# The Literacy Trek

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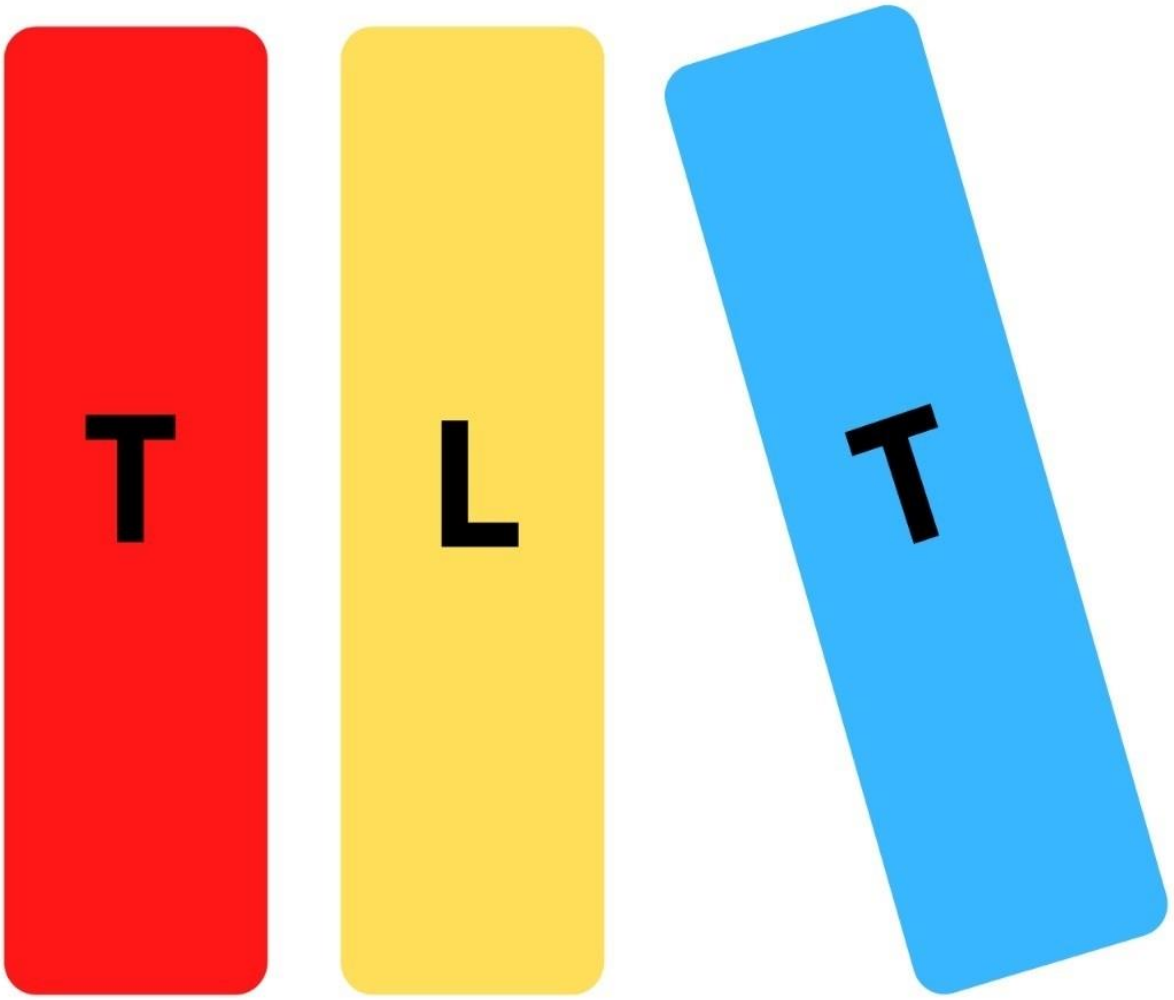


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# CONTENT

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The effect of speaking tasks on intercultural awareness: A case study in Turkey

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**Abstract**
In the globalization era, intercultural awareness has become increasingly important alongside English language proficiency. This study investigates how an 8-week intervention, featuring online interaction-based speaking tasks, influenced students' intercultural awareness levels. The study conducted at a prep school within a state university in Turkey utilized the Intercultural Awareness Questionnaire, focus-group interviews, and observations with 11 students. Quantitative data analysis was done with paired samples t-test, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. The pretest revealed a lack of fully developed practice-oriented intercultural awareness levels among participants, whereas post-test findings indicated development of more complex elements throughout the intervention. Moreover, the outcomes of the paired samples t-test showed notable enhancement in Intercultural Knowledge, Skills, Sensitivity, and Interaction dimensions in the post-intervention. However, no significant change was noted in Intercultural Interest. Overall, the study underscores the efficacy of interaction-based speaking tasks in enriching intercultural awareness through exposure to diverse cultures.


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English language teaching; interaction-based speakingtasks; intercultural awareness; tertiary level
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## Introduction

Within the increase in mobility and ever-growing technology, the English language has existed in different contexts around the globe. Based on this variety in context, the English language is understood within its own setting (Byram & Zarate, 1996). In this regard, linking it to only a particular culture is not healthy in such a variety of cultural settings (Baker, 2011a). Therefore, merely being knowledgeable about cultures becomes insufficient to establish effective communication in different cultural contexts. To do so, Intercultural Awareness (ICA) highlights the “fluid, fragmented, hybrid, and emergent” feature of the cultures (Baker, 2011a, p. 66). Drawing on the studies on ICA,

this concept was extended with the model by Baker (2011b). The model presents three levels: Level 1 indicating the awareness of different cultures on a general and basic level, Level 2 entailing detailed awareness of cultures besides being able to cope with possible miscommunication and go beyond stereotyping in different cultural contexts, and Level 3 including the emergent aspect of cultures, and the skills and capabilities to mediate and negotiate across diverse cultural settings. Besides these three categories, Baker also divides ICA into two parts: *conceptual ICA* which covers the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to intercommunicate with the different cultures, and *practice-oriented ICA*, centering on how the learners apply knowledge and skills in real intercultural encounters (2011b).

## Literature Review

In intercultural contexts, interaction significantly contributes to fostering intercultural awareness. Mainly two distinct families of theories serve as its basis: *cognitive* and *sociocultural theories*. The *cognitive theory* regards interaction as an information source (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013); put it differently, as an input. While input holds significance, output is also similarly important when interacting. As for the output encompassing speaking and writing, learners recognize the gaps, try to solve the language mechanism, and expand their learning with feedback from their schoolmates or instructors (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013), which points out the sociocultural theory. Second, *sociocultural theory* by Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes the close link between learning and social interactions. While individuals interact with others in their learning process, they want to interact with the more knowledgeable ones (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

The synthesis of these two theories brings us to the point where Baker (2011b) highlighted the significance of cultural understanding and capabilities to prevent potential conflicts in communication. While finding common ground, the context is inevitably crucial during the interaction process. The expansion of English into different contexts makes the English language dynamic (Baker, 2011b). With this dynamic context, making sense out of the interaction gains greater significance than the interaction simply being an information source (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). As students engage in

mediating and negotiating within social interactions, they continuously cultivate their own intercultural understandings. These interactions are likely to affect students cognitively and emotionally, as well. This leads to reflection which gives students opportunities to have an understanding of the attitudes of their own and others from an intercultural aspect. In order to follow all these principles, students need to demonstrate *respect* towards others and acknowledge their responsibility to foster their own intercultural sensitivity and understanding (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

Although these principles hold significance in language teaching and learning, certain challenges may be faced in terms of ICA implementation in the classrooms. In the previous studies, it was revealed that while teachers recognize the significance of incorporating culture into teaching English, they often express uncertainty regarding the implementation of intercultural tasks and activities; in addition, they are less inclined to cover cultural topics in the classroom because of the loaded schedule and lack of time (Ay, 2018; Özışık et al., 2019; Yılmaz, 2016; Zorba & Çakır, 2019). There is another issue in terms of reflecting ICA in the English language teaching materials. The existence of false and invented cultural points which are distributed disproportionately in the textbooks for English language teaching (Zorba, 2019; Zorba & Çakır, 2019) and the superficial intercultural content (Sobkowiak, 2021) put students at a disadvantage hindering them from thinking critically about cultural differences.

## Aim of the Study

Addressing the aforementioned gaps, this study aims to assess the development of students' ICA levels through conducting activities during online English lessons. Furthermore, it seeks to explore if there is an enhancement in the students' ICA levels following the intervention. This study also aims to collect the students' perspectives on the intervention process.

Given the stated objectives, this study aims to address the following research questions:

- What are the participants' intercultural awareness levels before the implementation of the interaction-based speaking tasks designed to enhance intercultural awareness (intervention)?

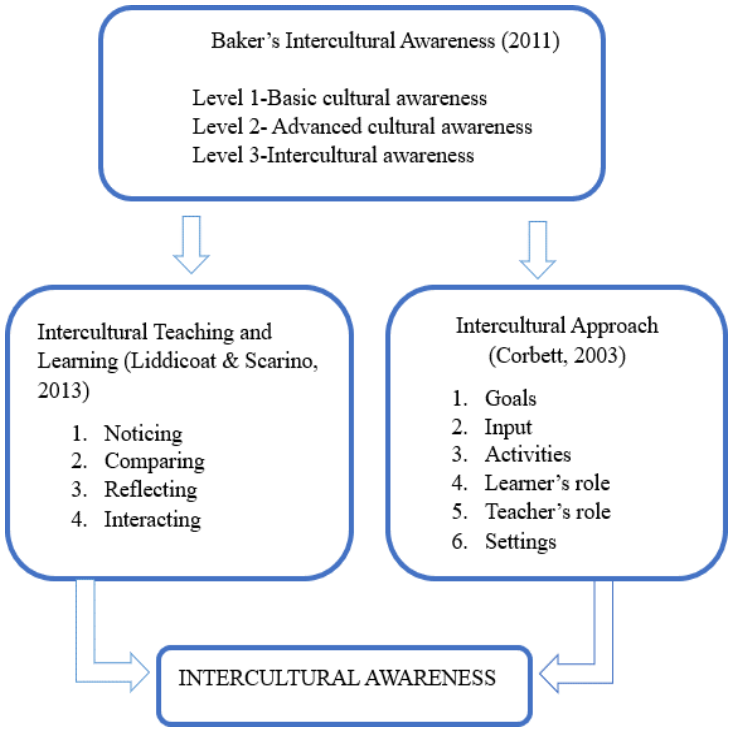
- What are the participants' intercultural awareness levels following the intervention?
- Is there a significant difference between participants' level of intercultural awareness before and after the intervention?
- What are the participants' perceptions about the intervention?

## Theoretical Framework and Activity Design

Figure 1 illustrates the framework which the researcher applied to design the activities.

**Figure 1**

*Theoretical Framework*




Built upon the existing knowledge, this framework encompasses three perspectives. As for the first one, the intercultural aspect of Baker (2011b) was used to design the activities in the English lessons. Secondly, the intercultural approach proposed by Corbett (2003) was followed to create the speaking tasks. Lastly, the perspective on teaching and learning interculturally by Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) forms the third part to follow the instructional procedure. Guided by this framework, the themes were identified after gathering the topics highlighted in the literature to facilitate students' intercultural awareness. Second, the themes were ordered and allocated to

specific weeks as illustrated in Table 1. Next, lesson plans were created with expert guidance.

**Table 1**

*Weekly themes and the types of activities*

| Week | Themes | Activities |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | food around the globe | information gap |
| 2 | English language around the world | interview |
| 3 | festivals | information gap |
| 4 | communication through the Internet | tell an anecdote |
| 5 | adverts | second storying |
| 6 | politeness and culture | discuss "Think-Pair-Share" |
| 7 | towns and cities | interview |
| 8 | stereotyping | discuss "Think-Pair-Share" |

## Participants

The study was administered at a preparatory school in the academic term 2022- 2023. The reason for choosing this context is twofold. First, in Türkiye, while some individuals are familiar with cultures where English is dominant, many have limited or no exposure to the English language and its associated cultures outside of school. Similarly, Coşkun (2016) revealed the insufficient opportunities for students to use English beyond school and limited knowledge of English culture. Furthermore, the reason for selecting a preparatory school is the students' immersion into the English language and their concurrent exposure to various cultures associated with English. 11 participants studying English (B1 level) took part in this investigation. The researcher used *convenience sampling* through which the participants are selected from the ones who are convenient and readily accessible (Creswell, 2014; Dörnyei, 2007). Since the participants seem to participate in the study more eagerly, this sampling method enables to get rich data (Dörnyei, 2007).

## Data Collection Tools

This study includes three types of data collection: the questionnaires (pretest and post-test), focus-group interviews, and observations. First, *the Intercultural Awareness Questionnaire* developed by Zorba (2019) was utilized for the pre- and post-intervention

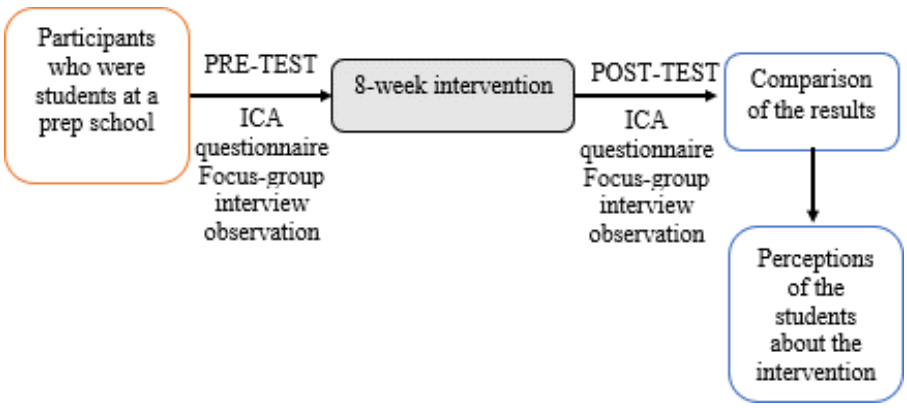
as the dimensions in the questionnaire compatible with the interaction-based speaking tasks embody the intercultural perspective of Baker (2011b) included in the aforementioned theoretical framework. Second, focus-group interviews were utilized to obtain a deep meaning from the data. The interview questions, which were semi-structured, were related to the aforementioned dimensions as well as the ones about the intervention process. Third, observations were aimed to uncover the practices that were possibly hard to put into words. Since structured observations entail a scheme, which makes the process more reliable (Dörnyei, 2007), the observation framework created by Yıldız (2016) was utilized with slight modifications for similar purposes. In this scheme, there were eight criteria derived from Byram, Gribkova and Starkey's intercultural viewpoint (2002). In addition, the criteria were structured according to Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) list of observable items. The rubric was modified getting professional assistance.

## Data Collection Procedure

The study followed three data collection stages, as shown in Figure 2, were followed in this study. First, in pretest stage, the ICA questionnaire was administered following the selection of the participants. Next, the participants in groups were interviewed to acquire a more profound understanding. Second, the researcher implemented an 8-week intervention. In the beginning and the final week of the intervention, observations were made by using the aforementioned rubric. As for the last stage, the same questionnaire was administered preceding the focus group interviews.

**Figure 2**

*Data collection procedure*



## Data Analysis

The quantitative data underwent analysis using the IBM SPSS Statistics Program. The reliability test showed a Cronbach's Alpha of .913 for the questionnaire and between .703 and .815 for its dimensions, indicating high reliability. These values show the reliability of the questionnaire. Following the reliability, a normality test was applied to ascertain the compliance of the data of pretest and post-test with the normal distribution hypothesis. Table 2 presents the test results.

**Table 2**

*Values of Skewness and Kurtosis*

| Groups | N | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pretest (Overall) | 11 | -.180 | -.282 |
| Posttest (Overall) | 11 | -.149 | -.407 |

After normal distribution was detected, parametric tests were administered. The paired samples t-test was utilized to determine if a statistically significant difference existed between the pretest and posttest, along with the descriptive analysis.

Qualitative data involved focus-group interviews and observations applied before and after the intervention. After transcribing and translating the data into English with the guidance of professionals, a thematic analysis was performed. During the implementation of the analysis, the coding steps of the qualitative data recommended by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) were considered. A software program MAXQDA was used for the analysis. Expert opinions were taken during the coding process for the intercoder reliability as the mutual agreement between the coders on the codes makes this process more consistent (Creswell, 2014).

## Findings

The evidence concerning the initial research question, which focused on uncovering the participants' levels of intercultural awareness before the intervention, included the results of the questionnaire (pretest), the interview results (pretest), and the findings from the observation made in the initial day of the intervention.

Based on the mean score across all dimensions, the levels of awareness were found 4.06 for Intercultural Knowledge, 4.15 for Intercultural Interaction, 4.19 for Intercultural Sensitivity, 4.20 for Intercultural Skills and 4.35 for Intercultural Interest. All the scores above 4 shows agreement. Similarly, the overall mean score indicates that intercultural awareness is high, which is 4.19.

**Table 3**

*Themes and coding frequencies in interview (pretest)*

| Theme | Subtheme | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| skills | negotiating and mediating | 9 |
| | overcoming stereotyping | |
| | making inferences | |
| interest | interest in different cultures | 12 |
| | interest in cultural practices | |
| | interest in comparing cultures | |
| sensitivity | empathy | 14 |
| | tolerance | |
| | openness | |
| interaction | mismatch in communication | 14 |
| | lack of experience | |
| | security | |
| | emotional state | |
| knowledge | for good communication | 16 |
| | for respect | |
| | for education | |
| | cultural relativity | |
| language | learning a language with cultures | 19 |
| | Learning a language without cultures | |
| | English as a global language | |

Table 3 shows the interview (pretest) results. Accordingly, it was obvious that the leading theme was language accompanied with three subthemes.

**Table 4**

*The findings from observation notes (1st day of the intervention)*

| Theme | Subtheme |
|---|---|
| Knowledge | knowledge of different cultures |
| | previous knowledge |
| | lack of knowledge |
| Interest | interest in different cultures |
| Sensitivity | embracing cultural diversity |
| Skills | negotiating and mediating |

Despite the high mean score of knowledge in the pretest of the questionnaire (M= 4.06) and knowledge standing out among the other themes in the interview results, observation notes in Table 4 indicate that the participants could not demonstrate their knowledge of various cultures during the speaking task. For example, they merely attempted to describe certain Turkish dishes or common foods such as fries and hamburgers.

Another conflicting finding is the discrepancy between the high mean score of intercultural skills in the questionnaire results (M= 4.20) and the existence of the subtheme mismatch in communication under the theme interaction. Despite the high mean score in intercultural skill, one of the respondents (P9) shared her experience of having a mismatch by stating, "*I have experience in this matter. One of my friends was a foreigner. Actually, we didn't have any problems at first. You know, because our common language was English, but then we clashed at some points because our lifestyles and cultures were different*".

The findings were gathered around three parts for the second research question: the questionnaire (posttest), the interview (posttest) and the observation (8th week) results. The overall mean score obtained from the questionnaire (M= 4.64) indicates that the participants reached a high intercultural awareness level. Regarding the dimensions, intercultural interest and intercultural sensitivity had the peak (M= 4.71 and M= 4.70).

**Table 5**

*Themes and frequencies in focus-group interview (posttest)*

| Theme | Subtheme | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Interest | interest in different cultures | 5 |
| | interest in comparing cultures | |
| Skills | ability to negotiate and mediate | 7 |
| | ability to have fun | |
| Language | learning language with cultures | 7 |
| | English as a global language | |
| Interaction | personality traits | 16 |
| | excitement | |
| | miscommunication | |
| Intervention | positive sides of the intervention | 17 |
| | the things that need to be improved | |
| | timing | |
| Knowledge | knowledge of languages | 18 |
| | knowledge of lifestyle | |
| | knowledge for experience abroad | |
| | cultural relativity | |
| | Having stereotypes | |
| | No need to learn all the cultures | |
| Sensitivity | respect | 19 |
| | tolerance | |
| | empathy | |

In Table 5, illustrating the results of the interview, the parallel results were provided with the questionnaire. The participants expressed an inclination towards diverse cultures and also mentioned their tendency to examine how other cultures vary from their own. Sensitivity emerged as the most repetitive theme in the interview. Also, respect was the most repeated subtheme of sensitivity.

**Table 6**

*The findings from the observation notes (8th week)*

| Themes | Subthemes |
|---|---|
| Stereotyping | Having stereotypes |
| | Overcoming stereotyping |
| Cultural diversity | Respect for diversity |
| Interest | Interest in the materials |

Table 6 illustrates the outcomes of observation (eighth week of the intervention), revealing the emergence of three themes and four subthemes. While two participants exhibited statements indicating having stereotypes, there were also discussions on strategies to address stereotyping. In addition, participants often addressed cultural diversity with an emphasis on respect. A participant (P5) said, "*Differences make all people perfect. What makes a rainbow is that it has different colors. I think it is important that we should accept people of different cultures and backgrounds*.".

As for the third research question, overall finding and findings of the dimensions were presented in the following part.

**Table.7**

*Paired samples t-test results*

| Groups | | N | X̄ | SS | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| intercultural awareness (overall) | Pre-test | 11 | 4.19 | .40 | -3.324 | .008 |
| | Post-test | 11 | 4.64 | .15 | | |
| intercultural knowledge | Pre-test | 11 | 4.06 | .58 | -3.086 | .012 |
| | Post-test | 11 | 4.65 | .19 | | |
| intercultural skills | Pre-test | 11 | 4.20 | .41 | -2.568 | .028 |
| | Post-test | 11 | 4.58 | .23 | | |
| intercultural sensitivity | Pre-test | 11 | 4.19 | .48 | -3.180 | 0.10 |
| | Post-test | 11 | 4.70 | .20 | | |
| intercultural interaction | Pre-test | 11 | 4.15 | .35 | -4.079 | .002 |
| | Post-test | 11 | 4.56 | .20 | | |
| intercultural interest | Pre-test | 11 | 4.35 | .54 | -1.910 | .085 |
| | Post-test | 11 | 4.71 | .26 | | |

As Table 7 indicated, a statistically significant difference was evident (t= -3.324, p<0.05) when the overall results of the participants were compared. Besides the overall results, all the dimensions except for *Intercultural Interest* showed a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test results. Despite no notable change in this dimension, an increase in the mean values is clear (Mpretest= 4.35 and Mposttest= 4.71).

**Table 8**

*The Results Related to the Perceptions of the Participants about the Intervention*

| The instrument | Themes | Subthemes | Excerpts |
|---|---|---|---|
| Focus-group interviews | Intervention | positive sides of the intervention | P7: "*First of all, I was satisfied with the training. Yes, I had the opportunity to see what perspective everyone here has on communication and check whether my perspective is correct.*"<br>P6: "*Honestly, I was satisfied because I normally lack self-confidence and I can't talk in any way, but I don't know. You were so sweet. That's why my speaking improved. I think I've gained some self-confidence. I mean, it's good for me in terms of speaking, frankly.*" |
| | | The things that need to be improved | P4: "*Just a more intensive version of the same topic could be better.*"<br>P7: "*Now, since we are learning things about cultures, I think we could learn different things if everyone did general research on a different culture at least once or twice and took notes and told it to each other in class. It's like a little homework.*" |
| | | timing | P4: "*I also think that it was enough, but it would still be nice if there was even more.*"<br>P1: "*I can't say inadequate, but it is something that can be improved after all. It would be better if it was longer.*" |
| Observation (8th week of the intervention) | Interest | interest in the materials | P7 said "*Very different story*." (for the reading text) The participants showed interest in the activity to guess the occupations of the people shown in the pictures. |

Concerning the fourth question, two different data groups were analyzed: the focus-group interviews (post-test) and the observation (8th week). As for the results shown in Table 8, the participants gave feedback on the material and stated the beneficial effects of lessons on their personal development.

