

Online Learning Experiences of University Students in ELT and the Effects of Online Learning on their Learning Practices

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Abstract

Online education has become an indispensable part of modern education all over the world especially in the last 20 years. One of the fields where teaching through online education has been popular and widespread is foreign language teaching. Thus, the pre-service English language teachers' online learning experiences in their departments can be significant for both their future teaching practices and teacher education in designing and implementing the online courses for students studying in English language teaching (*henceforth* ELT) departments. To this end, this study aimed at understanding ELT students' online learning experiences in online courses delivered asynchronously either as supplementary to face-to-face courses or through content that is directly delivered online independent of face-to-face courses. Apart from figuring out learners' opinions about online learning, the effects of their online learning experiences on their study practices were scrutinized throughout the study. Designed as a qualitative study, the data were collected from 41 ELT department students in a state university and analyzed qualitatively based on identifying common themes and categories. The findings of the study showed that students held both positive and negative opinions regarding online learning. Additionally, it was found that online learning contributed to students in terms of gaining e-autonomous study skills.

Keywords: English language teaching; online learning; asynchronous learning; e-autonomy

Introduction

In the last 20 years, ever-increasing technological developments have manifested themselves especially in the field of "Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), and as a result, information and communication technologies have become a part of everyday life (Sahin, 2014). In addition, new learning and teaching opportunities, known as online learning, have emerged for both the students and teachers in the education process with the combination of computer and internet thanks to the advancement of information and communication technologies (Jabeen & Thomas, 2015). Therefore, as in many fields, online learning has inevitably created profound changes by eliminating the usual learning patterns and practices in the field of foreign language learning and teaching. In the process of language learning, foreign language learners and teachers have more effective, efficient, and more permanent learning and teaching opportunities.

The spread of computers together with the use of the internet in language learning environments paved the way for designing computer programs for language learning purposes which is also known as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) (Blake, 2011; Guan, 2014). This use of computers and

the internet created various terminologies in the field of language learning such as e-learning, CALL, distance learning, web-based language learning teaching, or online learning (Gluchmanova, 2015). Despite different terms used referring to the use of computers, web sites, and internet assisting the learners in the process of language learning, online learning is one of the most commonly used terms covering all aspects of language teaching technologies. Today, the widespread popularity and availability of smart phones have also enabled the learners to reach the advantages of such learning environments out of classroom instruction which brought about a new terminology referred to as mobile learning (Godwin-Jones, 2017). Throughout this study, the term “online learning” is used to refer to any language-learning environment assisted with computers, smartphones, the internet, and other WEB 2.0 technologies.

Language learners benefitted from online learning with the rise of WEB 1.0 technology that came out as the initial step for the improvement of computer and internet-based educational activities. WEB 1.0 was initially used as a platform where one-way communication was carried out with no interaction with the user. Making use of web designs with rich use of visual aids where the content was fixed and unaltered for a certain period if not needed, the learners in WEB 1.0 passively learned the content (Asiksoy, 2018). Yet, the arise of WEB 2.0 technology enabled the users to create the content based on their experiences in learning to change their role from passive absorbers of the content to active ones (McCarroll & Curran, 2013). WEB 2.0 technologies provided users, or learners in education, to generate the content through platforms such as blogs, WIKIs, and forums (Tiryakioglu & Erzurum, 2011), but recently, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have also added new dimensions to the pace of language learning where users have the opportunity to create, share the content while interacting with each other making such platforms effective for educational purposes (Manca & Ranieri, 2016). As Luo (2013) states, due to the interactive and sharing nature of WEB 2.0 tools, language learning activities on the Web provide a significant link between these two domains.

Making use of both WEB 1.0 and WEB 2.0 technologies in language learning, online resources can be used in several forms such as a “Web-facilitated class”, a “blended” or “hybrid course, or a “fully virtual” or “online course” (Blake, 2011, p. 11). Initially, online learning was utilized as a component of the traditional education where teachers and the learners benefitted from online resources to enhance formal education; however, online learning over time has replaced the functions of traditional face-to-face education through distance learning programs (Watson, 2008). Alternatively and more commonly, blended or hybrid learning is the mix of both face-to-face conventional and online learning (Gluchmanova, 2015; Hockly, 2018). Quite recently, with the global and intense use of social media platforms and their mobile applications such as Instagram, Twitter or Facebook, and the mobile applications the pages and applications in such platforms dedicated to language learning can also be attributed as a recent type of learning environment where the users create, share the linguistic content and interact with other users in the same discourse community (Aydin, 2012; Manca & Ranieri, 2016; McCarroll & Curran, 2013; Taskiran et al., 2018).

