

Gaziantep University Journal of Educational Sciences

Gaziantep Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi

e-ISSN: 2667-5145

A Case Study of University EFL Preparatory Class Students' Attitudes towards Online Learning during Covid-19 in Turkey

Türkiye'de Covid-19 Sırasında Üniversite İngilizce Hazırlık Sınıfı Öğrencilerinin Çevrimiçi Öğrenmeye Yönelik Tutumlarına İlişkin Vaka İncelemesi

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Makale Bilgi/Article Info

Tarihçe/History:
Received/Alındı
30/09/2020
Revised/Düzeltildi
25/11/2020
Accepted/Kabul edildi
28/12/2020

ABSTRACT

By virtue of advancements in online technology, distance learning has been long discussed. There is an increasing emphasis upon online education, which ideally needs seems to affect both the teachers' pedagogical knowledge and the awareness learners have about their responsibilities and roles while learning course content online. Although near future education has been pictured with more online involvement by many, nobody was expecting such a sudden shift like the lockdown in 2020, throughout which nearly all stakeholders of education on a global scale were forced to adapt all that we know about teaching and learning to online mediums due to the indescribable Covid-19 pandemic. Within almost a week, most educational institutions worldwide had to switch to online education. It was a painful process not only for the administrators and teachers but also for the students. The main purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes and feelings of English preparatory class students in Gaziantep University towards the shift to online education. The analysis of the results from the journals and interviews revealed that students preferred traditional learning to online learning. The findings are hoped to shed light on the future of online learning.

Keywords

Online learning, students'
attitudes, Covid-19.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Çevrimiçi öğrenme, öğrencilerin
tutumları, Covid-19.

ÖZ

Çevrimiçi teknolojideki gelişmelere istinaden, uzaktan eğitim uzun süredir tartışılmaktadır. Çevrimiçi eğitime öğretmenlerin aldıkları eğitim ve öğrencilerin çevrimiçi kurs içeriğini öğrenirken sorumlulukları ve rolleri hakkında sahip oldukları farkındalıkları açısından artan bir vurgu vardır. Yakın gelecekteki eğitim birçok kişi tarafından daha fazla çevrimiçi katılımı resmedilmiş olsa da hiç kimse 2020'deki eve kapanma gibi ani bir değişim beklemiyordu; bu süre zarfında eğitimin neredeyse tüm paydaşları, eğitim ve öğretim hakkında bildiklerini Covid-19 pandemisi nedeniyle çevrimiçi ortamlara uyarlamak zorunda kaldılar. Neredeyse bir hafta içinde dünya genelindeki çoğu eğitim kurumu çevrimiçi eğitime geçmek zorunda kaldı. Bu, sadece yöneticiler ve öğretmenler için değil öğrenciler için de sancılı bir süreç oldu. Bu çalışmanın

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temel amacı, Gaziantep Üniversitesi İngilizce hazırlık sınıfı öğrencilerinin çevrimiçi eğitime geçişe yönelik tutum ve duygularını incelemektir. Öğrenci günlükleri ve röportajlarından elde edilen sonuçların analizi, öğrencilerin geleneksel öğrenmeyi çevrimiçi öğrenmeye tercih ettiklerini ortaya koymuştur. Bulguların çevrimiçi öğrenmenin geleceğine ışık tutması umulmaktadır.

Cite as: Evisen, N., Akyılmaz, O. & Torun, Y. (2020). A Case Study of University EFL Preparatory Class Students' Attitudes towards Online Learning during Covid-19 in Turkey. *Gaziantep University Journal of Educational Sciences*, 4(1), 73-93.

Introduction

Although it has been described as being in its infancy in a lot of research articles, such as Diaz and Entonado (2009), Kim and Shih (2003), Shahsavar, Tan and Aryadoust (2010), Tina (2010), and although some researchers such as Bates (2005), Betchoo (2017), and Guri-Rosenblit (2005) draw our attention to the difference between distance learning and e-learning, online learning seems to have come a long way. Looking back at when all the first seeds of the concept of distance learning were planted, it is a big surprise to see that it was initiated in the USA in the year 1728 by Caleb Philipps, an entrepreneur who offered to teach shorthand lessons via a newspaper to people interested (Holmberg, 2005). Simpson and Anderson (2012) order the development and growth of the concept of distance learning as first generation, second generation and subsequent generations. The first generation carried out learning from a distance mainly by correspondence, whereas the second generation refers to education through broadcasting. In this respect, the Turkish context could be lucky for it started its Open Education University in 1982 via television broadcasting and pioneered the Turkish distance learning system (Açıköğretim sistemi, n.d). The first two generations of distance learning were directed by the teacher, and there was little or no interaction at all, which led Moore (1989) to come up with the idea of another generation. Nipper (1989) then came with his idea of asynchronous computer conferencing. However, Taylor (2001) thought that distance education should be in the synchronous form of computer conferencing.

Whether asynchronous or synchronous, one cannot deny that online learning has become an indispensable part of our lives due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Nearly everybody was forced to go back home and stay in for an uncertain period of time. The administrators, teachers and students of the well-known traditional schools and face-to-face classrooms have become online administrators, online teachers and online students with one finger snap. Easy to describe but hard to experience, becoming a distant administrator, teacher and student will long have its impacts on all stakeholders, but revisiting the starting point of limitless and continuous learning for students all over the world and everybody else, the pain in our hearts seems to diminish. Not showing much of a similarity with nearly any other pandemic in history, the shutdown has brought about an enormous release of online lessons on a global scale. There are various dimensions to examine the phenomenon, but in order to try to describe the case in breadth, we decided to look at the effects of the Covid-19 outbreak and moving online on tertiary level students.

