Research Article

Transition to Distance Education during Covid-19 Pandemic: Opinions of Faculty Members and Pre-service Teachers in an English Language Teaching Department in Turkey

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Article Info	Abstract
	The purpose of the present study was to investigate the views of instructors and teacher candidates related to synchronous education during the pandemic at a state university in the department of English Language Teaching. The participants included 9 instructors, and 22 pre-service English teachers. Qualitative methods were adopted in this study: semi-structured interviews and an open-ended survey were used to collect data. Interviews with instructors revealed that drawbacks to synchronous distance education were more prevalent. Similarly, open-ended surveys administered to teacher candidates demonstrated that the participants were not satisfied with synchronous distance education even though they reported several advantages of it. Finally, implications were mentioned based on the results.

Introduction

Even though not a new medium for teaching and learning, distance education (DE) has become an appealing option adopted by educational institutions worldwide during the last few years because of Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, it has been unavoidable for institutions to end face-to-face education and transit to distance education during the pandemic (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020). Because of this, students were pushed into a position in which they were expected to adopt and engage in distance education at once, in addition to being affected by the chaotic atmosphere the Covid-19 pandemic has created. It is likely to bother students especially those who do not have the skills and technical instruments necessary for distance education (Händel et al., 2020). Since integration and application of distance education have been abrupt for the stakeholders in most educational

contexts, different terms have been coined for it including "emergency remote teaching" (Hodges et al., 2020), "crisis distance education" (Al Lily, Ismail, Abunasser & Alhajhoj Alqahtani, 2020) and "crisis-prompted temporary distance education" (Bergdahl &Nouri, 2020). A distinction was made between traditional distance education and distance education during Covid-19 pandemic by some researchers (Al Lily, et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020). Abruptness of distance education during Covid-19 pandemic, as mentioned above, was among the major factors which differentiated it form traditional distance education. This unexpected switch to distance education was likely to lead to tension among the instructors as they did not have enough time to adapt to it (Hodges et al., 2020). Moreover, it has gained a global status enforced by most countries to compensate for face-face education, which had to cease because of Covid pandemic, neglecting local drawbacks (Al Lily, et al., 2020).

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that distance education has already been gaining ground in the last few decades as it is believed to play an important role in promoting lifelong education which is highly desirable in the current era (Angelaki, 2013). Contrary to common belief that Covid-19 has brought about radical changes in the field of education through imposing distance education; according to some, it has just contributed to ongoing process of integrating distance education into educational contexts, which is not new (Alan, Biçer, & Can, 2020). Distance education has already been adopted in higher education in several programmes around the world including Turkiye (Bilgiç &Tüzün, 2019; Wolverton, 2018).

Even though various terms are used for distance education including online instruction, web-based instruction, e-learning or instruction, and virtual instruction (Sun &Chen, 2016), the main characteristic of it is that students and the instructor can attend to learning and teaching activities from separate places through the medium of the internet (Alan et al., 2020; Öztürk, 2021). The main distinction is made between synchronous and asynchronous distance education since distance education entails either one of them or both of them (Sun &Chen, 2016). While time and place flexibility are present in asynchronous distance education (ADE), flexibility is only limited to space in synchronous distance education (SDE) (Perveen, 2016). Synchronous distance education has been launched in order to promote social interaction and intellectual cooperation since they are difficult to maintain in asynchronous distance education (Wang &Wang, 2021). On the other hand, asynchronous distance education is more appealing in that it provides more freedom

regarding time and individual academic progression (Perveen, 2016). In the present study, distance education refers to synchronous distance education as it has been adopted as an instructional mode with the advent of Covid-19 pandemic.

The current study aims to reveal the opinions of both the instructors and students in terms of synchronous distance education. Additionally, this study considers English Language Teaching and Learning processes conducted at a distance. On the other hand, English is a major which cannot be thought without interaction, but the Covid-19 pandemic made distance education an obligation for many fields and for the English Language Education, as well. Thus, how the participants who taught and were taught English perceived synchronous distance education process highlights the importance of the present study. As a result, English Language Teaching Department was selected as the setting of the present study.