Since English language is the lingua franca as the common language used for communication among people across the world (Crystal, 2003), the ever-increasing need for learning and teaching of English has been eased with the use of online tools and resources. In line with this, English is taught as a compulsory course in all educational institutions from primary to university education, and in meeting this growing demand, due to the various advantages provided, online learning is used as a complementary resource to support face-to-face English education or solely as a distance learning resource especially in higher education institutions (Kern, 2013). It is known that in most developed countries, universities are offering online English courses for their enrolled students and for learners to have distant language education. As Sun and Chen (2016) state, online education is used increasingly in universities across the world, as primarily in the USA, as fully online (distant) or

blended form and the triggering reasons for making use of online education in higher education institutions are providing learners time flexibility, offering university access to learners, increasing the number of available courses and finally to increase enrolments to universities. In Turkey too, the tendency to make use of online education has steadily been in increase in higher education institutions and many universities are offering compulsory English courses through distance education to their learners in addition to using online resources to support classroom teaching especially in English Preparatory schools (Kirkan & Kalelioglu, 2017; West et al., 2015).

The developments in technology and widespread availability of internet connection brought some strength particularly in the field of language learning in higher education. The uniqueness offered by online learning stemmed from its interactive, repetitive, flexible, and customizable nature (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2014; Mohammadi et al., 2011). Featuring the needs of the individual learners, online learning opportunities provided learners with flexibility in terms of time, space, and resources (Costley & Lange, 2018). Meeting the demands of the learners, the challenges due to time restrictions of the face-to-face education were cleared by enabling the learners to access and adjust the content in their own scheduled time at their convenience (Lekawael, 2017). It is true that higher education institutions also benefit from offering online education for learners for the reason that a well-established online learning system reduces the costs for resources and gives more affordable education opportunities for the learners (Sun & Chen, 2016). Studies regarding online learning yield that not only the institutions but also learners gain from online education in terms of language learning since it provides independence to the learners and to have the chance to maximize the learning opportunities among several web-based tools, computer programs or as the more trendy manner social media applications and platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Abney et al., 2018; Aydin, 2012; Brick, 2012; Chawinga, 2017; Faizi et al., 2013; Wong et al., 2017).

Although online learning is effective in the process of learning and teaching foreign languages, some significant factors are affecting this process. These factors, which are based more on learners, are the learner's attitude towards online learning, readiness, autonomy, time management, and strategy implementation. In these regards, while having online education on either the computer or smartphone, how learners remain connected to the task during a learning activity, their time management skills, how much they are distracted or what strategies they apply in order not to be distracted are considered significant for the effectiveness and efficiency of online language learning. Today, especially given the intense use of computer and mobile phones by university students, their online learning experiences are of crucial importance to understand the perceived strengths, weaknesses as well as likely effects on students' study practices. Thus, having an insight into university students' online learning experiences and their perceptions regarding online learning can give insights researchers, program designers, and developers and school authorities as well as academics into strengths and weaknesses of online courses in ELT departments in addition to their study skills. Based on this significance, this study seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. What are ELT students' opinions regarding the strengths of online learning?
2. What are ELT students' opinions regarding the weaknesses of online learning?
3. How did the online learning experiences of the participants affect their learning practices?

Method

In this qualitative study, data were collected making use of an open-ended opinion form to get the opinions of the freshman and sophomore ELT students regarding their experiences in online learning. The opinion form was constructed and delivered online to the participants. In the opinion form, a

total of five questions regarding general features, perceived strengths, weaknesses, expectations, and learning behaviors in online learning.

Participants of the study

The participants of this qualitative study were freshman and sophomore students of English language teaching department at a state university in Turkey. In these grades, 118 students have been receiving their pre-service English language teacher education courses. The participants were involved in the study voluntarily. All the students in the 1st and 2nd grade were asked to participate in the study making use of an online opinion form constructed by the researchers. Out of 118 students, 41 students responded to the opinion form with a return rate of 34.7 %. Thus, this study is limited to the participants as the respondents of the questions presented in the data collection tool.

