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Learning English as a Foreign Language in Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) Process: Perspectives of   Secondary School Students

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ABSTRACT	ARTICLE INFO
In recent years, developments in information technology and digitalization with the impact of industry 4.0 proved the effects in education as in every field and started to provide educational institutions the opportunity to perform their activities independently of time and place. However, the sudden outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, which was experienced worldwide and in Turkey highlighted the importance of creating an online education infrastructure. Since the reflections of COVID-19 on English language education in secondary schools is far more than foreseen, the study aims to depict secondary school online English course from the perspectives of students during the Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) period., A qualitative case study design was implemented in the study. The study group consists of fifteen 6th grade secondary school students. A semi-structured interview form, which was developed by the researchers, was operated to collect data. The data obtained were analyzed by implementing content analysis. The findings revealed that distance learning with digital game-based applications motivates students toward the lesson and encourages them to participate in the lesson. On the other hand, students' affective filters, their lack of internet access or computers, and inadequate lesson planning for online learning negatively affect their learning processes. **Keywords:** Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT), English as a Foreign Language, COVID-19, Young Learners	

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Ortaokul Öğrencileri Gözünden Acil Uzaktan Öğretim (AUÖ) Döneminde Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce Öğrenimi

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ÖZET	MAKALE BİLGİSİ
Son yıllarda bilişim teknolojilerinde yaşanan gelişmeler ve endüstri 4.0'ın da etkisiyle dijitalleşme her alanda olduğu gibi eğitimde de etkisini göstermiş ve eğitim kurumlarına zaman ve mekandan bağımsız olarak faaliyetlerini gerçekleştirme olanağı sunmaya başlamıştır. Ancak tüm dünyada ve Türkiye'de yaşanan koronavirüs salgınının ortaya çıkması, online eğitim altyapısının oluşturulmasının önemini göstermiştir. COVID-19'un ortaokullardaki İngilizce eğitimine yansımaları öngörülenden çok daha fazla olduğu için, çalışma ortaokul çevrimiçi İngilizce dersini öğrencilerin bakış açılarından tasvir etmeyi amaçlamakta, bu nedenle nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden örnek olay tasarımı uygulanmıştır. Çalışma 6. sınıfta öğrenim görmekte olan on beş ortaokul 6. sınıf öğrencisinden oluşmaktadır. Araştırma verileri, araştırmacılar tarafından geliştirilen yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu ile toplanmıştır. Daha sonra elde edilen veriler içerik analizi uygulanarak analiz edilmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular, dijital oyun tabanlı uygulamalarla uzaktan İngilizce öğrenmenin öğrencileri derse karşı motive ettiğini ve derse katılmaya teşvik ettiğini ortaya koymuştur. Öte yandan, öğrencilerin duyuşsal filtreleri, internet erişimlerinin veya bilgisayarlarının olmaması ve çevrimiçi öğrenmeye yönelik ders planlamasının yetersiz olması öğrenme süreçlerini olumsuz etkilemektedir. **Anahtar Kelimeler:** Uzaktan eğitim, Acil Durumda Uzaktan Eğitim, Çevrimiçi Araçlarla İngilizce öğretimi, COVID-19, Çocuklara yabancı dil öğretimi	

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Introduction

Education systems worldwide faced an unprecedented challenge following school closures to contain the spread of COVID-19 as part of public health efforts. More than 1.6 billion students in 200 countries at all levels have been affected by this education disruption. In response, the governments have made great efforts to rapidly deliver emergency remote teaching to ensure valid continuity in curriculum-based study and learning worldwide (UNESCO, 2020a; UNESCO, 2020b; U.N., 2020).

Turkey took steps to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) activities by starting a correspondence course in 1961 by the Ministry of National Education [MoNE] (Zırhlıoğlu, 2006); however, ERT ceased to be an option nearly half a century later and turned into an obligation. In countries with a high risk of contamination, the status of schools in April 2021 was as follows: in Croatia, Sweden, Canada, Georgia, Switzerland, Romania, schools were fully open, in Hungary, Netherlands, Germany, Italy, the USA were partially open, in Estonia, Belgium, Iraq and in Turkey Schools were completely closed (Demirci, 2021).

Countries took various measures with the sudden transition to ERT. In France, New Zealand, Portugal, Romania, and Turkey, courses were broadcasted on public television channels. The Colombian government created an online platform with educational resources, especially for low-income students (OECD, 2020). The first measures taken by countries with a coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) in 2020 were urgent. Continuity of education was ensured by creating live virtual classrooms with Cned's "home classroom" application based on a free education platform in France; Social communication between students, classmates, and teachers was preserved (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). All schools in Germany were closed until April 19, 2020, and exams were postponed. Primary school teachers sent their homework and study notes to students via e-mail (Arık, 2020). Digital teaching materials in the online learning platform owned in China were employed during the COVID-19 pandemic (Çelikdemir, 2020).

