

KORONAVİRÜS 19 SALGINI SÜRECİNDE UZAKTAN EĞİTİMİN DEĞERLENDİRİLMESİ: TÜRK İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMENLERİNİN GÖRÜŞLERİ

AN EVALUATION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION DURING THE CORONAVIRUS 19 PANDEMIC: THE VIEWS OF TURKISH EFL TEACHERS

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Özet: Koronavirüs salgınının dünyadaki eğitim sistemleri üzerinde önemli etkisi olmuştur. Bu bağlamda, öğrencilerin eğitimini kesintisiz sürdürmek için uzaktan eğitim bir alternatif olarak görülmüştür. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye'nin farklı şehirlerindeki ortaokul ve liselerde görev yapan İngilizce öğretmenlerinin İngilizce öğretimi bağlamında uzaktan eğitimi kullanma konusundaki görüşlerini incelemektir. Bu amaçla nitel araştırma deseni benimsenmiş ve 2019-2020 eğitim öğretim yılı bahar döneminde 40 Türk İngilizce öğretmeni bu araştırmaya katılmıştır. Araştırmacılar, verileri toplamak için çevrimiçi bir anket geliştirmişlerdir ve uygulamışlardır ve tüm katılımcılara sosyal ağlar üzerinden erişmişlerdir. Çalışma, katılımcıların uzaktan eğitim konusunda herhangi bir eğitim almadıklarını ve uzaktan eğitim konusunda herhangi bir deneyime sahip olmadıklarını göstermiştir. Çalışmada ayrıca internet bağlantı sorunları, internet yokluğu, teknolojik cihaz eksikliği, teknik sorunlar ve uzaktan eğitim konusunda teknolojik bilgi eksikliğinin katılımcılar için en yaygın zorluklar olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Sonuç olarak, mevcut çalışma öğretmenler için acil bir uzaktan eğitim eğitimi düzenlenmesini, öğretmen önerileri dikkate alınmasını; üniversitelerde hizmet öncesi öğretmen yetiştirme programına uzaktan öğretim dersi dahil edilmesi gerektiğini önermektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Uzaktan Eğitim, İngilizce öğretmenleri, Koronavirüs19*

Abstract: The coronavirus pandemic has a significant impact on the educational systems around the world. In this context, distance education has been considered as an alternative to maintain the education of students undisrupted. The aim of this study is to explore the views of EFL teachers working at secondary and high schools in different cities in Turkey about using distance education in EFL contexts. For this purpose, a qualitative research design was adopted and 40 Turkish EFL teachers took part in this study in the spring term of 2019-2020 academic year. The researchers developed and implemented an online questionnaire to collect the data and accessed all the participants through social networks. The study showed that the participants did not receive any kind of training on distance education and did not have any experience in distance education. The study also revealed that internet connection problems, absence of internet, lack of technological devices, technical problems and lack of technological knowledge about distance education were the most prevalent challenges for the participants. As a result, the current study suggests that; an immediate training on distance education should be organized for teachers; teacher suggestions should be taken into consideration; and a course on distance teaching should be included in pre-service teacher training program at universities.

Keywords: *Distance education, EFL teachers, Covid-19 pandemic*

INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus pandemic had a significant impact on the educational systems around the world, leading to the global closures of schools, universities and colleges. As a result, switching to distance education has been considered as an alternative to the face-to-face activities in order to maintain the education of students uninterrupted.

Distance education (DE) is a kind of education where teachers and students are not physically present at their schools and communicate with each other through the use of different technologies such as television, DVDs, teleconferencing, and Web learning (Matthews, 1999; Kiryakova, 2009; Vlassenko & Bozhok, 2014). In DE, teachers send the textual, audial and visual learning materials to their students via mail, or through the online programs in which they do the distance teaching and also, they share those the textual, audial and visual learning materials with their students during the broadcast (Matthews, 1999).

