Developing New Student and Instructor Roles in Online/Distance Higher Education

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Abstract

The enforced rapid transition to online/distance education in 2020 created immeasurable disruption both for the faculty and students in HE contexts. The present study discusses whether an opportunity is born out of a globally experienced challenge for university instructors and students to develop new and transformative roles. The data for the present study were collected during the third term of distance education through a survey conducted with 112 students and 9 faculty members and semi-structured interviews with a convenient sampling of students and faculty members of an English department in Istanbul, Turkey. The findings indicated that online education enabled students to become more active and self-directed learners and faculty members to develop newer roles and strategies as course designers and mentors. The findings revealed an in-depth understanding of the experience and yielded implications for the viability of applications of distance/online/blended modes of learning and teaching.

Keywords: Online education, students, faculty members, higher education

Introduction

The global Covid-19 pandemic has interrupted the taken for granted assumptions about our present and possible future selves. We all have been dislocated from our familiar contexts of teaching and learning in higher education (HE) amid the mist of this precarious and unsettling process. The enforced rapid transition to online/distance education in March 2020 created a globally experienced, immeasurable disruption both for the faculty members and students, particularly in HE contexts which rely on face-to-face student and instructor interaction (UNESCO, 2020). Most students, partly misconceived to have equal access to the Internet and digital platforms, did not readily have the agency for 'self-directed' learning or to navigate their learning processes online. The faculty members had to take immediate, individual and collective decisions on converting their courses for distance education without being fully informed about online teaching pedagogy and the affordances of available digital learning management systems. However, during the 2020-21 Academic Year, having gained some experience in remote education, responsible organs of the universities and faculty members were able to make more planned and informed decisions about the delivery of online courses

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and the use of digital systems. The use of technology in education has the potential to make instructors function in new roles as designers, mentors and facilitators and students as active learners, collaborators and discoverers (Thorne et al., 2015). This study explores whether an opportunity was born out of a globally experienced challenge for university instructors and students to develop new and transformative roles.

When the first cases of Covid-19 were verified and announced by the Ministry of Health in Turkey in mid-March 2020, education in all K-12 schools and universities were suspended for a week or two. Institutions with readily available online education infrastructure straightaway transited to online education while others took some more time as the transition required substantial investment in particular technological systems. Students and teachers have experienced this instant transition from face-to-face education to online education both similarly and disparately for different reasons and in various domains. The definition of online education per se goes beyond the delivery mode of a course as it is a form of a distance education programs which is purposely designed to cater specific requirements of virtual classrooms with its idiosyncratic pedagogies for instruction, assessment and student participation. Thus, within the scope of this paper, I will be using the term "online education" to refer to "emergency remote teaching" which is indeed "a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances" (Hodges et al., 2020). Hodges et al. (2020) define the latter as the use of "fully remote teaching solutions for instruction or education that would otherwise be delivered face-to-face or as blended or hybrid courses and that will return to that format once the crisis or emergency has abated" (para. 13), which I believe fully accords with our experience. Some researchers used also the term "the emergency COVID Online Learning (CoOL)" to distinguish the prevalent definition of online education from the conventional understanding of online education of pre-pandemic times (Tsang et al., 2021). Henderson, Selwyn and Aston (2017) used "digital residents" for today's university students indicating that "digital environments such as the internet are a way of life rather than discrete functional tools that can be turned on and turned off" (p. 1568) for these students. Yet, they also pointed out that it is important for university students to develop an awareness about how they can better make use of these digital tools for their academic studies. They administered a survey to 1658 undergraduate students and documented how students benefited from digital technologies and which digital tools they found most useful for their studies. They identified 11 "digital benefits" of the tools as perceived by students such as providing flexibility of place and location, organizing and managing the logistics of studying, reviewing, replaying and revising, seeing information in different ways, and augmenting university learning materials (p. 1571). Prensky (2001) used the terms 'digital natives' for today's students as they were born into the world of technology and the Internet and 'digital immigrants' for the teachers and instructors who have been acculturating to the new environment with an 'accent' they preserve. Pointing at the fundamental differences between the thinking, learning and information processing styles of the 'digital natives' and 'digital immigrants', Prensky (2001) suggested that teachers, who struggle to teach today's generation as they speak the language of the "pre-digital age", should "learn to communicate in the language and style of their students" (p. 4). In line with these, one can anticipate that transition to online education at the outbreak of the

pandemic would be a smooth one for students, yet a challenging one for teachers. However, several early publications, focusing on CoOL experience in HE, have shown that the transition from face-to-face education to online education was disconcerting, demanding and strenuous for both parties (Bao, 2020; Cranfield et al., 2021; Oyedotun, 2020; Paudel, 2021; Peimani & Kamalipour, 2021; Ünaldı et al., 2021).