## Discussion

In relation to the first research question aiming to explore the participants' levels of intercultural awareness before the intervention, the pretest questionnaire results revealed a significant level of intercultural awareness, as indicated by the overall mean score. This may result from students' high level of intercultural awareness prior to this study. Likewise, it is apparent from the investigation performed by Güneş (2016) to investigate the undergraduate students' ICA levels that the students had already exhibited intercultural awareness in a high level prior to the treatment. The pre-test interview findings also showed the participants' willingness to understand diverse cultures to support their language learning. Similarly, in Wang's study (2014), it was highlighted that participants greatly recognized the importance of integrating ICA into foreign language education. However, the results indicate inconsistency in the application aspect in the present study. Pointing out this gap, the evidence from the observation showed that the participants uttered the names of some local food or more general food such as cake, fries, and hamburger without using their knowledge about different countries in the speaking task. That may reflect the participants' lack of practice-oriented intercultural awareness, which involves applying cultural knowledge in intercultural contexts (Baker, 2011b). Supporting this, despite the high mean score of *intercultural skills* in the questionnaire results (M= 4.20), one of the participants (P9) said, "*I have an experience in this matter. One of my friends was a foreigner. Actually, we didn't have any problems at first. You know, because our common language was English, but then we clashed at some points because our lifestyles and cultures were different*.". This gap between the high mean score of intercultural skill and what was stated in terms of mismatch may indicate the lack of opportunities of the participants to practice their intercultural skills. Similarly, the study of Coşkun (2016) highlighted that the students lacked opportunities to practice their language beyond the classroom. Also, Zorba's (2019) study pointed to the students' lack of experience in genuine intercultural communication resulting from their lack of courage to interact with foreigners. Practice-oriented ICA focuses on skills and behaviors mostly (Baker, 2011b). From this standpoint, the participants may have difficulty using those skills despite accepting its importance and necessity.

Addressing the second research question aimed to assess the participants' post-test intercultural awareness, observation notes from the 8th week indicated a trend towards more complex elements of intercultural awareness, such as addressing stereotypes and respecting cultural diversity. Although Baker's study (2009) found that participants demonstrated more basic knowledge and skills related to ICA, rather than more complex aspects of intercultural awareness, Abdzadeh and Baker (2020) revealed that students reached to a more complex understanding of culture moving from static to emergent at the end of the systematic course taken by students. It was also noted in the study of Baker (2012) that the participants developed a greater awareness towards stereotyping and skills to compare their own cultures and other cultures in a less stereotypical manner. Additionally, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) particularly emphasized the ability to compare, as it facilitates the creation of meaning by considering multiple perspectives. Furthermore, Özşen (2022) emphasized diversity and positive attitudes towards it. That appears to be an indicator of advanced intercultural awareness level according to Baker (2011b) pointing out that going beyond stereotyping and oversimplications and acknowledging different perspectives in different groups entail the point that cultures are complex. With this perspective, the participants seemed to be in progress towards a deeper understanding of intercultural awareness all through the intervention.

The third research question explored differences between pre- and post-test intervention results, revealing a significant difference in participants' scores. Similar findings can be detected in the studies of Abdzadeh and Baker (2020), Choeichaiyapoom (2013), and Zorba (2019). Pertaining to the dimensions, statistically significant differences were detected among *Intercultural Knowledge, Skills, Sensitivity, and Interaction,* while no notable difference was detected in the *Intercultural Interest*. This might suggest that the material made use of in the intervention enabled participants to facilitate their intercultural knowledge, skills, interaction and sensitivity. In a similar vein, the study of Civelekoğlu (2015) indicated that incorporating poetry into EFL classrooms positively impacts students, particularly by enhancing their intercultural knowledge. Unlike these results, Tural's study (2020) indicated the lack of significant change in participants' intercultural awareness levels after a six-week implementation of short stories to the students' possible lack of interest in reading literary texts. Unlike

the lack of interest, participants' high level of intercultural awareness before the implementation seems to result in the finding of no significant difference in Intercultural Interest. Supporting this, the study conducted by Kafa (2016) on the ICA levels of Turkish undergraduate students revealed through the survey results that the students already possessed a high level of intercultural awareness before the treatment. Thus, this may be associated with the point in this study that the participants had already showed an interest in various cultures prior to the intervention.

Regarding the fourth question intending to explore the participants' perceptions about the intervention process, the interview results of the posttest and observation made in the 8$^{th}$ week revealed how positive the participants were about the intervention. The first point was about how the implementation process facilitated their self-improvement such as fostering speaking skills and having self-confidence and empathy. These personal improvements may be attributed to the speaking tasks that were interaction-based and encouraged participants to speak English to succeed in tasks. A similar result was observed in Civelekoğlu's (2015) study, which demonstrated that students enhanced their critical and analytical thinking skills. Additionally, they gained greater confidence in their communication within intercultural settings before and after the implementation of poetry in EFL classrooms. Furthermore, the positive impact of the themes seemed to be evident, too. The participants had no idea of the topics to discuss beforehand. In relation to this, one of them(P5) said "*Since we talk about different subjects and we don't know about them beforehand, yes, when we need to talk about when we see it, it is necessary to think quickly and put it into that language. For example, we will say something, but we don't know how to say it. Let me say it is like we are translating English into English. I think it is useful in producing different expressions.*". The need for exposure and practice was also emphasized in the findings of Yılmaz' study (2016) revealing that the learners stated that they lacked opportunities for being exposed to a wide range of cultures and practicing English outside their university. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) highlight the crucial role of social interaction in intercultural learning, suggesting that it involves actively engaging with cultural diversity, where learners create, communicate, negotiate, and reshape meanings. In relation to this, the intervention seems to give some opportunities for the participants to

put both language and cultural aspects into practice, which may fill the gap of lack of opportunity to practice the language and culture.

## Conclusion

This study intends to determine if there is an enhancement in the intercultural levels and whether a notable difference existed before and after the intervention. Additionally, the study sought to explore the participants' viewpoints regarding the intervention. To achieve this, an 8-week online English lessons with interaction-based speaking tasks were developed with expert help. Next, the quantitative and qualitative data were collected throughout the implementation. Findings from the pretest indicated that the participants had already reached a certain intercultural awareness level before the intervention.

Even though knowledge and skills factors demonstrate high mean scores, it seems the participants' practice-oriented ICA needs to be developed. Pertaining to the post-test results, findings from the observation notes showed some points demonstrating the stronger intercultural awareness. The analysis of both pretest and posttest demonstrated a statistically significant difference in the overall outcome. It was also revealed that while a significant difference was detected in *Intercultural Knowledge, Skills, Sensitivity*, and *Interaction*, no notable change was found in *Intercultural Interest*. The significant changes may be attributed to the benefit of the content designed for the intervention. Also, the lack of significant difference observed for the dimension of *Intercultural Interest* may be linked to the influence of participants' prior interest. Finally, the findings from the observations and interviews showed that the participants held favorable views about the intervention.

### *Ethics Committee Permission Information*

This research study was administered with the approval of Research Ethics Committee, Gazi University, dated 18.10.2022 and numbered 17.

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## *Appendix*

Interview questions (pre-intervention)

1. İngilizce öğrenirken Amerikan ve İngiliz kültürü dışındaki kültürleri öğrenmek ister misiniz? Nedenini belirtiniz.
2. Sizce farklı kültürel geçmişlerden gelen insanlarla iletişim kurmak için ne öğrenmek önemlidir?
3. Farklı kültürden gelen birisi ile iletişim kurarken nasıl hissedersiniz?

4. Alışılmadık kültürden gelen birisi ile iletişim kurduğunuzda nasıl tepki verirsiniz?
5. Farklı kültürlere sahip insanlarla iletişim kurmak için ne tür becerilere sahip olmak gerekir?
6. Farklı kültürlere yönelik bilgi ve becerilere sahip olmanın İngilizce öğrenmenize katkı sağladığını düşünüyor musunuz?
7. Farklı kültüre sahip birisi ile kolaylıkla iletişim kurabilir misiniz? Evet ise, bunu nasıl gerçekleştirirsiniz? Hayır ise, iletişimi zorlaştıran şeyler nelerdir?
8. Farklı kültürden birisi ile konuşurken hangi konu veya konular üzerinde konuşmak istersiniz?
9. Farklı kültürlerin yabancı dil sınıflarında öğretilmesi gerektiğini düşünüyor musunuz? Nedenini belirtiniz.
10. Interview questions (post-intervention)
11. İngilizce öğrenirken Amerikan ve İngiliz kültürü dışındaki kültürleri öğrenmek ister misiniz? Nedenini belirtiniz.
12. Sizce farklı kültürel geçmişlerden gelen insanlarla iletişim kurmak için ne öğrenmek önemlidir?
13. Farklı kültürden gelen birisi ile iletişim kurarken nasıl hissedersiniz?
14. Alışılmadık kültürden gelen birisi ile iletişim kurduğunuzda nasıl tepki verirsiniz?
15. Farklı kültürlere sahip insanlarla iletişim kurmak için ne tür becerilere sahip olmak gerekir?
16. Farklı kültürlere yönelik bilgi ve becerilere sahip olmanın İngilizce öğrenmenize katkı sağladığını düşünüyor musunuz?
17. Farklı kültüre sahip birisi ile kolaylıkla iletişim kurabilir misiniz? Evet ise, bunu nasıl gerçekleştirirsiniz? Hayır ise, iletişimi zorlaştıran şeyler nelerdir?
18. Farklı kültürden birisi ile konuşurken hangi konu veya konular üzerinde konuşmak istersiniz?

19. Farklı kültürlerin yabancı dil sınıflarında öğretilmesi gerektiğini düşünüyor musunuz? Nedenini belirtiniz.
20. Sekiz hafta süren bu eğitimden memnun kaldınız mı? Evet ise size ne gibi katkısı oldu? Hayır ise ne gibi zorluklar yaşadınız?
21. Bu eğitimde bu kadar saat ders sizce yeterli miydi?
22. Bu eğitimde başka nelerin dahil edilmesini isterdiniz

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The effectiveness of L2 pronunciation instruction: A critical systematic review of the intervention studies

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**Abstract**
Pronunciation instruction studies have taken considerable attention in the field of foreign language teaching and research in recent years. For this systematic review, only the intervention studies indexed in SSCI were included. A literature search up to April 2024 was conducted using the Web of Science and relevant meta-analytic studies. Fifty-five interventions met the eligibility criteria based on the PRISMA 2020. This review is twofold: to examine the effects of English L2 pronunciation instruction and to identify the methodological status of these studies in terms of treatment formulation, design, sampling type/size, treatment duration, and outcome measures. Results showed that pronunciation instruction treatments positively affected L2 users' pronunciation performance. Regarding research methodology, the studies employed mostly pre- and post-tests, with at least one experimental group having relatively few delayed tests. The most common participant group was undergraduate students with pre-intermediate and intermediate levels. The participants' performance tended to be measured through technological tools in recent years. The suprasegmental features of speech that occurred with greater frequency compared to the mere segmental features. These studies also tended to include native speakers' ratings in the assessment phase of the instruction. The findings of this study are assumed to provide insights and recommendations for future research studies in L2 pronunciation.

**Keywords**
L2 pronunciation instruction, intervention research, English pronunciation, systematic review
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## Introduction

Pronunciation, as a linguistic ability and an easily observable indicator of language proficiency, entails producing and discriminating individual speech sounds or phonemes, referred to as segmental units, and the prosodic speech features that involve stress, rhythm, and intonation, referred to as suprasegmental aspects of language. These

phonemic and prosodic features of a language can therefore be a valuable tool for language learning with an explicit and controlled mode of cognitive functioning. Explicitly acquired knowledge, skills, and strategies can convert more difficult patterns into concrete, understandable, and finally, more learnable ones (Wulff & Ellis, 2018). Intentional and controlled learning becomes a key reason for successful L2 learning where natural communicative contexts are unavailable, or learners' proficiency level is low.

Effective oral communication requires meaningful word articulations that are understandable and coherent in terms of discourse and syntactic combinations. Intelligible pronunciation in English is essential for successful oral communication for both native and non-native speakers. Pronunciation is a spoken language aspect that can either ease intelligibility or impede oral communication. However, it does not merely have to do with intelligibility; it is also a matter of social acceptance, perception, and personal value. In line with its affective role on interlocutors, pronunciation can be perceived as "charming, pleasant or prestigious as well as unnatural or even irritating" (Baran-Łucarz, 2016, p. 41). Given the significant role of pronunciation in sustaining successful communication in multilingual contexts, research evidence has shown that pronunciation problems negatively affect successful communication (Deterding & Kirkpatrick, 2006; Jenkins, 2000) and may cause misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication (Sardegna & Jarosz, 2023). These phonological problems may result in avoidance of participation and misinterpretation (Rogerson-Revell, 2008). The belief that intelligible pronunciation may be acquired through intense exposure to L2 native environments and speakers has been dismissed (Sardegna & Jarosz, 2023). To improve language learners' competence to understand English speech and be accurately understood, explicit teaching methods, strategies, and contents are recommended.

This suggestion has inspired many experimental studies to test the effectiveness of pronunciation teaching interventions. These studies revealed that teachers should be aware of the rationale as well as the theoretical and pedagogical components of pronunciation education, and they should be assisted in their teaching since students require implementational and effective guidance. Research into L2 pronunciation and its instruction have been conceptually regarded through three major phenomena:

intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness. Intelligibility has become a significant focus in both research and practice. According to Jenkins (2002), mutual intelligibility should be the focus of second language learners' pronunciation and is the main indicator of their proficiency (Pennington & Rogerson-Revell, 2019). Comprehensibility, or "ease of understanding" (Munro & Derwing, 1995), refers to the effort required for the listener to be able to understand an utterance. Comprehensibility, both conceptually and empirically, encompasses not only segmental and prosodic features but also structural and lexical aspects of L2 speech. Accentedness is defined as “the degree to which the pronunciation of an utterance sounds different from the expected production pattern” (Munro et al., 2006, p. 112).

Relevant research fosters L2 pronunciation instruction for intelligibility and comprehensibility as a realistic and achievable goal instead of native-like mastery (Isaacs, Trofimovich, & Foote, 2018; Levis, 2005). Many researchers prioritize suprasegmentals since they consider that L2 suprasegmental features play a central role in intelligibility and/or comprehensibility (Gilbert, 2012), and suprasegmental errors have a considerable place in the assessment of L2 speech compared to segmental errors (Kang, Rubin, & Pickering, 2010). While suprasegmentals teaching is considered to be more effective than segmentals teaching to improve intelligibility (e.g., Derwing et al., 1998; Gordon, Darcy, & Ewert, 2013; Saito & Saito, 2017), Jenkins (2002) emphasizes the role of segmentals for intelligibility, particularly among the non-native speakers. However, as Lee et al.'s (2015) meta-analytical review highlighted, when segmental and suprasegmental features are combined, pronunciation instruction would have a greater effect.

While a growing body of research into L2 speech has been conducted regarding pronunciation teaching methodologies, approaches, priorities, and models, suggesting insights and providing theoretical and practical knowledge for language classrooms, the obtained results, methodological procedures, assessment tools, the use of research designs, interventional diversities, and participants’ demographics need to be systematically compiled for further research and minimizing gaps. There is a scarcity of updated, systematic, and critical analysis of the relevant research for this purpose. Saito (2012) reviewed the results of 15 quasi-experimental studies on the effects of L2

pronunciation instruction and showed that instruction was effective in improving segmental and suprasegmental aspects of L2 sounds with a varying degree and that it enhanced comprehensibility. In their meta-analysis, Lee et al. (2015) reviewed 86 research reports encompassing research articles, theses, conference proceedings, book chapters, conference presentations, and unpublished manuscripts. They focused on the effectiveness of L2 pronunciation instruction, including the overall effects and potential moderators, as well as methodological issues. They highlighted the threat to the validity of pronunciation research due to small sample sizes and different types of needs for a shift in the duration of the interventions. Saito and Plonsky (2019) proposed a framework to synthesize methodological practices and evidence in L2 pronunciation research. In the same way, another review (Thomson & Derwing, 2015) underlined some methodological constraints, such as small sample sizes that jeopardize the reliability of research results, a lack of diversity in sampling types, the longevity of treatments, the use of delayed tests, specific attention to the phonological features of instructions, and reliance on controlled assessment designs. In a more recent study, Metruk (2024) conducted a systematic review of the studies that have focused on the pronunciation development of the learners related to using MALL, reviewing 15 empirical studies published between 2015 and 2022. The reviewed articles showed that mobile learning, in particular smartphones, was effective in L2 pronunciation improvement with participants' positive attitudes.

## Method

### Identifying the Initial Research Questions

To better understand the effectiveness of L2 pronunciation instruction, provide some insights about the potential role of the moderator variables, and determine the strengths and weaknesses of the relevant research, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. According to the obtained intervention studies, what are the research findings regarding the effectiveness of L2 pronunciation teaching?
2. What is the methodological status of L2 pronunciation teaching in terms of causation?

## Identifying Relevant Studies

The search terms and the key concepts related to L2 pronunciation teaching were initially identified. To analyze the search results, only the Web of Science (WoS) database was employed since it offers many search options, provides complete information on the publications (i.e., title, author, sources, abstract, author, and keywords), includes only highly ranked and reputable journals, and is acknowledged to be prestigious (Joshi, 2016). For this reason, our study exclusively focused on the research articles published in the journals indexed in Science Citation Index Expanded (SCI-EXPANDED), Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), and Arts & Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI). Since search strings are expected to cover as much comprehensively as possible (Schardt et al., 2007), the query strings based on the relevant sources and the research questions were identified in the WoS database as follows: “English pronunciation teaching” OR “English pronunciation instruction” OR “L2 pronunciation teaching” OR “L2 pronunciation instruction” OR “EFL” OR “ESL pronunciation” “EFL” OR “ESL” pronunciation teaching” OR “EFL” OR “ESL pronunciation instruction” OR “EFL or “ESL” teaching pronunciation” OR “second language pronunciation” OR "phonetics instruction" OR "form-focused pronunciation instruction".

## Study Selection

Based on the research questions, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were determined and shown in the following table:

**Table 1**

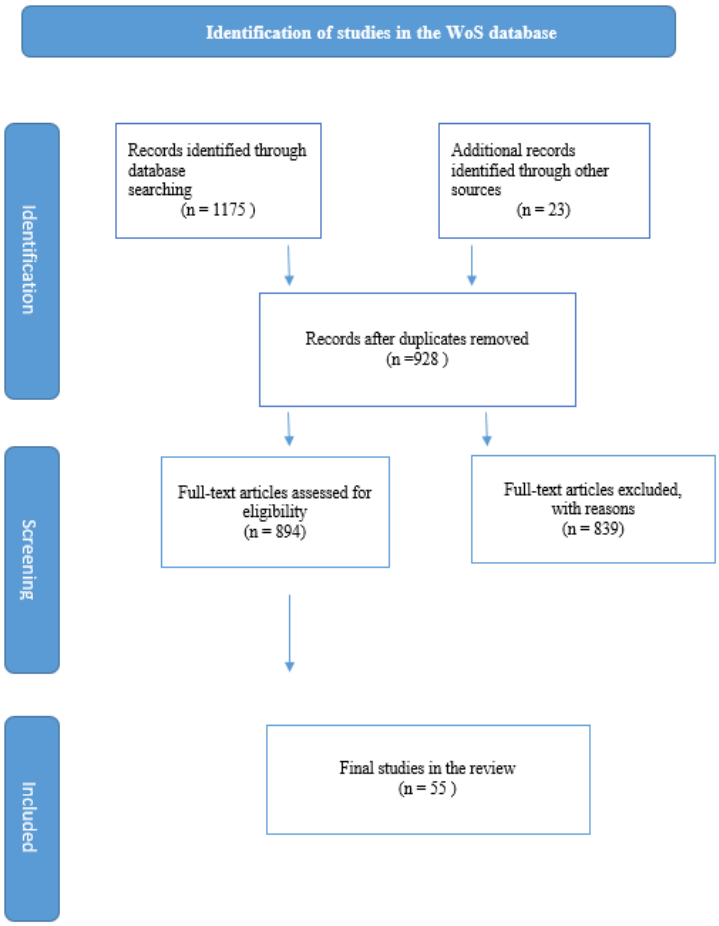
*Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

| Criterion | Inclusion | Exclusion |
|---|---|---|
| Period | No limit | N/A |
| Language | English | Non-English published articles |
| Type of research | Peer-reviewed original research | Conference proceedings, book chapters, reviews |
| Journal indexed | SCI-EXPANDED, SSCI, A&HCI | Journals Indexed out of SSCI, AHCI, and SCI-EXPANDED |
| Research scope | English L2 pronunciation teaching | Pronunciation studies other than English |
| Research focus | Intervention/causation research between/among variables | Mere descriptive or mere qualitative research |
| Population & sample origin | English as a second/foreign language | Native English speakers |

Based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 55 research articles were selected and thoroughly reviewed for appropriateness. The reviewed articles are marked with an asterisk (*) in the list of references. Fig.1 shows the flow diagram employed in the study.

**Figure 1**

*PRISMA Flow Chart on Article Identification, Screening, Eligibility Procedures, and Inclusion*




## Data Charting and Collation

Upon completing the study selection stage, the articles that were obtained were charted. Each selected article was classified based on the author(s), year, location of study, study purpose, research method, sample size/type, outcome measures, and main findings. The recorded information of the studies is shown in Table 2, Supplementary Material.

## Summarizing and Reporting Findings

In the final stage, the major findings were summarized, and some critical inquiries were posed to discuss the research evidence and assess the studies in terms of their findings, taking their methodological structures into account.

## Results

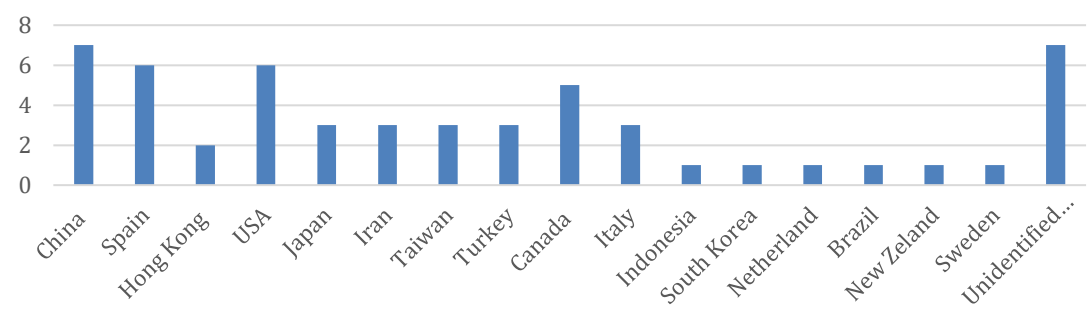
The causal studies that were determined according to the abovementioned criteria have aimed to test and enhance the effectiveness of proposed treatments and the authors' assumptions about L2 pronunciation instruction. The exclusion of the non-experimental research, which was based merely on descriptive data, provided rapid projection for the practitioners. The following sections encompass a comprehensive analysis of the obtained results. These sections consist of the research location and years over time, research purpose, design, sample features, treatment duration, performance assessment, and the main findings of the experimental pronunciation instruction research. The obtained results also provide insights into the methodological approach of the relevant research.