Literature Review

The role of distance education has increased in education life with the outbreak of Covid-19. As there are various aspects that affect the quality of DE, it has been considered from different perspectives by the researchers. There are two important parties whose roles and opinions cannot be ignored in a DE process: Instructors and students. Even though they have different roles and responsibilities, an effective DE process is realized with the active and effective participation of both parties. The focal point of the current study is to clarify the opinions of instructors and students included in emergency DE with the onset of Covid-19. There are different research studies that focus on instructors (Bergdahl & Nouri, 2021; Ironsi, 2021) and students (Alan et al., 2020; Ersin, Atay & Mede, 2020; Händel et al., 2020; Ironsi, 2021, Ozudogru, 2021; Stadler-Heer, 2021).

DE requires different teaching skills for the instructors as it requires different learning skills for the learners (Bower, 2001). The obligatory shift from traditional education to DE that emerged due to Covid-19 has brought the differences to light in a clear way. Undoubtedly, this emergency shift affected the parties who suddenly took part in a different education environment (Almahasees, Mohsen & Amin, 2021).

The faculty issue has been in question for a long time as well as the students issue; similarly, they have kept the place during the Covid-19 period, as well. Ironsi (2021) investigated the perceptions of students and instructors in terms of using Google Meet as a synchronous distance education tool for language education. Totally 47 participants were

included in the study; 12 language instructors and 35 pre-service teachers. The results revealed that the instructors had positive attitudes towards teaching language by means of distance education as they found the teaching process efficient, user-friendly, easy to handle and easy to interact…etc. The same study also included the perceptions of pre-service teachers in terms of being taught language through synchronous distance education. Even if they found it funny to learn language through GM, they were not satisfied with the interaction level, productivity and improvement of language skills.

A further study conducted in the USA before the outbreak of Covid-19 aimed to reveal the factors that were effective on instructors' opinions in terms of teaching at a distance (Green, Alejandro, & Brown, 2009). The faculty felt motivated because of ''flexible working hours, opportunity to use technology, opportunity to share knowledge with others, intellectual challenge, career development/advancement, and opportunity to gain teaching experience''. On the other hand, 54,07% of the instructors felt discouraged because of ''lack of sufficient financial compensation in comparison to workload, concerns about workload, and lack of institutional support''.

As for the perceptions of the students about distance education, a research study was conducted by Alan et al. (2020) with the participation of 699 Turkish pre-service teachers. According to the students who participated in the interviews, there are both advantages and disadvantages of distance education when it is compared to face to face education. The advantages were about developing independent learning skills, presenting education without time and space limitation, being economic, providing learners with the opportunity of learning at their own pace and repeating the subjects…etc. On the other hand, there were also some disadvantages stated by the participants such as lack of qualified feedback, communication and interaction problems, lower motivation and technological problems…etc.

Furthermore, Ozudogru (2021) conducted a study in order to reveal pre-service teachers' experiences in terms of emergency distance education. The study was conducted with the participation of 24 pre-service teachers studying at a state university in Turkey. The results revealed pedagogical, technological, social and emotional challenges in terms of being taught at a distance. To expand these challenges in a more detailed way, followings can be stated: receiving too many assignments, lack of practice in practice-based courses, lack of interaction between the instructor and students and among the students, unreliable online

exams, instructors' not showing social and emotional presence. On the other hand, the pre-service teachers also indicated some positive aspects such as time and place flexibility, sustainability of education and flexible assessment.

As seen above, most of the research studies were conducted to clarify students' or instructors' perceptions about distance education. The number of studies including both the perceptions of students and instructors at the same time is limited. It is important to include the opinions of both parties for the same setting as education is not a single-sided process and it includes at least two parties which are instructors and students. As this process was conducted at a distance, the thoughts of participants gains more importance. Considering this issue, the current study has crucial importance in terms of including the opinions of both parties at the same time for the same setting.