Marek, Chew and Wu (2021) conducted a very comprehensive study primarily exploring faculty perspectives from various parts of the world (90.2% Asia, followed by North American and European respondents) on their experiences in converting courses to distance education and secondarily students' learning experiences as perceived by the instructors during the Covid-19 pandemic. Their findings indicate that converting and adapting face-to-face courses to distance education within a very short amount time had been moderately a daunting task for most of the faculty, especially for those who had not used or been familiar with instructional technologies before. Most of the respondents reported that they had been overwhelmed with workload and stress stemming from required rapid changes in planning and implementation of diverse approaches depending on students' needs and affordances. Faculty members diverged on their views of student experience; while some stated that students adapted easily to the new system, others found students' behavior "dysfunctional" and indicated that students were not ready and as "tech-savvy" as they had been perceived and had difficulties with navigating their learning processes and time-management (p. 53). Mishra, Gupta and Shree (2020) published a case study investigating online teaching experience again from the perspectives of students and instructors at Mizoram University, India. One of the major challenges encountered was due to unstable Internet connection and the 'digital divide' between students who had access to necessary infrastructure and technological devices for online education and those who did not. They also highlighted that "level of understanding, lack of scope for meaningful interaction, the range for innovative teaching, and mechanical conduct of classes were the significant challenges reported by teachers" (p. 6). However, their findings also draw attention to a "blessing in disguise" (p. 5) in which instructors have gained virtual classroom experience, improved their teaching and presentation skills by using available digital materials and instructional technologies and developed newer strategies in engaging students in discussions while students, having difficulties with keeping up with the pace of the instructors while listening to the courses, had the chance to replay the recorded lessons and supplemented their learning with additional videos uploaded by their instructors. Aristovnik et al. (2020) conducted a very large-scale study and explored the impacts of the pandemic on the life (i.e., academic, social, personal and emotional) of HE students with a sample of 30,383 respondents from 62 countries using a web-based questionnaire composed of seven sections and 39 closed-ended questions. With regards to students' academic experiences, they found that most students were satisfied with the online delivery mode of the courses, especially with real-time conferences (3.30) and video recordings (3.26), followed by sending presentations (3.10) and written communication (3.14) on a global level (p. 8). Students coming from rural and remote areas were found to have had infrastructural problems related to the Internet and the electricity, and also limited access to some digital tools and study materials. Students were overall content with the way their lecturers' online

management of the courses and timely feedback on the coursework; however, almost half of the student population (42.6 %) indicated that their workload had become significantly larger, which according to Aristovnik et al. (2020) might be related to the fact that "lecturers unfamiliar with the new mode of delivery could overload their students with study materials and assignments" (p. 9). Undergraduate students were found to have had more concentration problems compared to postgraduate students as studying at home exacerbated with isolation and distracting factors led to higher stress, lack of self-discipline and feeling of work overload.

Despite the challenges, online education, or in other terms CoOL, provided a new, democratized platform where students could experience being more "self-directed learners" who "actively engage in the learning process and can adopt proper learning strategies according to the learning setting" (Geng et al., 2019, p. 7) and "take greater responsibility for the learning process rather than being passively fed information by teachers" (Ali, 2020, p. 148). Moreover, as Strielkowski (2020) claimed omnipresent, yet unutilized digital technologies available to HE institutions, which under normal circumstances would take months put to use due to administrative regulations or academics' reluctance, came to the fore and started to be used. This has paved the way for understanding the unorthodox fact that all elements of higher education (e.g., lectures, exams, defenses, even graduation ceremonies) and academia (e.g., meetings, conferences, research) could be conducted remotely and online as effectively as they are done in "real life" (Strielkowski, 2020). Implementation of online/remote education during 2020-21 and adoption of hybrid and blended models of education during the 2021-22 academic year, undoubtedly, revolutionized principal foundations of higher education.

Method

The present study is an exploratory case study in its nature, and therefore I have adopted a convergent parallel mixed methods research design (Creswell, 2013) in order to gain an in-depth understanding of online education as experienced by undergraduate students and faculty members of the respective context during the Covid-19 pandemic. Considering the three main characteristics (i.e., timing, weighting and mixing) of mixed- method research designs (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009), in this study the data are collected sequentially – first quantitative and then qualitative (QUANT + QUAL), and the weighting is QUAL vs quant indicating that the study prioritizes qualitative data analyses and uses quantitative data only for descriptive purposes.