### Pronunciation Instruction Research Settings

The experimental research focusing on the effectiveness of English pronunciation instruction was primarily conducted in expanding circle countries (e.g., China, Spain, Japan, and Turkey), compared to the outer and inner circle countries of English. In these countries, acquisition patterns and cultural contexts seem to influence L2 pronunciation perception and curricular features. On the other hand, the experimental pronunciation studies in the inner circle countries where English is used as a first language and widely studied as a second language, such as the US and Canada, are relatively less than those studies in the other group. Only one study has been detected attempting to enhance the pronunciation aspects of the L2 users in the outer circle countries (i.e., New Zealand) with some colonial history in which English has played a significant role in education, governance, and popular culture.

**Figure 2**

*Experimental Pronunciation Research According to Countries*

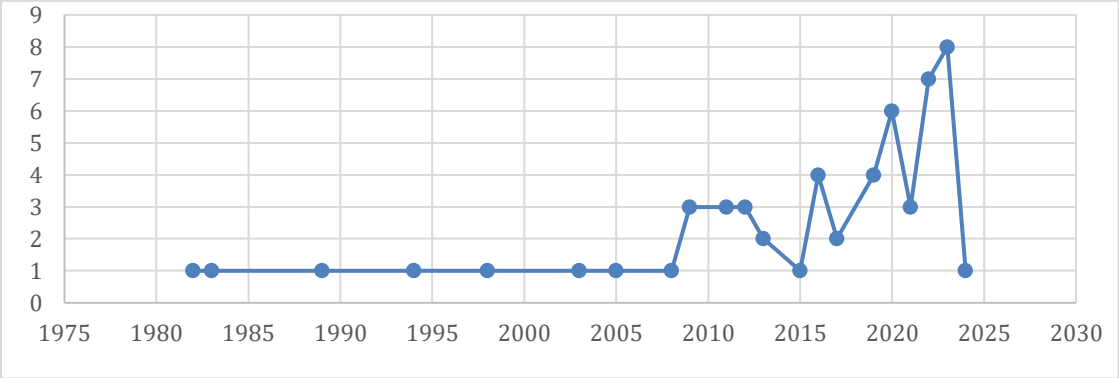


## Pronunciation Instruction Research According to Years

Regarding the experimental pronunciation research in terms of years, it is evident that there is increasing attention to the pronunciation development of L2 users. The increasing interest over the years seems to be parallel with the variability of the research topics. Particularly in the last four years, treatment-based pronunciation research has been increasingly published in the SSCI-indexed journals.

**Figure 3**

*Experimental Pronunciation Research According to Years*




## Treatment Formulation of the Pronunciation Instruction Research

In line with technological development, relevant research has tended to employ technological instruments, particularly ICT tools, automatic speech recognition programs, and computer-assisted treatments (2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 15, 19, 20, 21, 24, 28, 29, 31, 33, 34, 39, 45, 47, 48, 49, 50). Following new technological tools, new instructional types (e.g., types of feedback) and proposed models (e.g., form-focused instruction) investigating segmental and suprasegmental features of English attract attention. Suprasegmental research has attempted to improve the L2 users' comprehensibility (how easy L2 speech is for a listener to understand) rather than their intelligibility (how understandable L2 speech is). As for the distinction between segmental and suprasegmental features of English pronunciation studies, segmental-based studies are still individually investigated (11,17,22,27,51) though it is not clear that segmental mispronunciation may impede intelligibility, and it is often assumed that segmental problems do not cause difficulties for the listeners in a contextualised environment (Pennington & Rogersen-Revell, 2019).

The recent studies (5, 12, 17, 22, 26, 45, 46, 51, 53, 55) tend to move from a focus on form to communicative practices in the design of the experimental settings, as many researchers have emphasised the need for suprasegmental aspects of English pronunciation for intelligibility and comprehensibility rather than establishing their design to improve the accentedness of learners.

In a typical quantitative study, the number of participants affects the reliability of the research, where more participants are expected (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). However, except for eight studies (1, 3, 24, 25, 26, 31, 40), the number of subjects was less than 100. As for the level of schooling, the overwhelming majority of the participants were undergraduate students, and few of the studies included different age groups (1, 4, 46). Secondly, employees and learners with mixed ages participated in the experimental studies (6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 14, 15, 24, 29, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 41, 42, 44, 45, 47, 48, 51, 55) Few studies focused on diverse sample groups in terms of proficiency. For example, the studies with beginner- or advanced-level participants were ignored (1, 7, 16, 18, 30, 39, 46, 49). Moreover, in some of the studies, there seemed to be no information about the participants' proficiency features, which impeded a study from being replicated in a future study (2,3,4,6,12,14,23,24,34,36,40,48,50,54, 55). Participants' performances were often evaluated by native speakers of English (NS). Native speaker assessment was primarily seen in the studies investigating speech comprehensibility (3, 5, 18, 22, 30, 32, 35, 36, 38, 41, 43, 44, 45, 48, 52, 53, 55). As the researchers tended to improve the comprehensibility and intelligibility of the L2 learners, they seemed to benefit from NS raters. However, the same lack of information about the source of raters was also detected in this section (4, 6, 7, 8, 12, 14, 15, 19, 21, 24, 27, 29, 33, 40, 42, 47, 50, 54).

**Table 3**

*Methodological Status of the Interventional Studies*

| | | *f* | *%* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Duration of Treatment | 40-60 minutes | 2 | 3.64 |
| | 70-90 minutes | 1 | 1.82 |
| | 1-5 hours | 9 | 16.36 |
| | 6 hours and more | 2 | 3.64 |
| | 1-10 days | 2 | 3.64 |
| | 11 days and more | 3 | 5.45 |
| | 1-5 weeks | 11 | 20.00 |
| | 6-10 weeks | 7 | 12.73 |
| | 11-15 weeks | 5 | 9.09 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 16 weeks and more | 2 | 3.64 |
| | 1-5 months | 2 | 3.64 |
| | 6 months and more | 2 | 3.64 |
| | 1-5 session | 2 | 3.64 |
| | 6 sessions and more | 1 | 1.82 |
| | 1 semester | 1 | 1.82 |
| | 1-2 year | 1 | 1.82 |
| | No data | 2 | 3.64 |
| | Total | 55 | 100 |
| Sample Size | 1-15 | 2 | 3.64 |
| | 16-30 | 13 | 23.64 |
| | 31-60 | 15 | 27.27 |
| | 61-90 | 14 | 25.45 |
| | 91-120 | 7 | 12.73 |
| | 121-150 | 2 | 3.64 |
| | 151 and more | 2 | 3.64 |
| | Total | 55 | 100 |
| Level of Schooling | Primary School | 1 | 1.82 |
| | Secondary School | 1 | 1.82 |
| | High School | 1 | 1.82 |
| | Undergraduate | 24 | 43.64 |
| | Graduate | 3 | 5.45 |
| | Undergraduate + Graduate | 2 | 3.64 |
| | Employees & General L2 learners | 23 | 41.82 |
| | Total | 55 | 100 |
| Proficiency Level | Elementary | 1 | 1.82 |
| | Beginner | 5 | 9.09 |
| | Intermediate | 24 | 43.64 |
| | Advanced | 2 | 3.64 |
| | Mixed levels | 8 | 14.55 |
| | No Data | 15 | 27.27 |
| | Total | 55 | 100 |
| Test Design | Pre/posttest | 43 | 78.18 |
| | Pre/post/delayed test | 8 | 14.55 |
| | No pre/post/delayed test | 4 | 7.27 |
| | Total | 55 | 100 |
| Raters | Native Speaker | 17 | 30.91 |
| | Non-Native Speaker | 8 | 14.55 |
| | Native + Nonnative Speaker | 9 | 16.36 |
| | Software | 3 | 5.45 |
| | No Data | 18 | 32.73 |
| | Total | 55 | 100 |
| Outcome Measures | Production Test | 75 | 63.56 |
| | Perception Test | 12 | 10.17 |
| | Interviews/ Questionnaires/ Inventory | 18 | 15.25 |
| | Other Data Collection Tools | 13 | 11.02 |
| | Total | 118 | 100 |

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to explore and characterize the experimental studies on the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction published in exclusively SSCI-indexed

journals. Of the initially identified articles, 55 research articles were considered eligible for this systematic literature review based on PRISMA 2020.

Effective pronunciation instruction has become a question for language practitioners and researchers. However, the precise measurement of improvement in performance poses a significant challenge. The earlier studies, which tested the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction, were primarily laboratory-based (e.g., de Bot & Mailfert, 1982; de Bot, 1983) and were conducted in controlled laboratory settings. Nevertheless, the focus has gradually shifted towards classroom-based research.

The first research question focused on the effectiveness of experimental pronunciation research over the years. Pronunciation instruction positively impacted the targeted form(s), with almost 87% of the studies reporting significant improvement. The findings of the present study are in line with the results of the previous meta-analytic research (Lee et al., 2015) and the narrative review (Thomson & Derwing, 2015), which indicate that pronunciation treatments positively affect L2 speech. Metruk (2024), in a specific systematic review with different inclusion criteria, also found significant effects of mobile devices on L2 users' pronunciation performance. Moreover, given the data they obtained, Lee et al. (2015) demonstrate that pronunciation instruction may be more effective when both phonological features (i.e., segmental and suprasegmental) of English are taught together. However, our findings still demonstrate the lack of combined features in a single study.

However, due to the predominant focus on specific pronunciation features, the extent to which these interventions contribute to the comprehensibility and intelligibility of L2 speech remains inadequate. Also, despite the significant impact of pronunciation teaching that nearly all the studies reached, the effect sizes, particularly those of the recent studies, should be cautiously examined. As the number of studies that entirely or partly employ technology in pronunciation instruction tends to increase, the diversity of the instructional and assessment tools also attracts attention. This increase is inevitable since computers, mobile devices, and other ICT tools have become pervasive. However, though the effectiveness of the recent research has been generally significant, their sample size may cause some constraints. This assumption has also been mentioned in

Lee et al.'s (2015) meta-analytic study due to the lack of perceptual accuracy of technology-based instructional materials.

The second research question focused on the methodological status of the experimental research into pronunciation instruction. While this study profiled the methodological preferences and settings that researchers established, some suggestions and evaluations have been offered for further research. The treatment formulation of almost all the studies has been established in classroom settings. However, in this type of research setting, extraneous variables should be eliminated, and the confounding variables should be controlled for the validation of the studies. This assumption was also highlighted by the previous studies (Lee et al., 2015; Plonsky, 2011). Complementary data tools provide further insights encompassing some variables, such as individual differences, motivation, and interactions in L2. These complementary instruments may reveal evidence that quantitative tools cannot achieve (Thompson & Derwing, 2014). Given this assumption, it can be said that, though it is not common, mixed-methods research (8,9,10,23,24,29) tends to take place more compared to previous studies. This may be attributed to the popularity of mixed methods research since it strengthens the reliability of studies. In addition, experimental studies appear to be established within the duration of treatment. Only one study (46) was conducted using longitudinal methods of research to verify that teaching pronunciation is beneficial for L2 users.

The methodological procedures and conditions may also lead to some concerns. For example, the small sample size of most of the experimental studies may jeopardize the reliability and generalizability of the findings. Thompson and Derwing (2014) highlighted the importance of a large number of samples for a typical quantitative study. Accurate measurement of the language input, particularly to examine improvement intelligibility and comprehensibility, requires time (Pennington & Rogerson-Revell, 2019). However, the reviewed studies took hours or days, which can reduce the reliability of the empirical evidence. Therefore, interventional studies may yield reliable improvements in intelligibility and comprehensibility, although these enhancements may necessitate several weeks or even months to become evident.

The lack of participant diversity in methodological implementations significantly undermines the reliability and generalizability of interventions. For

instance, the overwhelming majority of the participants in the reviewed studies were university students, with minimal representation from secondary, high school, or graduate students. Though the age of learning is a crucial predictor of L2 pronunciation attainment (Flege et al., 1995), surprisingly, it is rarely studied in L2 pronunciation research. Only one study was seen aiming at young learners, which could affect L2 pronunciation pedagogy. Similarly, the proficiency levels of the participants were predominantly confined to the pre-intermediate or intermediate level. The pronunciation performance due to typical pronunciation instruction and the strengths and weaknesses of other target populations with different L2 proficiency levels must also be examined.

Though the abovementioned concerns have already been underlined in the previous review (Thomson & Derwing, 2015) and meta-analytic studies (Lee et al., 2015), the current study findings obtained identical results. It is essential to keep in mind that a single research study does not suffice to be persuaded. The replication of the study by other researchers, involving examining the same variables with different participants, settings, and methodologies, enhances confidence in the research findings as it leads to a much more robust body of evidence (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). Compared to the previous studies, the recent publications appear to provide detailed information, which makes the entire procedure understandable and replicable. For example, the proficiency levels of the participants and the treatment duration were hard to understand in the previous findings. However, the available data sources are yet to be adequate. Future studies can therefore combine different data collection tools in pronunciation effectiveness studies.

As to the assessment stage of pronunciation research, recent studies, unlike overreliance on read-aloud tests, appear to use spontaneous speech, picture description, or interviews, which aim to enhance intelligibility and comprehensibility rather than reducing foreign accents. This tendency seems to lead researchers to use native English speakers as the raters of intelligibility. However, as Jenkins (2012) poses the question of "intelligible to whom," consideration of the phenomenon of intelligibility between L2 speakers can be another research topic. Further, the interconnectedness of perception and production (Flege, 1995) emphasizes the necessity of assessing both to ascertain the

effectiveness of instructional methods. In this case, the reliability and comprehensiveness of the research findings can be considerably enhanced.

In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift in the attention given to pronunciation instruction within the realm of second language teaching and research. This shift is evidenced by a growing number of experimental studies in this field focusing on the effectiveness of pronunciation teaching. However, it should be acknowledged that there is a significant amount of variability in research designs, which may limit the replicability of findings. Nevertheless, the obtained findings show that explicit instruction of phonological forms can have a substantial impact. This is likely due to its ability to direct learners' attention to phonetic information, facilitating learning in a manner that an implicit manner hardly achieves.

Although this study provides relevant information for researchers and practitioners, some limitations should be acknowledged. First, intervention studies not published in SSCI-indexed journals, book chapters, or dissertations were excluded. Further research can be carried out to obtain more information. Second, only those studies that focused on the English language were included in the study; pronunciation research in other foreign languages was ignored. This could also be a research topic for L2 researchers. Finally, other databases could have been used in the search phase. However, a periodic search refreshment was performed, and relevant meta-analyses, systematic reviews, and narrative reviews were examined to reduce the possibility of missing any study that met the specified criteria. Despite these limitations, this study revealed that experimental research testing the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction in L2 settings has been quantitatively and qualitatively enhanced in terms of its pedagogical and methodological contribution. However, the aforementioned shortcomings need to be addressed in future studies, such as the samples' diversity, experimental design features, validation procedures, and outcome measures.

## Ethics committee permission information

Ethical approval is not applicable, because this article does not contain any studies with human or animal subjects.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Evaluation of a foreign languages school hybrid program in Turkey through Stake's Responsive Evaluation Model

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**Abstract**

In response to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, global educational institutions transitioned to fully online instructional modalities. Later, there was a gradual shift back to traditional educational formats. During this transitional phase, academic institutions adopted a hybrid delivery model, integrating elements of both online and face-to-face instruction. This study was conducted with students, instructors, and administrators affiliated with the Department of Foreign Languages at a state university, aiming to evaluate this department's hybrid program through Stake's Responsive Evaluation Model. In this program evaluation study, qualitative data were obtained through open-ended questions, narrative frames, metaphors, and drawings. A total of sixty nine students, eight instructors, and three administrators participated. Participants' positive and negative views were investigated, and suggestions were made to improve the current hybrid education program of the foreign languages school.



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## Introduction

Onyema et al. (2020) noted that more than one billion students could not attend school because of the closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak of COVID-19 has similarly caused significant disruptions to education in Turkey, requiring the implementation of online teaching (Ersin et al., 2020). Throughout the pandemic, the abrupt implementation of the lockdown created an unfamiliar context, resulting in a considerable impact on stakeholders. Therefore, Stake's Responsive Evaluation Model for this study was chosen regarding the insights of Usun (2012), who depicted that the main purpose of such a model is to determine stakeholders' problems, their language, environmental conditions, and standards. This

model achieves such emphasis with its own characteristics as Fitzpatrick et al. (2011) assert:

- Evaluation methods are flexible and adaptable.
- Program evaluations emphasize pluralistic perspectives from participants.
- Methodological procedures include case studies and qualitative methods for understanding specific cases.
- Reports follow a naturalistic approach, integrating comprehensive participant insights.
- Evaluators play a facilitating role, clarifying individual judgments while respecting participants' perspectives.

Regarding the domain of language acquisition, Wu et al. (2019) point out the rarity of research in which English language learners engage with hybrid language modalities and how such engagement facilitates and impacts their learning. Furthermore, Xie et al. (2020:185) reflect on the oncoming of hybrid education and its prospective permanence, stating, “Online courses and hybrid education will play an essential role in the long-term survival of many universities, and this system is set to become an important and integral component of the next normal in education.” Thus, it is worth conducting research in this area to develop an understanding of the effects of the pandemic on education and provide suggestions for further research.

## Stake’s Responsive Evaluation Model and the Study

Educational program evaluation improves educational practice (Sanders, 1994). Evaluating a language program can involve asking students to rate their language course and teachers using a questionnaire, giving achievement tests at the beginning and end of a period of instruction, or having a language teaching expert from another institution visit the program and prepare a report on its strengths and weaknesses (Lynch & Lynch, 1996). Educators engaged in program development or examining an existing educational program can provide a better study thanks to the evaluation programs because theoretical principles related to common evaluation models will enable them to be more creative and effective evaluators (Frye & Hemmer, 2012).

Among all the models, Stake's Responsive Evaluation Model has been chosen for the study for reasons outlined in the introduction section. Also, Stake (1983, p. 12) poses that an educational evaluation can be referred to as a responsive evaluation provided that it orients more directly to program activities than to program intents, responds to audience requirements for information, and considers the different value perspectives of the people at hand while reporting the success and failure of the program. He then synthesizes the things that the evaluator does:

> He makes a plan of observations and negotiations. He arranges for various persons to observe the program. With their help, he prepares for brief narratives, portrayals, product displays, graphs, etc. He finds out what is of value to his audiences. He gathers expressions of worth from various individuals whose points of view differ. Of course, he checks the quality of his records. He gets program personnel to react to the accuracy of his portrayals. He gets authority figures to react to the importance of various findings. He gets audience members to react to the relevance of his findings. He does much of this informally, iterating and keeping a record of action and reaction. He chooses media accessible to his audiences to increase the likelihood and fidelity of communication. He might prepare a final written report; he might not--depending on what he and his clients have agreed on.

In addition, for this model, he also reflects on the prominent events in a Responsive Evaluation in the same source (Stake, 1983, pp. 20) as 12 steps to be taken as follows:

1. Talk with clients, program staff, and audiences
2. Identify program scope
3. Overview program activities
4. Discover purposes, concerns
5. Conceptualize issues, problems
6. Identify data needs, re-issues
7. Select Observers, judges, instruments, if any
8. Observe designated antecedents, transactions, and outcomes
9. Thematize: Prepare portrayals, case studies
10. Validate, confirm, attempt to disconfirm
11. Winnow, Format for audience use
12. Assemble formal reports, if any

These steps were followed, and they guided the study as depicted in detail in the following sections.

## COVID-19 Pandemic and Education

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic hit hard and adversely impacted different parts of our lives, particularly education (Bozkurt et al., 2020). To prevent its spread, various precautions were taken that consequently affected educational systems. The pandemic has caused a wave of online learning to occur almost worldwide (Goldschmidt & Msn, 2020). Such a move then brought about the requirement that all components in the world

of education, including kindergarten, elementary, junior high school, and high school/equivalent to universities are to completely use technology and the Internet as the means and infrastructure in conducting online learning (Batubara, 2021). Pandemics forced the transition from the face-to-face approach into online education, which is either mobile, blended, or distance (Vázquez-Sánchez et al., 2021). In the context of the study, face-to-face delivery mode was immediately converted to online delivery mode. Following the abatement of the effects of the pandemic, the hybrid delivery mode was adopted in which the study also took place.

## Hybrid learning

Maity and Mukherjee (2021) explain hybrid learning as instruction that is well-balanced and equivalent between in-person and remote learning. With hybrid learning, learners are supposed to have alternative perspectives regarding time, space, materials, structures, contexts, and roles, fostering the emergence of innovative modalities through the change in institutional practices, educational spaces, and learning methodologies. (Nørgård, 2021).

While formulating a hybrid learning program, the literature highlights certain key points on hybrid learning as follows (Delamarter and Brunner, 2005, p.151):

1. The teacher should lubricate learning.
2. Courses are to be designed again from the ground up.
3. Online and face-to-face components should be deliberately integrated.
4. Socialization should be prioritized.
5. Students should be supported and trained.
6. Teachers should be supported and trained.

Sturgill (2018) asserts that the adoption of hybrid learning introduces an additional layer of complexity to the current educational scenario in university departments. Therefore, it makes sense to constitute a hybrid learning environment paying attention to all these considerations to design efficient learning programs and decrease the number of anticipated challenges as much as possible in the first place.

## Models of Hybrid Learning

Maity and Mukherjee (2021, p. 25) brief three models that generate hybrid learning. In *the Traditional Model*, the precursor of other hybrid models, teachers deliver learning instruction and activities in class and provide links to view or download supplementary

materials in an asynchronous online format (Ho & Burniske, 2005). The benefit of this model is its cost-effectiveness and enhanced accessibility for different learner profiles. Yet, the primary limitation is its tendency to reflect superficiality on pedagogical intervention, especially in remote work scenarios. *The Mixed Model* then expands the traditional hybrid model by allowing students to join in a combination of learning activities both at home and at school. Teachers communicate with students and then assess their understanding of the topic during in-person activities. Furthermore, they provide additional instruction, practice, and online feedback on the new material. When working remotely, both synchronous and asynchronous components are used to perform tasks independently. Lastly, the *Synchronous Model* connotates dividing students into two groups, one receiving in-person classroom instruction and the other recieving simultaneous live instruction through video conferencing. The advantage here is that teachers need minimum retraining because of its simplicity, and they can implement their existing lesson plans, thereby minimizing their workload. The drawback here is that it could be challenging for remote students to follow a lesson that is also being conveyed to a big group of students who are in the same physical class. It might be difficult for teachers to implement dual pedagogy in this context.

### Program Evaluation Studies on Hybrid Learning

Studies from different fields can accommodate this study despite the fact that there aren't many on the evaluations of hybrid language learning programs. When reviewing the literature, related studies were grouped under three umbrellas as the hybrid design regarding various aspects, perceptions of participants on the hybrid system, and comparison of the hybrid system with other delivery methods.