Literature Review

The literature is teeming with numerous definitions of distance education, the most famous of which seems to be the one put forward by Keegan (1995). To elaborate, Keegan (1995) asserts that distance education or online education is a form of education in which the student does not have to

bother going to “a fixed place, at a fixed time, to meet a fixed person, in order to be trained” (pg. 7). Reju (2016) defines online learning as “learning that is partly or entirely done on the Internet” (p.17). Similarly, Bates (2005) states that online learning is a kind of learning by making use of the Internet. Allen and Seaman (2007) use a more specific definition and assert that online learning refers to courses in which at least 80 percent of the course content is delivered online. According to Harasim, Hiltz, Teles, and Turoff (1995) online education means any class that offers its entire curriculum in the online course delivery mode. Online education provides students with the opportunity to learn no matter where they live, and what time of day, month or year it is (Harasim, Hiltz, Teles, &Turoff, 1995).

The literature holds some studies that list the factors that affect students’ attitudes towards online learning. To begin with, while Nwankwo (2015) stated that students’ characteristics are important when measuring their attitude; Galusha (1998), and Pena-Shaff, Altman and Stephenson (2005) added that motivation is equally important. Gefen, Karahanna, and Straub (2003), Hixon, Barczyk, Ralston-Berg, and Buckenmeyer (2016), Song, Singleton, Hill and Koh (2004), and Wang, Shannon, and Ross (2013) mentioned that previous experiences with online learning and learning in collaboration have an immense effect on students’ perceptions about online learning. Besides, Boeglin and Campbell (2002) made another contribution by stating that students’ level of cognitive maturity also plays an important role in their attitudes and perceptions about online learning. Similarly, Annetta, Murray, Laird, Bohr, and Park (2008) stated that students of the present era start school with completely different mindsets when compared to students of the previous generations. This could be commented on further as students being accustomed to virtual spaces and learning styles as was also put forward by Dabbagh (2007).

Some research contains the factors that prevent students from getting the best online learning experience. Galusha (1998), for example, pointed out that the cost, the feedback and teacher contact that the students receive or fail to receive; student support and services, alienation and isolation, lack of experience and training are among the other barriers that intervene while students are trying to learn online. In a similar fashion, Muilenburg and Berge (2005) listed students’ barriers to online learning as administrative/instructor issues, social interactions, academic skills, technical skills, learner motivation, time and support for studies, cost and access to the Internet and technical problems, respectively; however, they elaborated on social interaction, administrative/ instructor issues, learner motivation and time and support for studies. What they found was that students with previous online learning experiences had more positive attitudes towards any online class and would most probably want to take more online lessons in the future, whereas students with little or no previous distance education background scored the highest when asked about their concerns and/or reservations related with the concept. On a similar note, Ku and Lohr (2003) investigated students’ attitudes towards online learning via Chinese post-graduate students in an American university context. The participants were reported to have enjoyed the online experience, and that their attitudes were positive as to creating an online community, but it should also be added that they were not very sure about taking that specific online course again.

McBrien, Cheng, and Jones (2009) explored the case with online learning in higher education as well. They carried out a study with 62 students in order to find out their attitude towards their synchronous online learning experience especially with reference to learner structure and learner autonomy, the components of Moore’s (1993) theory of transactional distance, which implies that owing

to the decision that the teacher/instructor makes while teaching, there will be some specific consequences as to the structure of learning, interaction and learner autonomy. McBrien, Cheng, and Jones (2009) came to the conclusion that students in general enjoyed their online learning experience, but they missed the non-verbal signs of their teacher they would normally make use of in the traditional classroom. Students in that study commented on the structure of the course mainly in a disappointed manner, which means that online classes should be planned cautiously. As for learner autonomy, findings of the study display that while some students gained self-esteem and self-confidence, still a remarkable number of students felt insecure due to the technical difficulties they faced and the bombarding materials put stress on some students.

Cabi and Kalelioglu (2019) examined the attitudes of university students in a Turkish university context in 2019 in which they had a pre-test, post-test and open-ended questions as data collection tools. They had a study group and taught them computer literacy via distance education and they found that students' attitudes had changed positively at the end of the study; namely, students' computer and Internet self-efficacy and self-directed learning skills were shown to have increased throughout the study. Okwumabua, Walker, Hu, and Watson (2011) carried out a study in order to figure out the attitudes of African-American students toward online learning and tutoring experiences. Although students were between the ages of 7-16, it is a remarkable study in that it is one of the few studies that looked into the case from a racial/ethnic background. They concluded that those students generally had lower levels of anxiety related to the computer, but students added that they felt frustrated when it was time to carry out learning online. The researchers attributed this fear of online classes to students' being not familiar to such an experience before. Similarly, Paris (2004) scrutinized the affective, behavioral and cognitive attitudes of secondary school students. He investigated what 10th year students from a low socio-economic high school in Australia felt and thought of online web assisted learning. Paris (2004) found that both female and male students loved the experience on the whole; especially the diversity of the kinds of materials provided during online classes made them more appealing for students. Paris (2004) also mentioned that students preferred going online at school.

Mupinga, Nora, and Yaw (2006) investigated the learning styles along with the expectations and needs of industrial education college students in the United States of America, stating that the first component had generally been left out in studies. Although they came to the conclusion that it is hard to state which learning styles serve better for the purpose of success in online learning, they highly recommended that various learning styles be taken into consideration while planning further online classes. They especially highlighted the importance of finding out what online students need, expect and find comfortable prior to implementing an online course. By the same token, Lim and Kim (2003) carried out a study with 77 undergraduate students in the United States of America and found that gender, online learning motivation, instructional strategies designed to meet students' needs were respectively important factors when measuring students' perception about their online learning experiences.