The Context of the Study

The data for the present study were collected during the third term of distance/online education, Spring 2021. The participants of the study are composed of a convenient sampling of students and faculty members of an English department in Istanbul, Turkey. In the context of the study, a digital learning management system (LMS) that had been

developed via The Sakai Project by the university's IT department has been available for use since 2011. Even though the university has been encouraging all the departments to use this system for all their available undergraduate and postgraduate courses, only few departments and some compulsory and elective courses that are open to the whole university and implemented with principles of distance education were using the system to its fullest extent. The system functions similarly to Moodle or Blackboard; it allows for sharing announcements, syllabi, and course materials and creating assignments with originality reports (i.e., Turnitin is integrated within the system) and tests and quizzes, shows class rosters and statistics of use, has chatrooms and forums where students can share their ideas about a given topic, and enables instructors and students to interact with one another through messaging and emails. Different from the aforementioned systems, in this system users have their own home sites where they can create a profile and add other users and also have a drive where they save any type of document. Each course appears on a different tab on the user's home, be it an instructor or the student. In the context of the study, this LMS has been used actively for all the courses since its launch, yet not all the faculty members were using all the components of the available system. Before the pandemic, the LMS had been largely used for sharing the syllabi and materials of the courses, submission of assignments, and announcements. During the distance education period, other integral parts of the system came into use such as forums, chatrooms, and tests and quizzes. At the outbreak of the pandemic, in March 2020, in addition to the existing LMS system, Adobe Connect was used for the online delivery of the courses. In 2020-2021 academic year, the LMS was integrated with Big Blue Button, which allowed faculty members to create meetings on designated dates for the courses and also a new component – which helped to take attendance during the class – was added. Both Adobe Connect and Big Blue Button allow students to open up their cameras and microphones but only a limited number of students can use these simultaneously. Thus, mostly the lecturers use their cameras and microphones to deliver the lectures by sharing their slides/ materials and/or screens and students contribute to the class discussions by writing in the chat box.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences of online/distance education, I devised a survey on SurveyMonkey. The survey is composed of 55 items with closed-ended questions which provide ready-made options to choose from (Dörnyei, 2003). There are five sections in the survey exploring: a) students' initial experiences in their transition from face-to-face education to distance education, b) satisfaction with the LMS and online delivery of the courses, c) their overall academic experiences and feelings, d) demographic information, and e) the last item on the questionnaire probed whether the respondents would be willing to participate in an online interview. In order to devise the survey items, during the summer of 2020, I first reviewed the existing literature having investigated the perspectives of students and instructors on online education in higher education institutes (HEIs) during the Covid-19 pandemic. I devised the survey items based on the findings of these studies and considering the idiosyncratic situation of the context of the

study. I also devised a survey for the faculty members of the department composed of 19 closed-ended items investigating faculty members' overall experience of the period as instructors, academics and full-time employees. Both surveys provided information about the aims of the research, ensured respondents that their participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous that they could withdraw from the survey at any time they wished, and asked for their consent. I designed the questions for semi-structured interviews based on the questions of the survey. The research design received the approval of the Ethics Board of the university.

112 students responded to the survey and I have conducted approximately 20-minute online semi-structured interviews with 5 volunteering students in order to gain a deeper understanding of their experience and perspectives. Among 10 faculty members, 9 responded to the survey and I conducted 30-minute online semi-structured interviews with 4 volunteering respondents. The interviews were conducted via Zoom at the convenience of the respondents. The interviews were conducted either in English or in Turkish depending on the preference of each respondent, recorded on Zoom and later verbatim transcribed. The findings derived from the survey data set are analyzed descriptively, and the interview data set were coded and thematically analyzed, and excerpts were created.

Participant Profile

Among the students who agreed to participate in the survey, 80% are of 18-24 age group (composed of ~25% freshman, 11% sophomore, 27% junior, 37% senior years students). 95% of the student respondents live in Istanbul during the academic terms, and 90% of them live with their families. 40 students indicated that they worked in full time (n = 9) and part time (n = 31) jobs, and 22 students had co-living/caring responsibilities (i.e., for children n = 5, for adults n = 7) during the time of their studies. 80% of students indicated that during the pandemic, they had experienced feelings of anxiety, boredom, loneliness and fear of getting Covid, and almost half of the students encountered problems due to financial loss, travel restrictions and loss of a loved one.

Among the nine faculty members who responded to the survey, 3 are research assistants who have actively took part in online delivered courses as teaching assistants, 3 are assistant professors - two with 15+ years of teaching experience and one with 5-15 years of teaching experience, and 1 associate professor and 1 professor with 25+ years of teaching experience and administrative positions. 7 respondents indicated that they faced problems due to travel restrictions, 6 respondents had felt the fear of getting Covid and extreme exhaustion with excessive workload, and 4 experienced loss of a loved one.

Findings and Discussion

In this section, I will present the findings derived from both the survey and interview data sets first pertaining to students' perspectives on online education and then to those

of faculty members under two broad themes – transition from face to face to online education and academic experience, and I will discuss the findings of the study in line with the literature on online teaching and aforementioned studies. (Excerpts presented from the student interview data are labelled with S and for faculty members with F).

