

An Evaluation of an English Language Course Given via Distance Education

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ABSTRACT

Distance education has turned into the only option with the unexpected Covid-19 pandemic for many countries all over the world. In the system of Turkish higher education, it is frequently used for the compulsory basic English courses. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the English course given at a state university in Istanbul in order to see the perceptions of the students in the distance education. It was a descriptive study conducted with 121 freshmen during the academic year of 2018 and 2019. The data were collected with a 5-point Likert type scale and analyzed via SPSS software. The findings revealed that the students were content with their experience of the distance English course. Moreover, they were pleased with the process at most and there was rather less satisfaction with the context, input, and the product of the course. However, the majority still consider face-to-face language instruction as a more satisfactory mode of learning. This study revealed a moderate satisfaction with the distance English course in general, and the main source of this satisfaction has been identified as the course instructors. Therefore, instructors need to be supported in their preparation for distance education courses with rich materials and trainings. Moreover, the students found the course less efficient to develop writing and speaking, and needed a direct contact with the instructors at times. So, these courses should be designed to focus on productive skills more and to include some face-to-face or synchronous sessions along with the distance education classes regularly.

Keywords: Course evaluation, EFL, distance education, higher education, students' views

Uzaktan Eğitimle Verilen İngilizce Dersinin Değerlendirilmesi

ÖZ

Uzaktan eğitim Kovid-19 pandemisi ile dünyada pek çok durumda tek seçenek haline gelmiştir. Türkiye'deki yükseköğretim sisteminde ise zorunlu temel İngilizce dersleri için sıklıkla kullanılmaktaydı. Bu çalışma, İstanbul'da bir devlet üniversitesinde uzaktan eğitim ile verilen İngilizce dersinin etkinliğini öğrenci görüşlerine dayanarak değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, 2018-2019 akademik yılında birinci sınıfta okuyan 121 öğrenci ile yürütülmüş betimsel bir araştırmadır. Veriler, 5'li Likert tipi bir ölçek ile toplanmış, SPSS programı ile analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, öğrencilerin uzaktan İngilizce dersi deneyimlerinden memnun olduklarını ortaya koymuştur. En yüksek memnuniyet, dersin süreç boyutuna ilişkindir. Öğrenciler dersin bağlam, girdi ve çıktı boyutlarına ilişkin daha düşük düzeyde bir memnuniyet bildirmişlerdir. Yine de çoğunluk yüz yüze eğitimi daha tatmin edici bulmuştur. Bu çalışmada uzaktan İngilizce dersine ilişkin orta düzeyde bir memnuniyet olduğu ve bunun temelde dersi veren öğretim elemanlarından kaynaklandığı anlaşılmıştır. Bu yüzden, uzaktan eğitim ile ders verecek öğretim elemanlarının eğitimlerle ve zengin materyallerle hazırlık aşamasında desteklenmesi önemlidir. Buna ek olarak, öğrenciler dersi yazma ve konuşma becerilerinin gelişimine katkısı açısından yetersiz bulmuşlar ve öğretmenleri ile zaman zaman doğrudan iletişim kurma ihtiyacı hissettiklerini belirtmişlerdir. Bu nedenle, uzaktan İngilizce derslerinin üretim odaklı becerilerle daha fazla ağırlık verecek şekilde tasarlanması ve uzaktan eğitim ile yürütülen derslerin zaman zaman yüz yüze ya da eş zamanlı oturumlarla desteklenmesi önerilebilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Ders değerlendirme, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce, uzaktan eğitim, yükseköğretim, öğrenci görüşleri

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INTRODUCTION

Distance education has turned into the only option for millions of educators and learners with the unexpected Covid-19 pandemic all over the world, yet it is not a state-of-art concept. It is rooted into the ancient times “when early civilizations used drums, fire and smoke, petroglyphs and ultimately the printed word to communicate” (Threlkeld & Brzoska, 1994, p. 42). Distance education has always been shaped with the technological developments (Harry & Perraton, 1999); it was first carried out by writing letters, then with audio-visual aids like radio or TV, and finally, since the 1990s it has been framed by the Internet or Web-based technologies (Bozkurt, 2017; Demir, 2014; Kirali & Alci, 2016; Özbay, 2015; Tulunay-Ateş, 2014).

Distance education means “a form of education in which learner and instructor are separate during the majority of instruction” (Johnson, 2003, p. 1). It is not a kind of self-study since it is conducted by institutions (Johnson, 2003; Simonson et al., 2011). Also, students and teachers are separated in place and/or time (Simonson et al., 2011; Tinio, 2003). This naturally brings in the advantages of availability and convenience both for teachers and learners (Yüce, 2022). Moreover, there is an effective interaction among learners and instructors thanks to such technologies as e-mails, teleconferencing, or videoconferencing (Simonson et al., 2011).

Distance education classes are carried out as either synchronous or asynchronous sessions (Işık et al., 2010; Kırık, 2014; Toker-Gökçe, 2008). Synchronous systems, as the name suggests, refer to the distance education classes in which participant teachers and students can have two-way communication in real-time; that is, all the students and the teacher are expected to be online at the same time (Balaban, 2012; Demir, 2014; Johnson, 2003). This allows students to interact with the teacher and each other, to have discussions, to ask and respond questions, and to do tests collaboratively (Baki et al., 2009; Toker-Gökçe, 2008). The paramount gain in this system is the immediate feedback learners can get when they face any difficulty or trouble and it promotes their academic achievement and learning motivation (Demir, 2014; Şenkal & Dinçer, 2012). However, this also requires all the participants to be equipped technically and technologically as well as to be competent in using the necessary technology. Additionally, participants always need continuous and broad bandwidth for their internet connection which may not be supplied by the current technical infrastructure (Işık, et al., 2010). This may cause problems for data transfer, and students may suffer from low-quality interaction (Şenkal & Dinçer, 2012; Yüce, 2019).