Since March 11, when the first new type of coronavirus (COVID-19) case was detected in Turkey, the formal education practices of over 18.5 million students in primary, secondary, and high schools were directly affected. With the advent of the virus, the last lesson of school was March 13, 2020. As of March 23, 2020, the ERT started with the EIN (Education Information Network) television channel programs. The transition of the state schools to live courses via the EIN portal or Zoom reached the end of May. With the introduction of ERT through online courses, it was inevitable for teachers and students to become more interested in technology. Due to the pandemic, students made a rapid transition to ERT. During the summer break, English as a Foreign Language teaching was also provided for students to receive foreign language education, and a support package for primary school students was included in the curriculum. As of November 2, 2020, all primary schools were determined as 5th and 8th grades in secondary schools, 9th and 12th grades in high schools among the groups that receive face-to-face education for two days a week. Pre-school students also attended school. Schools in

Turkey took a break on January 22, 2021, and as of February 15, 2021, it was decided to switch to face-to-face education gradually. In line with the decisions taken within the scope of "controlled normalization" after the COVID-19 outbreak on March 1, 2021, face-to-face education started in all pre-school education institutions, primary schools, 8th, and 12th grades across Turkey. As of April 15, 2021, all levels, except pre-school education institutions and the 8th and 12th grade students who were going to take the university admission exams, had started to take online classes again. Due to the increase in COVID-19 cases, a lockdown period of 17 days started on April 29, and face-to-face education was suspended in classrooms providing face-to-face training (MoNE, 2021). During the ERT in Turkey, the Education Information Network (EIN) gained an infrastructure that can be used 24/7 for 18 million students. MoNE prepared many printed and digital resources apart from TRT EIN, EIN, and live courses to reduce learning losses during ERT. In addition to teachers' and parents' textbooks, workbooks for students, 17.5 million books were prepared for primary and secondary school students to respond to resource material requests were distributed to schools free of charge. Furthermore, English activity guides were prepared for various primary and secondary school students. Tablets and internet support were also provided to financially disadvantaged students. In addition to fixed 14,272 EIN support points, 164 Mobile EIN support points were established in schools and institutions across 81 provinces to enable students who did not have the opportunity to participate in the ERT process (MoNE,2021).

Recent research on learning English as a foreign language during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that most secondary school students and teachers had an online learning experience and skills and attitudes towards using information and communication technologies, accessing the Internet, and technological devices were the most decisive factors in the learning process (Lie et al., 2020, Guo et al., 2020; Lukas and Yunus,2020; Bhaumik & Priyadarshini, 2020). A disruption in these factors adversely affected student participation and interest in the courses. In addition, various studies highlighted the necessity of online English teaching curriculum design for secondary schools and higher education levels due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in which the whole world was caught off guard (Patston et al., 2021, Rasmitadila et al., 2020). Studies discovered that students felt more worried about their English lessons than they did about the other lessons(Patston et al., 2021). Furthermore, challenges encountered in the pandemic not only had an impact on academic achievement but also had psychological effects. It was revealed that secondary school students also felt anxious during English language learning as a foreign language (Patston et al., 2021; Cantürk & Cantürk 2021). Although studies focused on distance education implementations, the literature includes few studies related to learning English as a foreign language during the ERT process. The study is also essential since it sheds light on the subject from a different perspective in the age group studied. So, the current study aims to explore secondary school students' experiences of learning English as a Foreign Language during the ERT process.

Methodology

Research Design

In this qualitative inquiry, a case study design was implemented to explore the experiences of secondary school learners (Stake 2005). In this single holistic case study (Yin,2009), a group of secondary school students, who joined the ERT process during the COVID-19 pandemic, were included in the study. In this intrinsic case study research, the Stakian approach was adopted because of its epistemological commitment: existentialism and constructivism (Stake,2005). In this point of view, there is no definite time to start collecting the data, and it enables flexibility for the researcher.

Study Group

The participants consist of fifteen 6th grade students studying at a public secondary school located in Istanbul. A convenient sampling method which is one of the purposeful sampling techniques was carried out and the participants were selected from the 6thgrade secondary school students from foreign language-based classes (pilot scheme) who attended the researcher's online English class for more than a year since March 2020, when the schools were closed for preventive purposes due to the virus.