Mupinga (2005) added that not all students could make good online students as not all of them would possess the technical skills required. Richardson and Swan (2003) postulated that students' perception of social presence be never ignored when devising an online course as it has a connection with students' learning styles. It could be commented that being physically in the same room with the teacher and classmates is an indispensable requirement for the majority of students. Mupinga (2005)

also added that there was a strong connection between students' perceived social presence and their satisfaction with their instructors; namely, those who appreciated their instructors' lesson delivery also had higher ratings for social presence. The study also concluded that the higher the amount of social presence the students sensed, the higher their perceived level of online learning was. In another study, Suanpang, Petocz, and Kalceff (2004) tried to determine college students' attitude towards online learning in a statistics course in Bangkok, Thailand. They found that although students' perceptions towards online learning were not very promising initially, after being immersed in the program and feeling they could show some mastery of the content of the online lesson they received over time, students' attitude had significantly improved at the end of the study.

Methodology

In order to find out the attitudes and beliefs of the students during the mass transition to online learning and to get a general understanding about the incident, a qualitative descriptive research design was preferred. Moreover, since the researchers did not have any prior commitments to the phenomenon in question (Lambert, & Lambert, 2012), the qualitative descriptive research design seemed to be the most suitable methodology for the current study.

Purpose

Despite the fact that there have been numerous studies available about students' perceptions and the factors that affect their attitudes as regards online learning, there have not been many studies available as to the mass migration to online learning during a global crisis, and in this specific case, during a pandemic. Thus, the researchers set out to find answers to the following research questions if possible:

1. How do students perceive online learning?
2. What kind of advantages, if any, did the students experience with online learning?
3. What kind of disadvantages, if any, did the students experience with online learning?
4. Would the students want to continue their university education online under normal circumstances after Covid-19?
5. Do the students think online education is convenient for learning a language?

Research Context and Participants

The study took place between March and May, 2020 in an English Preparatory year program of a state university in Turkey. The university has a 100% English medium of instruction for the faculties of engineering, architecture, aeronautics, medicine, and for the programs of English Language and Literature, English Language Teaching, and Sociology. The participants were selected on a voluntary basis.

Table 1. The Participants of the Study

Participants	Age	Department
Mert	19	Electrical Engineering
Rümeysa	18	Electrical Engineering
Ayhan	22	Mechanical Engineering
Berfin	19	Sociology
Derin	20	Architecture
Meriç	20	Mechanical Engineering

Data Collection

Data for the present study were collected using the following tools:

- **Students' Journals about Online Learning during Covid-19**

Six students were chosen randomly and asked to keep journals for two weeks at the very beginning of the study. They were not limited in any way; the researchers told the students to feel free and write as they wish.

- **Interview with Students about their Overall Opinions as regards Online Learning**

The same six students were invited for interviews while the online term was about to finish. The interviews were conducted via Zoom meetings at the end of the online module just before the final exam. Each of the interviews lasted between 5-8 minutes.

Data Analysis

The journals were sent by the students via e-mail to two of the researchers who started coding the data. As for the interviews, they were first transcribed, and then in-depth content analysis was applied following the steps of content analysis (Creswell, 2012). The researchers first coded the journals and interviews separately, and after their first coding was complete, they met and compared the codes that emerged for each participant. The codes that both researchers agreed on were merged, and the third researcher evaluated that file for a final coding.

To ensure reliability and consistency, the third researcher was given clean copies of the journals and interviews. After the third researcher's coding was completed, the three researchers formed the final version of the codes and themes that emerged from the data tools. The themes categories that emerged from the journals were accustomation, sadness/ worry, disadvantages of online learning, appreciation, longing, advantages of online learning, and fear, respectively. Along with students' preferences for future online learning, the categories that emerged from the interviews were the disadvantages of online learning, and the advantages of online learning. Finally, students' descriptions as regards what online learning resembles were categorized separately.

The study was inductive in nature as the researchers did not have any theories to be proven when they started. As they received started analyzing the data, they tried to attach meaning to what had been written and uttered about online learning by the students.

Students' Journals

The journals that the students kept for the first two weeks of their online learning experiences were analyzed using content analysis. The steps described by Creswell (2012) were followed and the following categories and themes emerged:

Table 2. Online Learning- Emerging Categories and Themes from Students' Journals

Category	Total	Code
Accustomation	f:59	getting used to the process (27)
	%:35,54	expectations (13)
		hopes (16)
		failed expectations (3)
Sadness/ Worry	f:47	increase in the number of Covid-19 cases (8)
	%:28,31	psychological situation (25)
		worries about the future (14)
Disadvantages of Online Learning	f:22	technical problems (18)
	%:13,25	classroom management problems (4)
Appreciation	f:13	appreciating teacher's efforts (10)
	%7,83	appreciating updated school regulations (3)
Longing	f:12	missing school (10)
	%7,22	missing socializing in daily life (2)
Advantages of Online Learning	f:7	time-saving (1)
	%4,21	asynchronous learning opportunity (1)
		interaction with the teacher (1)
		differentiated instruction (1)
		feeling of comfort (1)
		effective lesson delivery (1)
		change in routine (1)
Fear	f:6	system-based fears (3)
	%:3,61	Covid-19- based fears (3)