Transition from Face-to-face to Online Education

The survey findings indicate that 54.6% of the student respondents found rapid transition from face-to-face education to online medium tiring and difficult, 37.1% smooth and easy and the rest were indecisive, yet a big proportion of students (64.2 %) got used to the distance education after having experienced some difficulties and stress at the beginning of the process. Half of the student population (50.5%) indicated that they enjoyed receiving their education at the comfort of their homes while the same proportion also had problems related to concentration as there were too many distractions at home. Students' initial responses to the question that asked whether online education is as efficient as face-to-face education showed that 52.5% of the students did not find online education efficient while for 27.8% online education was satisfactory, and the rest were indecisive. Only 20% of the students indicated that they had limited access to the Internet and computer facilities, which they thought had minimized their learning opportunities. The way interview respondents described their initial transition processes to online education is also consistent with these findings.

> The transition was a bit rocky, at first, we had the chatrooms. I really don't mind typing in the computer, but that was a bit hard because I wasn't used to doing classes like this. (Interviews\S:2)

> So that's why online education is convenient in terms of not making others sick. I was very fine with it actually; it was the best experience I've ever had. The best! Because I'm an introvert, at the comfort of my home, I was very close to my material, I did not have to use the public transportation to get school from where I am, which would make me very tired, and I became more motivated knowing that my materials were there, everything was digitally there so I could store them. (Interviews\S:3)

> When we first started with online education, there was a chaotic atmosphere. Both as students and teachers, we were not used to a system like that. We tried to survive as much as we could. But then, I think in the second-year online system was better. We all got used to it and there was a long summer holiday in between, so you could get together and planned better, I guess. (Interviews\S:1)

Faculty members were anticipated to have experienced a more stressful transition to the online education. They very rapidly found themselves in a situation where they had to convert their teaching materials and adapt them to the new medium of delivery, redesign their evaluation and assessment methods, and gain quick adaptation to the use of LMSs

and virtual classroom experience as well as establishing a meaningful and supportive rapport with students to uphold their motivation for learning, participation, and sense of belonging to their departments. The respondents were irresolute when they were asked whether converting their courses to online mode of delivery was a smooth and easy process; for most of them it was a difficult task only at the initial stages and created excessive workload and stress (Marek et al., 2021). Instructors' acculturation to online delivery methods is observed to have been affected by factors such as familiarity with learning management systems and online teaching skills, the design and interactional requirements of the courses, the extent of existing materials' readiness and adaptability to online teaching, and the nature of the components of the assessment and evaluation methods.

> Of course, it was a totally different atmosphere. And it was not easy for us to adapt to these differences at the beginning, especially for a certain age group who had actively been teaching in face-to-face education for so many years. (Interviews\F:1)

> At first, it was very difficult. We moved to online education very rapidly compared to the other universities. It was like redesigning a syllabus from scratch. The most difficult part for me was to rearrange the percentages that I had given for assessment. Not seeing the students was also difficult, but this was due to the system we were using. Not all courses are suitable for that, some courses require discussion and a lot of interaction. Lecture based courses are more suitable for online education. I already had some slides that I had been using in my classes, but I had to add more explanations or visuals to my presentations. (Interviews\F: 2)

> I believe that those faculty members who were using certain tools or online LMSs before moving onto online education were quicker to adapt or change the way they teach or the way they use certain materials and luckier than those who did not use these things before. (Interviews\F:3)

One of the faculty members also asserted that preparation of online classes was more time-consuming. Due to lack of natural classroom dynamics where students also steer the development of discussions and instruction with their comments and questions, they felt the need to plan meticulously how they would be handling the materials and what they would be lecturing about for three hours, beforehand.

Regardless of its daunting nature, the urgent need to convert courses to online education as an immediate response to a crisis has also been a rewarding experience. As Oyedotun (2020) suggested, "online facilities, which were already in place in the university but were in minimal use prior to COVID-19 by both lecturers and students, proved to be extremely useful tools during the transition" (p. 2). And the faculty members gained experience about "the potential of using educational technology to create virtual classrooms, live lectures, online tests and quizzes, the sharing of documents" (Marek et al., 2021, p. 42), which enabled teaching staff, departments, and

administrative stakeholders to take more informed decisions about the educational planning of 2020-21 academic year and the further investments required for more effective online teaching technologies. The half of the faculty member respondents affirmed their satisfaction with the support they had received from university's responsible organs at initial stages while the other half stated that they needed more technical assistance and guidance.

Satisfaction with the Learning Management System (LMS)

As has been aforementioned, an LMS generated by the IT department of the university has been in use since 2011 in the context of the study. The students were already used to following the announcements, weekly syllabus and materials, submitting their assignments and managing their correspondence with the instructors via using the available system. During the initial phase of online education, Adobe Connect was used for synchronous and asynchronous classes, in which students' simultaneous participation with cameras and microphones were limited to 5 attendees. Due to this, mainly the students participated in classroom discussion via texting in the chat-box which was visible to all the attendees and only the instructors were using their cameras and microphones along with their presentations/materials for the delivery of their courses. In the 2020-21 academic year, Big Blue Button was integrated within the LMS, but this did not change anything in students' modes of participation.