DE has both advantages and disadvantages. It provides students to attend the courses and teachers to manage the learning activities from anywhere and any time as long as they have internet connection (Nagrle, 2013). The content availability is another advantage of distance education. The students can access to the documents of the lesson whenever they want to review (Oliveira, Penedo & Pereira, 2018). Saving time is the other advantage of DE. The teachers and students do not have to commute the place in which the education takes place (Bijeesh, 2017; Nagrle, 2013). On the other hand, lack of social interaction is one of the disadvantages of DE. Students can feel isolated although they interact with their peers and teachers through discussion boards, emails, video conferencing software (Sadeghi, 2019). Students' learner autonomy comes to foreground and they need to motivate themselves in this process (Brown, 2017). However, the students may be distracted and may not follow the deadlines of the assignments and meet the requirements of their courses (Nagrle, 2013; Oliveira, Penedo & Pereira, 2018).

Turkey is also one of the countries to suspend face-to-face education. Turkish Ministry of National Education decided to switch to DE for primary, secondary and high school students through EBA TV as of 23rd March to make them to continue their education at their homes (MONE, 2020).

Furthermore, the live lessons through EBA have started for the 8th grade students, high school including preparatory classes and 12th grade students as of 13rd April, 2020 in order to reduce the negative effects and anxieties on the students preparing for the exams due to the Corona virus pandemic (MONE,2020).

Studies conducted on DE in Turkey so far mainly focus on the views of university students (Altunay & Mutlu, 2010; Altunay, 2013; Ekmekçi, 2015; Özüdoğru & Hişmanoğlu, 2016; Solak & Cakır, 2014). Thus, this study is significant as it reveals the views of Turkish EFL teachers about the use of DE in secondary and high schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

When we review the literature on DE, we come to the conclusion that most of the research on DE focus on learner perspectives rather than on how teachers view and what teachers think about DE. Therefore, it would be appropriate to give a chronological account of this research at this point, having already mentioned the lack of research on teacher perspective focused DE research.

Hurd (2000), for instance, examined the views of language learners and the challenges they encountered on learning French through DE. The results of this study showed that the participants' main concerns were lack of time, less opportunity to speak with others, having trouble with evaluating their own progress and requesting help.

In their study, Altunay and Mutlu (2010) examined the use of ICT of Open Education Faculty students in English language learning and their views on language learning through DE. The study demonstrated that the students are required to use various kinds of ICT tools and services. The students favoured ICT especially during vocabulary learning. Access to authentic materials was reported as a benefit of distance learning. The most important challenge the students encountered was that they had trouble with improving their speaking and writing skills.

Madaus (2013) investigated the benefits and challenges of online and technology blended courses from the perspective of college and university teachers. This study revealed that the most common challenges the teachers faced was the amount of time and planning required for online teaching and that the most frequently stated benefit was flexibility provided by online teaching.

In their comparative study, Solak and Cakır (2014) investigated the views of online learners and face to face learners studying at a vocational high school in a state university about learning English through online learning and discover their academic success by gender. The results of the study showed that there was no meaningful difference between the views of online learners and face to face learners about learning English through online learning. The study also revealed that academic success and gender did not play an important role in online and face to face learning. In the same year, Dashtestani (2014) aimed to find out the views of Iranian EFL teachers about online language teaching. The results of the study showed that the participants favoured blended learning rather than online learning. The most important challenges the participants encountered were lack of online materials, lack of interaction, cultural resistances to online learning and teachers' inadequate knowledge of online learning.

In a study by Ekmekçi (2015) on the assessment of DE from the viewpoints of EFL students taking English courses through DE. The study showed that more than half of the students had positive attitudes towards DE because of the flexibility feature of the course. Besides, the study demonstrated that nearly half of the students were dissatisfied with the assignments and exams. However, a study conducted by Altunay (2016) on the views of EFL learners about distance learning revealed that the students opted for traditional classrooms rather than online learning environments. Similarly, another study by Özüdoğru and Hişmanoğlu (2016) demonstrated that most of the students were not happy with English courses through distance learning. Thus, the students mainly favoured a face to face instruction.

In a study conducted by Altunay (2019), the views of freshmen students at a university about learning English through DE were explored. The results of the study indicated that although the students had lack of technological equipment and problems, they were satisfied with the distance learning as the distance learning provided flexibility in terms of time and place.

Finally, the most recent study by Mailizar et al (2020) looked into the challenges the Indonesian secondary school teachers faced on online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study demonstrated that the mostly stated challenges were lack of students' technological knowledge and skills, lack of their access to technological devices and internet and connection problems.