Asynchronous systems provide more flexibility since they allow learners to participate in classes from different places and at different times (Balaban, 2012; Johnson, 2003). That is why students are free to decide where and when to take classes and they can revisit the recorded sessions as many times as they wish (Demir, 2014; Toker-Gökçe, 2008; White, 2003). This type of distance education is considered as a more learner-centered method since students need to be more autonomous and take responsibility for their learning (Beyhan, 2007; Işık et al., 2010). Moreover, it is technologically less demanding compared to the synchronous sessions as minimum infrastructure and a normal bandwidth usually work for asynchronous systems (Işık et al., 2010; Şenkal & Dinçer, 2012). However, this may have negative effects on students’ feelings of belonging and involvement due to the lack of immediate feedback from a teacher and other participants (Yorgancı, 2014; Yüce, 2022).

Distance education provides solutions to various educational problems in underdeveloped, developing, and developed countries. It reduces expenses of education in underdeveloped countries while it is a significant facilitator for mass education in developing countries. Such countries usually face difficulties in supplying compulsory education with traditional educational institutions, so they utilize distance education to compensate for this deficiency. On the other hand, developed countries benefit from distance education to meet lifelong learning needs in society and to improve the quality of education. Having well-functioning and established traditional educational institutions, these countries usually seek for flexibility and convenience (İşman, 2011, p. 5; Özkul & Aydın, 2020). Moreover, distance education is considered advantageous due to the following benefits: it saves time, reduces costs, gives access to more students, provides more education opportunities, supports the production, and spread of information. It also allows for convenient and fast communication, grants more learning and satisfaction, and finally results in creating values and making more profits (Balaban, 2012, p. 3; Yüce, 2022).

Turkey carried out distance education on its agenda after Dewey completed his “Report and Recommendation upon Turkish Education” in 1924. At the very beginning of the education system, the fundamental idea was to make use of distance education to increase the literacy rate in society. However, the plans were not put into practice until 1956. When the first real distance education system was set up with the correspondence education, TV channels were included in the distance education system for the first time thanks to TRT in 1968. In 1981, the first

open distance education faculty was founded by Anadolu University. As for the 1990s, many other universities and other schools from different educational levels (high schools and secondary schools) have opened various distance education programs which have made up a significant portion of the overall system (Bayram & Aksoy, 2002; Bozkurt, 2017; Cabi & Ersoy, 2017; Düzakın & Yalçınkaya, 2008; Kaçan & Gelen, 2020; Kırık, 2014; Özbay, 2015; Özer, 1989; Tulunay-Ateş, 2014; Yavuzalp et al., 2017).

In the Turkish higher education system, distance education is frequently used for the “common compulsory courses” which are usually known as 5i courses due to the article number of the related law (Yükseköğretim Kanunu, 1981). According to it, in all higher education programs the following three courses are compulsory: Atatürk’s Principles and History of Turkish Revolution, Turkish Language, and Foreign Language. Regardless of their departments, all undergraduate students have to take these courses in Turkey so as to complete their BA. These courses are offered to a huge number of students and they bring about some challenges for the universities. For instance, they need enough academic staff to give these courses and enough space in buildings and weekly schedules which may become extremely challenging for some crowded schools with insufficient infrastructure. At this point, distance education is considered as a solution to these kinds of limitations (Adıyaman, 2002; Eroğlu & Kalaycı, 2020; Erol-Şahin, 2019; Fidan et al., 2018; Kocatürk-Kapucu & Uşun, 2020; Meriçelli et al., 2014; Pepeler et al., 2018; Yaman, 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

When the previous research upon applications of the distance education in the Turkish education system is considered, it is understood that teachers and learners point out some crucial concerns about it although they mention its advantages. For instance, Işıklı (2017) revealed that the higher education students who experienced the face-to-face version of 5i courses mandatorily were quite unsatisfied with the versions given via distance education stating that the face-to-face classes were much more sufficient. Likewise, in another study, Metin et al. (2017) concluded that the students found English courses in the distance education less effective than the face-to-face ones, and most of the participant students did not prefer taking the English course via distance education. In Tuncer and Bahadır’s study (2017), the participant students stated that they could not learn the course content with distance education. Moreover, Yıldız (2015) revealed that the academic staff agreed with the learners on the inefficiency of distance education due to the lack of powerful interaction and direct communication from which they could benefit in physical classrooms. In short, there are various studies which show that distance education applications are evaluated negatively and considered less effective compared to the face-to-face sessions (Erfidan, 2019; Eroğlu & Kalaycı, 2020; Gürer et al., 2016; Keskin & Özer-Kaya, 2020; Pepeler et al., 2018; Şen-Ersoy, 2015).

Although some studies have revealed that students attending into the distance education courses are more successful than the ones taking face-to-face classes (Seven, 2012), a considerable majority have concluded that achievement decreases with distance education due to the lack of regular learner participation (Barış & Çankaya, 2016; Demirkan et al., 2016; Gürer et al., 2016; Metin, et al., 2017; Özgöl et al., 2017). In Tuncer and Bahadır’s (2017) study, the participant students stated that they tended to get lazier and more irresponsible with distance education courses. Therefore, especially students who lack self-discipline or autonomy may not follow the lessons regularly and cannot learn the content of course properly which will result in low levels of success or a direct failure. Adıyaman (2002) clearly states that regular and active participation are a key factor for the achievement in foreign language courses conducted with distance education.