To start with the course design, in Hamza-Lup and White's (2018) study, the course was delivered in a face-to-face model and then switched to hybrid mode. According to the results, a well-designed interactive hybrid system in higher education is likely to be equivalent to traditional courses. The study of Karabulut-Ilgu and Jahren (2016) again emphasized the importance of hybrid course design. Findings suggested that hybrid learning has the potential to improve engineering education by providing the space in face-to-face meeting times for more open-ended, realistic problems which could be dealt with in small groups, having some advantages such as flexibility and

learner pacing. Conversely, it was noted that hybrid course design requires a watchful approach regarding learning activities, objectives, communication channels, and assessments.

Focusing on participants' viewpoints, Johnson et al. (2018) carried out a study to evaluate a hybrid program, aiming to explore the perspectives of adult learners. It was found that the computer literacy skills of adult learners influenced their self-efficacy in terms of their ability to use technology and study effectively. Lecturers' social engagement, particularly their student support, was also highlighted. Furthermore, internet access and power failures created challenges for adult learners' access to online activities. Regarding student perceptions again, a study by Jackson and Helms (2008) applied a SWOT analysis to gain insights into student perceptions about hybrid classes and their quality. The results revealed a nearly equal number of strengths and weaknesses. The top strengths were the delivery flexibility and time utilization, while the top weaknesses included technology challenges and the lack of faculty interaction.

Hybrid learning is also compared with other delivery methods, such as face-to-face and online learning. For example, the effect of hybrid education was investigated by Oh (2022). Students who attended 63.6% or more of the total in-person cadaveric-based laboratories got higher mean practical scores than those who attended 27.3% or less of the total in-person laboratories. Students who attended at least one in-person laboratory indicated better performance on image-based questions compared to those who did not attend any in-person laboratories, regardless of the lab delivery format. In the hybrid group, final grades were significantly higher than in the online group. Ahlin (2020) then investigated a hybrid program delivered in two different modes: traditional and hybrid. Qualitative data revealed a higher course engagement in the hybrid part, yet significantly higher average mean test scores were achieved among hybrid group students during exams.

In addition to taking the studies into consideration and contributing to the field with another study, especially on hybrid language learning program evaluation as it is rarely conducted, this study was conducted also regarding the effects of the pandemic and what it has changed, developing new perspectives on the educational system with

Stake's Responsive Evaluation Model as it places the stakeholders' views and experiences at the heart of the study.

## Methodology

### Research Design

Qualitative method was applied in this Program Evaluation study to explore the emerged themes by applying it to participants' reasons, feelings, and ideas. The data were collected through narrative frames, drawings, and metaphors to develop a deeper insight into the program.

### Participants and Context

The study took place in the School of Foreign Languages at a public university in Turkey. Student participants were from Pre-intermediate or Intermediate level classes, determined through the school's Placement Test. Instructors had a minimum of 10 years of teaching experience, with varying levels of technology literacy and integration prior to the study; however, it was the second year of extensive technology integration due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Administrators had similar teaching experience but ranged from 3 to 5 years in administrative roles within the language school. Overall, 69 students, eight instructors, and three administrators contributed to the study. These eight instructors were also members of different units: Testing, Material Development, Curriculum Development, ILC (Independent Learning Centre), and Professional Development.

About the program, it could be mentioned that there are four terms in an academic year: Fall-1, Fall-2, Spring-1, and Spring-2. At all levels, approximately %60 of the delivery of education takes place face-to-face, and %40 of it is online, comprising a combination of online synchronized lessons, asynchronous lessons, and LMS activities. Three levels exist: Elementary, Pre-intermediate, and Intermediate, in which students are placed according to their results of the Placement Test and CPT (Proficiency Test). If students fail a level due to their grades or absenteeism, they have to repeat the level, and a level can be repeated only once. If students fail the same level twice, they are transferred to Distance Learning Centre (DLC) classes. In this scenario, they follow the classes online and take the following Level Exit Exam (LEE). However,

if there is any other term left before the academic year finishes, the student finishing the term at DLC can return to the regular hybrid system and attend classes, provided the LEE of the module is passed.

In this study, sampling techniques were guided by Yildirim and Simsek (2016). Convenience sampling, a purposeful technique, was employed for the open-response survey. Typical case sampling was used for narrative frames, metaphors, and drawings.

## Data Collection Procedure and Data Analysis

The participants were asked to complete forms comprising open-ended questions, narrative frames, metaphors, and drawings, reflecting their perspectives on the hybrid language learning program they experienced. They were informed that the names would be kept confidential, and they could withdraw any time they wanted.

Firstly, three open-ended questions were directed to the participants. Participants were also asked to explain if there were any item(s) for which they would like to clarify further why they were given that rank. The questions are:

1) Which aspects of our hybrid language learning educational program are you pleased with?

2) What kind of modifications would make the mentioned program stronger?

3) What are your opinions and suggestions about our hybrid language learning educational program?

Participants were then given narrative frames to reflect their views on several aspects of their hybrid educational program. They filled in the frames by using adjectives to define their experience, stating what the program required, successful parts of the program, what problems they saw that stakeholders had, in what circumstances the program would be more successful, and things that they liked and disliked about the program.

In addition, through metaphors, participants were asked to whom/what they resembled during hybrid education, as well as which vehicle, animal, and food the hybrid education would be like if it were a vehicle, animal, and food. These metaphors

were intended to reflect the participants' opinions about the hybrid education in terms of its function (vehicle), system (animal), and vitality (food).

As the final instrument, participants were asked to draw an illustration such as a picture, poster, slogan, or figure to describe their view on hybrid education. They were provided the space for the drawing in the final part of the paper after narrative frames and metaphors. Participants were not limited by any other instruction or frame, and they were simply asked to create their own illustrations.

Various qualitative data analysis techniques were employed in this study. Content analysis was used for open-ended questions and narrative frames, while thematic inductive analysis was applied to analyze participants' drawings. An inductive approach was chosen to explore participants' experiences and feelings. Additionally, metaphor analysis methodology was conducted. Initially, metaphors were identified and listed, then grouped based on their expressions. Metaphorical concepts were compared to account for participants' diverse manifestations and experiences. Finally, each metaphorical concept was interpreted and explicated to complete the analysis process.

## Trustworthiness of Qualitative Analysis

To collect qualitative data from the participants, narrative frames and metaphors were prepared in Turkish, as the students who volunteered to participate were all Turkish. To eliminate affective factors and language proficiency level limitations, participants were able to use Turkish, enabling them to use all their capacity to reflect their views on this totally new pandemic context. Following the analysis of the data, a colleague was consulted to avoid translation loss in meaning derived from the translation during reporting. Moreover, an expert in the field was consulted for coding as Lombard et al. (2010) point out that inter-coder reliability requires "independent coders to evaluate a characteristic of a message or artifact and reach the same conclusion." In this sense, the researcher and the expert negotiated while coding the qualitative data. The process was finalized through a debriefing with the same expert to achieve content analysis consistency and inter-coder reliability. In addition to inter-coder reliability, member checking was applied, so the participants approved the general frame. Two instructors and five students contributed to this process, and they claimed their approval of the findings.

Furthermore, ethical issues were taken into consideration, with each step having the participant's involvement. All the data were collected on a total volunteer basis and the participants were informed about the purpose and the process of the study before they took part. It should also be noted that confidentiality and anonymity of the names of the participants ensured the feeling of freedom and security to give sincere answers without the fear of being recognized by any authority.

## Implementation of 12 Responsive Evaluation Steps throughout the Study

Stakes's 12 steps of Responsive Program Evaluation, which were arrayed in the *Introduction* part, were adopted throughout the study. To provide further explanation, the process could be mentioned as follows:

### *Talk with clients, program staff, and audiences*

As soon as the focus of the study was determined as a hybrid language learning program evaluation, the colleagues, administrators, and students in the setting were immediately involved in the process through informal talks and classroom talks. This step gave the researcher ideas about the instruments to be used, expectations, satisfaction, dissatisfaction with the hybrid program, and how to structure the study overall.

### *Identify program scope*

In this step, administrators and the Curriculum Development Unit were the main components of collaboration for the researcher as they were consulted while limning the program scope, components, and the structure of the program that was mentioned in *Participants and the Context* section of the study.

### *Overview program activities*

The program activities were reviewed in terms of not only in-class and out-of-class learning activities and practices but also online and face-to-face components, requirements, and assessments of the program.

### *Discover purposes, concerns*

As well as reaching the learning outcomes, the main purpose during the implementation of this program was to maintain education during the pandemic without a break. In this sense, online parts of the program were inevitable but out of the ordinary for stakeholders; therefore, the main concerns were gathered around this concept.

### *Conceptualize issues, problems*

With stakeholders that are unfamiliar with the hybrid delivery mode of education, the issues were mainly related with the online part of the system rather than the face-to-face part according to the preview that emerged from the first step of responsive evaluation. However, the research questions and data collection process were meant to cover both delivery modes as the study was to evaluate the hybrid program overall and not to miss out if any problems occurred in the face-to-face part, which did not come out during informal talks and classroom talks.

### *Identify data needs, re-issues*

The pre-determined issues obtained from step 1 were integrated into the study, giving way to the development of the qualitative evidence to gain a deeper insight.

### *Select Observers, judges, instruments, if any*

Following the conceptualization of the issues and identification of data needs, target population, and data collection instruments were settled, as mentioned in detail in the *Methodology* section.

### *Observe designated antecedents, transactions, and outcomes*

The scope of the program, transactions, in-level and general meeting discussions, student outcomes, and instructors' statements, both in formal and informal talks, were observed during and following the data collection process. Notes were taken during this process with the aim of taking advantage while naming the themes. This observation process was useful later to create categories in specific terms related to the setting as an addition to the themes in literature in general.

### *Thematize: Prepare portrayals, case studies*

Although this work is not designed as a case study itself, qualitative data contained personal stories and anecdotes thanks to the use of metaphors and narrative frames especially. This qualitative evidence contributed to the reflection of specific cases and the classification of the opinions of participant groups in the theming process.

### *Validate, confirm, attempt to disconfirm*

Following the data analysis process, the findings were presented with certain participants, namely two instructors and five students who took part in the study, as well as the expert who was consulted in the coding process. They were asked to feel free to

voice any objections to the themes based on findings and disconfirm any statements by the researcher if there were any that they disagreed with. This step was taken very seriously and contributed greatly to the study owing to the fact that, although there was no disconfirmation by the participants through member-checking, it was helpful in naming the themes.

### *Winnow, Format for audience use*

With the confirmation of the interpretation of the data, the essential findings were determined to shed light on the satisfactory components and the components to be improved in the implemented program. Then, the report, namely this study, was written to guide the practitioners and program developers of the hybrid education format.

### *Assemble formal reports, if any*

In order to be able to complete the study, the Committees for Scientific Research and Publication Ethics were consulted at both universities: one of which is Bahcesehir University, where the researcher is studying, and the second university, where the study took place and whose name is kept anonymous due to confidentiality and ethical concerns. The study was conducted with the approval document from both institutions.

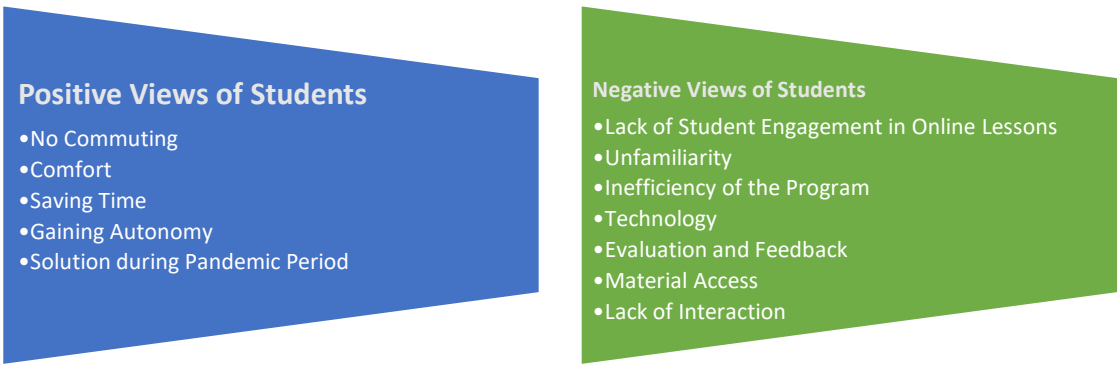
## Findings

### Students' Views about the Hybrid Program

It would be purposeful to visualize the identified themes in order to provide the overall depiction of findings in the first place.

**Figure 1**

*Views of Students Regarding the Implementation of Hybrid English Language Learning Program*



### *Positive Views*

Students revealed positive views about the hybrid program related to no commuting, comfort, saving time, gaining autonomy, and solution during the pandemic.

#### *No Commuting:*

Alison expressed that she liked "not going to school and not having long commute trouble." Julia was again happy with the system as it "reduced the number of days to come to school," and she "did not have to come to school all the time". For Malcolm, the program was successful because it helped students "to be able to get connected to lessons at home," and Betty specified more underlying that students could "participate in lessons either at home or somewhere outside in the way one wishes". According to Cedric, they did not "get bored" because they "did not come to school every day".

#### *Comfort*

Lily pointed out the program's "being comfortable" and Kendall added that hybrid learning "did not make them so tired". Sydney resembles hybrid learning to an armchair for gamers because it is comfortable, and Wayne, as a student, assessed the case from the instructors' perspective and then revealed that "they do not teach while standing up and get less tired". Smith then pointed out that "having lessons in the comfort of home sometimes affects students in a positive way". Gwen agreed, saying the experience was "fertile" because he was comfortable and he very much enjoyed following lessons in his sweatsuit.

#### *Saving Time*

James defined the program as successful as it served "a lot of free time" for students, and Nate referred to the same aspect, pointing out that "it's not stealing the whole day". Morris then contributed that the experience was 'nice' thanks to the "increase in the number of days for resting". Wayne again thought about instructors and added "instructors can save time for their families and children". He also expressed that this system "reduced the time that they lost while going to school and coming back" and Amelia supported him, saying that "not coming to school every day, thus having more time left "was good.

### *Gaining Autonomy*

Cedric expressed that the hybrid program required him "to be more disciplined and focused," and for Misha, this system required "to study regularly" while it required Kendall "to study more", required Kylie "to study herself", required Lily "to study more systematically" and required James "to study hard" in addition to "using time efficiently". Beth added that the program required her "to focus on lessons more" because she herself "tried to understand the topics that she had missed". Matt then expressed that the program required him "to have self-control". Emma reported that the system required her "to study more and to put more effort".

### *Solution during the Pandemic Period*

Alicia highlighted that "nowadays, in which the pandemic goes on, precautions [to avoid COVID-19] can be taken in a better way thanks to this program". According to Carla, the program "was thought on as much as possible," and she liked that "rather than missing school, students were considered partially by the support of online education". Carla added that the program achieved "not to rupture students completely from the school" during the pandemic period, and to Alicia, it was "a good precaution against the pandemic".

## ***Negative Views***

Students revealed negative views about the hybrid program related to lack of student engagement in online lessons, unfamiliarity, the inefficiency of the program, technology, evaluation and feedback, material access, and lack of interaction.

### *Lack of Student Engagement in Online Lessons*

Patric expressed that students switched on the computer and then continued sleeping just after logging in to UBYS, the school's online system.

**Figure 2**

*Learning in class but sleeping at home.*

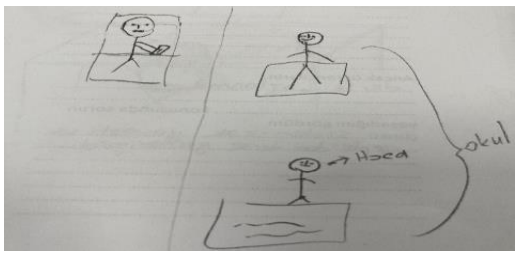


**Figure 3**

*Sleeping during online lessons*

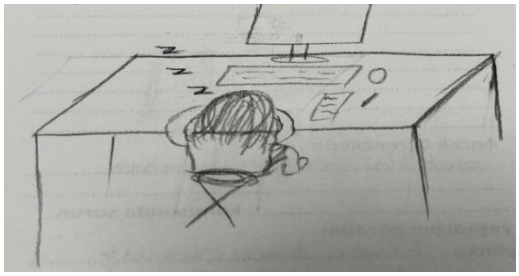


**Figure 4**

*Staying in bed in online lessons*

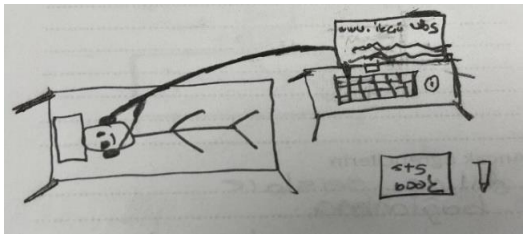
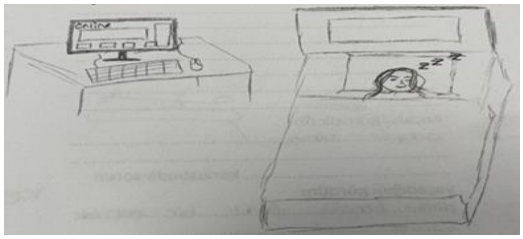


**Figure 5**

*Sleeping in bed in online lessons*



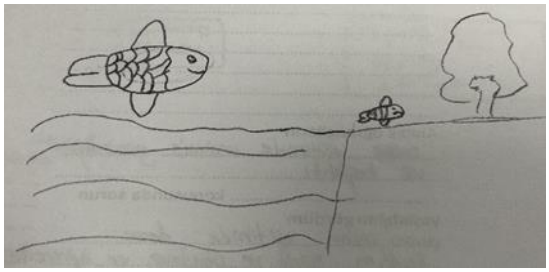
All drawings above show that students were sleeping in bed or on the table. Wayne asserted the experience was "boring" because he "cannot focus on lessons in front of the computer" and he feels "sleepy". Adrian agreed that the hybrid learning experience "was not fertile" for him because he "mostly did household chores or slept during online lessons". Evan added that it was supposed to be more successful if "students could have been prevented from hanging around the way they wanted".

### *Unfamiliarity*

Some students found it challenging to follow online lessons and comprehend what was going on. A participant revealed that it was something students were not used to, and therefore, it was compelling for them.

**Figure 6**

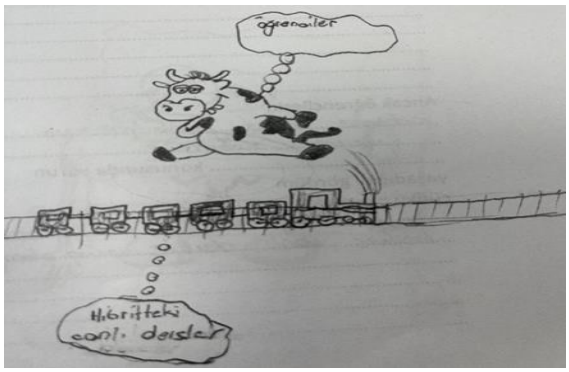
*Students' feelings of alienation in the hybrid system.*



The participant meant that if hybrid mode was an animal, it would be a 'fish' out of water as she "might agonise when I go out of the habitat that I have adapted".

**Figure 7**

*Students' feelings of not being able to make meaning in synchronous lessons*



This student tried to visualise a Turkish idiom 'to look at something the way ox looks at the train' meaning that a person who looks at something without understanding anything. She/He added that ox referred to students and train referred to live online lessons in the program.

About unfamiliarity again, Evan expressed that the hybrid system is like "Noah's pudding [which is the mixture of ingredients] as it is complex and difficult to understand." Ava aligns it with lahmajun [that has a mixture of ingredients] as it depicts the "confusion" in their mind [because of being unfamiliar with the system]. Lastly, when Nate was asked to associate himself with someone or something during hybrid learning, he could not as it [the system] felt so different.

### *The inefficiency of the Program*

According to some participants, the hybrid program was inefficient, and they labelled the program with the words useless and inefficient, which is shown in students' drawings.

**Figure 8**

*Blankness of hybrid education*

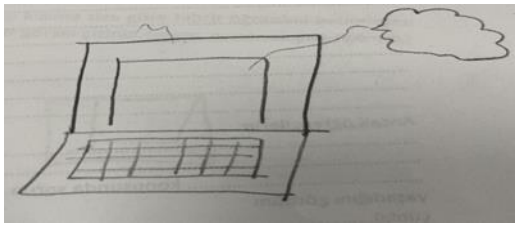
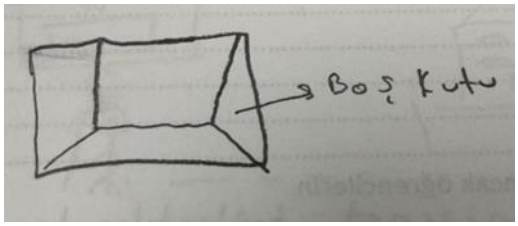


**Figure 9**

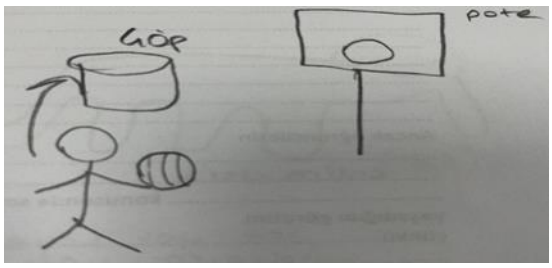
*Emptiness of hybrid education*




In the drawings above, the program was labelled as "empty" or "blank," revealing that participants thought it did not function efficiently in their learning. In the first one, online lessons were considered as blank, while the program was portrayed as an empty box in general through the second illustration.

**Figure 10**

*Student's regarding hybrid system as trash*




The ball represents hybrid education here and it is sent to the rubbish bin by the student instead of the basket reflecting a very negative view about the program.

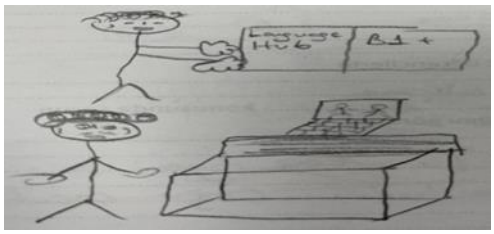
Tracey provided further explanations as she thinks that "online lessons were not regarded as important" and this view "which is applicable to both students and instructors means that online education is not something that is cared about". Ken then added that students did not join in online lessons at all because they regarded them as "unnecessary". Kylie also expressed that if hybrid learning were food, it would be "crisps as the half of the package is empty just like hybrid learning's online part is empty".

### *Technology*

Findings revealed that students had technology-related issues, mainly about infrastructure and the Internet in both online and face-to-face delivery modes.

**Figure 11**

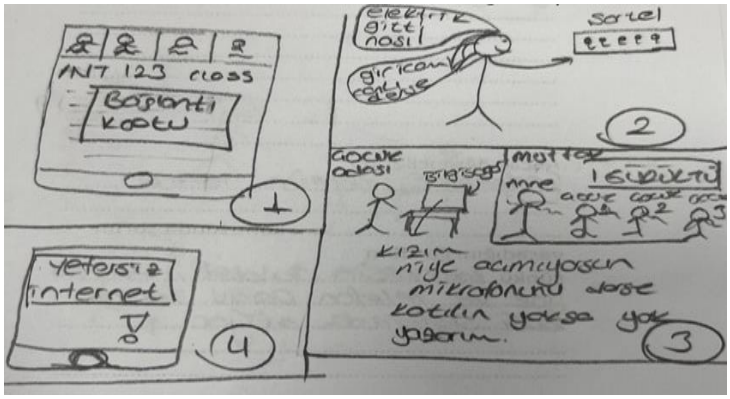
*Dysfunction of technology 2*



Above of the illustration, it is seen that there is no problem with the book in class; however, in live online lesson, the screen is frozen which means an issue about technology again.