METHOD

Research Design

A qualitative research design was adopted for the current study in order to investigate the participants' views in-depth. Purposive sampling was employed.

Participants

40 Turkish EFL teachers working at public schools in different cities in Turkey teaching via DE participated in the current study. The number of participants for each of secondary and high schools was 20. The majority of the participants were female (28), aged 31-50 (31) and had a bachelor degree (34). Half of the participants had 11-20 years of teaching experience (see Table 1 below).

		School Type	
		Secondary School	High School
Gender	Female	13	15
	Male	7	5
Age	20-30	4	2
	31-50	16	15
	Over 51	-	3
Academic Degree	Bachelor	16	18
	Master of Arts	4	2
Teaching Experience	0-10	7	4
	11-20	12	9
	21-30	1	7

Data Collection Instrument

This study was conducted in the spring term of 2019-2020 academic year. The researchers developed and implemented an online questionnaire to collect the data. They accessed all the participants through social networks. The questionnaire included 12 questions; 5 about demographic information; and the remaining 7 were as follows:

1. Have you received any training on online education? If yes, when and who gave the training?
2. Have you ever done distance teaching formally before? If yes, what was it about?
3. What are the benefits of distance teaching?
4. What are the challenges you encountered while implementing distance teaching?
5. Do you believe that distance teaching is useful for the students? Why? /Why not?
6. Do you think that you have adequate skills to teach in distance teaching? Why? /Why not?
7. What are your suggestions for future online education courses?

Data Analysis Procedures

The emerging key themes were coded and analysed qualitatively by the researchers. Quotations from the participants' statements were included as part of data analysis.

FINDINGS

The findings of the current study are presented and discussed in this section.

Have You Received Any Training On Online Education? If Yes, When And Who Gave The Training?

All the participants answered “No” for the first question of the questionnaire. The following quotation reflects the views of the participants:

“No, I have never received training on DE (participant 1, secondary school)”.

“No, I have not received training on DE (participant 20, high school)”.

Have You Ever Done Distance Teaching Formally Before? If Yes, What Was It About?

All the participants replied “No” to this question. In other words, none of the participants formally performed distance teaching before. The following quotations reflect the views of the participants:

“No, I have not done distance education formally before. This is the first time I have ever done because of the closures of the schools due to coronavirus pandemic (participant 12, secondary school)”.

“No, I have never done distance teaching formally before (participant 6, high school)”.

What Are The Benefits Of Distance Teaching?

Eight key themes emerged from the replies of the participants for the third question of the questionnaire (see Figure 1 below).

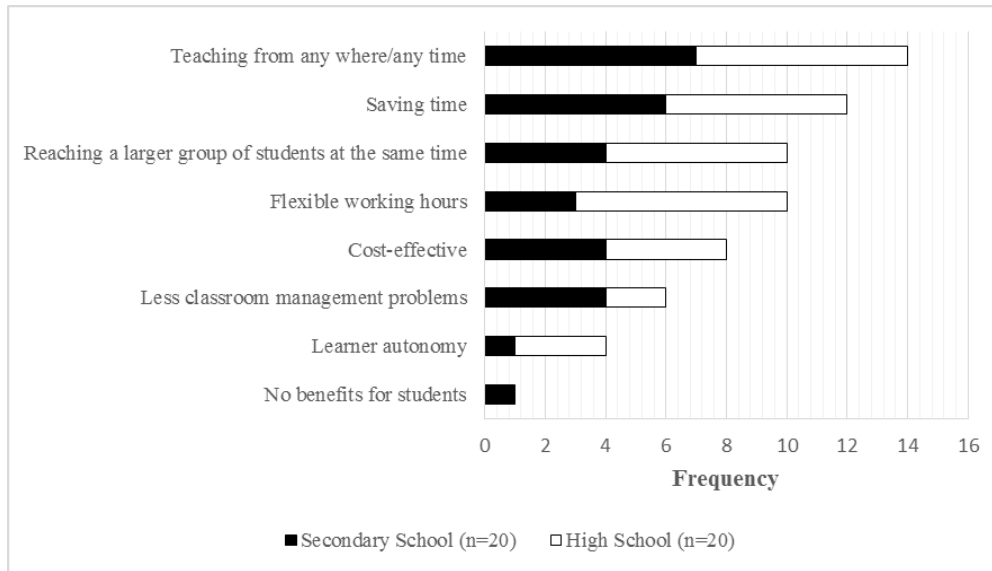


Figure 1. Frequencies for the views of the EFL teachers on benefits of DE by school