With a percentage of 35,54%, **Accustomation** was the most popular category. Students mentioned 27 times that they were getting used to the process. In this same category, students also mentioned some of their expectations, hopes and failed expectations, respectively:

Our online lesson for today is over. It is not as efficient as face-to-face education, but in a period like this, they have some good features so as not to hinder education. (Meriç)

There was not a big problem for the first time in four consecutive days, and today we studied very comfortably. While listening to the video, there was no serious issues except the freezing of the connection. We did not even understand how time passed. We are progressing much faster in a short time. (Berfin)

Online education is going well. I think I will learn English very well because I know the teacher and the friends. (Mert)

As can be seen from the extracts of students' journals, although the students were initially worried, they got used to the idea of online learning over time. The initial disappointment mostly caused by technical problems was replaced by more satisfying experiences as the process went smoothly. It should be kept in mind that these journals were taken at the very beginning of the period of transition to online learning and there were so many unexpected technical problems and inadequacies that were solved day by day by the authorities' and lecturers' efforts.

The second most popular category emerging from students' journals about online learning was **Sadness/ Worry** with a percentage of 28,31%. It could easily be seen that students were negatively affected by Covid-19 and were mostly worried about their families:

It was the second day of the online course. We decided to have the lesson between 5 and 7 o'clock with our teacher. There were some problems again. I didn't like the online lesson because it was difficult these days. I was trying to get used to. The number of corona virus cases was increasing. This situation was very sad. (Berfin)

I guess there will be some precautions soon. I think there must be. I do not know anything about my future. (Rümeysa)

The number of corona viruses has exceeded 30 thousand. A virus that spreads faster than we expected. All I wonder is why do people who rebel against the call to stay at home endanger our lives. It sounds ridiculous. The ban was also coming for us. People under age 20 were not going to be able to go out. I think it was a good practice. I didn't want to be a carrier. Our lesson was going well, but our mind was of course on those who died in the epidemic. This situation upsets us a lot. (Berfin)

Undoubtedly, the specialty of this case appears on the moods of the students substantially. Surrounded with the negativity by the Covid-19 news from our country and all over the world together with social isolation caused by the lockdown showed up as a psychological barrier to learning and weakened their motivation and interest towards online lessons. Uprising worries, thoughts and sadness downgraded the educational pursues and goals in those delicate and unique circumstances.

The category of the **Disadvantages of Online Learning** (13,25%), the third most popular category, was articulated remarkably less than the first two categories.

I had problems in getting connected today. I think due to the number of students who try to log-in concurrently. There was a 20-minute delay and the problem of freezing has started to be repetitive. (Rümeysa)

I could not log in today. I was anticipating it somehow. (Derin)

I was expecting that there would be problems with online education in countries like Turkey, where the Internet infrastructure is not very strong, and as I had just expected, it turned out to be true. Some friends don't have Internet access, some have a kind of slow connection. There are problems even when we have fast connection but the teacher does not have an equal connection. (Meriç)

Students generally mentioned log-in problems and picture freezing kind of errors. Besides, not having Internet access is seen as another disadvantage of online learning for some students. This inequality of opportunities in terms of Internet access or quality of connection worries some students.

In the fourth category, **Appreciation** (7,83%), it can be seen that the students generally appreciated their teachers' effort for the online lessons and the efforts that the school administration had made for them as regards grading and assessment.

Most of us think that our online classes are much better than out face-to-face classes, but that is so thanks to our teacher. (Derin)

Today I wanted to write about the School of Foreign Languages. The education they provide is superb, their teachers, especially H. and E., are highly qualified. (Meriç)

Online education has finally become compulsory in the majority of universities, but Gaziantep University had already started distance education. By the way, the system was much better today. Our lesson was going to start at 3 p.m. (Ayhan)

Assigning homework is much more logical than online testing. (Derin)

We have writing and speaking assignments this week. I think these assignments are great to keep us engaged. (Rümeysa)

The journal entries as regards the category of appreciation can also be interpreted as the students being aware of the difficulties of such a sudden switch to an online mode, and they feel grateful witnessing the efforts of all the shareholders (lecturers, managers, distance education centre staff, rectorate) to avoid any kind of interruption to their educational life.

The fifth category that emerged was **Longing**, with a percentage of 7,22%. It could be seen that students were not only missing their school and classroom but also socializing with their friends either in their hometown or in the city of their school.

But there have been days when I said to myself "I wish I had school," because I missed my friends and being at school. (Berfin)

Playing games at home, not worrying about having a school or work, just learning subjects from home and just having 2 hours of classes a day seemed amazing at first, but with each passing day, I come to realize the value of school. (Mert)

Today we violated the quarantine and my sister visited us. We tried to keep our social distance, but it would be weird not to hug my sister. It was a strange social gathering. (Mert)

With the severe change not only in the form of education but also in the habits, socialization, and routines, students found themselves totally in different images and situations that made them question their expectations and feelings at that time. In addition, they realized how they missed all the things they found ordinary before.

The next category that emerged from our students' journals was **Advantages of Online Learning** (4,21%).

It's becoming better, I can say. I'm learning the tricks of the system and English. Now we don't have many lessons, but we still learn, so that's good. (Berfin)

Distance education has many benefits. One of them and actually the most important one is that we interact with our teacher. (Derin)

I have a lot of free time. I like it. Plus, I can watch the lesson again. That is very good! (Meriç)

It could be said that the students generally found online learning time-saving and learner-friendly as it was providing them with the chance to re-watch the recording of the lesson, providing them with lots of other opportunities such as interaction, differentiated instruction, comfort, effective lesson delivery and a change in their daily cycle.