Data Collection Procedure

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed as a data collection tool in the study. Semi-structured interviews allow different studies on similar subjects to contribute to the literature by comparing them (Lune & Berg, 2012). The semi-structured interview was adopted as it was not as standardized as structured interviews and allowed flexibility to the researcher with additional open-ended questions (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The interview questions for secondary school students were prepared by the researchers based on the literature review, and reviews were obtained from two experts in educational Sciences. They were consulted for the adequacy of the semi-structured interview protocol. Revisions were made after the expert revisions, and the interview protocol was given its final form. A pilot implementation was complemented with three students who were not included in the study group. Then, the students were informed about the study, and the volunteers consisted of the study group. The parental consent forms were obtained from the volunteer students' legal guardians. After that, the interviews were carried out through Zoom meetings and recorded with the permission of the participants. Each interview lasted approximately half an hour. The researcher followed the interview protocol and operated the interview. Open-ended questions, a total of five, in the interview protocol were used to create flexibility during interviews and let participants provide more data.

Data Analysis

The method classified as content analysis by Straus and Corbin (1990) was employed to analyze the data in qualitative studies. In qualitative data analysis, all data are read repeatedly to apply

to content analysis, and then crucial thoughts or concepts in the text are revealed. After taking notes of the researchers' thoughts, the key phrases expressing each thought appear as codes. Categories are created by associating the codes with each other. Categories make the codes meaningful. Themes are created to cover all of these (Morse & Field, 1995). Yıldırım and Şimsek (2013) explain content analysis in four steps: 1. Coding of data, 2. Identifying the themes, 3. Organizing the codes and themes, 4. identification and interpretation (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

The qualitative research content analysis process is as follows (1) researcher collects data from text files such as field notes, transcriptions, (2) researcher transcribes the fieldnotes or records, (3) researcher reads the data carefully, (4) researcher assigns a code label to text segments and locate them accordingly. Finally, the researcher codes to text, whether for description or themes in the research report (Creswell, 2012). In the scope of this study, the researchers first transcripted the audio recordings and then followed the content analysis steps to obtain codes, categories, and themes.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure internal validity, the data collection form was shared with two experts, and the form was given its final version following the reviews. A pilot interview was conducted with three students. Merriam (1998) suggested various methods to ensure internal validity in qualitative research. In the current study, long-term observation was achieved through online teaching practices with students for an academic year, member checks ensured the trustworthiness of the study, and participatory modes of research were implemented through students' active participation. In addition to a detailed, thick description for external validity, reliability was tried to be increased by an independent researcher's method of confirming the research findings, by audit trail, and by the researcher expressing his/her position clearly. In this section, a researcher other than the researcher checked the findings (a critical friend) to ensure reliability, and the research report was presented (Lincoln and Guba,1985).

Ethical Considerations

Before the oral interviews, a consent form was obtained from the parents and the students themselves. The interview questions were recorded by asking the students audibly at the interview time appointed to them, and the cameras were turned off. Pseudonyms were used instead of the true names of the participants to provide confidentiality through anonymity.

Researchers' Role

One researcher taught online English courses to the study group for over a year, starting from March 23, 2020. She also did interviews with the students. The other researcher, an expert in educational sciences, reviewed the semi-structured interview forms and data analysis. The researchers monitored each other to prevent bias during the research.

Findings

This part of the study represents the themes and categories and codes that came out from the study data. While setting the findings forth, the most remarkable quotations were presented in this section.

As a result of the data analysis, two themes were extracted from the data acquired from the interviews carried out with the students: Challenges of learning English during ERTand English Teaching Strategies during ERT. The affective filter hypothesis, technical issues, poor lesson planning are the sub-categories of the first theme. Game-based instruction (gamification) and the use of LMS for written feedback are the sub-categories of the second theme. Table 1 which was presented below summarized the theme, categories, and codes.

Table 1. Theme One: Challenges of Online Learning

Theme	Categories	Codes
Challenges of online learning	Affective filters	• Lack of motivation
		• Lack of concentration
		• Nonchalance of ambiguity
	Technical issues	• Network problems
	Poor lesson planning	• Lack of equivalence between receptive&productive skills
		• Scantness of speaking activities
	Virtual learning environment	• Lack of socialization
		• Disengagement

Students indicated that they acquired an opportunity to remember what they learned at school through online English lessons before. However, they also stated that most of the students turned off their web cameras during online English classes and were not willing to participate. They also expressed that they lost their concentration since COVID-19 infected family

members, not enough room for effectively participating in lessons without interruption. Within this context, Nazli stated the followings:

> I used to participate in online English classes actively. However, when we visited our relatives who live in the village, we were infected as well. We could not come back to Istanbul. We were under lockdown for fourteen days. So, I missed English classes for two weeks, and then I felt a bit demotivated for a while.