As shown in Figure 1, the vast majority of the participants had positive attitudes towards DE. “Teaching from anywhere / any time”, “saving time” were the mostly stated benefits of DE by the participants. Only one participant stated that there were not any benefits of DE. The following quotations reflect the views of the participants:

“DE removes the barriers so I can teach from outside the school (participant 7, secondary school)”.

“I do not have to get up early and I don’t spend my time to go to school (participant 1, high school)”.

“I can decide the time I can teach in DE (participant 16, high school)”.

“We are not interrupted by the students thus, I do not have classroom management problems very much (participant 2, secondary school)”.

“The DE encourages learner to motivate himself/herself to learn and continue their learning by himself/herself (participant 6, high school)”.

“DE provides to teach more students at the same time (participant 5, high school)”.

“I think there are no benefits of distance teaching because my students do not have computers (participant 17, secondary school)”.

“DE enables us to send the document online and we do not need to spend money and use paper for their homework, exams (participant 11, high school)”.

What Are The Challenges You Encountered While Implementing Distance Teaching?

As Figure 2 illustrates, nine key themes emerged regarding the challenges the participants encountered while implementing DE.

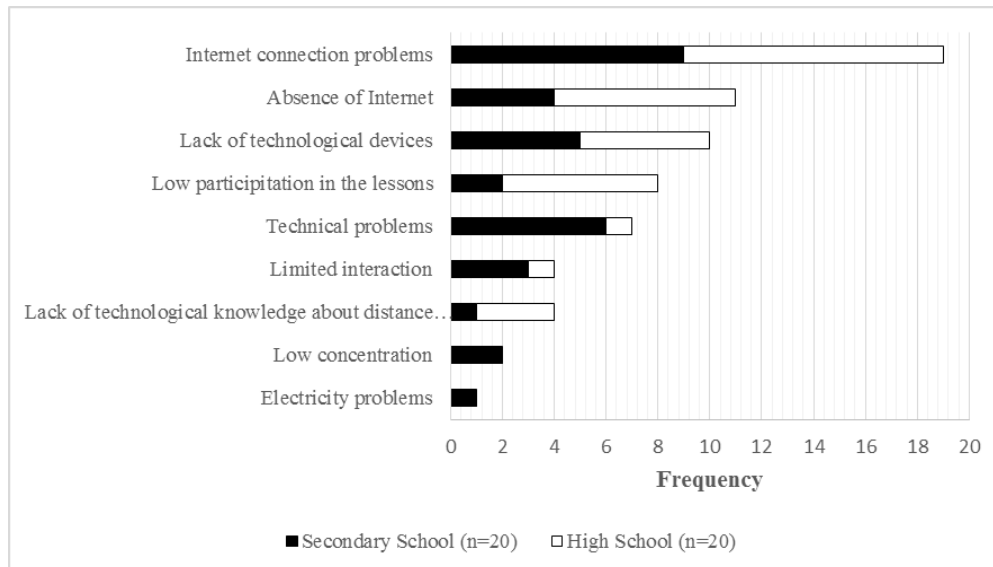


Figure 2. Frequencies for the challenges the EFL teachers encountered implementing DE by school

As shown in Figure 2, most of the participants reported “internet connection problems” as a challenge while implementing. In addition, “absence of internet” and “low participation in the lessons” were mostly encountered as challenges by the participants working at high school while “lack of technological devices”, “technical problems” and “lack of technological knowledge about the DE” were mostly stated as the challenges by the participants. Furthermore, “low concentration” and “electricity problems” were reported by only the participants working at secondary schools. “Electricity problem” was reported by only male participants. The following quotations reflect the views of the participants:

“I and my students have encountered to internet connection problem, we usually have difficulty in connecting (participant 16, high school)”.