**Figure 12**

*Different aspects of technological dysfunction*



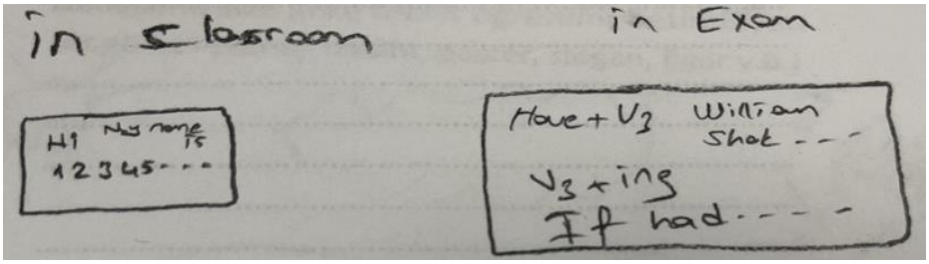

In the drawing above, the participant mentioned about four issues, three of which were related to technology and the Internet. In the first part, the participant pointed out the disconnection problem during the lesson; in the second one, the electricity cut off and, therefore, not being able to log in to the lesson was mentioned; in the third one, it was not related to technology, but with the last one, it was again about the Internet and its inadequacy of the Internet as the Internet has quota per month. When the use of it exceeds this quota, it is either cut off or invoiced extra, which means an extra burden for students.

### *Evaluation and Feedback*

Some students think that exams were more difficult than they were supposed to be regarding what was practiced during lessons in both delivery modes in general.

**Figure 13**

*Different difficulty levels between classes and exams*




This drawing above supports this finding as the participant thinks that what was done in class was at a basic level; however, an upper level was required for the exam. Madison added she saw that students had difficulty with exams because there was inconsistency between the exams and lessons. According to her, CPT was too difficult, but classes were not conducted accordingly". Another participant, Georgia, added that questions that were higher than their level were asked in the Level Exit Exams. Finally, validity in online exams was criticized. It was pointed out that students could cheat in the exams [quizzes, LEE, and CPT exams were conducted online, and cameras were off during the exams].

### *Material Access*

Some participants drew attention to the difference in opportunities for material access among students as they differ in terms of financial power. The course books were really expensive for some students. Technological devices also required a budget for students who did not own the equipment beforehand. Sarah mentioned her own experience: "My hybrid experience was not pleasing as my computer was broken down and my mobile phone was not logging in to the system. I couldn't afford to fix it, so I had to borrow a computer from my neighbour perpetually, feeling embarrassed".

## Lack of Interaction

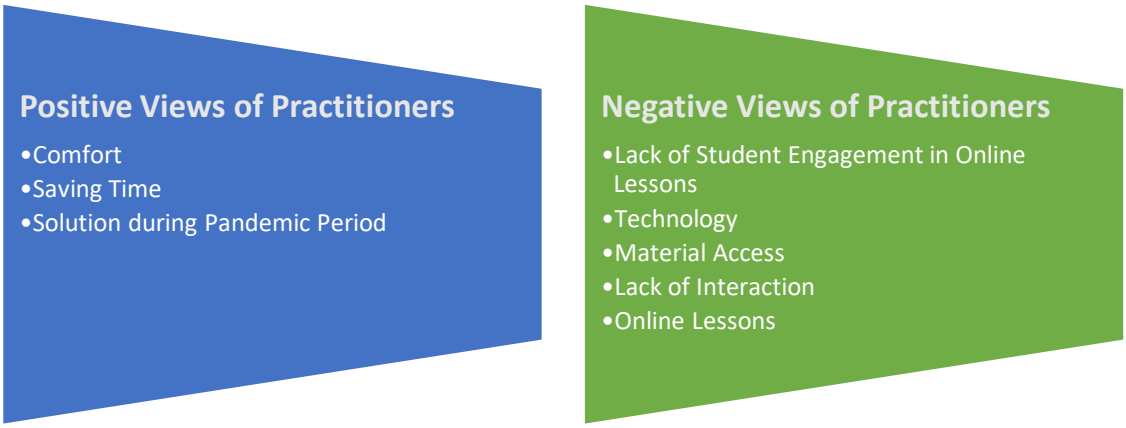
Matthew stated: "I think online education is not productive. Communication and interaction with the instructor lacks". Cyrus then underlined the lack of interaction in online lessons as follows: "I am somebody that loves learning at school. It [the online part of hybrid learning] was a little boring as we could not use mimics, etc., as we could at school, so there was less interaction".

## Practitioners' Views of the Program

As the second participant group, practitioners' views are also demonstrated in the figure below.

**Figure 14**

*Views of Practitioners Regarding the Implementation of Hybrid English Language Learning Program*




### *Positive Views*

Among the practitioner participants, the positive views are related to *comfort, saving time,* and *solution during the pandemic period* as follows:

#### *Comfort*

Collin expressed that "students and instructors were comfortable; there was no stress". Philip added that the most successful aspect of the program was "enabling students and instructors to have lessons with the comfort of home". He also liked the program because of "students' not coming to school within bad weather conditions when it is winter". Denzel added that about the program, he liked that "the program enabled students to reach lessons at home having a comfortable atmosphere through the non-existence of obligation to attend school every day".

#### *Saving Time*

Collin expressed what he liked about the program was that they did not lose time by not having to be at school in lesson time" and he added having the meetings online prevented instructors from losing time. Tracey also underlined that this program would not waste "time to arrive in school". Spencer then stated that her experience was "facilitative" because "it enabled her to manage her time better".

### *Solution during the Pandemic Period*

Philip declared what he liked about the program: "There wasn't any physical contact with students when lessons were online while the pandemic was going on". Tracey added that she liked the program because of its "terminating the risk of infection and worries because of school about health as well as its preventing us from getting entirely disconnected from school and students in times when we couldn't socialize because we could not go out of home". Tracey stated that if the system were a vehicle, it would be a motorcycle because "although it was not as handy as a car, it could take us somewhere in the traffic jam (pandemic)".

### *Negative Views*

This group of participants had negative views about hybrid education about technology, online lessons, lack of student engagement in online lessons, lack of interaction, and material access.

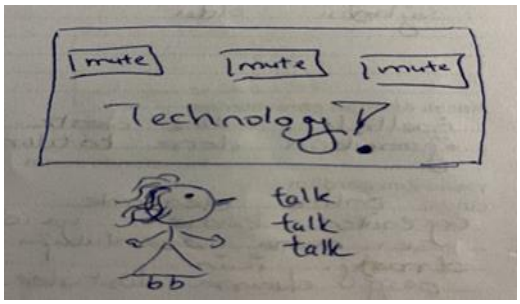
According to Celine, if hybrid learning were a vehicle, it would be a public bus because "it is full of surprises. In fact, it is expected to be reliable, yet it might get broken down in an unexpected time, it can set depart early or late".

### *Technology*

In parallel with student participants, practitioner participants also pointed out the problems related to technology.

**Figure 16**

*The instructor's not being listened by students in online lessons*




The instructor talks and teaches while either technology does not work properly or students mute the sound and do not follow the lesson at all. In a way, the instructor is talking to himself/herself during online lessons.

Jeff said his experience with using technology was "challenging" and explained, "I am not good at using the computer, and I didn't have training before for such an educational method. It was a harsh process as an administrator, too, to give sufficient

support to instructors about this". Sean then stated he saw "some instructors had difficulties with technical knowledge" and added, "the problems occurring in electronic equipment may occur due to a variety of reasons, and it's not smooth to solve them in the distance" [as administrator].

### *Online Lessons*

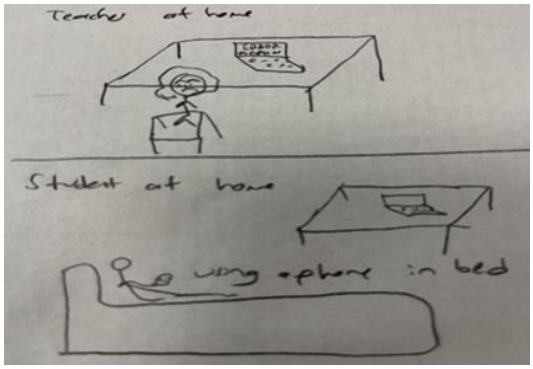
Some practitioners pointed out only the online live lessons in the program about their negative views. Collin expressed that students regarded online live lessons as a free day. Philip said he associated himself with "someone who rowed against the tide" because they had to go on the lessons that way, although they knew it would not work. Leonardo agreed with other participants associating hybrid education with a hybrid car, stating: "It was providing the high performance of gasoline while in face-to-face mode, yet having a low performance of electricity while in online mode".

### *Lack of Student Engagement in Online Lessons*

Similar to students, instructors point out the lack of student engagement in online live lessons rather than face-to-face classes.

**Figure 17**

*A student not listening to the instructor in online mode*




This drawing seems to be very similar to many students' drawings related to lack of student engagement in online lessons displaying the student busy with the phone in bed while the instructor is desperately trying to teach in front of screen with no student participation on the other side.

Collins claimed he would compare himself to a parrot because "it was difficult to motivate students," and he "had to make motivating speeches all the time". Felix said that "students were either not logging in online live lessons or not engaging in the activities". He then associated himself with a news presenter, as he had lots of times when he was not sure whether anyone was watching or listening to him.

### *Lack of Interaction*

Leonardo expressed that "interaction is too bitty in the online atmosphere; also, communication channels are lacking". Jeff agreed that he does not think "interactive activities that play an important role in language learning could be carried out in a fertile way". Philip also reported that his experience was negative, and he explained: "I talked more compared to face-to-face education and I requisitely was the one that continuously spoke in online lessons even though I normally do not prefer teacher-centred education. Not being able to interact with students mitigated the effectiveness of education".

### *Material Access*

Denzel highlighted the inequality of material access among students, stating that he was not pleased with "not every student's having the same technological opportunities". Whitney made similar statements referring to the same problem and she said, "It was difficult to see the imparity among students and continuing teaching this way. I had students that were not able to log in to the lessons since they did not own internet quota left or whose dormitory were under poor internet connection circumstances".

## Discussion and Conclusions

According to the findings, students had positive views about *a) no commuting* as it was referenced in the study by Tabor (2007) that 'fewer physical meetings represent less travel time for commuting students and an attractive alternative for non-traditional or working students, *b) comfort* as approved by Manea et al. (2021) for many reasons such as 'students no longer need to wake up early in the morning and prepare for travel' or 'students are more relaxed, and the environment is quiet' during online live lessons, *c) saving time* just like in Nikolopoulou's (2022) study, students regarded it as among pros of hybrid education for its 'adaptability for working students', and *d) gaining autonomy* through the hybrid mode contrary to 'traditional environments that reduce a student's sense of autonomy' (Xiao et al., 2020) as Linder (2017) also suggests that 'hybrid learning environments allow students to self-pace. Students may have more options about when they can study, a wider variety of study materials to use, and a larger range of learning experiences that they can choose to partake in' in addition to another study

that defines hybrid education as 'enabling more flexible, self-controlled, and self-paced learning' (Dragicevic et al., 2020), *e) solution during the pandemic period* which is discussed in practitioner participants' part of the study in the next research question findings. Meanwhile, they had negative views about *a) the lack of student engagement in online lessons,* just like Salta et al. (2022) expressed 'students' engagement with online classes was a challenge during the COVID-19 period', *b)unfamiliarity* as students sometimes could not grasp what was exactly going on because it was a sudden change for them with the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic. Almazova et al. (2020) drew attention to the fact that higher educational institutions worked hard to transform the curriculum into an online format, putting effort into decreasing the negative effect of the sudden changes on the educational process and providing ongoing teaching and learning. Still, this simultaneous transformation within days was a great challenge for all the stakeholders. In the study, it was determined that students were unfamiliar with the new system and could not always catch up with it, *c) inefficiency of the program,* probably because 'the most common mistake' was made 'when first entering the ranks of hybrid teaching by allowing the online and face-to-face components to function independently of each other, in parallel dimensions (Delamarter & Brunner, 2005, pp.152).

For example, Koehler et. Al. (2013) reminded that as designers, they decided that face-to-face time would be invaluable for beginning the process of community building and developing the habits of student life that would serve them well in the years to come. The online weeks would be better spent focusing on academic concerns (disciplinary knowledge) and reinforcing already established community norms. Yet, owing to the sudden switch with the pandemic, there was no similar planning or intention about face-to-face and online time in the evaluated program of this study, which probably contributed to the inefficiency of the program. The integration of technology, pedagogy, and content (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) is required throughout the designing process of the two delivery modes, *d)technology* as the study by Jackson and Helms (2008, pp.11) pointed out that it can be a strength as a tool to reach the education; however, 'without online access at home, students are still required to travel to the college or some other place that provides access. Technology could be a big problem with the final grade (crashes or computer viruses, for example). Everyone may not have

access to the Internet. Keskin (2011) determined that while the rate of the university students forming the sample who have a computer to connect to the Internet in their residence is 33.9%, the rate of those who do not have a computer to connect to the Internet is 64.6%. This rate means that almost two-thirds of the students who answered the survey do not have a computer to connect to the Internet. El Mansour and Mupinga (2007) also found out that 'technology hiccups' can lead to negative student experience in hybrid courses, *e) evaluation and feedback,* as Shartel (2012) pointed out "feedback is an integral part of the educational process. It provides learners with a comparison of their performance to educational goals with the aim of helping them achieve or exceed their goals. For best results, the sender and receiver of feedback must work as allies," and no problem occurred in qualitative evidence, while some students indicated that there was inconsistency between what was conducted in class and asked in summative evaluation. Kibble (2017) expressed his experience was that "subject matter experts naturally tend to start thinking about the content they should teach in a course, then about how they will teach it, and finally about how to assess student learning". Yet, the study found that content was planned; however, how to teach, either in face-to-face or online form, and if online, either in synchronous or asynchronous part, was not considered properly. Therefore, there emerged disagreements among students about the function of evaluation, *f) material access* as not all students could afford to buy course books or technological devices and the Internet; however, Robert and Pelletier (2022) insist that "student equity is centered in all modalities. Institutional programs support equitable access to education with flexible modalities, personal devices, and ubiquitous internet access". On the contrary, Joseph (2020) reported that "connectivity in some rural and remote school districts is often problematic. Internet equipment and connectivity favour wealthier students".

In practitioners' positive views, *a) the comfort* component was identified as a hybrid design 'offers personal benefit to educators in terms of their comfort level' (Meydanlioglu & Arikan, 2014), as well as *b)saving time,* which means 'reduced seat time' (Koohang et al., 2006) in class and stakeholders' time to commute is decreased. These aspects were determined in harmony with students' views. In addition, the program's being *c) a solution during the pandemic period* was regarded positively by practitioners. However, it should be noted that this shift was not planned and prepared

for as it happened almost overnight due to COVID-19, and Gagnon et al. (2020) remind that "these campus closures forced programs that were not designed for online instruction to deliver course content using asynchronous and synchronous online instruction which was likely to cause deficiencies". Among the negative views: a) *the lack of student engagement in online lessons* emerged with instructors finding themselves talking all the time, although Wiggins and McTighe (2005) suggest hybrid learning environment be student-centered in coherence with Trentin (2016) emphasizing learning by doing "has the potential to foster students' active and collaborative participation in a 'doing' rather than 'listening' type of learning" and to ensure it, lesson designs linking effective pedagogy with student motivation and engagement, such as active and collaborative learning, accompanied by motivational hooks and providing multiple means of representation and expression (Franklin & Harrington, 2019) are all required. Following this, *b) technology* that "in hybrid environment, faculty needs to be more conscious about how to guide students in order to enhance their learning and not confuse them poor design flow or have technology become an obstacle to the experience" (Mossavar-Rahmani & Larson-Daugherty, 2007) and one limitation of hybrid education is that it is likely to get affected by "computer worms, power failures, and other technology problems" (King, 2002), *c)material access* as instructors observed some students not having the required materials the way Sadeghi (2019) pointed out "any student seeking to enroll for a distance learning program needs to invest in a range of equipment including computer, webcam, and stable internet connection", and *d)lack of interaction* which "depends on how well trained both faculty and students are in communicating in the dual environment" as put forward by Mossavar-Rahmani and Larson-Daugherty (2007, pp.70), is prompted by collaboration which a positive impact on the educational experience (Graham, 2001) were the same components with students' negative views in addition to *e)online lessons* component put forward by practitioners. Hall and Villareal (2015) then assert that "in the online environment, students have the opportunity to apply their knowledge to complete projects, engage in real-world scenarios, and deepen their understanding through discussion forums," whereas these components did not seem to function in the institution of the study leading to negative views about online lessons.

All in all, in addition to the findings based on the positive and negative views of both the student and practitioner participant groups, pedagogical implications and conclusions are provided. Students and practitioners in implications refer to the participants of this study.

*Hybrid education can be a solution during pandemic or post-natural disaster periods only when it is designed carefully regarding the current situation of that time*

As student participants experiencing hybrid learning during the pandemic revealed during such vulnerable times, it might be hard to maintain educational activities; however, the change in the delivery mode of education is supposed to be helpful in bypassing this adverse but temporary period of time. Therefore, practitioners should be extremely meticulous when determining the topics, exercises, debates, questions, or any kind of activities in order to avoid dredging up past incidents.

*Hybrid education's being compulsory or selective matters and the situation's implicit background must be considered*

Different conditions of student participants of the study in owning required materials and different attitudes towards student autonomy revealed that hybrid education works well provided that learners have financial, location-based, or any other personal reasons that prevent them from attending lessons in the classroom; thus, they choose to use the hybrid method. In a different scenario, in which learners do not prefer the adoption of hybrid education but are compulsory for them across nations or nationwide because of different reasons, the lack of knowledge about the requirements of the system, how to succeed, and how to take control of their own learning process is likely to end up in failure.

*Material design and material access should be emerged from a process in which both face-to-face and online delivery methods are taken into consideration in a hybrid education system*

In hybrid education, both physical and digital products are to combine visual appeal and functional efficiency to enhance the learning experience of students by creating user-friendly and attractive digital materials. Otherwise, student engagement could suffer, as the study revealed. Moreover, both participant groups drew attention to students having

unpleasant experiences mainly due to the prices of books or financial requirements to obtain technological items. Material design certainly contributes to the structure and flow of lessons; however, no matter how perfectly designed they are, their function may fail unless every student has access to them.

*Efficient technology and necessary infrastructure are required, especially for online components of hybrid education*

Both students and practitioners emphasized the role of technology in the hybrid system, focusing mainly on its malfunctioning. Classrooms equipped with adequate technological items are likely to facilitate interactive discussions and group activities that complement online learning. Hence, it is also vital to receive technical support immediately when needed through IT staff without disrupting the flow. When hybrid education is obligatory and provided as a part of national education, the government or municipalities should provide students in need with the necessary equipment through scholarships or loans, whatever is needed.

*Ensuring student engagement is one of the key factors in success in hybrid education, just like in all other educational forms*

Challenges related to student engagement were portrayed by both students and practitioners, and motivating students is critical to ensure their engagement. It can be overcome thanks to using interactive, communicative, and multimedia resources in online courses, providing hands-on activities in face-to-face sessions, and creating eye-catching materials, visuals, and videos across both modes, as well as lesson designs that encourage learners to actively participate rather than passively listen. Requiring students to turn on their cameras would also be useful to keep them focused, motivated, and engaged, so they will not feel invisible.

*Instructors need to have some certain characteristics to act as the propellant function to implement the essential constituents of hybrid education*

As the findings from both participant groups reflect, course design must be meaningful. While planning the lesson flow, considering the strengths and challenges of both in-person and online components and strategically placing activities should be considered to achieve a robust design. Providing sufficient feedback regularly to support learning

and encouraging student autonomy should also be prioritized for instructors. Moreover, the importance of instructors' efficacy in using technology must be emphasized, as serious problems and inefficiencies are likely to occur in the online components of the system.

*Interaction in hybrid education refers to student-student and student-instructor interaction in both face-to-face and online components*

The importance of interaction was underlined by both participant groups. The lack of interaction caused participants to develop a negative perspective towards the online component of hybrid learning. Interaction, collaboration, and a sense of community could improve the motivation and engagement of students. To achieve student-instructor interaction, the availability of instructors through office hours would be useful to provide feedback or answer students' questions about the system and lessons. Welcoming students' questions via email and responding within a reasonable timeframe, especially when there are no face-to-face lessons, would also be effective. To provide opportunities for student-student interaction, prompting collaboration and communication are key factors with various implications. Discussions in the classroom and via online discussion boards, assigning group work in the classroom and using online chat rooms, incorporating peer feedback, and assigning group projects could be beneficial in this regard.

*Evaluation and Feedback have a crucial role in hybrid education, just like in the other delivery modes of education*

Student participants also pointed out efficient and inadequate aspects of evaluation and feedback. They mainly focused on the difficulty level of the exams compared to what was conducted in courses. Rather than testing the learning outcomes only, evaluating on a regular basis through formative assessments with the help of quizzes, LMS exercises, tasks, and portfolios could be useful through careful and purposeful distribution of practices between both online and face-to-face components of the system. Lastly, as a contributor to validity, students may be required to turn their cameras on during the exams to prevent copying, which was also mentioned by student participants. Feedback also has great importance, as students can communicate with instructors less in hybrid

education compared to traditional face-to-face education; therefore, the timing and regularity of giving feedback to students on their performance or work is valuable.

### *Learner autonomy means either an advantage or disadvantage for a student in hybrid education*

Some student participants clearly expressed that they learned how to take control of their learning thanks to the hybrid system. Students' responsibility for taking control of their learning plays a key role here. In deeper meaning, although learners who do not have an efficient level of autonomy may find it challenging, autonomous learners can develop self-regulation, adopt proper learning strategies, set realistic goals, monitor their progress, and take control of their learning process. They are likely to enjoy the flexibility of the system, the comfort of home, overcome geographical/physical constraints, and save time and money.

In addition to evaluating, redesigning, or adopting similar programs based on these suggestions, conducting studies at various institutions with multiple case studies is likely to provide a broader perspective for future studies.

## Ethics Committee Permission Information

This research study was conducted with the Research Ethics Committee approval of Bahcesehir University, dated 29.07.2022 and numbered E-20021704-604.01.02-37648

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Exploring English as a foreign language students' perceptions and needs of digital competences in a Turkish higher education context

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of college students towards digital competences and how they evaluate their needs for competence in learning and using English as a foreign language (EFL). The participants are 20 students (10 males and 10 females) learning EFL at the school of foreign languages of a private university in İstanbul, Türkiye. Data were collected via a socio-demographic questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. For the analyses of the qualitative data, codes, and themes were determined and organized according to the inductive thematic analysis approach, for which Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step procedure was followed. The results revealed themes of skills for digitalization, ownership of digital tools, positive attitudes towards digital competences in language education, needs relating to language use and learning: assessment, communication, interaction, resources, information, lessons and teachers, and finally, differences between before and after distance education in terms of digital competences. Compared with the present literature, tertiary level EFL learners have positive views of digital competences that cover widely accepted definitions and perceive their own digital competence levels as sufficient, teachers are perceived as having more digital competence than students. Digital competences are widely used in lessons, extracurricular activities, and assessment-evaluation processes, even though school curricula do not sufficiently prioritise them. They also believe that they need similar digital competences in foreign language education, parallel to literature. Although it has been shown that the school gives students enough opportunity to enhance their digital competences, there are still several suggestions made by the participants to advance their academic and professional goals. Furthermore, it is thought that national higher education policies do not place enough emphasis on this issue. In conclusion, digital competences should be prioritised, according to suggestions made by national policymakers, institution administrators, and university instructors as well as students.