The last category that emerged from students' journals was **Fear** with a percentage of 3,61%. It could be seen that students had two kinds of fears: system-based fears and Covid-19 based fears.

There was fear of getting used to this system. I had a hard time logging into the first system. Our lesson started around 1 a.m., but I could not hear the teacher too much because the system was intense. There was a problem as many people attended online classes. (Berfin)

When I first learnt about it, I was not very nervous, but the sudden 3 weeks' vacation made me very nervous because I wasn't expecting it. (Rümeysa)

Maybe Corona-virus has brought me the life I have always wanted, but I hope it won't take my beloved ones from me. (Mert)

Along with their fear of the possibility of not being able to attend the online lesson and therefore missing important course content, our students were also scared of picking up the corona virus themselves. The thought of the death of their beloved ones due to the epidemic was one other source of fear for them.

Interviews

To get a deeper understanding of how our students felt towards online learning, the participants were further interviewed online, and the interviews were recorded.

The researchers asked the students whether they liked their online learning experience, whether they would like to try online learning again, if online learning was suitable for language learning, and the disadvantages and advantages, if any, of online learning for them. As a final request, the researchers asked the students to describe their online learning experience using metaphors.

Table 3. Online Learning- Emerging Categories and Themes from Student Interviews

Category	Total	Code
Disadvantages of Online Learning	f:22 %:36,06	-lack of interaction (8) -speed of lesson traffic (4) -technical problems (3) -lack of motivation (2) -time management problems (1) -financial difficulties (1) -domestic factors (1) -monotony of materials (1) -teacher's new responsibilities (1)
Advantages of Online Learning	f:18 %:29,50	-comfort (5) -time-saving (4) -economic (3) -being together with family (2) -health (2) -fostering autonomous learning (2)

Convenience of	f:11	-good for interaction (2)
Online Learning:	#:18,03	-suitable for writing skills (2)
LL?		-ideal for grammar and vocabulary (2)
		-free -time providing (2)
		-good for speaking skills (1)
		-similar to face-to-face learning (1)
		-timing problems with feedback (1)
Future	f:10	-suitable for theoretical lessons (2)
Willingness	#:16,39	-isolation (1)
towards Online		-end of socializing (1)
Learning		-change in order/ routine (1)
		-ignoring multiple learning styles (1)
		-unfamiliar method (1)
		-not matching personality (1)
		-not suitable for applied courses (1)
		-budget-friendly (1)

To start with, when our students were asked about whether they liked the online learning experience, only one of the six interviewees said that he enjoyed it; the remaining five students stated that they did not like online learning.

Among the responses that were coded, the most popular category for our students was the **Disadvantages of Online Learning** (36,06%) throughout the interview. According to our students, online lessons had some disadvantages as to be seen in the following excerpts:

Sometimes there is noise in the house. I can't prevent it. But at school, there isn't such a noise.
(Derin)

The lessons are a bit too fast. I have difficulty in keeping up with the teacher. I ask a question, but the teacher may not see or hear it. (Ayhan)

Sometimes we have difficulty in managing our time. We delay our schoolwork in online classes.
(Meriç)

In general, it can be said that the lack of interaction is a big issue for our students since they were not accustomed to such kind of learning before. In addition, they thought that the pacing of the online classes was a bit too speedy for them. The students also believed that the technical problems they face, their being unable to manage their time efficiently, their extra responsibilities at home were among the distractors of online learning. The monotony of the materials they covered was another concern for our students. They wanted more attractive materials and activities as is obvious. There was also the financial aspect of the situation, such as some students' families not having enough income to afford a reliable Internet access and/or computer or smartphone for their children. Finally, our students mentioned their teachers' changing role and responsibilities as another disadvantage of online learning.

The second most popular category was the **Advantages of Online Learning** (29,50%).

I don't waste time on the bus. It is relieving not to rush to school. (Mert)

I am together with my family. They look after me very well. I am healthy, and I think that is very important. (Rümeysa)

I can manage my time. I can learn whenever I want. That is very good. At school, there is always a fixed timetable, but here I can do more things after the classes. (Berfin)

It is comfortable. You learn at home. It is also safe. (Derin)

When the students were asked about the advantages they experienced, they mentioned the time-saving aspect of online learning, which was due to not having to leave their homes and not commuting to school. They also stated that they were together with their families and nurtured by them. To some students, online learning was also budget-friendly as the only thing they needed was a computer and Internet access. There was also the advantage for students with some chronic diseases as they did not have to leave their homes to attend the traditional face-to-face classes. Finally, online classes provided autonomous learning opportunities for our students, which made them feel more relaxed and confident.

Convenience of Online Learning for Language Learning was the third most popular category with a percentage of 18,03% as can be seen in Table 3. The students were asked about their perspectives on whether online learning was suitable for language learning or not. A close examination of the responses shows that the majority of the students believed that online learning was good for learning a language:

Yes, I think language can be learned with online education because learning a language mostly involves speaking. It is appropriate if the education given is sufficient and good. (Rümeysa)

Partly yes, because the school environment is better. You know, there is interaction there. (Ayhan)

I think online education is not an obstacle, of course we can learn a language via online courses. Online education is a bit like face-to-face learning. (Berfin)

I do not think it is very suitable for speaking and writing. Since the course duration is short, speaking and writing cannot be done sufficiently. But the remaining time is very advantageous for the student to improve himself. For grammar and vocabulary online learning is good. (Derin)

It is not suitable as a first option, but may be useful if online training is used so as to support face-to-face training. (Meriç)

Any lesson through which the student cannot ask the question they have in mind is not efficient. For example, I write something, and I can't ask my teacher "is this correct?" (Mert)

To elaborate further, the most striking result to be seen in the negative responses to the question whether online education is beneficial for the teaching and learning of languages is that almost all the students think it is not fully sufficient for the acquirement of speaking and writing skills, but it is effective for grammar and vocabulary. The students are mostly worried about how to improve their speaking skills without face-to-face interaction, and about how to become better writers without instant feedback. However, they are satisfied enough with learning grammar, reading and vocabulary online.