“I have encountered the technical problem such as ‘sdk init failed 14’ while implementing it (participant 9, secondary school)”.

“I have mostly encountered low participation of my students in the lesson as a challenge (participant 14, high school)”.

“Most of my students do not have internet access at their houses so they can not get the DE (participant 12, high school)”.

“I had difficulty with using the technological stuff because I am not competent with using technology (participant 17, high school)”.

“My students do not have computers, mobile phones, laptops at their houses to attend the DE (participant 12, secondary school)”.

“The students could not concentrate on the lesson as much as they do in the real teaching environment (participant 4, secondary school)”.

“The electricity went off so often. It was really challenge for me (participant 8, secondary school)”.

“It is not possible for me to interact with each student as I could do in face to face classroom (participant 18, high school)”.

Do You Believe That Distance Teaching Is Useful For The Students? Why? /Why Not?

As Figure 3 illustrates, eight key themes emerged regarding the views of the EFL teachers about the usefulness of DE for their students.

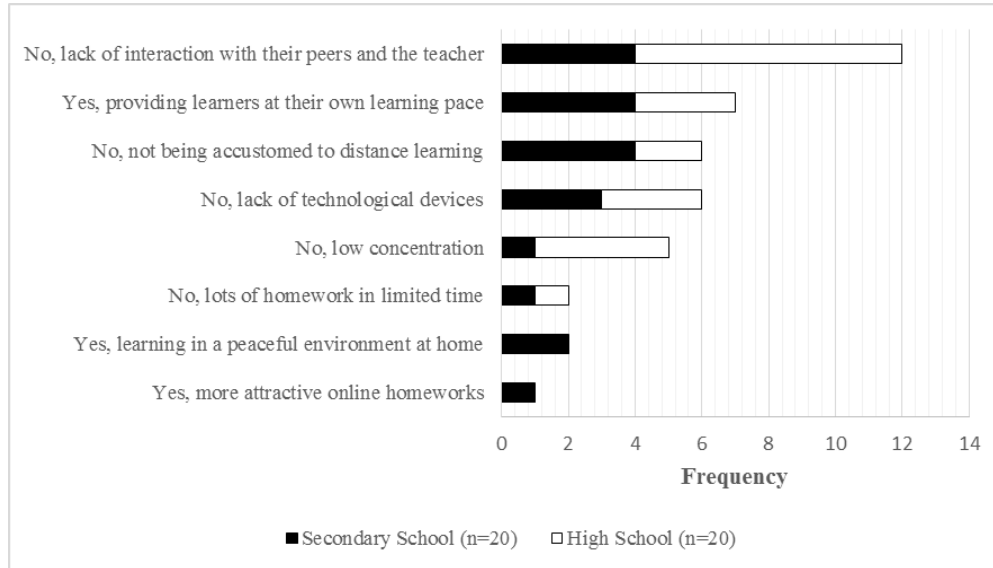


Figure 3. Frequencies for the views of the EFL teachers about the benefits of DE for the students by school

Most of the participants reported that the DE was not useful for their students because the students could not interact with their peers and the teacher. However, ten participants pointed out that DE was useful for their students as it enabled the students to learn at their own pace. The following quotations reflect the views of the participants:

“I do not think that DE is useful for the students because we can not interact with each other as much as we do in face to face teaching (participant 9, high school)”.

“No, I do not think that it is useful for the students because the students do not know how to study online because it is new for them (participant 14, secondary school)”.

“I do not think it is useful because most of my students in the eastern Anatolia region do not have technological devices thus, they can not benefit from distance teaching (participant 12, secondary school)”.

“I do not think that distance education is useful the students because the teachers send their students a lot of activities at the same time without depending a schedule and the students have to do those activities in a short time. It is a real challenge for the students (participant 19, high school)”.

“Yes, I think it is useful for the students because students learn in a peaceful environment such their rooms, houses without any distraction (participant 3, secondary school)”.

“Yes, I think it is useful for the students because they can continue studying the lesson by themselves on their own learning pace (participant 6, high school)”.

“No, I do not think that DE is useful for the students because they do not have necessary equipments such as computers, headphones to attend (participant,13, secondary school)”.