There are some other significant drawbacks of distance education uncovered by the related research. One problem is the lack of preparation for distance education courses especially at higher education institutions. When teachers or instructors do not have a chance to get prepared for a distance education course, they tend to implement the content designed for the face-to-face sessions which are likely to result in loss of interest and motivation both for the teachers and learners (Gürer et al., 2016; Yaman, 2015). Likewise, students may not be accustomed to or ready for the distance education which may create dissatisfaction, negative attitudes, stress, or frustration (Gürer et al., 2016; Şen-Ersoy, 2015). Therefore, students expect to get oriented for such courses to feel safe within this new system (Erfidan, 2019; Şirin & Tekdal, 2015). Another issue is the inequality among the learners taking distance education courses. These are studies which show that there are a considerable number of students who do not have access to proper technology such as sufficient internet connection and quota or a personal computer to benefit from the distance education courses effectively (Erfidan, 2019; Gürer et al., 2016; Metin et al., 2017; Pepeler et al., 2018; Şen-Ersoy, 2015). Even if everyone had an equal opportunity to access the system, both teachers and students face irritating technical problems owing to insufficient infrastructures (Barış & Çankaya, 2016; Erfidan, 2019; Gürer et al., 2016; Özgöl et al., 2017; Şen-Ersoy, 2015; Yıldız, 2015). One final and

significant shortcoming is the inconsistency in testing and evaluation processes (Erfidan, 2019; Yaman, 2015). Generally, students complain about having face-to-face tests for such courses or doing super easy tests compared to the course content since they are not tested on vital language skills like speaking or writing (Eroğlu & Kalaycı, 2020; Metin et al., 2017; Özgöl et al., 2017). On the other hand, teachers and instructors consider cheating as a serious problem for online tests used in the evaluation of distance education courses (Kınalıoğlu & Güven, 2011; Uluğ & Tuncer, 2017).

Besides all the drawbacks mentioned-above, some notable advantages of distance education have also been revealed by the related literature. First, technology itself is a motivating element for learners and it provides flexibility and mobility for them. That is why they are free from time and place while taking their classes and they get the opportunity of learning by stopping or re-watching the videos if they wish in their own pace (Barış & Çankaya, 2016; Erfidan, 2019; Gürer et al., 2016; Özgöl et al., 2017; Şirin & Tekdal, 2015; Yüce, 2022). Furthermore, they feel more comfortable and less anxious out of physical classrooms; therefore, they get more self-confident, self-disciplined, and autonomous (Barış & Çankaya, 2016; Tuncer & Bahadır, 2017). If they attend the classes regularly, distance education increases their achievement and due to feeling successful, they develop positive attitudes towards such courses (Pepeler et. al, 2018; Seven, 2012).

Distance education is getting an inevitable place in our education system, and it has significant benefits as summarized-above. Therefore, it would be important to look for ways to improve it. It is necessary to evaluate the quality of distance education programs or courses to reveal their weaknesses and to plan how to compensate for the deficiencies and improve the effectiveness. To sum up, this paper serves a similar purpose for an EFL course given at a state university in Istanbul.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent are the students satisfied with taking the English Course with distance education?
2. What are the strengths and the parts to be improved in the program of English Course conducted via distance education?
3. Do the students' perceptions vary in terms of their gender, their access to a personal computer or free internet access, the situation of their usage of a distance education course before, the average time that they spend on the internet per day, and their preference for distance education for the course?

METHOD

Research Design

This study has a descriptive research design in which the data are collected with a survey tool. Descriptive-survey research is a quantitative research type commonly used in educational studies and the purpose is generally to describe groups at one point in time or to detect differences between groups in terms of some demographic variables (Lodico et al., 2006, p. 174-175). Moreover, this research aims to describe the effectiveness of the English Course given via distance education based on the perceptions of the students taking the course. In other words, it is intended to reveal to what extent the students are satisfied with taking the English Course with distance education as well as to detect the strengths and the parts to be improved in the course program. It is also searched whether the students' perceptions vary in terms of the following factors: gender, having a personal computer and free internet access or not, having taken a distance education course before or not, their average time on the internet daily, and their preference of distance education for the course. In survey studies, information is gathered through self-reporting questionnaires or interviews like Likert type scales where participants are asked for degrees of their agreement with a statement (Hutchinson, 2004, p. 285; McDonough & McDonough, 2006, p. 176-177). Similarly, this study uses a 5-point Likert type scale to reveal what the participant students think about the distance education course.

Research Sample

This study was conducted with 121 freshmen who took the English Course via distance education at a state university in İstanbul during the 2018 and 2019 academic year. Table 1 presents the background information in relation to the participant students.

Table 1. Sample of the Study

Variables		<i>n</i>	<i>f</i> (%)
Gender	Female	69	57
	Male	52	43
Faculty	Dentistry	3	2.5
	Arts and Humanities	45	37.2
	Education Sciences	6	5
	Law	14	11.6
	Engineering and Natural Sciences	11	9.1
	Health Sciences	10	8.3
	Art, Design, and Architecture	7	5.8
Having a personal computer	Yes	71	58.7
	No	44	36.4
	Missing	6	5
Having free internet access	Yes	86	71.1
	No	34	28.1
	Missing	1	0.8
Having taken a distance education course before	Yes	35	28.9
	No	86	71.1
Average time spent on the internet daily	0-2 hours	27	22.3
	3-5 hours	66	54.5
	6 hours +	26	21.5
	Missing	2	1.7
Total		121	100

As presented in Table 1, 69 of the participant students are female and 52 of them are males. Most of the participants are from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities ($n=45$) and Political Sciences ($n=25$) since these are the most crowded faculties of the university. Additionally, 58.7% of the students have a personal computer ($n=71$) and 71.1% have free internet access ($n=86$). However, only 28.9% of them have taken a distance education course before ($n=36$). It means the English course is the first distance education experience for the rest 71.1% ($n=86$). According to Table 1, 54.5% of the participant students ($n=66$) spend 3-5 hours on the Internet daily whereas there are also fewer students who spend less and more time.