Method

Research Design

As stated above, this study aims to reveal the opinions of instructors and ELT students who were required to participate in a synchronous distance education process as a result of Covid-19 outbreak. To this end, a qualitative method was adopted in this study through employing semi-structured interview and open-ended survey as research tools. Data collection process of the current study started after the students and instructors experienced DE process for an academic year. Semi-structured interview and open-ended survey were chosen as data collection tools for the purpose of getting well-elaborated answers from the participants since they truly reflect participants' point of view in detail (Bryman, 2012; Roberts et al., 2014).

Setting

The current study was conducted at the English Language Teaching Department of a state university in Diyarbakır, Turkey.

Participants

The opinions of main parties of a distance education process were considered for this study: Instructors and students. All of the participants were selected on a voluntary basis.

Totally 6 faculty members and 3 instructors who taught English through synchronous distance education during 2020-2021 academic year were included in the study. 8 of them were between 33-42 years old and they all had English language teaching experience more than 10 years. Only one of the participants was over 60 and had 41-year experience.

Additionally, 4 of them had not had experience in terms of distance education before Covid-19 process; on the other hand, 3 of them had experienced only asynchronous distance education, 1 of them had taught only via synchronous distance education and one of them had experienced both. During Covid-19, they taught different courses such as language skills, English Language and Literature, English Translation, Vocational English for Nursery, Engineering, Communication faculties, Linguistics, English in Mass Media…etc.

In addition to the instructors, 22 students having studied in preparatory class of English Language Teaching Department in 2020-2021 academic year were also included in the study. The students who have similar backgrounds in terms of distance education process and learning experiences were included in the current study; that is why only the preparatory students were considered as the participants. Most of the students participated into the current study had not been taught at a distance before Covid-19 outbreak. Twenty of the students were between 19-21 years old and two of them were over 30. 19 of the students were female and 3 of them were male. Additionally, only two of them had graduated from a university beforehand and the others were high school graduates.

Procedure

In 2020-2021 academic year, as most of the education institutions did, the related state university where this study was conducted started to provide education through synchronous distance education. Before the outbreak of Covid-19, the education process had been realized in a face-to-face environment. Covid-19 resulted in emergency distance education for the students and instructors. Most of the participants met necessary technology-based education probably for the first time. The new education process brought challenges for both instructors and students. At the beginning of the academic year, after the university decided to conduct the educational process at a distance, the instructors and students were provided with a written document and training videos to learn how to use the learning management (LM) system. Indeed, as the process started in an emergency manner, there was not enough time for the orientation of instructors and students.

Through the related LM system, the instructors were able to give courses in a synchronous way. During the classes, the students were able to see the instructors, but the situation was not same for the instructors as they could not see the students while teaching. The lecturers needed to turn on the students' microphones in order to help them participate in the classes verbally. The LM system also provided lecturers with the opportunities of

uploading course materials, assignments, videos and forum activities. By using related LM system, the lecturers taught English through synchronous distance education for an academic year and they decided on their own course design, materials and assessment criteria.

On the other hand, the students were also included in the education process through technology. They learnt about LM system by means of provided materials and asking lecturers for support. There was not obligatory attendance to the synchronous classes, the students were allowed to watch course videos afterward as the classes were recorded by the LM system.

Data collection process of the current study started after the students and instructors experienced DE process for an academic year. A qualitative method was adopted in the present study. Semi-structured interviews and open-ended survey were chosen as data collection tools for the purpose of getting well-elaborated answers from the participants since they truly reflect participants' point of view in detail (Bryman, 2012; Roberts et al., 2014).

Data Analysis

The interview data was recorded and transcribed by the researchers. In order to analyze the data derived from the semi-structured interview with the lecturers and open-ended survey administered to pre-service teachers, qualitative content analysis was employed, because it is the opinions of participants that the researchers focus on in the current study and the qualitative content analysis creates opportunities to analyze both manifest and latent data (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Moreover, it enables researchers to arrive at sound and detailed interpretations as a result of close reading of the data (Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Morgan, 1993). Through reading the data multiple times, familiarization with the data was completed in order to make sense of the data and get a clear picture of the data as a whole (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Then, codes were created, which was followed by categorization. How these categories relate to each other, and how frequently they were uttered were also designated relying on the data. Following the ultimate categorization including abstraction, the process of interpretation was carried out (Bryman, 2012; Lindgren, Lundman & Graneheim, 2020; Mayring, 2000).