The findings of the student survey revealed that 64.1% of the students were satisfied with the LMS and the general services the system provides (79.3%) such as assignments, resources, calendar, messages and chatrooms. 80% of the students indicated that they used the existing LMS more efficiently during the online education period than they used to do in pre-pandemic times. Only half of the student respondents (57.6%) found Big Blue Button efficient and sufficient for the online delivery of the courses; interruptions stemming from the university's infrastructural problems or the Internet systems that students or instructors were using at their homes were also reported as drawbacks. Similar to the findings of Cranfield et al. (2021), students were satisfied with the system mostly because they did not have to open up their cameras to attend the classes or participate in the discussions.

> I like our system because in Zoom you have to have the camera open, which is kind of not nice. I personally liked not having to open up my camera, I'd like to see people, but I felt more comfortable because I don't like seeing myself, I get distracted. (Interviews\S:2)

This is an interesting finding where students and faculty members diverge. Although all of the faculty respondents found the LMS quite sufficient as an online education platform and felt themselves competent in using the system, they were hesitant about the efficiency of Big Blue Button for the very same reason students felt satisfied with the system – not opening up their cameras. Faculty members believed that Big Blue Button was insufficient and unsustainable for holding interactive classroom discussions, which

is considered highly significant for literature courses.

> For the most part I'm very happy the way we can work with certain aspects of our LMS, its user-interface is easier, it is more accessible in both mobile and on desktops. Other platforms may not be accessible to all devices or some of their aspects are harder both for students and professors, I am quite content with our LMS but not happy about Adobe Connect or Big Blue Button because we do not have this human connection, we had this limitation of five or six webcams used simultaneously, which is a problem for larger courses. (Interviews\F:3)

Because the students participated in class discussions mainly by typing in the chat-box rather than opening up their cameras and microphones, most faculty members thought that the courses were not as effective as they used to be in face-to-face education. Apart from this, faculty members were specifically satisfied with the LMS as it allowed them to share sufficient number and sizes of materials and resources, open up assignments with similarity reports, post course syllabi and instant announcements, create short tests and quizzes, and they made extensive use of forum pages where they could further assess student participation on various discussion topics.

Academic Experience

The findings of the student survey revealed that majority of students had positive attitudes toward their learning processes and their overall academic experience during this period despite the problems related to lack of socialization on campus with their friends and instructors and isolating or distracting home environments. 70.9% students indicated that they gained more experience in self-regulated learning and took more responsibility of their learning processes during this time. Three major reasons for developing self-directed learning strategies and habits were having more time to complete their readings and to do further research for their assignments (62%), having more opportunities to supplement their learning with additional materials such as YouTube videos, online lessons and extensive reading (67%), and being able to study in their own time and at their own pace (66.6%). Moreover, as students had to participate in classrooms via writing and had to complete forum tasks and submit assignments more often than they used to, half of the student respondents (57.6%) reported that these activities improved their writing skills and that they had become better at organizing their thoughts and more articulate in expressing their ideas. Student respondents described their self-directed learning processes and improved writing skills as follows:

> In the past, we had time, too and we could support each other. But during this period, we had more time to read. There was the need to focus only on our lessons. This makes you forget about Covid and your loneliness. I read a lot during those times. I paid so much attention to the feedback and I became more ambitious each time and tried to write in a better way. I had the chance to consult a lot of resources while writing and I think this improved my English

and writing. (Interviews\S: 1)

My studying techniques definitely adapted into the whole online learning. I personally liked the whole ritual of getting up and going to school and having my head in the space. So, I tried to do similar stuff in home with the whole, getting a coffee, getting dressed up. It helped; I think this period helped me a bit better articulate myself. You know, I tried not to use similar words in my forums or assignments all the time, I looked over what I've written, I tried not to post drafts. (Interviews\S:2)

Time is very extended for us to prepare a well-developed essay and we are always explaining ourselves with essays, paragraphs, this period affected our writing skills. In face-to-face period, we were speaking in the classroom, we did presentations, and we had some quizzes, but they were not all related to writing, so I believe that my writing skills have improved during this period. (Interviews\S:4)

As can be seen from the excerpts above, self-isolation at home and having more uninterrupted time to complete the assigned tasks and readings enabled students to develop newer strategies for studying, writing and doing research, which in return were perceived to develop their writing skills particularly in terms of planning and revising.

Students had divergent views in terms of their participation in classroom discussions. 41.3% of the students felt confident in participating classroom discussions, while 36.7 % did not feel confident, and 21.8% remained indecisive. Findings have shown that half of the students felt more comfortable with writing in the chat-box rather than speaking as part of their participation whereas the other half indicated that they could not participate as much as they wanted to since writing was the common way of expressing their ideas and responding to the instructors' questions.