**Keywords**
Digital competences, Distance education, English as a foreign language, perceptions.
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## Introduction

Since the turn of the 20th century, there has been substantial transformation in people's lives due to the flood of technical advancements. One of the most notable changes

sparked by technology advancements was the use of educational technologies (EdTechs). As a result of the high rates of access to the Internet and online resources, e-learning has grown by 900% since 2000, according to a recent report by Research and Markets (2023), making it the education business sector with the highest growth. In English Language Teaching (ELT) field, research emphasizes the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in language learning. Studies also conclude that education assisted with digital tools and content along with multimedia and the Internet facilitates the learning and teaching processes since the emergence of such EdTechs (Boz & Çoban, 2015).

With the technological advancements of the 21st century, digital competence is considered one of the most crucial skills becoming highly significant in education (Özbay & Özdemir, 2014). Cognitive, emotional, and social skills are linked with technical processes to create digital literacy, and these processes call for a continual focus on the most recent technological advancements particularly in education, not only in Türkiye but also throughout the globe (Nawaz & Kundi, 2010). The instructor, student, and learning environment have all changed of due to acting by the demands of the 21st century. One of the educational levels most impacted by digital technologies can be higher education. The ongoing growth of these technologies has created an environment conducive to innovative teaching-learning methods (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the higher education industry was reported to be one of the least digitalized and most labour-intensive industries prior to the COVID-19 epidemic (Humpl & Andersen, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic substantially changed the character of education globally, necessitating the use of digital technology and online learning techniques by higher education institutions. Building digital competences is necessary to effectively navigate this new educational paradigm (Hodges et al., 2020; Koehler & Mishra, 2016). The swift transition to remote learning and emergency distance learning caused challenges for university professors as well as students. As higher education moved toward a competence-based approach, educators in these institutions have started to feel the need to become more digitally literate (Trubavina et al., 2021).

Numerous studies have examined the digital competencies that university instructors and students need in conventional face-to-face learning environments. However, the pandemic's extraordinary effects and the accompanying shift to distant learning have forced a re-evaluation of these competences in the context of online and remote instruction. As a result, a growing body of literature focusing on the digital skills teachers and students need to successfully navigate the challenges posed by the pandemic and distance learning has emerged (Sangrà et al., 2012; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2020). For instance, according to studies comprehensively reviewing the relevant literature conducted by Alférez-Pastor et al. (2023), Başaran (2017), Fernández-Batanero et al. (2021), Pettersson (2018), and Zhao et al. (2021), it is evident that both instructors and students, at all levels as well as at higher education, encounter difficulties in effectively utilizing digital competences within their educational practices, regardless of their status as digital natives or immigrants. Carrying out a study regarding perceptions of EFL learners towards digital competences is essentially the goal of this study in order to move forward with adopting digital competences. The present study attempts to fulfill this need by examining college students' perceptions of digital competences and how they evaluate their level of competence and their needs in that context.

## Literature review

### Digital competences

The notion of digital competences can be related to the concept of digital literacy, which was primarily discussed by Tyner (1998). 'Literacy' describes the ability to read, but it is currently used in a broader and societal context, which reaches us to the term 'competence' (Buckingham, 2006). Various official documents published by the European Commission (2006, 2007a, 2013, 2018) define digital competences as one of the nine key competences citizens need to participate in today's society. Digital competences can be described as the skills of individuals to ensure the use, storage, and production of information on computers or any other mobile electronic devices and to direct communication and cooperation with others on the Internet (European Commission, 2007b).

In policy documents and studies created by international organizations, digital competence substantially incorporates digital skills in addition to social-emotional components for utilising and comprehending digital technologies. For instance, digital competence is offered among the Lifelong Learning Competences proposed by the European Parliament, this is given as a description within the digital competence framework: "...the use of digital technologies broadly, confidently and critically to acquire information, communicate and solve fundamental problems in all aspects of life..." (European Parliament, 2006, p.11). Five categories of digital competence for European citizens have been defined under this framework as acknowledged by the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE) (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2017). Furthermore, the Centre for the Development of Digital Competences of the European Parliament developed another conceptual framework for educators in 2017 (Redecker, 2017). Digital skills are presented in six categories in order to help educators improve their digital literacy. This conceptual framework gives advice on applying technical skills in training and courses rather than concentrating on the technical skills themselves (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2017). The term "digital competence" is defined as follows in a study created by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) within the United Nations in 2019: "...digital competence encompasses the knowledge and skills required for an individual to be able to use ICT to achieve goals in their personal or professional life..." (UNCTAD, 2019, p. 3).

Apart from the digital competences being a sub-domain of lifelong learning, digital tools have become the most significant learning and teaching environment in the 21st century. Digital tools are important in the production, sharing, teaching and learning of information. Some of the benefits of digital tools are offering a flexible learning opportunity for students of all ages, making the learning process independent of time and place, and offering learners the opportunity to learn at their own pace (Day, 2002; Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Van Laar et al., 2017). For learners to take advantages of these benefits effectively and efficiently, teachers are supposed to have high levels of digital competences for the production and delivery of contents as well as assessment. The importance of being digitally competent teachers in the digital era and its close

relationship with the quality of education in the 21st century has been the concern of different reports published by international institutions (Lázaro-Cantabrana et al., 2019).

## Digital education in Türkiye

Digital competence stands out as an important challenge for the educational systems of the new era of cutting-edge technologies. The current Turkish national curriculum focuses on integrating digital skills into schools to support subject learning. Within the scope of the Turkish Qualifications Framework prepared to ensure the classification of national qualifications in line with the European Qualifications Framework, eight key competences that all individuals should acquire in the lifelong learning process have been identified (YÖKAK, 2016). As one of the eight key competences in this framework, digital competence is defined as the safe and critical use of information society technologies for work, everyday life, and communication. Digital competence includes the safe and critical use of information society technologies for business, daily life, and communication. It is supported through basic skills such as access to information through ICT and the use of digital devices for the evaluation, storage, production, presentation, and exchange of information, as well as participation in common networks and communication online.

On the other hand, within the scope of the General Qualifications for the Teaching Profession published by the MoNE (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2017), digital competence is not defined as a separate field. During the pandemic process, in the Digital Literacy Teacher's Guide, one of the guidebooks published with teachers by the Turkish Ministry of National Education (2019), digital literacy was defined as the set of knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to participate in digital life, to live, learn and work in a digital society. By the MoNE General Directorate of Teacher Training and Development, within the scope of the General Qualifications for the Teaching Profession, the concept of digital competence is not defined as a different field. However, in the indicators of the competence to manage the teaching and learning process in the professional skills competence area, there is an indicator for teachers' digital competence with the statement '…uses ICT effectively in the teaching and learning process'. On the other hand, there are objectives related to digital transformation in the 2023 Education Vision prepared by the MoNE (Turkish Ministry

of National Education, 2019, p. 94). Although there is no direct target specific to the development of teachers' digital competences, some targets related to the development of teachers' digital skills are included in other targets. For example, two objectives are set within the scope of Digital Content and Skill Supported Transformation in Learning Processes:

> Target 1: An ecosystem will be established for the development of digital content and skills
>
> Objective 2: Content will be produced for the development of digital skills and teacher trainings will be organised

Within the scope of digital literacy skills, four skills were defined as (1) processing skills; (2) thinking skills; (3) collaboration skills, and (4) awareness skills. In addition to the basic concepts summarised above, some suggestions are given for digital literacy in practice, promoting digital literacy in the classroom, issues to be considered, and improving students' digital literacy. In addition to the guide, information and educational videos on cyber security and the correct use of technology in the digital competence frameworks in the Education Informatics Network (EBA), which is used as a distance education portal in Türkiye, are available to students, teachers and families online in the Cyber Security Portal tab. Various online workshops, certificate programs and in-service trainings were also organised by the MoNE during the pandemic period to improve the digital literacy and competences of teachers and school administrators.

## Previous studies

Examining the research conducted in Türkiye and elsewhere on students' digital abilities, it has been found that having a personal computer (Arslan, 2019; Korkmaz et al., 2019; Puentedura, 2006), having a consistent Internet connection, using EdTechs and applications when teaching, receiving technological education (Korkmaz et al., 2019), and taking part in vocational courses and projects (Casañ-Pitarch & Candel-Mora, 2021; Dempsey & Burke, 2020; Gençtürk-Erdem et al., 2021; Ito et al., 2009) all affect how much time people spend online or on digital devices. Several studies (Aktamış & Arıcı, 2013; Baş & Yıldırım, 2018; Gezer & Ersoy, 2021; Gürleroğlu, 2019; Karmila et al., 2021; Korkmaz et al., 2019; Mete & Batıbay, 2019; Ortaakarsu & Sülün,

2022; Özden Köse et al., 2021; Öztürk & Akgün, 2012; Poçan et al., 2023; Şimşek & Tuncer, 2019;) have found that incorporating various web 2.0 tools into instructional practices enhances student motivation, contributes to their academic achievement, and fosters a positive attitude towards the subjects varying from science to maths, to social sciences and languages. Significant outcomes have been attained from these studies. A recent study conducted by Metin (2022) identified a modest positive association between students' digital competence and their preference for visual and tactile learning modalities. Nevertheless, in some of the research examined, the use of Web 2.0 tools was shown to be associated with factors such as motivation and academic achievement. However, it is worth noting that most of these studies were conducted at pre-tertiary levels, which makes it obvious that the impacts of digital competences ought to be investigated at higher education level.

Other studies highlighted that although accessing and using digital platforms may appear simple, doing so effectively calls for digital competences (Durodolu & Mojapelo, 2020). For instance, Koyuncuoglu (2022) found that university students frequently had intermediate levels of digital competence but difficulty in evaluating their skills for cyber security. The results of a study conducted by Göldağ and Kanat (2018) revealed that whether students have social media accounts is not significantly related to the level of their digital competences. Onursoy (2018) also carried out a study that found that the literacy skills of college students are insufficient because it was emphasized that accessing digital environments and using digital tools skillfully does not mean being a good digital literate. Along with these findings, it is also reasonable to infer that the concept of digital competences is not widely and correctly understood. Kuru (2019) concluded that teacher candidates who have recently begun their studies at university lack awareness about the idea of digital literacy, that some candidates perceive the concept incorrectly, and that candidates judge digital capabilities via technological literacy. This is where the value of developing digital capabilities is relevant. Critical thinking skills like investigation, questioning, problem-solving, and decision-making are crucial for becoming technologically proficient (Duran & Özen, 2018).

## The current study

In the current study, students' digital competences are investigated from a broad perspective to gain insights into how they learn and prepare for life with their digital skills. As it is crucial for students to utilise their digital skills in the learning processes, understanding their position towards these competences is significant to integrate them into the curriculum and national policies. The local and international literature reviews partially reveal the learners' perspectives on this general but currently crucial issue in regard to the curriculum, classroom activities, and assessment-evaluation activities in institutional and national levels. However, a joint examination of students' digital competences and addressing the issue of differentiation according to various perspectives is needed. Studies, especially the ones designed qualitatively, that deal with this issue in depth are almost non-existent— no research designed like this present study has been found. The value of this study is based on the extensive input reflecting the perspectives of EFL learners at the university level from various aspects thanks to semi-structured interviews rather than just evaluating or assessing their digital competences through questionnaires or surveys. This, eventually, would yield some findings that have not been observed in previous studies. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to ascertain the general and unique perceptions of students in a higher education institution regarding digital competences in general and in terms of language learning, how they perceive digital competences and what kinds of digital competences are required in language learning processes. Thus, the study aims to present thorough justifications and consequences from students for the following research questions:

1) What are the EFL students' perceptions about digital competences?

2) In which areas of education do EFL students feel the need to have digital competences?

## Method

### *Setting and participants*

The participants of the study were 20 Turkish students learning EFL at the School of Foreign Languages of a private university in İstanbul, Türkiye. The genders of the student participants are exactly equally distributed: 10 female, 10 male. The average age

of the students was 21.4. While the oldest student was aged 43, the youngest was 18. The proficiency levels of participants varied from A2 to B2, all studying at English Preparatory School before their faculty departments.

### *Data collection procedure and instruments*

After obtaining the ethics committee approval from the university in which the research took place (Approval number: 2023/01-17), interviewees were invited to participate in the study by individual e-mails. 134 students were sent e-mails with the attachments of informed consent forms providing them with information about the context and the purpose of the study as well as ethical concerns. 20 participants were randomly selected among the ones who agreed to take part in one-to-one interviews.

In qualitative research, open-ended questions are frequently asked during interviews in order to elicit the participants' experiences and opinions (Creswell, 2012). Interview questions were prepared specifically for the study purpose and were not adapted from other studies. Eventually, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted as the instrument of data collection within the study. The original language of the interviews is Turkish; however, an English translation is provided for the purpose of catering to the international audience. 788 minutes of data were collected in total throughout the semi-structured interviews, which is equal to 13 hours and 8 minutes of recordings.

The participants were interviewed either face-to-face or virtually online on the Zoom platform. When the interview was held virtually on Zoom, the session was recorded as a video on the researcher's computer for data storage and archiving purposes as well. For each interview, the participants were instructed to read out the question and give their answers thoroughly without interruption primarily answers thoroughly without interruption. The researcher asked follow-up questions to get further details from the participants. Prior to the interviews, all the interviewees were asked to fill in a form of demographic information such as gender, age, level of classes, ownership of digital devices, environment of study, Internet connection, time spent before and after online and face-to-face lessons. Demographic data, however, were not used in the analysis but only used to describe the digital profiles of the participants of the study. The digital profile of students is presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**

Student participants' digital profile

| Students | Digital Device | Internet | Work-space | Daily Time Spent on Digital Devices (hour) | Daily Time Spent Online (hour) | Distance Classes (hour) | Face-to-face Classes (hour) | Extra Study (hour) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Student-1** | laptop, smart phone | both | personal desk | 7-10 | 7-10 | 4 | 4 | 1 |
| **Student-2** | laptop, smart phone | both | personal desk, library | 5-7 | 1-3 | 4 | 4 | 1 |
| **Student-3** | laptop, smart phone | Wireless | personal desk | 5-7 | 3-5 | 5 | 4 | 1 |
| **Student-4** | laptop, smart phone | both | study room | 5-7 | 5-7 | 4 | 4 | 1 |
| **Student-5** | laptop, tablet, smart phone | both | personal desk | 5-7 | 3-5 | 4 | 4 | 1 |
| **Student-6** | laptop, smart phone | both | personal desk | 7-10 | 7-10 | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| **Student-7** | laptop, smart phone | both | personal desk | 7-10 | 5-7 | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| **Student-8** | laptop, tablet, smart phone | both | personal desk | 5-7 | 5-7 | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| **Student-9** | laptop, smart phone | both | personal desk, library | 5-7 | 5-7 | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| **Student-10** | laptop, tablet, smart phone | both | personal desk, study room | 7-10 | 7-10 | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| **Student-11** | desktop laptop, tablet, smart phone | both | portable desk | 10+ | 7-10 | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| **Student-12** | laptop, smart phone | both | personal desk, | 5-7 | 5-7 | 4 | 4 | 3 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | study room | | | | | |
| **Student-13** | laptop, smart phone | both | personal desk, library | 5-7 | 5-7 | 4 | 4 | 1 |
| **Student-14** | laptop, tablet, smart phone | both | personal desk, study room | 3-5 | 3-5 | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| **Student-15** | laptop, tablet, smart phone | both | personal desk, study room | 7-10 | 7-10 | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| **Student-16** | laptop, tablet, smart phone | both | personal desk, study room | 5-7 | 5-7 | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| **Student-17** | laptop, smart phone | both | personal desk | 5-7 | 5-7 | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| **Student-18** | laptop, smart phone | both | personal desk, mobile | 5-7 | 5-7 | 4 | 4 | 1 |
| **Student-19** | laptop, smart phone | Wireless | personal desk | 7-10 | 5-7 | 4 | 4 | 1 |
| **Student-20** | laptop, smart phone | both | mobile | 7-10 | 7-10 | 4 | 4 | 1 |

## Data analysis

The qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews were transcribed, organized, and analyzed using the systematic procedures recommended by Corbin and Strauss (1990), based on the assumptions incurred during and after the data collection phase. An inductive thematic analysis approach was utilized to determine the themes that occurred in the qualitative data. To achieve this, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step procedure was followed. This involved re-reading the texts and generating preliminary annotations to establish a level of familiarity with the data; employing descriptive phrases to code, categorizing and organizing the data using the Microsoft (MS) Word and Excel software applications, resulting in the emergence of comprehensive and explanatory academic themes; and ensuring the accuracy and suitability of the themes

for representing the collected data. During the procedure, the qualitative data were also analyzed via the Atlas.ti Qualitative Data Analysis Software web version on web.atlasti.com. For this, the transcribed data were uploaded to the software to better organize the data and identify codes and themes.

## Results

### Students' Perceptions of Digital Competences

Analyses of the data from the responses to the first research question that explored students' perceptions of digital competences produced three themes: 1) Skills for digitalization, 2) ownership of digital tools, and 3) positive attitudes towards digital competences in language education. The themes yielded through the analyses are presented in Table 2 below:

**Table 2**

*Themes, Sub-Themes and Codes*

| Themes | Sub-Themes and Codes |
|---|---|
| Skills for digitalization | Different dimensions of information in the digital era Digital learning<br>Access to information<br>Production of new data<br>Emotive responses to technology |
| Ownership of digital tools | Ownership of digital devices<br>Number and variety of digital tools and devices<br>High-quality digital devices |
| Positive attitudes towards digital competences in language education | Positive attitudes in general<br>Opportunities for practising the target language<br>Online digital tools and platforms<br>Completion of tasks and assignments more practical<br>Digital/virtual activities through distance education<br>Higher potential grades thanks to digital competences |
| Students' Needs for Digital Competence in Distance Education | Tools and devices asked to use by the school<br>Assessment<br>Communication and interaction<br>Access to resources and information<br>Effective online lessons<br>Teachers' digital competences |
| Differences between before and after distance education in terms of students' digital competences | More digital competent<br>Personal development efforts<br>The use of digital tools and devices |

## Skills for digitalization

The students focused on concepts like digital learning, performing any skills effectively on digital devices, access to information, production of new data and emotive responses to technology. Most students did not mention language learning processes, but they argued that how effectively one can apply the subject they are competent in into a digital environment would reflect their digital competences. More strikingly, several students approached the skills for digitalization to a broader extent merging the terms of knowledge and the use of technology. For example, Student-15 said, "*Digital competence is knowing what we should do and where, or what we should download from where and how we should use it*". Student 10 paid more attention to the digitalization of teaching and learning environments by saying, "Normally, *we can be good students in a face-to-face class, but the ability to attend classes online and participate in classes digitally is also important*". Students managed to give a more comprehensive definition of the term digital competences when they had a broader perspective, focusing on different dimensions of information in the digital era. For example, Student-13's definition was as follows: "*I can say that digital competence is all the knowledge, skills and attitudes that people use in the process of accessing, understanding and using information that is different in various digital environments, my teacher*".

*Ownership of digital tools*. A large number of students held the idea that digital competences are solely comprised of the ownership of digital devices despite the detailed questions trying to lead the participants into the right track. Although several students referred to device ownership only as a pre-requisite towards digital competences, there were some who highlighted that owning as many and higher-quality digital devices as possible would mean a higher level of digital competences. For instance, Student-9 reported that "*digital competences are digital objects that people have*" and Student-18 said that "*digital competence requires owning, accessing and using digital devices, as well as the ability to use them effectively*". On the other hand, Student-20 highlighted that owning digital devices would not be enough to have digital competences by exemplifying: "*I mean, I have a good computer, but because I don't know how to use Word, I went to the Internet Cafe for example, I uploaded my writing*

*homework from there. That's why sometimes having technology doesn't mean much on its own*".

*Positive attitudes towards digital competences in language learning*. Students had explicitly positive perspectives towards digital competences. Student-8, for instance, stated that "*I think we must have digital competences to increase the dimension of language exposure*". Similarly, Student-2 related exposure to the use of digital devices and said: "*So, I try to be exposed to English as much as possible, whether it's on my phone, on my computer, or whatever I do, I'm trying to get exposure*". Few students underlined the significance of digital competences, referring to opportunities for practicing the target language. Student-9 verbalized what she experienced as follows:

> I made a lot of mistakes in my writings in the first semester. Now, I write very well because I watched videos all the time. I was constantly looking at other people's academic papers that were on the same level as me, so without my digital skills, I would probably be wandering around from teacher to teacher to ask for help for writing.

Student-20 gave a similar example of the use of online digital tools to practice language: "*We sign up for some online apps to talk, listen or practice and learn, and all this requires a lot of digital competence*".

As far as it was observed in the data, the students had positive perspectives towards digital competences also because of higher potential grades in courses thanks to these competences. In fact, they were not directly linked to higher grades, but indirectly leading to better performance by facilitating and making the completion of tasks and assignments more practical. In that context, student-14 stated that "*I think the person with better digital competence will do their homework faster and reach their goal faster. I think it will be such a performance increase, of course it's more practical*". Additionally, Student-3 talked about her experience with low grades and associated her better grades to digital activities through distance education. The excerpt from the interview demonstrates her positive perspectives towards digital competences: "*My grades last semester were quite bad. It got better thanks to digital studies in the distance education process*".

## Students' Needs for Digital Competence in Distance Education.

In response to the second research question which explored the areas which students need digital competences in distance education, the analyses revealed two themes: 1) Needs related to assessment, communication, interaction, resources, information, lessons and teachers and 2) differences between before and after distance education in terms of students' digital competences.

*Needs related to assessment, communication, interaction, resources, information, lessons and teachers*. Students referred to the needs for digital competences demanded by the school while using the relevant tools and devices. For example, Student-8 replied to the interview question with the following utterance in her own words: "*Some applications that the school wants us to use, some websites, office programs, computer and so on*". Student-4 and Student-7, respectively, mentioned other specific tools and skills as follows:

"For example, my teachers share some things in class, for example, I do not know them very well, I have difficulties there". For example, you open something called Padlet, enter something there, and write something. I felt quite lacking in those matters"

"For example, we use Word when we write writing assignments. We do not need to know advanced skills, but sometimes it is necessary to know Word well".

As stressed by Student-8 and Student-12, there are several components of assessment and evaluation conducted online or with heavy use of digital tools that requires high level of digital competences. Student-15 and Student-17 respectively elaborated on this issue in their own words as follows: "*Especially for exams and portfolio, I need the Internet, computer and phone. Because the exams are taken on two devices, you need to have two devices. I need good Internet. I need the computer to be fast because when it is slow, sometimes conversations slip or I can't log in to sites*", and "*I needed a lot of digital skills when I was taking my classes and doing research about the course, even while I was taking my regular exams in distance education*". Access to information was worded by Student-13 in her own words as follows:

I need digital competences in the field of access to information. Accessing information in distance education is very important for everyone, because when you have a teacher face-to-face, the teacher can transfer to you, but you need various devices in various fields to access that information during periods when the teacher is in front of you virtually. The most important of these devices is the Internet. Thanks

to the Internet, you can access information online. The Internet is a much-needed tool for us in distance education.