The next category was **Future Willingness towards Online Learning** (16,39%). Here, the students were asked whether they would like to continue their education in the online mode. To be seen in the following extracts, the majority of the students expressed their dislike about online learning in the future:

Yes, I think several courses can be online. Theoretical lessons can be online. It is also good financially. (Mert)

I do not want to take it because the online education process is an inefficient process for me due to connection problems and the decrease in the number of courses. (Rümeysa)

No, because the efficiency inevitably decreases, the activity... is not as effective as face-to-face training. (Berfin)

No, because it is not efficient. I don't want any online education at all. (Derin)

No, I do not want to continue with online learning. I think socializing is better, making eye contact with the teachers, and talking face to face is better. I want it to be face to face. And lessons are even more efficient in face-to-face education. (Meriç)

No, because the face-to-face class environment is better. I don't like staring at the screen. (Ayhan)

As is clear from the above comments, one of the students stated that online education could be an alternative for the delivery of some courses, especially theoretical courses, while another student would not like to take online education again due to the several technical issues that she faced throughout the term. The remaining students also mentioned the efficiency of face-to-face lessons when compared with online lessons, and they stated that online education lacks a lot in this respect.

In the last question throughout the interview, the students were asked to describe the concept of online learning. They likened online learning to a fake location for schooling, a book, a navigation experience, team spirit, and a self-help experience, as to be seen in the following categorization:

**An artificial location for schooling:* One of our students mentioned that online learning was like an artificial place for learning course content in the time of the pandemic Covid-19.

**A book:* One of the students likened online learning to a book put in front of an illiterate child, probably a pre-schooler. Similar to the pre-schooler who would not be able to read what is stated in the book, his first online experience made our student feel like a fish out of water.

**A navigation experience:* The student who likened online learning to the experience of using a navigation device to find their way on an unknown path made it clear that it was something he had never tried before.

**A team-spirit opportunity:* This student expressed that she was aware of the fact that she had to make a lot of effort to keep on track with her teacher if she wanted to learn her subject well.

**A self-help experience:* One of the interviewees said that she thought of online learning as a do-it-yourself experience. According to her, students were going to be alone most of the time, so they had to struggle for their own learning themselves.

**A light at the end of the tunnel:* This student was sure that there were going to be some positive results at the end of the term for them.

Overall, it could be commented that online learning was both a co-operative and an individual learning experience with a strange book as the course material in a dark and artificial place through which the way out was going to be found by a navigation device so as to reach the light at the end of the tunnel.

Discussion and Conclusion

While scrutinizing the importance of motivation of our students when measuring their attitudes, we can also see how their motivation and accustomation grow in parallel, just like Galusha (1998), and Pena-Shaff, Altman and Stephenson (2005) underline. As Ku and Lohr (2003) also state in their research on the attitudes of Chinese students towards online learning, convenience, flexibility and self-regulated learning are the top things which students like about online learning. Our findings also prove them right in that online learning can be fostered by designing effective online learning environments for all nationalities.

Although tertiary level students of the 21st century arrive in their traditional face-to-face classrooms more technologically and socially connected (Friedrich, Peterson, & Koster, 2011), problems such as the feeling of isolation and helplessness might still emerge when they start online classes (Muilenburg, & Berge, 2005). In addition, the frequent connection problems students encounter might turn into distractors (Parry, 2013), which might reduce their level of interest towards the course content. However, it should not be forgotten that the best learning outcomes are to be observed when the learners themselves realize that they need to employ their own learning strategies (Olgren, 1998), be it an online learning environment or a traditional learning environment.

The results of this present study are two-fold. To begin with, this research has been instrumental in trying to understand students' attitudes toward online learning. Next, our findings have provided us not only with an approximate view of the students' attitudes toward online learning but also enlightened some of the reasons behind their positive or negative attitudes. It provided us with a depiction of their

two-month experience of online learning in the exceptional times of the pandemic of Covid-19 by the analyses of student's journals, and in-depth interviews.

To sum up, it can be concluded that the majority of our students did not enjoy their online learning experience and want to turn back to traditional classrooms as soon as the threat of Covid-19 disappears. Nevertheless, it is a clear fact that a considerable number of students find online learning advantageous, practical and helpful and want to go on with online education in the future. It is also obvious that students' perceptions about the online learning process are inevitably affected by the pandemic threat and the sudden switch to the online mode of learning for which many of the students were not prepared neither mentally nor financially.

A limitation of our study might be the fact that we could not scrutinize whether students' perceptions changed after their final exam scores and yearly grades have been announced. It might be wise to encourage future researchers to conduct some further studies on how willing students would welcome the idea of online learning under normal circumstances and compare students' attitudes with their yearly average scores.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Giriş

Bu araştırmanın amacı, 2019-2020 akademik yılı bahar döneminde Covid-19 pandemisi sebebiyle çevrimiçi eğitime yönelmek zorunda kalan pek çok eğitim- öğretim kurumunda öğrencilerin geçiş süreci boyunca yaşadıklarını ve bu duruma ilişkin tutumlarını Gaziantep Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu örneklemini üzerinden incelemektir.