Table 1. Participants of the study

Demographic Variables	Frequency	Percent
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	29	70.7
Male	12	29.3
<i>Age</i>		
19-20	18	43.9
21-22	20	48.7
23-24	2	4.8
25 and older	1	2.4
<i>High School Type</i>		
Anatolian High School	29	70.7
Anatolian Teacher High School	6	14.6
Vocational High School	4	9.7
Public High School	2	4.8
<i>Language Preparatory Training</i>		
Yes	22	53.7
No	19	46.3

A great majority of the participants were female with a percentage of 70.7% while nearly 30% of them were male students. Their age range changed between 19 and 22 (n=38, 92.6%) with only one participant over 25 years. When the high school type based on their graduation is analyzed, it is seen that majority of the participants (n=29, 70.7%) graduated from Anatolian high schools. These schools offer intensive language education in foreign language division classes. Thus, most of the ELT students as the participants of this study had intensive language education in their high schools. Yet, it is interesting that four participants graduated from “vocational high school” where they only vocational education with no emphasis on language education. Finally, more than half of the participant students had one-year intensive language preparatory education before receiving courses in the department. Considering that majority of them graduated from Anatolian high schools receiving language education in addition to having preparatory education at university, it is for sure these students have a past with sufficient exposure to language education.

Data collection process and analysis

In this study, data were collected from the students studying at English language teaching department of a state university in Turkey. To make students have the online education experience for their professional life in the future, a number of the contents of some departmental courses such as “Writing”, “Approaches to language teaching” and “Linguistics” are delivered online in the blended form particularly when the formal class hour is limited to deliver the content that requires extra time allocation. Thus, some of the content delivered in the online courses was complementary

to formal classes while others were independent of the formal classes. The design and delivery of the online courses were administered by the course lecturers based on weekly modules that included course materials in presentation, video, document or other audio-visual forms to engage students in learning tasks and activities, to enhance their time management skills by setting time restrictions for the assignments and to monitor their progress in online courses. Within modules, students were required to join in discussions, submit the assigned tasks, or have short exams to check their progress for the given modules. Additionally, course lecturers had the opportunity to deliver their courses in synchronous and asynchronous ways. To provide students, particularly 1st-year students, with the necessary time to have sufficient experience in online and face-to-face education in the university context, the data collection was conducted at the end of the 2019-2020 teaching year, fall period just before the final exams.

The data collected from the participants were analyzed by the researchers by coding the participants from A1 to A41 to provide participant anonymity. Then recurring categories and themes were identified by thematic analysis. Conducting a second identification from the beginning, the common themes and categories both in the initial and the second administration of the analyses were unified and the finalized. Thus, by repeating the analyses and unifying the themes and categories that recurrently appeared in both stages of the analysis, the reliability issue is increased by providing reliability among the raters.

Findings

One of the major aims of this study was to reveal ELT major students' experiences in online learning and to this end, their reported insights into various aspects of online learning as a novel practice in their learning lives were shown. In the opinion form used as a data collection tool in this study, participant students were asked whether they had previously experienced any online learning activity before the one provided in the department at university. It is seen that 95% of them had no previous online learning experience before university while only two of them had limited experience due to having English language education for the university entrance exam. Thus, their opinions in this study reveal their first experience in online learning.

Participants' opinions regarding the general features of online learning

Regarding this, throughout the study general features of online learning were presented based on participant responses. To this end, two aspects of the positive sides of online learning were identified under *efficiency* and *individualized learning* as seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Participants' opinions regarding positive aspects of online learning

	Themes & Categories	Participant codes
Positive general aspects	<i>The efficiency of online learning</i>	
	Time flexibility	S1-S4-S23-S25-S30- S37
	Comfort zone	S4-S30-S41
	Practicality	S6-S11-S14-S17-S27-S37- S40-S41
	<i>Individualized learning</i>	
	Bearing responsibility	S12-S18-S23-S41
	Self-discipline	S26-S31-S38-S39
Self-directed learning	S22-S25-S31-S32-S39	