In a sense I participated more in online education, but in a way I couldn't. I've always spoken in classes, but when it comes to writing, sometimes I was too late to express my opinions. (Interviews\S: 5)

I think my participation was less than I normally do. I get self-conscious when I write because it will stay there. If I had had a bit more confidence in me, I'd talk with microphone, but I don't. If everyone talked, it would be the best thing. In normal classes, I participated a lot, but here I don't know, I think because of the environment and because we were on computer, I got more anxious, because in the chat it stays there, and I was too much concerned about what I wrote and my participation. (Interviews\S: 2)

I am terrible at using the keyboard and typing. I always misspell things and then I get nervous and do more mistakes. Ok, everyone can do it. The important thing is to go on participating. I got used to it later on, I did better, I guess. (Interviews\S: 1)

The excerpts indicate that, particularly at initial phases, some students felt self-conscious about expressing their ideas with the fear of making structural deviations or spelling mistakes in writing, which inhibited their active participation. Trying to articulate their ideas accurately delayed some of the students' responses. And while some students got used to participating in lessons by writing in time, some others became more uninterested and detached from the classes with a feeling of alienation.

> We don't have much tendency to write. In the past, we asked for permission to speak and we expressed our thoughts. But now, I don't feel like doing that when I don't see my friends around me. I don't really feel like being there. And the classes were recorded anyway. I did not participate, even did not listen sometimes because I was thinking that I could always go back to the recordings and complete my notes. But in regular classes, you listen attentively, you participate, knowing that you cannot rewind, you focus on what is being told. (Interviews\S: 4)

Faculty members brought different perspectives on students' participation in class. One of the faculty members found students' participation unsatisfactory and inauthentic.

> You cannot really know whether they are really there or not. Among the 50 students only 10 of them are participating in discussions, only few opened up their cameras and spoke. (Interviews\F:1)

Another faculty member observed a more active participation in her classes, and she remarked that students who used to remain silent half the time during face-to-face education contributed more to the classroom discussions during the online education period.

> At the initial phases of online education, some of the students who used to actively participate in class discussions got lost, they couldn't adapt and didn't like it at all. But I was surprised at some students, those who did not speak in class participated more. This was an interesting experience. This is probably in real classroom settings, those who knew best were the first to speak and answer the questions, but here because they have to write and it takes them some time to write, I was able to elicit more answers at the same time. I felt like those who were shy about speaking felt more confident in writing. (Interviews\F: 2)

This does not corroborate with the findings of previous studies demonstrating that good and motivated students do well whereas others work less or even disappear in online education (Marek et al., 2021). However, Peimani and Kamalipour (2021) similarly reported that "several reticent learners seemed to be more comfortable communicating through a textual, rather than oral, medium" (p. 9). Therefore, it can also be inferred that online education and being able to participate in classroom discussions via writing offered a safe and motivating space for retiring students.

In the context of the study, it was obligatory to record all the classes delivered via Adobe Connect and Big Blue Button. The recorded sessions automatically appear on

the LMS once the classes are over and students are able to access to these recordings whenever they want until the end of each academic term. The recordings were found to be the most useful and most favored component of online education among the students as the recordings provided them with the flexibility of being able to go back to the lectures and complete the missing points in their notes and/or understand the parts which remained unclear. It was found that the availability of recordings did not notably affect students' notetaking during the classes.

> With the class recordings, I can go back and listen, I can read again and again while listening, so that's a really good thing. If I can't understand something, I know that I can go back to it (Interviews\S:2)

> Even though I attend the classes and I understand everything, I always feel as if I did not understand enough or rather, I might have overlooked because in the middle of a session, there are intense emotions and you're focusing on writing all these notes, so the recordings are a way to assure that I wrote what I wrote but I can always go back to and look at the recording and I can always feel safe knowing that thank God, I did not miss anything. It gets to point where I watch the recordings twice to assure that I did not forget anything, again I don't want to leave anything behind. (Interviews\S: 3)

> I could understand most of the things and if I couldn't, I could always watch the recordings. I benefited from the recordings to complete my notes. (Interviews\S:5)

Students' contentment and satisfaction with the class recordings corroborate with the findings of Aristovnik et al. (2020) and Mishra, Gupta and Shree (2020). According to the faculty members' views, the recordings affected students' attendance to the classes in two ways; some faculty members noted their serious doubts about students' real status of attendance in classes observing that some students just appeared present on the system but were not actively listening to the lectures while others pointed to the fact that students were not attentively listening to the lectures or taking notes due to the unlimited access to the recordings. One of the faculty members also mentioned that availability of recordings led students to use the exact wordings of the instructors in their written coursework or in exam papers, which consequently hindered students' critical thinking and synthesis skills. Although the faculty members were not concerned about censorship or some form of surveillance, some of them felt self-conscious and disturbed by the idea that the recordings, which involved images of their physical appearance and lecture notes, were accessible at all times to the students. One faculty member remarked on the benefit the recordings brought to those students who could not attend classes during the day as they were working in part-time or full-time jobs during the pre-pandemic times and observed an increase in the grades of those students.