*Differences between before and after distance education in terms of students' digital competences*. The theme that there are obvious differences between before and after distance education in terms of students' digital competences has been observed as the most common view among students. One of the best references to that attitude is worded by Student-3 in her own words as follows: "*There is a positive difference in terms of digital competences before and after distance education, I think it has improved.*" Similarly, Student-7 shortly disclosed her opinion as "*I think distance education has definitely increased them.*", while Student-4 further particularized her argument by saying that "*I think there is a big difference now. It will likely increase even more. This will come to a point even more, but now it has its positive aspects*".

Digital tools and devices were the predominant aspects of the theme with a lot of references to devices such as laptop computers, cameras, microphones, smartphones, and applications like Zoom, Teams, Word and AI tools. In this respect, Student-16 expressed his point of view in detail as follows:

For example, I did not know Zoom, I did not even know anything about Microsoft Teams or something. For example, I figured out Zoom a little more after distance education. I feel more comfortable now. Zoom was a system so complicated. The first time I saw it in was distance education, you know, when I first entered digital, I felt like "What is happening!?", I got nervous sometimes with microphone, camera or others. I did not know, I did not have the competence, I did not have the ability before distance education.

Student-19 who highlighted the tools he can use effectively shared his argument in his own words as: "*Now, digital competence on the Internet is much higher, and I can use many things such as grammar sites, Chat GPT much more effectively than before. I have taught myself how to use them correctly during distance education*".

## Discussion

Through the analyses of interview questions, the major findings of the study regarding the first research question focusing on EFL students' perceptions of digital competences included several conclusions due to the dimensions of the topic. First, university

students believe that digital competences are highly essential in foreign language education. The participants conceptualized digital competences as encompassing several key elements. The themes included the ownership of digital devices, possessing digital skills, and maintaining a positive perception towards digitalization.

There is existing literature that contains a large body of research which indirectly corroborates the conclusion about the interpretation of digital competences (Ahmed & Roche, 2021; Wong et al., 2015; Yustika & Iswati, 2020). In addition, Meniado (2023) stated that new digital applications encountered in online language learning environments make students happy, attract students' attention and increase their motivation. To specify on a recent study conducted on a similar profile of samples, Akman (2021) examined the relationships between digital literacy, online learning and academic willingness according to the views of undergraduate university students, and as a result of the study, it was determined that students' attitudes towards the concept of digital literacy were positive, and this was an important variable that had an impact on students' academic willingness. Moreover, university students, most of whom are in generation Z, were found to be sufficient in defining, learning, applying and acknowledging ICT skills. It has been determined that a positive attitude has developed towards digital learning environments, which have become widespread especially during the pandemic, rather than traditional teaching approaches. In other studies which were conducted with Gazi University and Fırat University students in Türkiye, the digital literacy levels of the students were examined, and it was concluded that the level of their digital competences was high, and their perceptions were positive (Doğan, 2020; Kozan & Bulut Özek, 2019). In these studies, sub-themes such as accessing information about the skills that participants should have regarding digital literacy awareness, using information, transferring data, checking the accuracy of information, being interested, being conscious, and being able to communicate in digital environments were reached. It has been concluded that university students have a decent awareness of the digital competences they need to be digitally literate.

Digital technologies assume a progressively significant role in contemporary society, and as a result, digital competence has been a subject of debate about its nomenclature. Some refer to it as Internet skills, while others prefer the terms computer

literacy or digital literacy (Janssen et al., 2013), yet the significance of digital competences has been extensively acknowledged and emphasized within educational environments by both university teachers and students (Cook, 2023; López-Meneses et al., 2020). Similarly, the research done by Kayaduman and Battal (2020) revealed a significant favorable association between students' digital literacy abilities and their attitudes towards distance education. Their conclusion was parallel to themes that emerged in our data analysis.

As for the results related to the second research question, studies examining the digital literacy status of university students support the results of this research study. For instance, Onursoy (2018) investigated the digital literacy levels of university students. The results showed that although students' use of technology and their digital literacy levels are parallel, their digital literacy levels lag behind. It can be concluded that university students, who are called digital natives, may not have the ability to process information resources at tertiary level. Due to the fact that university students are introduced to the digital world and technological tools at an early age, digital literacy levels can be high in studies using different study groups and different digital literacy scales. Regarding this situation, in the study conducted by Uyar (2021), in which the digital literacy levels of the students studying at the vocational school were examined, it was observed that the digital literacy of the students was at a high level.

There seems to be more consistent literature published internationally in discussion of the findings for this research question. According to the research done by Alakrash and Abdul Razak (2021) in Malaysia, EFL students predominantly employed digital technologies to enhance their vocabulary acquisition. The rationale for these findings could lie in Education 4.0, which entails the integration of technology in educational practices. This approach necessitates that both educators and learners embrace digital tools to remain abreast of contemporary teaching methodologies and learning modalities (Hodges et al., 2020). Furthermore, due to the shutdown of schools as a preventive measure against the worldwide transmission of COVID-19, educators and students were compelled to use digital technology for online learning. The use of digital technology in distance education, including language learning, seems to have led to a significant advancement in digital competences, which was actually a justification

stated by the participants of this study. Nevertheless, the outcomes pertaining to students' digital literacy seem to contradict most of the findings presented in the literature review. Numerous studies have consistently shown a notable deficiency in digital literacy skills among students studying EFL. According to Supratman and Wahyudin (2017), despite being digital natives, contemporary EFL students continue to exhibit deficiencies in digital knowledge and abilities. The findings suggest that contemporary students in school-age brackets do not possess a higher level of technological proficiency compared to their educators. The earlier research that categorized university students as digital natives was shown to be invalid in recent studies, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Sánchez-Cruzado et al., 2021).

## Conclusion

In the current study, in which the data were analyzed using qualitative methods, specific findings were obtained, most of which overlap with the existing literature. Based on the grounded theory, when the data were collected and analyzed, the participants expressed their perceptions of digital competences in a way that highlighted the significant elements in universal definitions that emerged as codes and categories in the analyses. The students were found to have the skills to avoid great difficulties while learning a foreign language whether through distance education or face-to-face. They were observed to be aware of the advantages of using digital tools and contents while learning English, as well as identifying the digital competences they would need.

Taking all the findings into consideration, it has been concluded that tertiary-level EFL learners have positive views of digital competences that cover widely accepted definitions and perceive their own digital competence levels as sufficient, teachers are perceived as having more digital competence than students. Digital competences are widely used in lessons, extracurricular activities, and assessment-evaluation processes, even though school curricula do not sufficiently prioritise them. They also believe that they need similar digital competences in foreign language education, which is parallel to literature. Although it has been shown that the school gives students enough opportunity to enhance their digital competences, there are still

several suggestions made by the participants to advance their academic and professional goals. Furthermore, it is thought that national higher education policies do not place enough emphasis on this issue.

Based on these conclusions, it is recommended that digital competences at higher education level should be prioritised in accordance with the suggestions made by national policymakers, institution administrators, and university instructors but most of all, the university students learning English as a foreign language to pursue their education.

## Limitations, Implications, and Recommendations

The study has several limitations. First of all, the findings of this research are based on qualitative analyses. However, different scales and assessment tools can be used to measure digital competences in a real sense, and more comprehensive results can be obtained by examining the quantitative data together with the qualitative data. Secondly, this study was carried out at only one university. Studies can be conducted with participants from different universities, and research that includes comparisons between participant groups can be carried out so that discrepancies in the significance attributed to digital competences in ELT and their incorporation into language education.

An important implication of the study is that practical courses on the use of digital tools can be added to the compulsory curriculum for university students studying in all departments to use in their higher education endeavours, in all areas of their lives, and in their future professional lives. A second implication derives from the finding that distance education increased the students' digital competences. New and process-appropriate distance education models should be developed, and digital competences should be integrated into curricula and updated in accordance with distance education. In addition, the use of additional communication applications should be encouraged to strengthen learner-teacher communication not only during distance but also in face-to-face education. A third implication stems from the finding that the resources the students used are very sensitive to cyberbullying. This being the case, seminars and trainings in which students are taught how to safely search, access, edit and share information can be provided to raise awareness about digital data security.

## Ethics Committee Permission Information

Ethics committee approval from the university (Approval number: 2023/01-17) was obtained before data collection.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Metaphor analysis of audio description in English language teaching

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**Abstract**
This study investigates the use of audio description (AD) and metaphors in enhancing foreign language learning. Data collection involved a convenience sample of 25 students who provided metaphorical descriptions of their AD experiences through a single-item questionnaire. The data analysis employed content analysis to categorize and interpret these metaphors. The findings underscore metaphors' cognitive and emotional benefits in making abstract concepts tangible, thereby enhancing the language learning process. The examination of the metaphors elucidates how students harness metaphorical constructs to explicate various facets of change within their English language learning trajectory. Encouragingly, affirmative responses are discernible within the metaphors, particularly pertaining to themes such as knowledge production, creativity, value, the transmission of knowledge, wisdom, and animacy. The utilization of metaphor, as delineated within this discourse, fosters an ongoing process of scholarly inquiry and comprehension. Future research should continue exploring these tools to further validate and refine their application in diverse educational settings.

**Keywords**
Metaphors,
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## Introduction

Language learning is a complex process where learners not only expand their vocabulary in a new language but also strive to understand its cultural, semantic, and emotional nuances. In this process, learners must develop new tools and approaches to accurately express and comprehend abstract concepts, emotions, and thoughts.

The study of metaphors has expanded across various disciplines, and the literature on this topic is extensive and continually growing. Despite researchers' efforts to deeply understand the construction, comprehension, and application of metaphors, the sheer volume of publications and research in this field can be daunting. Lakoff and

Johnson's (1980) ground-breaking work on conceptual metaphors has sparked significant interest in metaphors' cognitive and linguistic functions. This interest is now more relevant than ever, as the integration of metaphorical analysis into language learning research continues to gain traction. This study aims to contribute a novel perspective to the existing literature by examining metaphors within the context of the language learning process.

Recent studies have shown that metaphors play a crucial role in conveying abstract and complex ideas, making them essential tools for both everyday communication and academic discourse (Gibbs, 2017; Kövecses, 2020). The necessity of metaphorical usage extends beyond mere aesthetic expression, as a fundamental mechanism for understanding and discussing multifaceted concepts (Ortony, 1993). Metaphors are particularly significant in educational settings, where they help students grasp intricate ideas by relating them to familiar experiences (Sfard, 1998).

Given that metaphors are powerful tools for concretizing abstract concepts, this study focuses on their role in language learning. Research indicates that metaphorical reasoning is not inherently slower than literal reasoning; in fact, it can enhance cognitive processing by providing more vivid and relatable mental imagery (Steen, 2011). This study explores the impact of metaphor usage on language learning by analysing the metaphors employed by English language learners. It seeks to determine how metaphorical approaches can facilitate language acquisition and enhance learners' comprehension and retention of new information.

By examining the metaphors learners use, this study hopes to shed light on the cognitive processes underlying language acquisition and offer practical insights for educators. The findings are expected to reveal how metaphorical thinking can be leveraged to improve language teaching methodologies and support students in developing a deeper understanding of the language they are learning.

## Metaphor and Foreign Language Learning

The definition of metaphor poses a significant challenge regarding whether it should be considered a cognitive phenomenon related to how we best understand it or a linguistic phenomenon related to how we express it (Cameron & Low, 1999). According to Lakoff and Johnson's Cognitive Theory of Metaphor, metaphors are not merely linguistic

decorations but fundamental to our cognitive processes, shaping perceptions, thoughts, and actions (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). They suggested that a metaphor is far from merely a figurative or decorative device or simply an elliptical simile. An elliptical simile is a metaphor that occurs without using an explicit "like" or "as" connector when comparing two different concepts or objects. Thus, it involves establishing a similarity between the compared things indirectly or by implication, without an explicit comparison expression. They argue that metaphors structure perceptions, thoughts, and actions. Recent studies support this view, emphasizing the cognitive underpinnings of metaphor and their significant role in conceptual thinking. For instance, Shutova et al. (2023) explore the application of conceptual metaphor theory in various cognitive domains, highlighting its importance in understanding abstract concepts through metaphorical mappings. Additionally, Steen (2023) discusses the Deliberate Metaphor Theory, which underscores the distinction between deliberate and non-deliberate metaphor use, reinforcing the idea that metaphors are central to our cognitive processes and communication strategies.

Various categories of analysis could be considered concerning the use of metaphors in foreign language learning. One such category is the level of theory, where theoretical analysis and categorization of metaphors take place. Generally, it can be stated as defining metaphor, for example, "what can be analysed as a metaphor" (Steen, 2008, pg. 234). However, other studies mainly focus on individuals engaged in production or interpretation tasks involving metaphors. Among these studies, we can provide examples of the most commonly used techniques, such as how word elements in a metaphor acquire meaning, how concepts are activated, how interpretation of a metaphor is reached, and/or how new meanings can be provided for word elements (Stamenković et al., 2020; Thibodeau & Durgin, 2008).

Martinez et al. (2001) argued that the situated learning perspective continues in teacher education. In this context, while the behaviourist perspective views the learning process as a passive acquisition of knowledge, the cognitive perspective regards learning as a process where schemas are individually constructed. Additionally, the sociocultural perspective considers learning as a result of active participation in the activities of a social community. These different perspectives support various learning

and teaching approaches in teacher education and encourage profound reflection on different instructional strategies. In this context, it can be said that different perspectives, naturally including metaphor analyses, play a significant role in developing various language education strategies and teaching methods.

It is a well-known fact in education that metaphors have great potential for research and application. They assist both foreign language learners and teachers in revealing how they construct representations of themselves and their experiences (Kramsch, 2003). Studies have been conducted using metaphors to explore teacher roles (De Guerrero & Villamil, 2001; Saban et al., 2006) as well as to aid in defining the language learning process (Caballero, 2006). For example, Wan et al. (2011) investigated belief discrepancies between 70 students and 33 English as a foreign language teachers in China and identified eight categories: perceived as provider, nurturer, loyalist, educator, culture transmitter, authority, stimulator, and collaborator. However, many studies using metaphor analysis have been conducted to help teachers express and evaluate their assumptions, beliefs, and views about teaching and classroom interaction (Dooley, 1998; Mahlios & Maxson, 1998).

As a research tool, metaphors possess several important and unique qualities. For instance, Ortony (1993) identified three communicative functions of metaphors: expressiveness, conciseness, and vividness. It is time to elucidate these qualities with a metaphor related to learning. For example, if a student describes foreign language learning as "as easy as pulling a hair out of butter," this imagery conveys the ease and proximity to accomplishment that the learner might experience. Therefore, this metaphor vividly expresses students’ emotions about a complex cognitive process such as learning.

Metaphors also provide useful windows into teachers' professional thoughts and understandings. Several studies have demonstrated that metaphorical language can significantly assist educational researchers in understanding teachers' thoughts. For example, Shaw and Mahlios (2011) explored literacy metaphors among pre-service teachers, revealing how these metaphors change after instruction and connect to theoretical frameworks. Similarly, Saban (2006) reviewed the functions of metaphors in teaching and teacher education, emphasizing their role in revealing teachers' conceptualizations. Lastly, Thomas and Beauchamp (2011) used metaphors to

understand new teachers' professional identities, showcasing how metaphors can provide deep insights into teachers' cognitive processes and beliefs. In other words, metaphors serve as an important resource for elucidating teachers' thought worlds, while metaphorical language can help educational researchers better understand teachers' and students' perceptions.

Taking another perspective, understanding what it means to be a foreign language teacher is crucial, specifically in various socio-cultural and educational contexts (Borg, 2006). One way to achieve this understanding is through analysing metaphors related to language teachers. Indeed, numerous studies have examined pre-service teachers' and in-service teachers' attitudes towards classroom practices, teacher-student interactions, and the evolution of teaching and learning beliefs using this method (Leavy et al., 2007; Zapata & Lacorte, 2007). However, metaphors can also be a significant research tool (e.g., in describing teacher roles). Oxford et al. (1998) collected various metaphors to express different perspectives on the concept of 'teacher,' such as metaphors perceiving teachers as social engineers shaping students according to society's needs, gatekeepers transmitting the cultural heritage of society to students, facilitators of personal growth and development, and social reformers tasked with facilitating the creation of a democratic society. In another study (Guerrero & Villamil, 2002), examples of metaphors describing teachers include portrayals of teachers as collaborative leaders, knowledge providers, challengers, caretakers, innovators, resource providers, artists, repairers, and sports coaches. This categorization aimed to elucidate various aspects and roles of teachers through different metaphors.

## Brief Overview of Relevant Theories

In traditional theories, metaphor is considered solely a linguistic issue. In contrast, contemporary metaphor theory emphasizes that metaphorical expressions are a matter of thought and understood through mapping between domains in the mind. Advocates of contemporary metaphor theory argue that metaphors are pervasive and used unconsciously and automatically in our daily speech, shaping our thoughts and actions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). However, metaphors are rooted in our physical and cultural experiences. Therefore, analysing the metaphors people use can provide a new research method for understanding their fundamental beliefs and ideas and can offer a way to

examine what underlies specific thoughts and behaviours (Schmitt, 2001). Thus, using metaphors to understand students' internal ideas for reasons such as their language learning backgrounds, cultural histories, or personality traits seems to be an effective and promising tool. As a versatile tool, metaphor can be used both as a window to see students' belief systems and as a teaching aid in the classroom.

However, a significant problem with current metaphor theories is that many researchers fail to distinguish between how a metaphor is processed and the meanings that emerge after a metaphor is understood. For example, the metaphor "playing the three monkeys" is commonly used in Turkish. Each of us can read this expression and think of various metaphorical interpretations. When we consider the process of how we interpret this metaphor, we can say that it happens very quickly and unconsciously because metaphor comprehension processes are different from conscious thinking processes while reading or hearing a metaphor. It is essential to carefully distinguish between the metaphor comprehension process and how we interpret the metaphor (Gibbs, 2003). For example, metaphors in research influence how we perceive language learning and shape educational methods and materials. These metaphors can guide our understanding and approach to education. It might be intriguing to see how different metaphors, such as 'viewing the student as a machine,' reflect on our overall perspectives on learning and cognition" (Ellis, 2001). Additionally, some studies highlight the value of non-traditional research methods (e.g., metaphor analysis) in analysing student views to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary approaches (Swales, 1994).

It can be argued that students are more inclined to process directly familiar metaphors, and less familiar metaphors often evoke the literal meaning of the metaphor (Giora & Fein, 1999). Such experimental results remind that theories can overgeneralize and that theoretical frameworks should be chosen at a level of detail appropriate for the analysed metaphor and discourse type(s).

In this case, different views on foreign language education can shape new approaches and methods for metaphor analysis in language teaching: structural, functional, and interactional approaches (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The structural view acknowledges language as "a system of structurally related elements for encoding meaning" and aims for "mastery of the elements of this system" (Richards & Rodgers,

2001, p. 20). The functional view argues that language is "a tool for expressing functional meaning" and emphasizes meaning and function categories (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 22). The interactional view sees language as "a tool for the realization of social transactions..." and organizes teaching content according to interactional patterns or student tendencies (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 22). The metaphors that emerge based on the aforementioned approaches reflect the context in which language learning is used.

## AD and Language Learning: Insights and Outcomes

Integrating AD techniques, such as intralingual subtitles, has shown significant potential in enhancing the language learning experience for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. These methods provide learners with multimodal linguistic input, aiding comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and overall language proficiency.

Caimi (2006) investigates the use of intralingual subtitles in language learning, demonstrating how subtitles can enhance listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. By providing a written form of the spoken language, subtitles help learners reinforce their understanding of new vocabulary and language structures. To build on this foundation, Blane (1996) discusses the practical applications of interlingual subtitling in language degree programs. His study shows that engaging students in subtitling tasks improves their translation skills and overall language proficiency. This hands-on approach encourages active learning and a deeper engagement with the language.

Further expanding on the use of audiolingual tools, Fryer (2010, 2016) explores AD as a valuable educational resource. AD not only aids orally impaired individuals but also benefits language learners by offering rich, descriptive language that enhances listening skills and comprehension. Fryer's research highlights AD's role in providing detailed contextual information that supports language learning. In addition to these methods, Lertola (2012) examines the effect of subtitling tasks on vocabulary learning. Her findings suggest that engaging in subtitling activities helps learners retain new vocabulary by encountering words in meaningful contexts, thereby improving their language skills. Pavesi and Perego (2008) emphasize the benefits of tailor-made interlingual subtitling for second language acquisition. Their research indicates that

customized subtitles provide linguistic input that matches learners' needs, facilitating more effective language learning. Taking this further, Vermeulen and Ibáñez Moreno (2017) review the pedagogical value of audio description in foreign language teaching. They highlight AD's effectiveness in improving listening skills and overall language competence by providing detailed and contextually rich language input. Lastly, Moreno and Vermeulen (2015) present a case study on the use of the VISP app, which employs audio description to promote English language learning among Spanish students. Their study demonstrates that mobile app-based AD can significantly enhance speaking and listening skills.

In conclusion, integrating AD techniques, such as intralingual and interlingual subtitling and audio description, offers substantial benefits for EFL learners. These methods enhance comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and overall language proficiency by providing rich, multimodal linguistic input and engaging learners in active language processing tasks.

## Significance of the Study

In light of above information, metaphors can play a significant role in language learning. Metaphors, which are not directly derivable from word combinations and sometimes gain meaning by being associated with personal experiences, are suitable for use as language learning materials. These structures can help language learners develop a deeper understanding and support them in grasping language usage more effectively. In this study, the importance of metaphors in language learning has been emphasized, and contributions have been made to the literature through metaphor analyses to ensure the realization of this situation.

This article stems from an AD research carried out with students of the English Language and Literature Department at a public University (2021-2022). It presents the main observations from an exploratory analysis of data from open-ended question form and focuses on one basic variable selected for relevance in assessing the pedagogical value of AD as a tool in the foreign language (FL) classroom. The research question is;

- To analyse students’ perceptions of their own learning progress throughout the AD with metaphors.

## Methodology

### Participants

The study employed a convenience sampling strategy (Dornyei, 2007), selecting members of the target population of language learners who met certain basic criteria. The sole requirement for participation was that individuals be students from the English Language and Literature department with at least one year of advanced language learning experience, ensuring they could comprehend the English language elicitation prompt. The sample consisted of 28 third-year students enrolled in the same advanced English course. Participation was voluntary, and all students demonstrated significant interest in the study and its findings. Completed forms were returned to the lecturer. The participants' ages ranged from 20 to 22 years (M=21.2). After excluding irrelevant and non-metaphorical responses, 25 forms were analysed, with 18 female and 7 male respondents.

### Data Collection & Instruments

In a controlled laboratory setting, each student was provided with a personal computer to facilitate individual engagement with the task. The students were instructed to describe the contributions of watching videos or series scenes with audio descriptions on Netflix. This exercise aimed to explore the pedagogical impact of audio description techniques on language learning. To articulate their experiences and insights, students employed metaphors, which served as a cognitive tool to express the perceived effectiveness and emotional resonance of the audio description method. These metaphors provided a rich qualitative data set, offering deeper insights into the students' cognitive and emotional responses to the learning technique.