Students' experiences in different online courses offered in the English Language Teaching department, either in hybrid form or independent of face-to-face class content as explained previously, revealed that they found it as strength of online learning providing efficiency and individualized learning. Regarding this, participants reported that online learning had positive aspects such as offering time flexibility on the part of the learners. In terms of offering time flexibility, several students reported that online learning contributed to their learning by giving them the chance to tune their timing within their own pace of living. To illustrate, S1 stated, *"One of the best sides of having online courses is that we can adjust timing by not limiting ourselves"*. In addition, supporting this view, S23 expressed that *"I find online learning beneficial because we can have our courses whenever we want. After I do my daily routines, I conduct my assignments online based on my timing."* S30 also explained, *"Because I can arrange my time as I wish, I try to find and use the best time which I feel to be the most fruitful for me."* Apart from the time efficiency of online learning which was also expressed by several other participants (S4, S37, etc.), economic efficiency was also referred to as strength by one of the participants, which accompanied the time flexibility issue. For example, S25 stated, *"I wish all our courses were online because we do not have the time restriction for anything and it is quite cheap for me, I do not need to pay for books, bus fares to go to school, etc."* At the same time, participants found studying from home or their dormitory also beneficial referring to this as "comfort zone". According to the responses gathered, it is seen that they value online learning not only for time efficiency or economic reasons but also for the comfortable learning environment out of traditional classes. One of the participants explained, *"I find online learning very effective because in my dormitory I can join the courses without thinking about how I look, what to wear, etc., I feel very relaxed."* (S30) while another participant (S4) stressed that studying from home motivating and said: *"I feel in comfort studying from home and this enables me to focus better on my courses which make me motivated"*. Similarly, S41 stated that s/he preferred online learning because it was for the convenience of the students saying, *"Students should be given to choosing some of their courses online, and this way they can study wherever they feel comfortable."* In terms of practicality, online learning was viewed positively by some participants (S11, S17, S40, etc.) due to easy access to the internet through computers and smartphones. Regarding this, S27 expressed that *"I can easily get connected to the internet everywhere and I use my mobile to log into online course platform using dormitory Wi-Fi or my mobile internet."* and two other respondents (S14 and S37) expressed that online learning enabled them to access course materials easily. Additionally, S6 had similar opinions about this issue and stated that *"...in online learning we have easy access to course notes and we have no waste of time as we do while going to school."*

The second theme regarding positive aspects of online learning a general feature was related to *individualized learning*. According to participant answers, online learning gave students the responsibility to study individually and independently. They needed to follow the content regularly that is inevitably dependent on their time management skills. They also stated that online learning required self-discipline and self-directed learning opportunities. To specify, for example, S31 explained, *"Personally, when I study our online courses, I could arrange my study conditions based on my individual needs and interests because in the class I do not like studying in groups."* S38 similarly emphasized the significance of individual effort in reaching the learning outcomes in online learning by saying that *"no matter what the content or course is, the students' efforts make the change in online learning; the more you individually search for the information, the more you learn compared to those who do not show any effort."* Regarding responsibility-taking, according to S12, due to online learning students needed to take their responsibility for their learning and become aware of the necessities mainly for assignments brought about by online learning. In addition, S41 stated, *"at school, I listen to our teachers carefully, but in online learning, I feel more responsible for my studies, because if I do not study individually, I will miss the time and fail in online courses."* In terms of the self-discipline aspect, S39 claimed that online learning gives students the necessity to keep

themselves in self-discipline that is strongly contributing to individual development. He explained this by saying *“online learning gives us the ability to take the control of our learning and to turn ourselves into disciplined students, otherwise online learning can easily turn into a failure if we do not create disciplined learning behaviors.”* Adding another aspect to the issue of self-discipline, S26 reported that online learning called for careful time management on the part of the students. S26 clarified this by stating *“a student who procrastinates everything to the last minute and has no regular study habits will surely become unsuccessful in online courses. They have to control their time carefully and study regularly.”* As a final strength of online learning, online learning was regarded positively by the students due to leading them to experience self-directed learning. Related with self-directed learning, S22 expressed that *“I can say that this is the first time in my student life that I have to learn things independently of my teachers. OK, they give directions to me but I feel alone in online courses and control my learning.”* Similarly, S39 also wrote, *“we normally feel we only learn when we are in the class or when teachers teach us. However, now I know I can learn without needing another person.”*

While respondents revealed some positive aspects regarding the general features of online learning, some negative views were also depicted as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Participants’ opinions regarding the negative aspects of online learning