Çevrimiçi öğrenmeye karşı öğrencilerin algı ve tutumlarını inceleyen pek çok araştırma mevcuttur. Bazı araştırmalar öğrencilerin tutumlarını etkileyen faktörleri ele almış, öğrencilerin karakteristik özellikleri (Nwanko ,2015), motivasyonları (Galusha, 1998; Pena-Shaff, Altman & Stephenson, 2005), sanal öğrenmeye ve paylaşarak öğrenmeye dair önceki deneyimleri (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003; Hixon, Barczyk, Ralston-Berg, & Buckenmeyer, 2016; Song, Singleton, Hill & Koh, 2004; Wang,

Shannon, & Ross, 2013), öğrencilerin bilişsel olgunluk seviyelerinin (Boeglin & Campbell; Annetta, Murray, Laird, Bohr, & Park, 2008; Dabbagh, 2007) ön plana çıktığını saptamışlardır. Öte yandan başka araştırmalarda öğrencilerin çevrimiçi öğrenmeden en ideal şekilde faydalanmalarına ket vuran faktörleri ortaya koymuştur. Galusha (1998) maliyet, öğrencilerin alabildikleri veya alamadıkları geri dönüt ve öğretmen desteği, rehberlik ve teknik destek, yabancılaşma ve yalnızlaşma, sanal ortamda öğrenmeyle ilgili deneyim ve eğitim eksikliğinden bahsederken Muilenburg ve Berge (2005) idari ve/ veya eğitime dair problemler, sosyal etkileşim, akademik beceriler, teknik beceriler, öğrenci motivasyonu çalışma için zaman ve destek sorunu, maliyet, internet erişimi ve teknik sorunları en önemli sebepler olarak sıralamaktadırlar.

Yükseköğretim öğrencilerinin çevrimiçi öğrenmeye karşı tutumları Ku ve Lohr (2003) ve McBrien, Cheng ve Jones'un (2009) çalışmalarında genel anlamda olumlu olarak raporlanmıştır. Öğrenciler sanal ortamda bir grup ve çevre oluşturmuş olmaktan memnun olduklarını belirtmiş (Ku & Lohr, 2003), ancak öğretmenlerinin jest ve mimiklerinin eksikliklerini hissettiklerini dile getirmişlerdir (McBrien, Cheng & Jones, 2009). Cabi ve Kalelioğlu'nun (2019) çalışmasında da Türkiye'deki bir üniversitede öğrenciler çevrimiçi öğrenmeye geçmeden önce sanal ortamda öğrenme konulu bir eğitimden geçmiş, sonrasında bu ortamda aldıkları dersler ve kendi geliştirdikleri çalışma yöntemleriyle ilgili olumlu görüş bildirmişlerdir. Okwumabua, Walker, Hu ve Watson'un (2011) çalışması da konuya etnik açıdan bakan az sayıdaki araştırmalardan birisi olması nedeniyle önemlidir. Bu çalışma Afrikalı-Amerikalı öğrencilerin bilgisayarla ilgili endişe düzeylerinin düşük ancak çevrimiçi ortamda öğrenmeyle ilgili kaygı düzeylerinin yüksek olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Araştırmacılar bu yüksek kaygı düzeyini öğrencilerin çevrimiçi öğrenmeyle ilgili deneyimleri olmamasına bağlamışlardır. Paris (2004) ise düşük gelir dağılımından gelen öğrencilerin sanal ortamda öğrenmeye ilişkin tutumlarını incelemiş ve öğrencilerin böyle bir ortamda öğrenmeyi sevdiğini ve özellikle de materyallerin çeşitliliğinin onlara cazip geldiğini belirtmiştir.

Mupinga, Nora ve Yaw'un (2006) çalışmasındaysa Amerika'daki bir üniversitede öğrenim gören öğrencilerin sanal ortamdaki beklentileri, ihtiyaçları ve öğrenme tarzları üzerine yoğunlaşmış ve çevrimiçi ders planlaması yapılırken birden çok öğrenme yöntemi göz önünde bulundurulmasının faydalı olacağı sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Lim ve Kim (2003) de Amerika'da üniversite öğrencilerinin çevrimiçi öğrenmeye ilişkin tutumlarının ölçülmesi esnasında sırasıyla cinsiyet, sanal ortamda öğrenmeye ilişkin motivasyon ve öğrenci ihtiyacına göre tasarlanmış eğitim yöntemlerinin önemli olduğu sonucuna varmışlardır.

Mupinga'ya (2005) göre tüm öğrencilerin çevrimiçi öğrenmeye dair teknik bilgiye sahip olamayacağı, bu yüzden de ideal öğrenciler olamayacakları sonucuna varmıştır. Richardson ve Swan (2003) da öğrencinin sosyal bir varlık olduğunun asla göz ardı edilmemesi gerektiğini ve bunun öğrencilerin büyük çoğunluğu için önemli olduğunu belirtmiş ve bu yüzden çevrimiçi ders planlaması yapılırken buna mutlaka dikkat edilmesi gerektiğini vurgulamışlardır. Mupinga (2005) da benzer bir bulguyla öğrenciler sosyal varlık olarak benimsenen ve öğretmenleriyle iyi ilişkiler kuran öğrencilerin çevrimiçi öğrenme deneyimlerinden ve öğretmenlerinin ders işleyişlerinden yüksek seviyede memnun kaldıklarını belirtmiştir.