Research Instruments and Procedures

The data were collected via the Scale of English Language Course Curriculum Conducted by Distance Education which was developed by Orhan and Çeviker-Ay (2017). This scale was found suitable for the aims of the study since it was specifically developed to evaluate 5i English programs based on the perceptions of university students taking it as a distance education course. These English courses are named after the article number in Law of Higher Education which states that all undergraduate programs are to offer Foreign Language, Turkish Language and Atatürk's Principles and History of Turkish Revolution as the three compulsory courses at Turkish universities (Yükseköğretim Kanunu, 1981). Therefore, almost all universities offer A1 and A2 level compulsory English courses in the freshman year by force of article mentioned-above in the law (Yaman, 2015). There are totally 36 items in the scale that make up the following four factors: context (6 items), input (8 items), process (9 items), and product (13 items). These factors refer to the components of the CIPP (context, input, process, product) model which asks four main questions for the program evaluation: "What should be done?," "How should it be practiced?," "Does the practice comply with what was planned?" and "Did the program become a success?" (Stufflebeam, 2003). To put it more explicitly, *context* includes items regarding the objectives and appropriateness of the course for the students' level, needs and expectations whereas *input* refers to the course content such as tests, materials, and resources. In addition, *process* is related to the actual implementation of the program and the teaching methodology while *product* covers the outcomes of the program. The scale involves five-point Likert-type items and the participants were asked to evaluate to what extent they agreed with each item as follows: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, and 5= strongly agree. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated as .98 for the whole scale, and the reliability values for each of the factors are as follows: .92 for "content", .94 for "input", .93 for "process" and .97 for "product". The other personal information

about the participants' gender, faculty, personal computer, internet access, previous distance education experience, and the habit of internet usage were collected with a short questionnaire delivered along with the scale.

This study was conducted with the freshmen who took the English Course with the distance education at a state university in İstanbul during the academic year of 2018 and 2019. This course is compulsory for all the undergraduate programs with no exception, and it is given both for the fall and spring semesters to teach A1 level and A2 level English subsequently. At the beginning of the academic year, all the freshmen take an exemption test and the ones who fail automatically register to this course. The data were collected in the spring semester of the 2018-2019 academic year when 551 students in total registered for the course. It was a face-to-face course beforehand, but it was transformed into distance education, and it was the first year of its implementation at the university. The lessons were delivered as synchronous live sessions thorough Advancity Learning Management System (ALMS) which is the most used distance education platform at Turkish universities (Kocatürk-Kapucu & Uşun, 2020). Attendance in the live sessions was not mandatory, so the recorded lessons were available on the platform for the students who wanted to watch later or again. However, the students were given a classic written test with multiple-choice questions at the end of the semester. That is the assessment was not conducted online due to the legal restrictions. The scale that was used to collect the data was delivered to 200 students, but 121 of them were included in the analysis since the others did not respond to the items properly or did not return the scale at all.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed with SPSS 22 software. To find out the appropriate statistical analysis techniques (parametric or non-parametric tests), the assumptions of normality and homogeneity were tested. First, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted to assess the normality of the data since parametric testing requires normal distribution (Martin & Bridgmon, 2012, p. 35, 144) and the results are given in Table 2.

Table 2. The Results for Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

Values		The scale total
N		121
Normal Parameters	\bar{x}	2.95
	sd	.913
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.062
p		.200*

* $p > .05$

As understood from Table 2, the data show normal distribution ($p = .200$) which means that the first condition for parametric testing is met. As the second step, the homogeneity of the data was tested for each of the variables, and the results were considered significant at the level of $p > .05$ (Lodico et al., 2006; p. 256). The test results show that the requirement for homogeneity is met with the following variables: gender ($p = .34$), having a personal computer ($p = .53$), average time spent on the internet per day ($p = .11$), and the preference for distance education ($p = .79$). However, the assumption of homogeneity is rejected for these two variables: having free internet access or not ($p = .01$) and having taken a distance education course before or not ($p = .02$). Consequently, nonparametric tests are warranted in the analysis for these two variables whereas parametric testing is conducted for the others (Bryman & Cramer, 2005, p. 144). In short, Mann Whitney U Test, Independent Sample t -Test, and One-Way ANOVA were conducted to analyze the data, and the results of the tests were considered statistically significant at the level of $p < .05$ (Bryman & Cramer, 2005, p. 146-147).

Research Ethics

The data were collected from the students after they completed the course and the evaluation procedure. The participation was completely voluntary, and the students were not asked for any information related with their identity. Also, necessary permissions were taken from the school to collect data and from the researcher to utilize the data collection tool.