	Themes & Categories	Participant codes
Negative general aspects	<i>Lack of classroom features</i>	
	The need for interaction	S5-S7-S16-S19-S30-S41
	Lack of immediate feedback	S14-S21-S27-S36
	Online distracters	S2-S9-S14-S39
	<i>Challenges of online learning</i>	
	Infrastructure and connection	S25-S33-S37-S40
	Dangers of comfort zone	S2-S33
	The complexity of online platform	S1-S23-S26

Participant opinions about online learning yielded two concerns identified as *“lack of classroom features”* where they mostly tended to compare online and traditional learning environments, or at least the need they felt in online learning, and *“challenges of online learning”* as the weaknesses arising mostly from external factors in addition to learners having no experience prior to their current education level. Many of the participants (S5, S7, S16, S19, S30, and S41) complained about online learning due to no interactive nature. To illustrate, S5 and S30 criticized online learning saying, *“There was no student-teacher, student-student interaction that they regarded as a negative factor”*. S16 stated, *“I cannot even compare the effectiveness of online courses with classroom interaction. If I wonder anything, I can ask the teacher and get the answer. We interact with teachers and our friends at school which is motivating.”* Another harsh criticism was made by S41 as *“language is an organism learned in interaction, yet in online learning, we mostly read and write without speaking and this leads us to find other solutions to interact with our friends for learning.”* Some students (S14, S21, S36) also complained about the lack of immediate feedback in the online learning environment in the context of this study. S14 explained that *“I prefer learning in the classroom because when I make a mistake, teachers can give me feedback immediately or my friends warn me; even their mimics help me if I fail but in online learning, these are not available.”* Likewise, S21 and S36 stated that they could understand the difference between the class atmosphere and online learning setting and the favored class environment because of immediate feedback they could get from the teachers. Regarding this aspect, S36 responded, *“at the weekends I study online and submit my assignments, but I prefer to ask my questions at school because in the online platform I must ask my question and wait for the teacher’s answer, but it is too late”*. In terms of online distracters, students complained that there are several online distracters while studying on the computer and mobile phone. Among

the distracters were online notifications sent by the operating system of the computer or mobile phones such as update notifications, text messages, emails, or instant calls received during the online study. Regarding this, S14 stated, *"in the class, you are not distracted but while studying online, I receive several game requests by my friends on the phone and I find myself playing online games. When I realize this, I already forget the course or what I was studying."* A similar case was explained by another participant, S39, saying that *"in online learning, I learned that I must do something not to be disturbed by phone calls or text messages and I should stick to my learning goals."*

Another major aspect regarded as a negative point of online learning by the learners came under the category of *"challenges of online learning"*. Under this title, participants complained about their struggles for keeping on the track for online courses due to a number of obstacles caused by internet connection problems or unaffordable devices for online learning such as computers or smartphones, environmental or external factors causing students to be disturbed at home or dormitory. For the challenges in terms of infrastructure and connection, participant students emphasized that online courses were costly due to necessities for having a computer/mobile phone and internet connection. Concerning this, S25 expressed that *"I normally use my friends' computer for online courses after they finish their assignments in the dormitory, but my family cannot afford to buy me a laptop, unfortunately, and I am afraid to miss my assignments."* and S37 explained that *"in the dormitory, I use the dormitory Wi-Fi, but in most cases, I have troubles in connecting to the internet, so my studies in online learning seem to fail."* As another weakness reported by some students, "comfort zone", which was reported as a strength by some participants in the above-mentioned parts, turns out to be a barrier for a number of the learners. In this respect, A33 stated that she has trouble concentrating on online courses at home due to having three siblings. Regarding this, A33 complained, *"I study at university in my hometown and I live together with my three siblings. When I study online, I cannot concentrate on my studies because I study in the same room with my siblings and they all make noises."* One another problem reported regarding studying online was, interestingly, about the "comfort" brought by the convenience offered by online learning. S2 claimed, *"I think the freedom to study whenever and wherever you want is very dangerous since this gives the way for slackness and you start to miss the courses and postpone everything."* Finally, some students criticized the online platform provided by the university for being difficult to navigate and complex. In this respect, S23 stated, *"At first the course site on the internet was very complex and I could not find where the "course materials section" was or uploading assignments were very confusing and time taking. The system should have been simpler."* S26 also made a similar comment on this issue saying *"to understand the online course platform, I sometimes have to ask my friends about the course menu to find the "discussion" section or course content section. The system is very complex, indeed!"*