Yöntem

Öğrencilerin algıları ve çevrimiçi öğrenmeye ilişkin tutumlarını etkileyen faktörler hakkında çok sayıda çalışma olmasına rağmen, küresel bir kriz sırasında çevrimiçi öğrenmeye kitlesel göçle ilgili çok sayıda çalışma mevcut değildir. Buradan yola çıkarak araştırmacılar mümkünse yükseköğretim kurumundaki bazı öğrencilerin çevrimiçi öğrenmeyi nasıl algıladıklarına, varsa avantaj ve dezavantajlarının ne olduğuna, pandemi sonrası eğitim ortamı tercihlerine ve çevrimiçi öğrenmenin dil öğrenmeye uygun olup olmadığına dair görüşlerini irdelemeye çalışmışlardır.

Nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılan çalışmada öğrencilerin çevrimiçi öğrenmeye geçişle ilgili algı ve tutumlarını belirleyebilmek için gönüllü öğrencilere günlükler tutturulmuş ve aynı öğrencilerle mülakatlar yapılmıştır. Öğrencilerin günlüklerde bahsettikleri ve mülakatlarda dile getirdikleri konular Creswell'in (2012) açıkladığı şekilde içerik analizi kurallarına göre kodlanmış ve kategorilendirilmiştir. Analizin güvenilirliğini sağlamak için önce iki araştırmacı içerikleri kodlamış ve kategorilendirmiştir. Daha sonra üçüncü araştırmacı da içerik analizi yapmıştır. Üç aşamalı bu analizlerin sonunda uzlaşılan kod ve kategoriler araştırmaya dahil edilmiştir.

Bulgular

Öğrencilerimizin çevrimiçi öğrenmeye ilişkin tutumlarının incelenmesi esnasında motivasyon ve çalışma süreçlerinin birbirine paralel olarak arttığı görülmüştür. Ayrıca çevrimiçi öğrenmenin konfor, esneklik ve kendi düzeninde öğrenme imkânı sunması öğrencilerimizin memnun olduğu yönler arasındadır. Tüm uyruk ve etnik kökenden öğrenci için çevrimiçi öğrenme ortamlarının etkili içerik ve öğrenme deneyimi sağlayabileceği de çalışmamızla kanıtlanmıştır.

21. yüzyıl öğrencilerinin yüz yüze eğitim yapılan sınıflarına eskiye oranla daha teknolojik donanımlı ve sosyal olarak bağlantılı gelmesine rağmen (Friedrich, Peterson, & Koster, 2011) uzaktan eğitimde yalnızlaşma ve çaresizlik hissi gibi problemler görülmeye devam edebilir (Mullenburg & Berge, 2005). Ayrıca sıklıkla yaşanan ağ bağlantı ve kopma sorunları öğrencilerimiz için sorun teşkil edebilir (Parry, 2013) ve bu da onların derse ve ders içeriğine olan ilgilerini azaltabilir. Ancak ister geleneksel öğrenme ortamlarında olsun ister çevrimiçi öğrenme ortamında olsun öğrencilerimizin kendi öğrenme yöntemlerinden faydalandıkları zaman en iyi öğrenme deneyimini elde edecekleri unutulmamalıdır (Olgren, 1998).

Çalışmamızın sonuçları iki yönlüdür. Öncelikle bu araştırma öğrencilerin çevrimiçi öğrenmeye yönelik tutumlarını anlamak için bir araç oldu. Daha sonra, bulgularımız bize öğrencilerin çevrimiçi öğrenmeye yönelik tutumlarının yaklaşık bir görünümünü sağlamakla kalmadı, aynı zamanda olumlu veya olumsuz tutumlarının arkasındaki bazı nedenleri aydınlattı. Öğrenci günlüklerinin analizleri ve derinlemesine görüşmeler bize Covid-19 salgınının istisnai zamanlarında öğrencilerimizin yaşadığı iki aylık çevrimiçi öğrenme deneyimlerinin bir tasvirini sağladı.

Özetle, öğrencilerimizin çoğunluğunun çevrimiçi öğrenme deneyimlerinden hoşlanmadıkları ve Covid-19 tehdidi ortadan kalkar kaybolmaz geleneksel sınıflara dönmek istedikleri sonucuna varılabilir. Bununla birlikte, önemli sayıda öğrencinin çevrimiçi öğrenmeyi avantajlı, pratik ve yararlı bulduğu ve gelecekte çevrimiçi eğitime devam etmek istediği açık bir gerçektir. Öğrencilerin çevrimiçi öğrenme süreciyle ilgili algılarının, kaçınılmaz olarak pandemi tehdidinden ve öğrencilerin çoğunun ne zihinsel ne de finansal olarak hazırlıklı olmadığı çevrimiçi öğrenme moduna ani geçişten etkilendiği açıktır.

Sonuç

Çalışmamızın Covid-19 pandemisi sırasında öğrencilerin çevrimiçi öğrenmeye yönelik tutumlarının ölçülmesiyle ilgili başkaca çalışmalara ışık tutmasını bekliyoruz. Çalışmamızın bir sınırlılığı, öğrencilerin algılarının final sınavı puanları ve yıllık ortalamaları açıklandıktan sonra değişip değişmediğini inceleyememiş olmamız olabilir. Bu bağlamda gelecekteki araştırmacıları, gönüllü öğrencilerin normal koşullar altında çevrimiçi öğrenme fikrini nasıl karşılayacakları ve öğrencilerin tutumlarını yıllık ortalama puanları ile karşılaştırmaları konusunda bazı ileri araştırmalar yapmaya teşvik edilebilir.