In terms of their overall academic performances and achievements, 70.9% of the students were satisfied with their grades they had received from their assignments and exams, and they felt that their instructors were fair with their assessment methods

and criteria. Half of the students observed an increase in their grades during the online education; however, some students (46%) also thought that online education created an inequitable situation for those who really studied in contrast to those who did not act with academic integrity, and in relation to this 75.5 % of the students developed more sensitivity to plagiarism issues. The findings revealed that 81.6% of the students thought the number of written assignments and quizzes had increased during this period. 70.1% felt overwhelmed with the number of tasks they had to complete and 64.3% of the students felt quite exhausted with the number and length of materials they needed to cover for their courses. Students complained mostly about the posts they had to write for the weekly forums.

> I don't know if they were more, the number didn't look as much, but I think it worked on me like I was at home; so, I either had to sit down and watch TV or do my homework. So, I did nothing, but studied, and this was overwhelming. Weekly forums were a bit tiring. I had to stay up till 12 to write those down, to do something good. (Interviews\S:2)

> The forums literally drained me. We posted a lot in the forums. Actually, writing posts on different topics was fun, but we had a lot to cover. We also had quizzes, assignments, deadlines and we tried to do all of them at the same time. We were talking and thinking that each professor in a way acted as if we were only taking her course. I guess there was a lack of communication among the professors. (Interviews\S:1)

> I think there was more homework involved. Since quizzes and exams have become unfortunately less significant, we had more homework (Interviews\S:5)

Faculty members verified that they had felt the need to assign more written coursework during this period due to the university's online education policy on the percentages applied for web-based midterm and final exams – neither could be higher than 20%. The forum posts were also used as an assessment component to compensate for students' minimal participation in classes and in a way evaluated whether or not students were reading the assigned texts. One faculty member commented on the disproportionate workload assigned on students as follows:

> Students- taking 5 or 6 courses- reached out to me and said this is too much. I think the main problem here is, we were trying to fill out some gap or we have this feeling that something is lacking in online education and we try to fill that part by making students write in chatrooms and forums. We have this drive forcing them to do more, we were not expecting them to write forum posts during face-to-face education. We also had these institutional online education regulations that we cannot give 40% for final exams or midterm exams because they are not invigilated, and that made us fill the course with little activities. With this excess of quizzes or forums or in- class presentations, are we still thinking in terms of ECTS or students' workload or are we thinking about the

assessment criteria? I don't know. I think it is the latter. (Interviews\F: 3)

Different academic disciplines employ different assessment criteria and evaluation methods, of course. For the Humanities and literary studies, students' preparedness for and participation in classroom discussions are considered highly important in terms of their academic performances. The midterm and final exams also require students to produce long essays in which they are expected to construct diligent arguments and discuss the topic by synthesizing theory and analysis of literary texts. Therefore, as mentioned by the respondent, when faculty members could not give higher percentages to the exams and thereby make students produce papers of the aforementioned quality, they might have felt the need to assign more written assignments and tasks. Evidently, this has caused them to deviate from the principles of pre-determined learning outcomes of the respective courses. So, this does not really stem from unfamiliarity with the new mode of delivery as suggested by Aristovnik et al. (2020).

As has been documented in other studies, this period has had an impact on the mental well-being of students and faculty members, as well. Particularly, students who previously had the experience of socializing and studying with their peers on campus, missed spending time with their friends (79.5%) and having one-to-one conversations with their instructors. 82.1% of the students appreciated the support they had received from their instructors during this period and they indicated that they had not lost their motivation or sense of belonging to the department. For the 2021-22 academic year, student respondents stated that they would like to go back to face-to-face education or at least have some of their courses online and some of them on campus. When students were asked if they would like to continue taking online courses together with face-to-face courses when the pandemic is over, 50.6% agreed, 28.9% disagreed, and 20.4% remained indecisive.

In a similar vein, faculty members mentioned that they missed socializing with their colleagues. According to the faculty members the most difficult aspects of this period were: managing student plagiarism, finding time and peace of mind for their own academic research, impromptu meetings held after-hours, being apart from their students and colleagues, and engaging students to participate in classroom discussions. And the perceived assets of the period were: teaching and working at the comfort of home, not commuting to work every day, being able to organize their own time, developing new teaching skills and gaining virtual classroom experience, devising new materials and new ways of teaching along with familiarizing themselves with available teaching and learning technologies. In the context of the study, faculty members are expected to be present on campus within the working hours; they have asserted that seeing and experiencing that everything can be done remotely helped them develop a newer sense of what it means to be an academic and demonstrated a novel way of being a full-time employee. They stated that they missed being in class with their students, yet they did not feel the need to commute to the work every day and be present in the office at all times. Therefore, most of the respondents stated that they would prefer to have more flexible working hours and that a "hybrid model" of working (i.e., being present at the office on some working days and working remotely on the others) could be an ideal

solution once they go back to the "new normal". As Strielkowski (2020) mentioned, "many traditional principles of academic life will have to be reshaped due to our recent experience with the COVID-19 pandemic. While some of us are afraid of moving away from the status quo, others are willing to undertake this path" (p. 4). One of the faculty members noted that more technologically oriented faculty would not want to go back to the so called "normal" and would opt for a hybrid working and education model in the following years.