“Yes, I think that it is useful for the students because more colorful, enjoyable homework attracting them is given (participant 7, secondary school)”.

“No, I do not think that it is useful for the students because the students can not concentrate on the lesson without a real teaching setting (participant 8, high school)”.

Do You Think That You Have Adequate Skills To Teach In Distance Teaching? Why?/Why Not?

As illustrated in Figure 4, five key themes emerged regarding the views of the EFL teachers about their skill in DE.

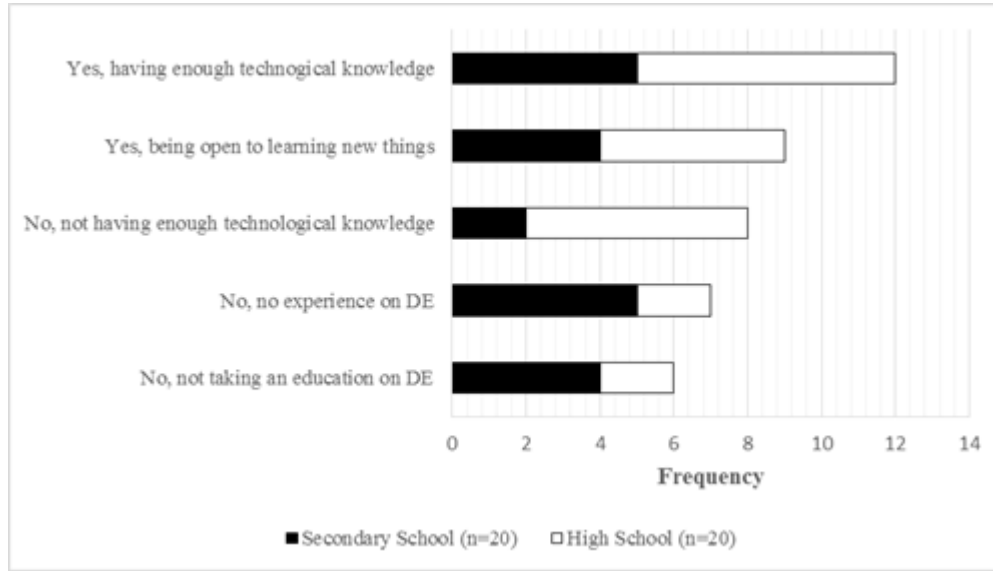


Figure 4. Frequencies for the views of the EFL teachers about their skill in DE

As shown in Figure 4, most of the participants pointed out that they had adequate skills to teach in DE by indicating two reasons “having enough technological knowledge” and “being open to learning new things”. However, some participants stated that they did not have adequate skills to teach in DE with the reasons “not having enough technological knowledge”, “no experience in DE” and “not taking education on DE”. The participants stating “having not enough technological knowledge were over 37. The following quotations reflect the views of the participants:

“Yes, I have enough technological knowledge to keep up with the latest educational technology (participant 2, high school)”.

“Yes, I have basic skills but I am searching for new things to be used in distance teaching (participant 13, secondary school)”.

“No, I do not because I have not taken any education to implement DE (participant 10, secondary school)”.

“No, I don’t believe that I have adequate skills to teach in distance education because I have not experienced in teaching in DE before (participant 6, high school)”.

What Are Your Suggestions For Future Distance Education Courses?

As Figure 5 illustrates, ten key themes emerged regarding the suggestions of the EFL teachers for future distance education courses.

