynaklanmaktadır. Bu yüzden sınıfları birkaç gruba bölerek ders işlemenin öğrencilerin uygulama yapma fırsatını arttıracağı düşünülmektedir.

Motivasyon eksikliği yaygın bir sorundur ve öğrencilerin okula gelip derslere şahsen katılmaları gerekmediği için kaçınılmazdır. Geleneksel sınıflarda öğretmenler, öğrenciler sıkıldıklarında atmosferi değiştirme şansına sahiptir. Ancak uzaktan eğitimde bu mümkün değildir çünkü öğretmenlerin ders sırasında öğrencileri gözlemleme şansı olmadığı için konu değişikliğine ihtiyaç duyup duymadıklarını anlayamayabilirler.

Son olarak ortaya çıkan bir diğer dezavantaj ise sosyalleşme eksikliğidir. Uzaktan eğitim programına katılanlar uzaktan eğitimin sosyalleşmeye uygun olmadığının farkında olsalar da sosyalleşmenin öğrenmede önemli olduğu bir gerçektir. Sosyalleşme eksikliğinin üstesinden gelmek için İngilizce öğretmenleri, öğrencilerin bir araya gelip İngilizce dersiyle ilgili bir şeyler paylaştıkları ve hatta bu şekilde İngilizce pratik yapma şansına sahip olabilecekleri web tabanlı tartışma forumlarından yararlanabilirler. Ayrıca öğrenciler, video konferans platformlarında hem öğretmenin huzurunda hem de gruplar halinde kendi başlarına bir araya gelmeleri için teşvik edilebilir. Bu sayede motivasyonlarını, sosyalleşmelerini ve etkileşimlerini artıracak bir topluluğa ait olduklarını hissedeceklerdir.

Etik Beyan: "*Evaluation of an English Course in a Distance Education Program*" başlıklı çalışmanın yazım sürecinde bilimsel, etik ve alıntı kurallarına uyulmuş; toplanan veriler üzerinde herhangi bir tahrifat yapılmamıştır ve veriler toplanmadan önce Kırklareli Üniversitesi Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Kurulu'ndan 21.07.2020 tarih ve 35523585-199-E.10659 sayılı etik izin alınmıştır. Karşılaşılacak tüm etik ihlallerde "Mehmet Akif Ersoy Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi Yayın Kurulunun" hiçbir sorumluluğunun olmadığı, tüm sorumluluğun Sorumlu Yazara ait olduğu ve bu çalışmanın herhangi başka bir akademik yayın ortamına değerlendirme için gönderilmemiş olduğunu taahhüt ederim.