Furthermore, the students were required to provide a rationale for their chosen metaphors. This reflective component was designed to uncover the underlying reasons for their metaphorical choices, thereby revealing their cognitive processes and attitudes toward the audio description technique. This approach not only helped in understanding the effectiveness of audio descriptions in enhancing comprehension and engagement but also in identifying the specific aspects of the technique that resonated most with the

learners. By analysing these metaphorical expressions and the accompanying rationales, the study aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the pedagogical value of audio descriptions in language education. The findings were expected to contribute to the development of more effective multimedia learning tools and strategies, leveraging the cognitive and emotional benefits of metaphorical thinking in educational contexts.

To collect the necessary data, a single-item questionnaire was utilized. The researchers anticipated that the learners' written descriptions would provide meaningful insights into their metaphorical conceptualizations of L2 learning. The question "What is L2 learning for you?" was designed to prompt responses that convey epistemological concepts, revealing the learners' understanding and perceptions of the L2 learning process.

## Analysis

In order to include the students' interests into language learning, the authors decided to carry on the research with some videos or series on the Netflix platform. The AD, located on the side of the screen, was determined in accordance with the weekly curriculum by researchers beforehand. After each session, the participants were asked to talk about the session, answer the comprehension questions, and make a representation of the subject.

Data were gathered through open ended question form such as; giving some kind of examples by using metaphors to identify AD in language learning or the reasons behind choosing them. Metaphors are typically more easily understood as unified thoughts than as distinct words, as noted by Ortony and Fainsilber (1999). As thus, the students' metaphors and their entailments were presented precisely in order to structure the data. The metaphor analysis approach developed by Cameron and Low (1999) was then used. "Gathering examples of linguistic metaphors used in speaking regarding the subject…, expanding from them to the conceptual metaphors they demonstrate, and applying the outcomes to propose understanding or the ideas that form or constrain people's beliefs and acts" is the methodology's stated requirement. The students' explanations for their metaphors were carefully examined because individuals will interpret the same metaphor in different ways. The results were then categorized into multiple themes.

A technique for analysing the content of many types of data, including verbal and visual data, is content analysis. It makes it possible to categorize and reduce phenomena or events in order to more effectively analyse and interpret those (Harwood & Garry, 2003). Thus, the data were analysed through content analysis design.

### Reliability and Validity

To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, the researchers employed a member-checking strategy. They selected three students to verify the accuracy of the interpretations of their metaphors. Overall, the participants confirmed that the interpretations were accurate. Regarding reliability, the researchers invited two associate university professors specializing in English Language to review the consistency of the data analysis procedures. The professors reported a high level of consistency throughout the data analysis process.

## Results

The study focuses on the metaphors used by students to describe their experiences and perceptions regarding audio description activities. These metaphors provide likenesses for accessing a new perception through audio description. This study emphasizes the role of audio description as a bridge between linguistic and visual perceptions. Firstly, the study highlights the emergence of animal analogies among the grouped metaphors. These analogies, drawn from the experiences and perceptions of students regarding audio description activities, serve as vehicles for understanding the transformative nature of audio description in language learning.

### Animal Metaphors

Some metaphors are the animals sharing commonalities relatable to the characteristics of Audio description. One commonality is flight, which gives a panoramic bird’s eye view. Bats are mammals with flight capability; Eagles soar above the sky with a keenness of eye-sight, or acuity of vision, and talons with powerful grasping capability. Lions, although they cannot fly, exhibit the kind of grace in their movement that this gets across the effect of flight. Combined with the common predatory nature (e.g. eagles

swooping down), these three animals highlight the descriptive potential of the Audio description tool metaphorically.

1. Flying-bat in night

"It's like a new built bridge between two distant towns" because audio description tasks provide me to access a new perception

Bats are disabled animals, just like the audio description users. When they fly in the night they can't see, but they use their voice to find their way. Just like disabled person can imagine through the audio. The bats can't see clearly, and they use their ability to head to find food, just like how we use our hearing to learn). The setting and scene in the movie flow are reflected in detail. The BAT metaphor can foreground the fine details, considering the echolocation bats use to navigate in the dark. Listening to the echoes bouncing off objects of high-frequency sound waves they emit, bats determine their surroundings, which helps with the location of prey, avoidance from obstacles, and discovery of roosting sites.

2. Eagle eyes

"The eagle that makes a learner fly over a giant horizon full of new discovery". (Justification: I am here to express not only the support but also the improvement that AVT can offer its users. Because every action is seen and defined verbally, we pick the good one and think about it.

In this metaphor, the key word is eagle. The term 'eagle eyes' describes a superb vision. Granted, with a nearly panoramic vision (340-degree visual allowing compared to 180 degrees in humans), an eagle has an exceptional visual acuity four times better than a normal human. Eagles move their head every 5 seconds. Their great colour differentiation means they see colours more vividly than humans do (Newmark, 2019). All these qualities indicate description power.

The metaphor is an outstanding combination of two fascinating birds of prey with excellent, exceptional vision owls during the night and eagles during the day. Here it would be humorous to remember an expression in Turkish, "*ondan kaçmaz*".

3. Lion of words

"My metaphor is a lion and my reason to prefer this metaphor is a figure of speech that makes a comparison between power and coward".

Audio description makes people understand unimportant things that are truly important for the work because these powerful words make powerful understanding.

Being a lion is about power, courage, leadership by nature, and hunting ability, all of which relate to vivid images demonstrating a high-definition, high-resolution quality. The hunting ability, in particular, can be resembled to someone who hardly misses the target focused.

## Guiding Wisdom Metaphors

1. Reading a book

"When you read a book, you can imagine every small detail".

When a book is read, those reading it ascribes or attributes a meaning to what is read. The human being is disposed to attribute meaning to observations or experiences. This means that attribution is about making sense, or, in other words, interpretation. In order for someone to interpret something, they need to be equipped with the details. The word details and humans' meaning attribution to what is experienced or observed is important in that it implies that description AD provides the film 'viewer' with constructs a simulation of the film. Those experiencing the situation of a scene have contextual meaning to be assigned, which would bring an advantage to foreign language learners if they made use of AD technology. That meaning attribution is about the human inner world has implications for literature majors who are known for their intrapersonal intelligence.

2. Light switch

"It's a light switch in our mind's various areas. It is because these tasks can really make our mind's work harder by using various areas of it".

Illumination is one key term to foreground what the light switches foreground. Besides, the metaphor includes a variety of emphasis in the part 'our mind's various areas'. Variety and light in combination reflects descriptive power. Mind's various areas

are also reflections of the left hemisphere's dominance for language and the right hemisphere for visual attention and its special role in the spatial localization of stimuli.

3. Pool of knowledge

“I think since I have been assigned in Advanced English course, with the audio description, my brain is a pool of knowledge. I learned so many things, and while I was learning, I enjoyed every second of it”.

In its literal sense, the pool is supposed to be full of water. This metaphor suggests that the speaker's brain has become a reservoir or repository of knowledge since being introduced to advanced English courses with audio descriptions. It implies that the learning process has filled the speaker's mind with a wealth of information, akin to how a pool is filled with water. This metaphor underscores the richness and depth of the speaker's learning experience, highlighting the immersive and fulfilling nature of their journey in mastering the English language with the aid of audio description.

4. Rebuilt school

“We can express a scene in some various sentences, so that the scene will be more effective to understand while we learn, like rebuilt school”.

AD is the audio descriptor’s interpretation of the scene, they write the way they see it. As for the metaphor thunder potential, the Turkish “*dank etmek*” means in English light dawns (colloquial), dawn on, hit someone, so both the Turkish phrase and its English equivalents feature understanding, enlightenment effectively, strikingly.

5. Thunder potential

“There is always thunder in the sky but there have to be energy to show up”.

Closely linked to energy, lightning is an electrical discharge between storm clouds or within the clouds. When it occurs the extreme heat occurs and causes the explosively fast expansion of the surrounding air.

6. Power of water

“The activation of the potential is drinking water, because, drinking water is both beneficially and fast thing. You can drink fast and it can be beneficially fast”.

With this metaphor, it is understood that making use of AD is seen as tapping the tap for drinking water. The water is beneficial, and we can increase its flow. Evaluated with its justification, this metaphor triggers the perception of word strings with high fluency. Resembling the narrative tor river *"nehir"*. This narration can be reflected with "nehirration", a word play in with Turkish and English parts mixed. Some responses are in the form of word plays.

7. Picturesque scenery

"Audio description is picturesque scenery because AD gives a scenery that we can imagine perfectly".

If the potential is activated, the words in the description may have such an impact that makes something like a picture out of scenery. According to dictionary.com, picturesque means strikingly graphic or vivid (of writing, speech etc.), or creating detailed mental images. The graphic account of something is describing it vividly or clearly.

8. Pencil with eraser

"AD is pencil with eraser because it's with pencil on it help the struggle the normal eraser might be far away but this is with the pencil".

Both pencil and eraser are commonly used in teaching and learning settings. The Turkish "*kalem efendisi*" (literal translation of which is being a gentlemen/lady of pencil) is closely related to the educated.

The respondent's metaphor is the pencil with an eraser on it. The AD option is just one click away, as close as an eraser to the pencil. Describing something is a process of addition and deletion, just like the way we write on a Word file.

9. English teacher

"Audio description is an English teacher because it explain what happening".

This metaphor underlines the benefit of AD for PAH continuum, or cycle. AD provides the learner with input in the form of descriptive language use. This respondent is likely to recognize the need for the teachers' consciousness raising but prefers to emphasize the use of technology for educational purposes in the way the student

determines it to be. The metaphor below can be used to highlight the facilitator function/status of teachers.

10. Piece of cake

“Learning with audio description is a piece of cake. My reason for using this metaphor is that AD is a great opportunity for learning language”.

A piece of cake is actually used to express something highly easy. In parallel with this, the metaphor is seen as a facilitative tool. And that it creates an opportunity to understand the elaboration in the justification.

11. Opening a light in a full of dark art museum

“It is like opening a light in a full of dark art museum”.

The metaphor below is directly related to enlightenment (especially art). Besides light, there is a museum associating a wealthy legacy of wisdom dating back to old times. This causes a person to see the real beauty and imagery of the world and light a torch in their mind. This metaphor is actually grammatically wrong but as can be inferred from the accompanying justification, the student meant to write Turning on the light in a fully dark art museum. Light makes it possible to perceive the surroundings clearly. The use of an art museum reflects richness. So turning on the light, one is able to see the richness of the art museum that would otherwise be unseen due to the dark preventing the visibility.

12. Old castle

“Like old castles”.

Castles have many passages and secret rooms, which means audio-visual translation is a huge case with many ways to reach or explore. Since old castles are steeped in history, this metaphor reflects depth. Which associates in-depth analysis, which is a process of investigation of issues in great detail. An Oold castle associates with a medieval castle, which typically consists of such elements as a keep (great tower, heart of the castle), curtain walls and towers, a barbican, which fortifies the gate, gatehouse (main entrance), courtyards, a great hall, a chapel and the quarters nearby of priests, stables, dungeons, a bakehouse and a brewery. All these demonstrate the depth and detail typical of descriptive power.

## Transmission of Knowledge Metaphors

1. Accessing to brain easily

"Like accessing to brain easily".

Thanks to developed social platforms and technology, we are able to learn foreign languages directly. The metaphor claims Audio Descriptions can clearly reflect the movie's actual scenes. The metaphor associates the adage 'a picture is worth a thousand words', so AD benefits vocabulary practice. Easy access to the brain's direct learning of the foreign language is expressed in the justification, which directly represents in the metaphor 'accessing to brain easily'. This associates the direct method, arguing for direct connection between the meaning and the target language (L2) form, and avoiding interference of source/first/L1 forms. The directness may contribute to the facilitation of the process.

2. Access card

"Like access card to unknown things".

It enables people to unlock new things and aspects. This metaphor emphasizes the key role AD plays as an access card functioning as the key to unlock what is getting in the way to decode and access the view.

3. Usage books

"Like usage books".

The metaphor usage book reflects the learning of the how-to concept. It effectively utilizes technological elements to convey necessary information, ensuring that readers can easily comprehend the material. When we read it, we can effortlessly understand complex systems like AVT.With this metaphor, the student means manual, a book serving as a guide and providing practical how-to instructions. The AD is perceived to be a practical guide to powerful expression.

## Value Metaphors

1. Hidden treasure

"It is just like a hidden treasure".

Generally, one does not watch movies with audio descriptions except for subtitles, so, one could not have the opportunity to understand the details of the scenes diligently. As the participants explain in the justification, one understands movies with subtitles. Diligence is needed to understand the details of the scenes. For someone who cannot understand the movie without subtitles, there is no possibility of benefiting from the audio descriptions. That is likely to be the reason for the adjective being hidden. Nonetheless, the metaphor shows the importance of the detail considering it to be a treasure. It can be inferred from the treasure part of the metaphor the audio description would help the student to improve in terms of descriptive expression if the participating student were someone able to comprehend a movie without subtitles.

2. Gold

"Audio description is gold because audio description give me precious informations like a gold".

"Audio description was no different than finding a gold mine since it provided the necessary material for my learning".

The use of gold as an economic indicator, and in many countries, a standard for monetary systems, is well-known and established. The rarity of gold makes it highly valued. Gold is a symbol in literature and art representing opulence, luxury and achievement. Corrosion-resistant, gold has an enduring appeal. Associating wealth, the gold colour is so distinctive that one can recognize it instantly. With high malleability, gold can take the shape of various forms, which not only metaphorically associate intricate patterns on dynamic high-resolution screens, it is also a key contributor to screen technology. All these qualities set the metaphor gold apart in reflecting the descriptive potential of language use through audio description. The features directly relatable to aesthetic vision quality relate to the use of gold as a safe haven for investors, especially during economic turmoil or currency fluctuations associated with a screen not showing signs of flickering. The metaphor gold or metaphors including gold are relatable to the metaphor lion. Gold, the king of metals is relatable to the metaphor lion, king of animals.

3. Wine

“Wine because over the years, I know that my homework will be a open-door and will not lose its taste”.

The value of some things does not change as time passes. Wine is commonly used as a metaphor, “*şarap gibisin*” in Turkish, to compliment on youth. The student whose metaphor was wine did it to foreground the lasting, enduring effect of using AD in the target language learning task.

4. Father

“The most father because this practical is so useful for learning English”.

The metaphor "the most father" implies that the described practical activity is extremely valuable and essential for learning English. It suggests that this particular method or tool holds a position of utmost importance, similar to the role of a father figure in a family. In Turkish, the phrase "*en baba*" is a colloquial expression that conveys superiority or excellence, which is humorously translated word-for-word into English. In essence, the metaphor underscores the significance and effectiveness of the described practical activity in facilitating English language learning.

## Creative Metaphors

1. “It is imagescribtion”.

This metaphor likens the experience of images forming in one's mind through audio description to a brand-like quality. It suggests that the vividness and clarity of the mental images generated by the audio description resemble the distinctiveness and recognition associated with a well-established brand. This metaphor highlights the effectiveness of audio description in creating vivid mental imagery, akin to the impact of a strong brand presence.

2. “It is most likely audioforeign”.

In this metaphor, the term "audioforeign" is presented as if it were a brand name, emphasizing its significance and distinctiveness. Combining "audio" and "foreign," the metaphor suggests that this tool provides audio content specifically tailored for foreign language learning. The comparison to a brand name implies that "audioforeign" is recognized and trusted for its effectiveness in providing audio resources for language

learners, similar to how consumers rely on established brands for quality products. Overall, this metaphor emphasizes the unique and valuable nature of audio resources designed for foreign language learning.

### Knowledge Production Metaphors through Direct Experience

1. Cook to Yourself

"Potential of AVT's in FLL is learning how to cook by yourself not using any books: Learning ow to book by yourself is very hard while not using any direct source".

It is possible to summarize the message the metaphor gets across by processing the audio input without any transcript facilitating it. No transcript of the listening input is available to the learner aiming to use AD for language learning purposes. It is a challenge certainly with a facilitating teacher accompanying, the learner may not suffer from these challenges of overwhelming cognitive overload.

## Discussion & Conclusion

Despite the notable increase in publications during the 1980s addressing the application of audio description (AD) in foreign language (FL) educational settings, empirical research remains limited. There is a scarcity of data supporting or refuting the efficacy of AD exercises in FL classrooms (Källkvist, 2008). Nevertheless, over the past three decades, numerous studies have highlighted the benefits of various AD modes in foreign language instruction, particularly emphasizing the use of subtitles in all their modalities (Blane, 1996; Pavesi & Perego, 2008). According to the findings of those researches, using AD improves the acquisition of vocabulary (Lertola, 2012) as well as listening ability (Caimi, 2006). Sometimes, audio describers feel compelled to explain cultural material that is hidden in the visual information or even to incorporate difficult-to-understand audio details in addition to the visual descriptions (Fryer, 2010). Due to its advantages, Audio Description (AD) serves a diverse audience, encompassing various age groups, socioeconomic statuses, and cultural backgrounds. It is particularly beneficial for individuals who find it challenging to follow the storyline (Fryer, 2016).

In this study, participants provided diverse and imaginative descriptions and explanations using metaphors, illustrating the positive aspects of learning a language

with audio description (AD). They employed positive metaphors to convey the effectiveness of language learning through AD. This examination of students' perspectives on AD in language learning settings has significantly contributed to a deeper understanding of its educational value. Using metaphors to describe the learning process and considering the complex cognitive processes involved, questionnaires that require metalinguistic and metacognitive reflection enhance learning opportunities and foster learner autonomy, as highlighted by Vermeulen and Ibáñez Moreno (2017).

Sometimes, audio describers feel compelled to explain cultural material that is hidden in the visual information or even to incorporate difficult-to-understand audio details in addition to the visual descriptions (Fryer, 2010). Because of this, as in parallel with this study results, AD is beneficial to audiences from a variety of age groups, socioeconomic levels, and cultural backgrounds, as well as "for those who feel it hard to adhere to the storyline stream" (Fryer, 2016).

As this study addresses language students to the task of AD with metaphors, a metaphor transcends mere analogy; it's not solely a tool for understanding by likening one thing to another. When articulated, it also conveys an argumentative stance or a sincere inclination towards one concept over another (Mustacchi & Krevans, 2001). For instance, underneath each metaphor articulated by the participants lies multiple layers of meaning. As the metaphor depicted an ideal learning setting within a university classroom, encompassing essential personal, social (instructor and peer), and contextual elements discerned through their reflections (Hoban, 2000). The metaphors also carry a pedagogical aspect for the students, and the instructor in this study utilized them with an awareness of this aspect, acknowledging the significance of metaphors in facilitating understanding and communication in the learning process. For example, one participant used the metaphor "Flying bat in the night" to describe navigating language learning with AD, likening it to the reliance on auditory input to grasp new language concepts. Another student described the process as exploring an "Old castle," symbolizing the complexity and richness of AD, with its many passages and secret rooms representing the depth and intricacy of learning. The metaphor "Hidden treasure" was employed to illustrate how AD unveils detailed aspects of language that might otherwise be missed, much like discovering hidden treasures.

Berliner (1990) asserts that metaphors wield significant influence, shaping our perceptions of ourselves and others. They subtly but profoundly impact our cognition, influencing the formation of our thoughts and concepts. Metaphors play a crucial role in organizing our thoughts and interpreting events. Therefore, we investigate the efficacy of metaphor as a tool for reflection, which, as Bateson (1972) highlights, is essential in the human quest for significance. That is particularly pertinent for the students. Metaphors have emerged as valuable research instruments in this study, given their extensive usage among language instructors and within language acquisition theories. Moreover, they are essential means for encouraging reflection and enhancing educators' awareness (Guerrero & Villamil, 2002). For instance, one student used the metaphor "Virtual reality goggles" to describe AD, indicating that AD allows learners to see without being physically present, much like virtual reality. Another participant described AD as "Simulation," which creates another world, offering a different and clearer perspective. Additionally, the metaphor "Thunder potential" was used to represent the energy required for expression in AD, akin to the energy needed for a thunderstorm to manifest. These metaphors not only enhance comprehension but also reflect the students' personal and emotional engagement with the learning process as a tool for this research.

The metaphors identified in this study, such as "Flying bat in the night" and "Old castle," illustrate how students conceptualize their learning experiences through vivid imagery. This supports the argument made by Lakoff and Johnson (2003) that metaphors are not merely decorative linguistic devices but are crucial to cognitive processing. Similarly, Shutova et al. (2023) emphasize the application of conceptual metaphor theory in various cognitive domains, highlighting its importance in understanding abstract concepts through metaphorical mappings. By utilizing metaphors, students can express complex ideas in relatable terms, thereby enhancing their cognitive engagement with the learning material.

Metaphors such as "Rainbow" and "Lion" reflect AD's emotional impact on learners. These metaphors convey the sense of accomplishment and empowerment that students feel through their learning experiences. Kramsch (2003) highlights the importance of metaphors in helping learners construct representations of their experiences, which can boost motivation and engagement. This emotional resonance is

crucial for sustaining interest and enthusiasm in language learning, as noted by Sfard (1998), who argues that metaphors are essential for grasping intricate ideas by relating them to familiar experiences.

By making abstract concepts tangible and relatable, metaphors significantly enhance the effectiveness of FL education. Future research should continue exploring these tools to further validate and refine their application in diverse educational settings.

## Suggestions

Based on the findings and insights from this study, several recommendations can be made to enhance the use of AD in foreign language learning:

1. Incorporate Metaphors in Teaching: Encourage the use of metaphors in language learning to help students articulate their understanding and engage more deeply with the content. Metaphors can make abstract concepts more tangible and relatable.
2. Expand Empirical Research: Conduct more empirical studies to validate the effectiveness of AD exercises in FL classrooms. This research should focus on diverse learner groups and contexts to comprehensively understand of AD's impact.
3. Develop Comprehensive AD Materials: Create AD materials tailored to different proficiency levels and learning objectives. These materials should include a variety of content, such as movies, documentaries, and educational videos, with detailed and contextually rich descriptions.
4. Training for Educators: Provide training programs for educators on the effective use of AD in language teaching. This training should cover the creation and integration of AD content, as well as strategies for using AD to enhance comprehension and engagement.
5. Foster Reflective Practices: Encourage students to engage in reflective practices by using questionnaires and discussions that prompt metalinguistic and metacognitive reflection. That can enhance their learning autonomy and deepen their understanding of the language learning process.

6. Utilize Technology: Leverage technology to make AD more accessible and interactive. Mobile apps and online platforms can provide students with easy access to AD materials and allow for more personalized learning experiences.
7. Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Foster collaboration between language educators, cognitive scientists, and technology developers to create innovative AD tools and resources. This interdisciplinary approach can enhance the quality and effectiveness of AD in language learning.
8. Continuous Feedback and Improvement: Establish mechanisms for continuous feedback from students regarding using AD. Use this feedback to refine and improve AD materials and teaching methodologies.

## Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the use of AD in foreign language learning, several limitations should be acknowledged:

1. Sample Size and Diversity: The study was conducted with a relatively small and homogenous sample of students from a single institution. Future research should include larger, more diverse samples to increase generalizability.
2. Lack of Control Group: The absence of a control group in the study design makes it difficult to attribute improvements in language learning solely to the use of AD, as other factors could also play a role.
3. Cultural Context: The cultural context in which the study was conducted may influence the findings. Future research should explore AD's impact in different cultural settings to enhance the understanding of its global applicability.

## Ethics committee permission information

Ethical approval is not necessary for the study reported in this article due to the time of data collection.

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