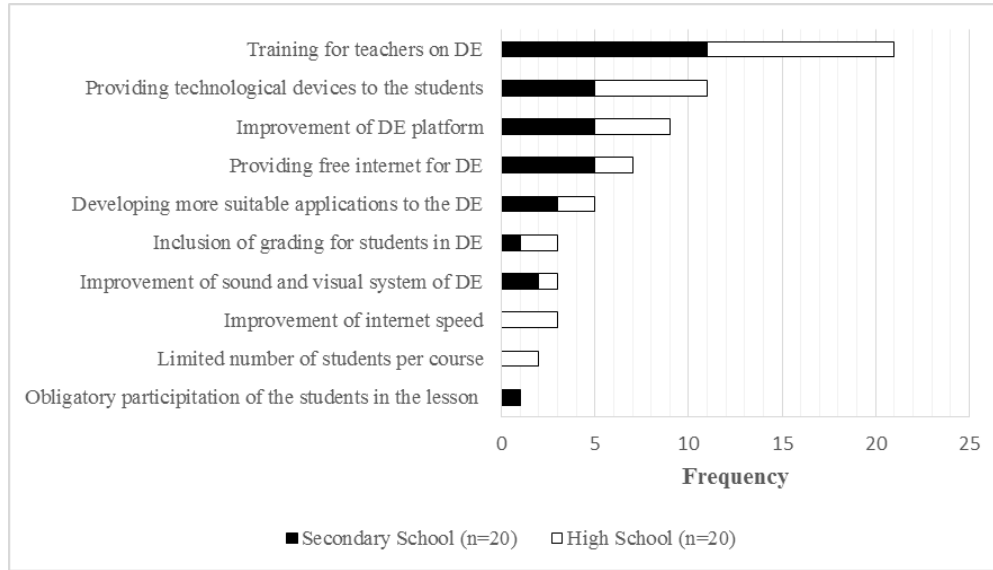


Figure 5. Frequencies for the suggestions of the EFL teachers for the future online education courses.

As shown in Figure 5, the majority of the participants reported that training on DE for teachers should be organised. Some participants stated that technological devices should be provided for students and free internet should be provided for both teachers and students. In addition, some participants suggested that DE platform should be improved. One participant teaching at a secondary school suggested that there should be an obligation for the students to attend in the lessons. The following quotations reflect the views of the participants:

“Every teacher at every level should be trained on how to teach in DE as soon as the coronavirus pandemic is over (participant 8, secondary school)”.

“The government should provide technological devices such as computers, headphones for students and also free internet for both teachers and students (participant 19, high school)”.

“The number of the students should be approximately 10 per lesson (participant 18, high school)”.

The content of the platform of the DE should be organised better and the necessary equipments should be provided (participant 18, secondary school)”.

“A better network is necessary for DE. Its platform should be improved such as adding new programs, applications into the platform (participant 1, secondary school)”.

“There should be online exams and the students should be graded according to their exam results (participant 15, secondary school)”.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study showed that none of the participants received training on DE. This finding may result from the fact that formal education for secondary and high school students is conducted traditionally in the schools for the students at a particular age in accordance with the programmes based on the national educational objectives across the country. Another reason is the fact that preservice teacher education courses traditionally do not contain any courses on DE.

Another finding of the study demonstrated that none of the participants had distance teaching experience formally before. This result may emerge from the fact that formal education for secondary and high school students were typically carried out in the traditional face to face teaching environments before the closures of the schools due to the coronavirus pandemic. This result corresponds to that of a previous study by Mpofo, Samukange, Kusure and Ziyandu et al (2012). In their study, the vast majority of the participants were inexperienced in DE. Furthermore, UNESCO (2020) indicates that teachers have been inexperienced in distance teaching.

This study also revealed that DE mostly enabled the participants to teach from anywhere / any time, and saves time. This result of the current study corresponds to that of the previous studies by Dashtestani (2014) and Madaus (2013).

As for the challenges the participants encountered in implementing DE, this study showed that “internet connection problems”, “absence of internet”, “lack of technological devices”, “technical problems” and “lack of technological knowledge about the DE” were found as the most prevalent challenges. This result of the current study has been supported the earlier studies conducted by Assareh and Bidokht (2011), Huang, Liu, Tlili, Yang, Mailizar et al (2020), Mathew and Iloanya (2016), Molawa (2009), Wang et al (2020).

Furthermore, this study indicated that most of the participants did not find DE useful for their students due to lack of the interaction between their peers and their teacher, not being accustomed to DE, lack of technological facilities. This results from the fact that DE is new to both teachers and students and they may feel more isolated in DE than the traditional teaching environment. This result of the study corresponds to that of the earlier studies by Assareh and Bidokht (2011), Madaus (2013), Mailizar et al (2020).