When all these attributes regarding online learning are considered, it is seen that participants viewed online learning positively due to providing time and money efficiency, comfort, and practicality in addition to enhancing students' learning by giving them responsibility, self-discipline, and self-directed learning. Yet, participant reports also yielded negative aspects regarding online learning because participants held the opinion that online learning fails to appeal learners due to not having an interactive nature as in face-to-face classroom education, not receiving immediate feedback and distracters caused by external factors. At the same time, online learning needed costly infrastructure requirements, environmental factors, and complex online education systems difficult for students to use. Thus, it can be stated that online learning has both strengths and weaknesses as an alternative learning environment for traditional class learning.

The effects of online learning on participants' reported learning behaviors

The final research question posed in this study aimed at figuring out the likely effects of online learning on participants' customized learning routines. Since face-to-face education and online

education bear, certain characteristics unique to each other, participant students' experiences in online learning would force them to modify their learning behaviors since this was one of their first experiences in online learning throughout their learning lives. The participant responses revealed certain behavioral changes in terms of their learning practices (See Table 4).

Table 4. Effects of online learning on participants' study practices

	Themes & Categories	Participant codes
Changes in students' learning practices	<i>Individual learning practices</i>	
	Self-awareness	S2-S12-S37-S38
	Procrastination	S10-S20-S38
	E-Autonomy	S5-S26-S31
	<i>Fostering cooperation</i>	
	Creating interaction	S12-S25-S29
	Collaborative learning	S1-S24-S35
	Making extensive studies/researches	S11-S28-S40

One of the reported effects of online learning on students' learning behaviors came under "*individual learning practices*" title that included self-awareness, self-determination, and e-autonomy. Regarding these aspects, the participants explained that since online learning was a novel experience for them, they created an awareness of their learning that they had not realized in their previous learning processes from primary to high-school education. What was heavily emphasized by the participants (S2, S12, S37, S38) that they were dependent on a teacher for their learning which caused confusion in their early online learning attempts and they failed to continue their studies online resulting in a transition from teacher dependency to self-directed learning. S2 explained this by stating, "*online learning is favorable for a passive student in the class, but as an active student, I initially got confused and needed my teachers. I tried hard to learn individually and I can learn myself now*". Another participant (S12) responded that:

"Before this, I used to think learning could only happen in the class, but later I realized I could learn better in online courses because I feel more motivated without classroom stress. I now come from school and directly search and repeat the course content and do online assignments which I did not do before having online courses."

Another aspect in terms of the behavioral changes in participants' study practices was about procrastination and having less responsibility. Students reflected in their answers that their procrastinated courses accumulated and went out of their control to be covered fully that afterward caused them to avoid procrastination and develop timely study routines. Regarding this, S20 explained, "*I did not pay attention to the online courses at first without having their responsibilities thinking that I had lots of time, but much later I had to handle the situation by planning my online studies and studying timely every day.*" Supporting this S38 stated that "*in-school courses I used to postpone everything, but in online courses, I realized this was a great risk, so I forced myself to stick to my online learning goals; I now study based on a program every day.*" Another unique finding found in this study can be termed as e-autonomous learning, which indicates students' autonomous learning in an online learning environment setting certain goals, regulating learning, and applying some learner strategies. Additionally, this included students' strategies to avoid online distracters that interrupt their learning during online studies. Three students (S5, S26, S31) explained this issue by emphasizing the need to change their usual learning habits. To illustrate, S5 explained that "*to stick to my learning goals in online learning, I apply several strategies, and do I some things such as logging out of social media applications to avoid being disturbed.*" Likewise, S26 stated, "*I have to set goals for my online courses because they take time and I need to keep up with the assignments and necessary readings. So, I have made a plan for my online courses and adhere to this plan*". In addition, S31 explained that:

“...while I am having my courses at school I just listen to teachers and take notes; in online learning, I noticed this did not work. I came up with new strategies by stopping the videos, searching the content in different platforms, and continue studying. I also listen, summarize, reflect on the content in a written way, and do the exercises. These are the new strategies which help me in online learning.”