Conclusion

The pandemic crisis evidently has shaken our taken for granted assumptions about the foundations of tertiary level education and reshaped our conceptualizations of education and academic life. We all have witnessed and experienced newer possible ways of teaching and learning thanks to the technological advancements that are available to us in the 21st century. Students, in a way, became more active learners as they found themselves in a situation where they had to take responsibility of their own learning processes. As, Cranfield et al. (2021) proposed, "the emergency e-learning provided these students with the opportunity to improve their independent learning skills" (p. 12). They can be said to have become discoverers, as well, because in the times of self-isolation at home most of the students seem to have developed newer strategies to supplement their learning and meaning-making processes with research and additional texts and resources, learned to make use of available educational digital tools and improved their digital literacy skills (Ali, 2020). Moreover, CoOL provided students with the opportunity to contemplate and reconceptualize what university education means for them and many students have gained an awareness about what they need to do in order to achieve the desired results. As instructors found themselves in a situation where they had to take immediate decisions, convert and adapt their materials and teaching approaches in line with the requirements of online delivery mode, they have become designers. And those who were more open to experiment with new ways of teaching by stepping out of their comfort zones continued to learn and develop newer strategies on the way. In order to establish an emphatic and supportive rapport with the students and to create a safe teaching and learning atmosphere during these unsettling times, they have become mentors. Anomalous circumstances of CoOL period did not provide as much room for students to become collaborators as systematic online or blended education systems do. In order for students to become collaborators, instructors need to internalize their roles as facilitators. Yet, none of the parties were ready to adopt these roles as online education has been considered only as a temporary and complementary solution to these peculiar times. Peimani and Kamalipour (2021) argued that:

> The extent to which higher education transformations have taken root and will persist into the post-pandemic future remains a key question, particularly considering the surging need for developing and implementing adaptive teaching, learning environments, and incorporating innovative remote technologies and digital networks into course designs. At stake is the role of

academia to remain reflective on its practices that will be important for shaping the future of learning and teaching in higher education (p. 11).

Therefore, all these recently published studies exploring the perspectives of students, teachers and instructors on online education in different contexts provide invaluable insights for our future designs. Based on needs analyses, it is important for HEIs to devise or invest in the most useful teaching and learning technologies for their specific contexts if online education maintains to be a part of their education systems. Faculty members should be provided with systematic support, if needed training, about the utilization of LMSs not only for the online delivery of their courses but also for the courses delivered in face-to-face education so that university students can become more active, self-regulated and independent learners. If HEIs opt to implement online teaching blended with face-to-face education in later stages, a balanced distribution of online and face-to-face courses, careful planning and implementation of assessment and evaluation methods, and effective coordination among the faculty members teaching the same year of students are essential pedagogical approaches to be considered by the programs. I believe rather than yearning for going back to the good old days or trying again to "normalize" post-pandemic times, we need to take lessons from this invaluable experience, look ahead and adopt more transformative approaches in higher education.

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Yükseköğretimdeki Uzaktan Eğitimde Gelişen Yeni Öğrenci ve Öğretim Elemanı Rolleri

Öz

2020 yılında yükseköğretim kurumlarında uzaktan eğitime yapılan hızlı geçiş hem öğrenciler hem de öğretim elemanlarının eğitim-öğretim hayatlarında kesintiye sebep olmuştur. Bu çalışma küresel olarak yaşanan bu zorluğun içinden, öğretim elemanları ve öğrencilerin yeni ve dönüştürücü roller kazanmaları için çıkmış olabilecek fırsatları değerlendirmektedir. Çalışmanın verisi Türkiye, İstanbul'daki bir üniversitenin İngiliz edebiyatı bölümündeki 112 öğrenciye ve 9 öğretim elemanına uygulanan anket ve aynı gruplardan yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşmelere gönüllü olarak katılan kişilerden toplanmıştır. Çalışmanın bulguları uzaktan eğitimde öğrencilerin öğrenim süreçlerinin daha etkin ve öz-yönlendirmeli bir yapıda ve öğretim elemanlarının ise verdikleri eğitimin yeni roller ve stratejiler geliştirmeleri sonucunda daha yaratıcı ve yol gösterici bir yapıda gerçekleştiğini ortaya koymuştur. Çalışmanın sonuçları yaşanan bu deneyimi derinlemesine anlamayı ve uzaktan eğitimde kullanılan uygulamalarının uygulanabilirliğini ve etkilerini tartışmayı sağlamıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Uzaktan eğitim, üniversite öğrencileri, öğretim elemanları, yükseköğretim