FINDINGS

This section introduces the findings of the study based on the research questions. The first one was stated as “To what extent the students are satisfied with taking the English Course with distance education?” The means for the Scale of English Language Course Curriculum Conducted by Distance Education Scores are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. Means for the Scale of English Language Course Curriculum Conducted by Distance Education

Factors	\bar{x}	<i>sd</i>
Context	2.97	1.01
Input	2.92	.98
Process	3.28	.93
Product	2.73	1.02
The Scale Total	2.95	.91

According to Table 3, the mean score (\bar{x}) of the total scale is 2.95 which can be interpreted that the participant students are quite satisfied with the course in general. When the factors are considered separately, it is seen that the students are pleased with the process at most (\bar{x} =3.28). Moreover, it is understood that they stated low levels of satisfaction with the context (\bar{x} =2.97), input (\bar{x} =2.92), and product (\bar{x} =2.73) of the distance English course. In short, it can be concluded that the students are content with their experience of distance English course although the mean scores show the low levels of satisfaction even if they do not refer to dissatisfaction. Table 4 shows the participant students’ preferences for the English language course conducted via distance education which also gives a clue about their satisfaction levels with it.

Table 4. Frequencies of the Students’ Preference for the English Language Course Conducted by Distance Education

Variables		n	f (%)
Their preference	I would rather have had this English course face-to-face.	67	55.4
	I am pleased to have had this English course via distance education.	48	39.7
	Missing	6	0.5
Total		121	100

As seen in Table 4, 55.4% of the students (n=67) stated that they would rather have had the English course face-to-face whereas 39.7% of them (n=48) were pleased to have taken it as a distance education course. That is why most of the students find face-to-face language instruction as a more satisfactory mode of learning considering their experience with distance education for the English language course.

The second research question asks about “the strengths and the parts to be improved in the English Course program that was conducted by distance education”. The means for the items within each of the factors (context, input, process, and product) are presented in the following tables. First, Table 5 displays the findings for the context of the course.

Table 5. Means for the Items about the Context of the English Language Course Conducted by Distance Education

Items	\bar{x}	<i>sd</i>
1. The length of the course is enough to achieve the objectives.	3.27	1.16
2. The objectives of the program are responsive to the student needs.	3.07	1.26
3. The program is appropriate for the students’ language levels.	3.05	1.21
4. The objectives of the program are responsive to student expectations.	2.96	1.22
5. The program is complimentary for the other courses.	2.88	1.16
6. The English course conducted by distance education develops English knowledge.	2.59	1.23
Total	2.97	1.01

As shown in Table 5, the mean score for the context is 2.97 which means that there is neither a real dissatisfaction nor full contentment with this dimension of the distance education English course. That is why the participant students are indecisive about the suitability of the length (\bar{x} =3.27) or the objectives of the course since they are not sure if it meets their needs (\bar{x} =3.07) or expectations (\bar{x} = 2.96). Moreover, they are hesitant about the appropriateness of the course program for their language levels (\bar{x} =3.05) and they do not think the program is

relevant to their other courses ($\bar{x}=2.88$), or it helps to develop their English knowledge ($\bar{x}=2.59$). Table 6 presents the means of the items with which the students evaluated the input provided in the course.

Table 6. Means for the Items about the Input of the English Language Course Conducted by Distance Education

Items	\bar{x}	sd
1. The number of tests uploaded in the portal is enough.	3.25	1.15
2. The content of course is sufficient.	3.10	1.11
3. The learning resources and materials used in the portal are sufficient.	2.98	1.11
4. The portal provides enough resources to improve English listening skills.	2.91	1.15
5. The portal provides enough resources to improve English grammar.	2.88	1.18
6. The portal provides enough resources to improve English reading skills.	2.86	1.23
7. The portal provides enough resources to improve English writing skills.	2.76	1.17
8. The portal provides enough resources to improve English speaking skills.	2.70	1.20
Total	2.92	.98

As seen in Table 6, the mean score for this dimension is 2.92 which indicates that the participant students express some degree of dissatisfaction with the content provided in the distance education English course. Although they seem more positive about the number of the tests provided in the portal ($\bar{x}=3.25$) and overall course content ($\bar{x}=3.10$), they are obviously hesitant about the sufficiency of the learning resources and materials ($\bar{x}=2.98$). Moreover, it is understood that they find the resources for writing ($\bar{x}=2.76$) and speaking ($\bar{x}=2.70$) less sufficient than the ones for reading ($\bar{x}=2.86$), listening ($\bar{x}=2.91$), or structural knowledge ($\bar{x}=2.88$). Table 7 shows the findings related to the process of the English course conducted by distance education.

Table 7. The Means for the Items about the Process of the English Language Course Conducted by the Distance Education

Items	\bar{x}	sd
1. All exams are held without any problems throughout the course.	3.49	1.18
2. The instructors carry out the course in accordance with its objectives.	3.40	1.16
3. The instructors use the appropriate teaching methods for the topic/objective.	3.33	1.20
4. The instructor explains the topic clearly in the portal videos.	3.33	1.07
5. The instructors utilize the materials effectively.	3.24	1.13
6. It is easy to ask questions to the instructors.	3.23	1.16
7. Any problem during the implementation of the program is cared for a proper solution.	3.22	1.06
8. The instructors try out ways to help to teach the topic easily.	3.20	1.21
9. The tests and materials provided in the portal are used to consolidate the topic.	3.10	1.16
Total	3.28	.93

Table 7 shows that the mean score for the process of distance education English course is 3.28, and this is the most satisfactory dimension according to the students' perceptions. When the means for each item about the process of the course are considered, it is understood that there is a satisfaction with the process although there is also room for the improvement. Almost all the items about the process are directly related to the course instructors which could be the source of relative satisfaction expressed by the students. It is seen in Table 7 that the most satisfying aspects of the process are the implementation of the exams ($\bar{x}=3.49$) and the instruction of the course in accordance with the objectives ($\bar{x}=3.40$). Furthermore, the way the instructors used the course materials ($\bar{x}=3.24$) and their teaching methods ($\bar{x}=3.33$) in addition to their explanations for the topics ($\bar{x}=3.33$) are perceived quite positively. The students are also pleased with consulting the instructors for their questions ($\bar{x}=3.23$), and the problem-solving approach adopted throughout the course ($\bar{x}=3.22$). Finally, it can be concluded that the students believe the instructors should try out other ways to ease their learning ($\bar{x}=3.20$) and the materials, and resources should be more sufficient for consolidation purposes ($\bar{x}=3.10$). Table 8 presents the means for the items that evaluate the product of the English course conducted by distance education.