Apart from developing new and individual learning practices, student responses showed that they also tried to compensate for the negative sides of online learning by forming cooperation in the form of transferring traditional learning conditions into the online environment. It was already presented that students complained about lack of interaction and immediate feedback in an online learning setting, yet it came out that students found various solutions such as creating WhatsApp groups to create an interactive online learning environment. Regarding this, S12 stated, *“We created a WhatsApp group and when we study online we share and discuss everything in this group. We even call each other if someone in the group says that /she understood the subject very well”* and S25 also explained that *“sometimes I get confused in online learning in understanding certain tasks and I call my high school teachers or friends to get some advice.”* Going beyond creating an interactive online learning environment through other mass communication means, students explained that they also tried to create a class-like learning environment by studying together with their friends especially when they needed to submit tasks and assignments. In this respect, S35 explained that *“...in the dormitory, two friends of mine and I study our online courses together and help us understand the content if we have a problem.”* Likewise, S1 clarified that *“online learning helped me learn to study on my own, yet when we have assignments we come together and help each other’s assignments or tasks.”* The final effect of online learning on students’ learning routines was found to be related to leading students to make additional searches about the content either by reading extra articles or by finding additional materials on the internet. Participants complained that some of the content uploaded by the teachers was solely based on reading texts that did not appeal to audio-visual learners, so they sought for other materials such as videos, content-related visuals and conducted extra reading. Having awareness of their learner types and regulating their learning routines, S11, S28, and S40 explained this aspect from different angles. To clarify, *“some of the materials in the system are too boring and not satisfactory for me, so I search for the materials which appeal to me.”* (S11). On the other hand, S28 stated, *“thanks to online learning, when I finish my tasks, I do extensive reading on the topics that I find interesting and this makes me more motivated. In school lessons, after the course is over, I am over”*. Finally, S40 stated that:

“My teachers prefer to upload articles mostly, but when I do not listen to or watch someone explaining the content, I feel stressed and unable to learn. In this case, I first find videos of the same content on YouTube, watch it, take notes, summary the content, and finally read the articles in the system.”

When overall, the findings indicate that online learning, as a novel experience for a great majority of the participant students, influenced their study habits by creating an awareness of their learning styles that appear to have been realized in comparison with traditional face-to-face education learning practices. In addition, students’ procrastination habits in online learning brought risks necessitating them to regulate their learning practices to avoid procrastinating behaviors. Also, students needed to apply autonomous learning behaviors for online courses which are called e-autonomy and it is reported that they came up with a number of e-autonomous learning practices to set themselves independent of teachers as they do in the classroom environment by taking the responsibility of online learning. Participants also developed collaborative learning routines to eliminate the perceived gaps they found in online learning. Among such collaborative new learning practices to succeed in online learning were the initiation of WhatsApp groups for interaction, helping each other in online learning and making additional and self-directed learning activities such

as making an extensive research on a given topic or finding extra learning materials that they find appropriate to their learning styles.

Discussion and Conclusions

Set out to investigate the ELT students' online learning experiences which they were exposed to in two basic ways; initially, as complementary courses to support their face-to-face ELT major courses in which the teachers uploaded extra learning materials for some courses, and secondly as totally new content uploaded in online learning system which students were not taught in the class and were responsible from for their success in the exams. We believe this study to be significant due to a number of factors. Initially, as Tamayo-Maggi and Cajas-Quishpe (2020) point out, online language instruction proved to be valuable in the university context and according to Duncan & Barnett (2009), online learning has been established as an important alternative system from primary to higher education. Thus, we can say their exposure to online learning in their pre-service language teacher education process is important and their experiences in online courses may give an insight into their perceived strengths and weaknesses on the part of teacher educators in the field of English language teaching so that they can adopt new practices in online courses or make adjustments in the course design and online course components. Also, online language teaching and learning has a long history compared to other fields of education (Wang & Sun, 2001). In this respect, understanding students' online learning experiences as the future implementers of online language teaching to the students is significant because their online learning experiences may shape their prospective online teaching practices. As Trowler (2020) acknowledges, teachers' future teaching practices are conditioned by the current practices that they experience or become exposed to.

This study showed that although online learning is widespread and popular especially in the field of language education, almost all the participants experienced it for the first time in their educational lives. This is significant because in pre-service English language teacher education in Turkey, there is no a course which aims at equipping learners with the necessary pedagogical skills for online language teaching (Yaman, 2018) although it is very likely that they will have to perform online language teaching in their profession in the future. If students are not exposed to online courses, they have the probability of graduation with insufficient knowledge in designing and implementing online English courses. Online learning will be dominant in the field of language teaching in the future; thus, courses which aim at designing and implementing online language teaching where students will have the necessary skills to design and implement online teaching with the appropriate methodology addressing various learner needs to be based on the content of teaching should be included in English language teacher education programs in Turkey.