As for the perceptions of the participants on their skills in DE, the participants had enough knowledge to teach in DE. This may result from the fact that they gained skills on using ICT tools by using and adapting the ICT tools to meet the needs of their students and to make their lessons more attractive for their students (Guri-Rosenblit, 2013). However, some participants in this study stated that they did not believe that they had enough skills to teach in DE due to lack of technological knowledge. This result is supported by the previous studies by Dashtestani (2014), Hadijah and Shalawati (2017), Hampel & Hauck (2004), Madaus (2013) and Mailizar et al (2020). Besides, Dashtestani (2014) found out that the participants opted for blended learning rather than DE which may result from the fact that they believe that traditional teaching promoted more interaction than DE. Nevertheless, DeLacey and Leonard (2002) suggested that DE enabled the students to develop their interaction. In addition, the current study revealed that some participants pointed out they did not believe that they had enough skills to teach DE because of “no experience in DE” and “not taking education on DE”. Similarly, Hadijah and Shalawati (2017) reported that the participants were not competent with teaching in DE due to their lack of experience in online teaching and professional knowledge on e-learning.

In the current study, the participants made various suggestions for future online education courses including a training for DE, providing free internet for both teachers and students and an improvement of the DE platform that is currently in use in Turkey. The vast majority of the participants pointed out that they needed a training on DE in order to gain the required skills and knowledge about DE. This result also parallels a previous study carried out by Dashtestani (2014).

The findings of the current study suggest that policymakers and other stakeholders should organise an immediate training DE for teachers to gain the required skills and develop their self confidence in DE. They should also take the suggestions into consideration to improve the efficiency of DE.

Blended learning should formally be used in all lessons for the students at secondary and high schools. Besides, a course on distance teaching should be included in teacher training program at universities.

GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Korona virüs salgınının dünyadaki eğitim sistemleri üzerinde önemli etkisi olmuştur ve okulların, üniversitelerin ve kolejlerin küresel olarak kapanmasına yol açmıştır. Sonuç olarak, öğrencilerin eğitimini kesintisiz sürdürmek için uzaktan eğitime geçiş yüz yüze etkinliklere bir alternatif olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Türkiye de yüz yüze eğitime ara veren ülkelerden birisidir. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 23 Mart itibarıyla ilkokul, ortaokul ve lise öğrencilerinin eğitimlerine evlerinde devam etmeleri için EBA TV üzerinden uzaktan eğitime geçme kararı almıştır (MEB, 2020).

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye'nin farklı şehirlerindeki ortaokul ve liselerde görev yapan İngilizce öğretmenlerinin İngilizce öğrenme bağlamlarında uzaktan eğitimi kullanma konusundaki görüşlerini incelemektir. Bu amaçla nitel bir araştırma deseni benimsenmiş ve 2019-2020 eğitim öğretim yılı bahar döneminde Türkiye'de farklı illerdeki devlet okullarında uzaktan eğitim aracılığıyla eğitim veren 40 Türk İngilizce öğretmeni bu çalışmaya katılmıştır. Araştırmacılar, 12 sorudan oluşan çevrimiçi bir anket geliştirmişlerdir ve uygulamışlardır; demografik bilgiler ile ilgili 5; geri kalan 7'si ise verileri toplamak için açık uçlu sorulardır ve tüm katılımcılara sosyal ağ üzerinden erişilmiştir. Ortaya çıkan anahtar temalar, araştırmacılar tarafından kodlanmış ve nitel analiz yapılmıştır. Katılımcıların ifadelerinden alıntılar, veri analizinin bir parçası olarak dahil edilmiştir.

Çalışma, katılımcıların uzaktan eğitim konusunda herhangi bir eğitim almadıklarını ve daha önce uzaktan eğitim konusunda herhangi bir deneyime sahip olmadıklarını göstermiştir. Çalışma ayrıca internet bağlantı sorunları, internete erişimin olmaması, teknolojik cihaz eksikliği, teknik sorunlar ve uzaktan eğitim konusunda teknolojik bilgi eksikliğinin katılımcılar için en yaygın zorluklar olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Sonuç olarak, mevcut çalışma şunu önermektedir; öğretmenler için acil bir uzaktan eğitim eğitimi düzenlenmelidir; öğretmen önerileri dikkate alınmalıdır, üniversitelerde hizmet öncesi öğretmen yetiştirme programına uzaktan öğretim dersi dahil edilmelidir.

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