Table 8. Means for the Items about the Product of the English Language Course Conducted by Distance Education

Items	\bar{x}	sd
1. The program has improved my memorial strategies for vocabulary.	2.87	1.14
2. The program helps to improve the ability to guess the meaning of unknown vocabulary in the texts.	2.83	1.13
3. The program has improved my reading comprehension skills.	2.83	1.17
4. The program has improved my distance education skills.	2.81	1.20
5. I am pleased with attending this program.	2.80	1.23
6. I believe that this program was beneficial for me.	2.77	1.22
7. I improved my vocabulary learning strategies at the end of the program.	2.76	1.17
8. The program has increased my interest in English.	2.76	1.23
9. I think the program has met its objectives.	2.75	1.18
10. At the end of the program I reached the level to utilize the strategies for using the proper vocabulary.	2.68	1.20
11. At the end of the program I reached the level to express myself in written English.	2.60	1.22
12. At the end of the program the students reach the level that is required in their undergraduate program.	2.55	1.21
13. At the end of the program I improved my communication skills in English.	2.55	1.20
Total	2.73	1.02

Table 8 presents that the overall mean for the items about the product of the English language course conducted by distance education is 2.73, and it refers to a dissatisfaction with this dimension. Although the means for every item indicate a tendency for indecisiveness, it is understood that the students demand improvement in each aspect. The most satisfactory outcome of the distance education English course is related to the vocabulary learning since the participant students believe that they improved their memory strategies ($\bar{x}=2.87$) and their ability to figure out the meaning of new words from the context ($\bar{x}=2.83$) at the end of the course. The course is also acceptable considering their enriched vocabulary learning strategies ($\bar{x}=2.76$). However, it is seen that the students do not regard the course much effective in terms of their progress in the productive skills as the mean (\bar{x}) is 2.60 for writing and 2.55 for communication whereas it is 2.83 for reading. Moreover, they think that the course did not facilitate their English well enough for the requirements of their undergraduate program ($\bar{x}=2.55$), and they are uncertain about meeting the objectives throughout the program ($\bar{x}=2.75$) and their happiness about attending to the course ($\bar{x}=2.80$) or its benefits ($\bar{x}=2.77$). Finally, they believe that the distance education English course made a modest contribution to their distance education skills ($\bar{x}=2.81$) and to their interest in learning English ($\bar{x}=2.76$).

The third research question was expressed as “Do the students’ perceptions vary in terms of their genders, having a personal computer or free internet access or not, having taken a distance education course before or not, the average time they spend on the internet daily and their preference of distance education for the course?”. The results for the independent sample t-test which was conducted to find out if there are any significant differences in the students’ satisfaction levels in terms of their gender, having a personal computer, or their preference for distance education are given in Table 9.

Table 9. Independent Sample t-Test Results

Variables	Groups	n	\bar{x}	sd	t-test		
					t	df	p
Gender	Female	69	2.88	.950	-.940	119	.349
	Male	52	3.04	.862			
Having a personal computer	Yes	71	3.06	.926	1.638	113	.104
	No	44	2.78	.871			
Preference for distance education	Face-to-face	67	2.65	.840	-4.217	113	.000*
	Distance education	48	3.35	.909			

* $p < .05$

According to Table 9, the participant students’ satisfaction with the course varies significantly in terms of their preference for distance education ($p=.00$). When the means are considered, it is understood that the students who

are happy to have had the course via distance education are more satisfied ($\bar{x}=3.35$) than the ones who would rather have had face-to-face sessions ($\bar{x}=2.65$). Although there is no statistically significant difference according to the students' gender ($p=.34$) or having a personal computer or not ($p=.10$), it is seen that the males have expressed a higher level of satisfaction with the distance education English course ($\bar{x}=3.04$) than the females ($\bar{x}=2.88$). Moreover, the participants with a personal computer have stated more satisfaction ($\bar{x}=3.06$) than the ones who lack this facility ($\bar{x}=2.78$). The results of the Mann Whitney-U Test which was used to determine if there is a significant difference in the participants' satisfaction levels in terms of their having free internet access or having taken a distance education course before are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Mann Whitney-U Test Results

Variable	Groups	N	Mean of Ranks	Sum of Ranks	U	z	p
Having free internet access	Yes	86	59.43	5111.00	1370.00	-.536	.592
	No	34	63.21	2149.00			
	Total	120					
Having taken a distance education course before	Yes	35	72.87	2550.50	1089.50	-2.375	.018*
	No	86	56.17	4830.50			
	Total	121					

* $p<.05$

The findings presented in Table 10 indicate that there is a statistically significant difference in the students' satisfaction with the English course in terms of their previous distance education experience ($p=.01$). Accordingly, the participants who had taken a distance education course before are more content than the ones who took this English course as their first distance education experience. However, it is seen that the accessibility to free internet does not make a significant difference in their satisfaction with the program ($p=.59$). The results for the Kruskal Wallis-H Test which was conducted to reveal if there is a significant difference in the students' satisfaction level with the distance education course in terms of the average time they spend on the internet per day are shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Kruskal Wallis-H Test Results