When the students' evaluations of the online courses that were presented asynchronously are considered, they held both positive and negative opinions based on their online learning experiences. In terms of positive aspects of online learning, students viewed online learning as positive due to providing time and economic flexibility, comfort, and practicality to the learners. These findings were common to most studies conducted about online learning (Kemp & Grieve, 2014; Salamat et al., 2018; Sun & Chen, 2016; Young, 2006). Thus, it is possible to that online learning is learner-friendly in that unlike traditional learning scheduling and rigidity, online learning provides flexibility to learners, increase efficiency in term of comfort zone, and practicality. At the same time, findings showed that online learning provided positive aspects because of giving learners responsibility, self-discipline, and self-directed learning opportunities in their learning. As a life-long skill, self-directed learning that online learning bears in its nature enables learners to pursue their learning goals based on their interests by managing their learning and taking responsibility (Foo & Hussain, 2010). Thus, online learning promotes self-directed learning on the part of the learners making them independent in their learning process (Salamat et al., 2018).

Apart from having positive aspects, findings showed that online learning also had some negative aspects. The lack of interaction was among the reported deficiencies existing in online learning. The students' evaluations of their online learning experiences in this study were based on the asynchronous online system where the course lecturers uploaded course content as mentioned previously. This can be counted among the limitations of this study because interaction can be provided in synchronous online courses where students and teachers meet each other in online platforms. Findings in this study showed that online learning showed some weaknesses due to limited or no interaction, lack of immediate feedback, or delayed feedback and online distracters. The aspects of lack of interaction and delayed feedback in asynchronous online learning were also reported in other studies in the literature (Berge, 2013; Gillett-Swan, 2017; Muilenburg & Berge, 2005; Yuce, 2019), yet the issue of online distracters where students are disturbed during the online study has been brought into literature in this study. Students mostly log into online learning platforms through their mobile phones. Particularly, in smartphones users are exposed to frequent notifications sent by social media applications. In a study conducted on notification frequency, it came out that users received 63.5 notifications every day in the form of messages, e-mails, and social media updates (Pielot et al., 2014). In addition, the same case is true for computers, and users receive several notifications online. Thus, this study shows that online distracters create a big challenge for learners while trying to focus on online studies since they cannot concentrate fully on their learning. Other barriers such as infrastructure and connection problems, environmental factors, and complex online learning platforms were among the findings of this study. In spite of being quite few, a number of participants reported that they could not afford to buy a computer for online studies. They also complained about internet connection problems where they stayed either at home or in the dormitory. At the same time, external factors such as places that are not appropriate for the students to conduct their online studies, due to noise or having more than one person at the same time, caused problems in students' online learning. As Santrock and Halonen (2010) inform, for online learning to be effective, learners are advised to design their learning places appropriate for themselves.

The findings regarding general aspects of online learning were common to most studies, yet the effects of students' online learning experiences on their study practices were not addressed in the related literature. Although not posed as a research question and not presented in the findings of this study, students were asked to express their preferences between face-to-face and online learning. The responses showed that students valued face-to-face education since they were dependent on teachers; thus, most complained about the individualized and autonomous learning nature of online learning. However, regarding the effect of online learning experiences on students' usual study practices and routines, findings showed that online learning experiences of the students contributed positively to their learning practices by making them gain awareness about their learning and they had to change a number of their long-term deposited teacher dependent learning routines. Driving learners to form self-directed and individualized learning practices, online learning seems to have given them choice to identify, set their personal online learning goals and seek ways to manage their learning that we call as e-autonomous learning practices. Online learning was risky for those who did not take their learning responsibilities since it required more self-disciplined learning practices on the part of the learners compared to face-to-face learning (Santrock & Halonen, 2010) and to succeed in online courses, students need to develop e-autonomous learning practices since, in online learning, the progress is dependent on learners' conscious and controlled efforts. As a unique conclusion of this study, it seems obvious that students' gaining e-autonomy in their online studies led them to diagnose their most effective learning materials based on their learner styles and interests and to evaluate their learning outcomes.

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