> Another student, Hasan, added *''I do not know when the schools will be open or how the English teacher will grade us. The exams we attended were canceled. So, I do not feel like sitting in front of the computer.''*

Melis, the new student, describes the disengagement as follows:

> I have not met my classmates yet nor seen their faces on Zoom. There are some very active students, but most students are like ghosts; I do not even hear their voices. The class population is over 40, but I only see at most 10-15 students, at most 20. *'*

> Another participant Ali used the following expressions:

> *'*Once, our teacher used the Zoom breakout rooms to divide us into groups and do some speaking practice. I was so excited and happy at first. I attended room 1; there were three other students, none of them turned on their cameras, and they were all muted. I waited more than 10 minutes till the teacher came back and checked us. Then, she changed my room. It seemed like all the rooms had some similar problems. In the end, the English teachers' attempt to make group activities turned into a disappointment. I am sure that she will never try it again.

Technical/technological issues were one of the most striking topics among the students. Technical issues referred to internet network problems as code. Merve, one of the most successful students of this 6th-grade pilot scheme class, summarized the internet network problem as follows:

> There was a problem not only between the students but also with our English teacher's internet network. Some students dropped out of the English classes, and I also experienced it too. Moreover, the teacher did not have internet access for two weeks; she sent us some worksheets and e-books as e-mails till the network problem got solved.

Furthermore, another Female student Ece added:

> I wanted to attend some interactive games, but my internet connection was low speed. Even if I attended, I was the latest on the leaderboards due to answering the questions as fast as my classmates with higher speed internet connections, which frustrated me. In the end, I gave up trying. *''*

Obtained data also revealed that equal teaching of language skills was not achieved.

> Derya, a very attentive student, expressed his opinions*: ''I wish we had some role-play and drama activities. We cannot practice with my classmates face-to-face, so I feel like I need more speaking practice online.''*

Table 2. *Theme 2*: English Teaching Strategies

Theme	Categories	Code
English Teaching Strategies	Implementation of Web 2.0 tools	The game-based approach in ELT (Gamification)
		Use of LMS for written feedback

The majority of the students who attended online English classes expressed that they mostly participated in the classes for playing virtual games. A female student named Selma explained this as follows:

> During some other lessons, we only watch videos or do exercises one by one, but mostly we write what our teachers say so whereas in English classes we play games on Kahoot, Wordwall. I like Classroom challenges and being on the leader board. So, I only attend English classes.

Selma also made expressions related to the use of LMS for written feedback:

> We all use Classdojo for English classes. I upload some of my assignments there, and My English teacher corrects my writing mistakes sometimes makes comments on my study. She asks me to correct and reupload them, which helps me to learn better.

Conclusion and Discussion

In this study, the case of learning English as a foreign language during ERT was discovered. Although there were many attempts to facilitate online English teaching, there are still challenges to overcome. As revealed in (Lie et al., 2020, Guo et al., 2020; Lukas &Yunus, 2020; Bhaumik & Priyadarshini,2020), the study findings proved that during the COVID-19 pandemic, internet access and lack of computers were some of the main problems. A disruption in these factors had an adverse effect on student motivation and engagement. The study

implemented by Cantürk &Cantürk (2021) highlighted that the global pandemic had some psychological effects, such as anxiety. The technical issues, ambiguity, and other challenges led to the affective filter hypothesis of Krashen (1982), the emotional hindrances that prevented language learning effectively. Furthermore, technical problems and the nature of learning a foreign language during ERT caused anxiety (Patston Timoty et al., 2021).

The study also revealed that the lack of an online English curriculum for secondary schools caused ambiguity and equivalence between receptive and productive skills. It can be stated that there is a need for an English curriculum for secondary schools at the time of the pandemic, which was adequate with Patston 's (2021) research findings.

When the literature is reviewed, the studies present the positive effects of game-based instruction in foreign language teaching in traditional classroom settings (Kayseroğlu & Samur, 2018; Stocker, 2020; Putra & Priyatmojo, 2021; Veljković Michos, 2017). However, from the findings of this study, the use of a game-based approach is even more crucial when teaching young English learners through online classes, in which technology integration was suggested due to the short attention span of Gen Z as stated (Szymkowiak et al.,2021)

The study also explored that the pandemic affected the study group emotionally. It caused a lack of concentration, motivation, and disengagement and building up affective filters. The stakeholders must take precautions for the psychological effects of COVID-19 on secondary school learners. School counselors can guide students in managing stress, anxiety, and studying during the pandemic. As revealed in this study, the standard 6th grade English curriculum is not adequate for ERT. The educational authorities need to develop another English language teaching curriculum for ERT. In-service training of teachers through curriculum adjustment and the use of technology in English teaching should be provided. Besides, productive skills should not be neglected while teaching younger learners online.

The lack of a specific English language assessment/examination in 6th grade caused nonchalance of students since they did not feel responsible for learning, showing the low self-efficacy of secondary school kids due to their mental and physical development. With the widespread use of smartphones, foreign language learning applications are right next to us.

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