Variables	Groups	N	Mean of Ranks	X ²	df	p
The average time spent on the internet per day	0-2 hours	27	67.39	1.660	2	.436
	3-5 hours	66	58.37			
	6 hours+	26	56.46			
	Total	119				

* $p<.05$

According to Table 11, the participants' satisfaction with the distance education course does not vary significantly in terms of the average time they spend on the internet per day ($p=.43$). Still, the results of the analysis have revealed a decrease in their contentment with an increase in the time they spend on the internet. In other words, they tend to get more pleased with the course as they spend less time on the internet.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This section focuses on the results of the study that are briefly summarized and discussed in the light of the related literature as mentioned before. First, despite a low level of satisfaction, the participant students are quite satisfied with their experience of distance education English course. Still, most of the students find face-to-face language instruction as a more satisfactory mode of learning. This outcome is not surprising since it is consistent with most of the studies in literature (Doğan, 2020; Eroğlu & Kalaycı, 2020; Gürer et al., 2016; Işıklı, 2017; Metin et al., Pepeler et al., 2018; 2017; Şen-Ersoy, 2015; Tugen et al., 2010). Kocatürk-Kapucu and Uşun (2020) state that there is a dramatic increase in the use of distance education particularly for 5i courses at Turkish universities since 2010. They also conclude that there is not unity in terms of distance education applications among higher education institutions (Kocatürk-Kapucu & Uşun, 2020). Therefore, it is a new experience for all parties: the institutions, instructors, and learners which means that they need time for professionalization. Besides, it is understandable that Turkish students who have been exposed to face-to-face education up until the tertiary level

prefer it to the distance education. As they do not have much awareness of distance education applications, they do not consider such classes as a proper course. Thus, they do not give much importance to them or follow the lessons regularly (Metin et al., 2017; Yaman, 2015). As a result, such issues may prevent the effective learning and cause students to evaluate such distance education courses negatively in spite of their relative advantages. Second, there is neither a real dissatisfaction nor full contentment with the context of the distance education English course. The students are indecisive about the suitability of the length or the objectives of the course since they are not sure if it meets their needs or expectations. Moreover, they are hesitant about the appropriateness of the course program for their language level, and they do not think the program is relevant to their other courses or it helps to develop their English knowledge. These findings related to the context are consistent with the study conducted by Pepeler et al. (2018) who used the same scale to evaluate the distance education English course at a state university in the eastern part of Turkey, and it revealed that the participant students had negative perceptions about its context. This dissatisfaction can be explained with the last-minute transitions from face-to-face classes to distance education. Not having proper preparation for a distance education English course or necessary teaching skills, teachers tend to make use of the program, materials, methods, and techniques they have designed for face-to-face courses (Gürer et al., 2016). It is not possible to conduct a needs analysis, either. Besides, the course is offered completely in the same way with the same content to all learners from various faculties and programs with different needs and expectations. Consequently, it gets tougher to achieve the course objectives or meet the learner needs.

Third, the participant students express some degree of dissatisfaction with the content provided in the distance education English course. Although they seem more positive about the number of tests provided in the portal and overall course content, they are hesitant about the sufficiency of the learning resources and materials. Moreover, they find the resources for writing and speaking less sufficient than the ones for reading, listening, or structural knowledge. This is a compatible finding with the other studies in literature as well (Eroğlu & Kalaycı, 2020; Işıklı, 2017; Pepeler et al., 2018; Şen-Ersoy, 2015, Şirin & Tekdal, 2015). Generally, the quality of the materials is problematic rather than quantity. Students do not think that they can benefit from the materials to develop their foreign language skills (Pepeler et al., 2018) and it has also been indicated that distance education courses are less efficient to improve the productive skills than the receptive ones (Doğan, 2020) which could be a natural consequence of lacking effective interaction and constructive feedback (Eroğlu & Kalaycı, 2020).

Fourth, there is a dissatisfaction with the product of the distance education English course. Moreover, Pepeler et al. (2018) concluded that product was the least satisfying factor in their study. Therefore, it is possible to deduce that students are highly skeptical of the course outcomes. The findings related to this dimension are also parallel to the results for the content as explained-above. For instance, the students do not regard the course much effective in terms of their progress in the productive skills which can be linked to the quality of the materials focusing on speaking and writing in addition to the inconsistency in testing procedures since they are not tested on these vital language skills (Erfidan, 2019; Eroğlu & Kalaycı, 2020; Metin et al., 2017; Özgöl et al., 2017). Moreover, the students think that the course did not facilitate their English well enough for the requirements of their undergraduate program. Besides, they are uncertain about meeting the objectives throughout the program and their happiness about attending the course or its benefits. As discussed-before, most of the time, distance education courses are not designed efficiently based on learner needs, expectations, or differences (Yaman, 2015). As a result, students find lessons tedious, and so they tend to give up the regular attendances. There are also a considerable number of students who find it enough to go over the previous years' test questions before the exams without attending any of the classes throughout the semester (Metin et al., 2017). As absenteeism reduces students' achievement in distance education courses seriously, it is important to motivate and encourage them to participate regularly (Seven, 2012). On the other hand, the most satisfactory outcome of the distance education English course is related to vocabulary learning. The students believe that they improved their memory strategies and their ability to figure out the meaning of new words from the context at the end of the course. The course is also acceptable considering their enriched vocabulary learning strategies. This finding also makes sense since students are generally given classic written exams in which they are tested on their knowledge of vocabulary, structure, and basic reading skills with multiple-choice questions (Eroğlu & Kalaycı, 2020). Therefore, they may tend to develop their memory strategies which help to memorize word lists and structural rules. Moreover, the students believe that the distance education English course made a modest contribution to their distance education skills. Students are not mostly trained for distance learning skills, and they expect to have an orientation about the distance education platform (Erfidan, 2019); otherwise, they can improve themselves in a limited extent. The students also believe that the distance education course did not increase their interests in English at most. This perception is in

harmony with the findings of Şen-Ersoy (2015) and Erfidan's (2019) studies which conclude that students do not consider EFL courses as suitable for the distance education due to the lack of practice and interaction. As a result of it students perceive English as a course to pass rather than a skill to get (Eroğlu & Kalaycı, 2020).

Fifth, although process is the most satisfactory dimension, there is a room for improvement as well. It is seen that Pepeler et al. (2018) came across the same result in their study since their participants were pleased with the process of the distance education course. The course instructors could be the source of this relative satisfaction. The most satisfying aspects of the process are the implementation of the exams and the instruction of the course in accordance with the objectives. Furthermore, the way the instructors used the course materials and their teaching methods in addition to their explanations for the topics are perceived quite positively. The students are also pleased with consulting the instructors for their questions and the problem-solving approach adopted throughout the course. These findings are also supported by Şen-Ersoy's (2015) study which reports that the participants were glad about their instructors' interest, enthusiasm, and attempt to interact with them. Thus, it is possible to conclude that instructors' teaching style in a distance education course has a considerable impact on the level of students' satisfaction with the program. However, Gürer et al. (2016) state that instructors are usually supported about technical issues by their institutions thanks to distance education units at universities, but they do not get enough assistance to improve their teaching skills for the distance education (Erfidan, 2019).

Lastly, the participant students who are happy to have had the course with the distance education are more satisfied with it than the ones who would rather have had face-to-face sessions. This is a natural consequence as dissatisfaction with the distance education leads learners to face-to-face courses which were revealed by Metin et al. (2017) as well. Moreover, the participants, who had taken a distance education course before, are more satisfied than the ones who took this English course as their first distance education experience. This finding shows that the students might have coped with the challenges of distance education with ease thanks to their previous experience. In other words, they were familiar with distance learning, and they were already equipped with the key skills and strategies. Therefore, they might have used this experience to have benefit more from the course which might have increased their success and satisfaction. However, it is seen that the accessibility to free internet does not make a significant difference in the satisfaction with the program which is consistent with the findings of Pepeler et al. (2018) whereas Metin et al. (2017) found a significant connection between two variables. This can be explained with the availability of free wireless internet and computer labs on campus for the participants, and so they might not have considered internet access as a challenge for their distance education course. Similarly, the participants' satisfaction with the distance education course does not vary significantly in terms of the average time they spend on the internet per day. Still, it has been revealed that they tend to get more pleased with the course as they spend less time on the internet. Yaman (2015) states that students tend to get distracted by social media while watching their distance education lessons. It might be assumed that the learners spending more time on the internet found it more difficult to focus on the lessons due to a similar problem. Furthermore, the males have expressed a higher level of satisfaction with the distance education English course than the females, and the participants with a personal computer have stated more contentment than the ones who lack this facility even though these differences are not statistically significant. It is also consistent with the findings of various papers which studied gender as a variable (Işıklı, 2017; Pepeler et al., 2018; Seven, 2012; Şirin & Tekdal, 2015).

In a nutshell, this paper concludes that the participant students are quite pleased with their experience of distance education English course which indicates various aspects to be improved. The best part of the program seems to be the process thanks to the contribution of the course instructors. However, these aspects such as the course objectives, materials, testing procedures, productive skills, learners' and teachers' digital literacy and distance education competencies need to be promoted to satisfy learners more.

Finally, some suggestions are made in accordance with the conclusions and discussions above. It is crucial to invest in the instructors since they play a key role in the implementation of distance education courses. They should be trained for the necessary digital and pedagogical skills to design and conduct efficient distance education English courses. They should be given enough time to get prepared and supported in terms of technical issues and provided with a rich collection of materials. It should be the same for students as well. The distance education platform and course content should be introduced to them so that they can benefit from the lessons better. Since 5i English courses address various learners from different faculties and programs, a needs analysis will be useful to design a course that meets their needs and expectations. Such a course will require diversity and include interesting and motivating content for most of the learners, and this will eventually encourage them to participate regularly. It is seen that distance education English courses fail to develop productive skills in general, so these

courses should be designed to focus on these skills more. Students should be given more opportunities to practice speaking and writing. In addition, a system should be set up to provide them with constructive feedback on their production. Testing procedures should also include these skills to motivate students. Moreover, students need to communicate with their instructors directly. Therefore, the course should be designed to include some face-to-face sessions regularly along with the distance education classes. At least, synchronous sessions can be preferred to allow interacting with the instructor. This will provide a smooth transition from the traditional face-to-face lessons to distance education more effectively without developing negative attitudes towards such courses. This study has also used a quantitative data collection instrument to describe the current situation from the learners' perspectives. Therefore, it will be possible to get a deeper understanding if qualitative studies are also conducted to get both learners' and instructors' views about their experience with distance education English courses.

Statements of Publication Ethics

This paper does not require an ethics approval document according to ULAKBİM's (TR INDEX) new coverage criteria as the data were collected before 2020.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this study.

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