Findings

In order to clarify the opinions of lecturers and students in terms of synchronous distance education, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the lecturers and an open-ended survey was implemented to the students for their perceptions.

The interviews with the lecturers were done in a face-to-face manner and each one was recorded with the approval of interviewees. Recorded interviews were transcribed and the data were analyzed in a qualitative way. Open-ended surveys implemented at the end of academic year after the synchronous distance education process were also analyzed qualitatively.

The Results for the Qualitative Analysis of Lecturer Interviews

In the first part of this section, findings obtained from the interviews with the faculty members were reported one by one in accordance with the interview questions.

Table 1. Advantages of synchronous distance education

Advantages	Number of the Participants
Access to media-rich content and integrating them easily into online courses	P1, P7, P8, P6, P9
Spatial flexibility	P4,P5, P7,P8
More economic in terms of accommodation and transportation for both lecturers and students	P7, P8,P9
All of the class time is used for teaching	P6, P7

As shown in Table 1, having access to media-rich content and integrating them into online courses and spatial flexibility were the most commonly reported advantages of synchronous distance education by the participants. Moreover, some other advantages of synchronous DE according to faculty members were as in the following:

"It is easier and more practical to integrate media-rich content like videos, web-sites into the online courses. For example, I could easily share useful links with my students during my classes." (P1)

'' There may be some distracting factors in traditional classrooms, but when you teach in a virtual environment, you use whole class duration for teaching.'' (P7)

''As distance education provides students with the spatial flexibility, they do not have to pay for transportation and accommodation, so it is more economic'' (P8)

Table 2. Disadvantages of synchronous distance education

Disadvantages	Number of the Participants
Very limited (mostly written) lecturer-student interaction	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8,P9
Not getting any reaction or feedback from the students during the online classes	P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8,P9
Lack of body language including eye-contact	P1, P4, P6, P7, P8,P9
Not being able to assess students' performance with reliable tools like exams/ Unreliability of online exams	P2, P4, P5, P6, P7,P9
It's becoming burdensome for lecturers (teacher talk time is too much)	P2, P3, P4, P5
Not being able to monitor whether students are listening to the teacher when they are online	P2, P4, P5, P7
Students' not having adequate/equal technological opportunities to follow the classes	P6, P7, P8,P9
Working from home (ex: children and pets could be distracting)	P1, P2
Limited and ineffective lecturer-student interaction outside of class hours	P1, P5

Table 2 displays disadvantages of synchronous distance education according to the participants. All of the participants claimed that the interaction between students and the lecturer was very limited. Moreover, almost all of them complained about not getting any reaction or feedback from the students during online classes. In addition, various other disadvantages ranging from lack of body language including eye-contact, too much teacher talking time to not being able to monitor whether students are listening to the teacher when they are online, and limited and ineffective lecturer-student interaction outside of class hours were also mentioned by the lecturers:

> *"When I did not get any reaction from the students, I felt like they were not listening to me and the class was out of my control" (P1)*

> *"The interaction was very limited. It was partly because the LMS we used since we could not see or hear students immediately. We had to send a request to students to activate their cameras and microphones and they were required to approve it. However, most of the students rejected my requests indicating that their cameras or microphones were not available or did not work. Therefore, I wanted them to write their questions and answers on the chat column. As a result, the interaction was in written form for most of the time" (P4)*

> *"Only a limited number of students attended to online classes as majority of them indicated that they did not have computers or regular internet access. "(P3)*

> *"Since I did not see or hear the students and just saw their names on the screen, I did not know they were really there; they could deal with something else in the background. In order to understand whether they really followed the lesson, I asked questions during the class*

including very simple questions, several students did not write any answer in the chat box."

(P5)

"Since students do not want to switch their cameras or microphones and only a limited number of students attend to the classes, the teacher is the only speaker and he/she has to speak without stopping until the last minute of the lesson. It is really exhausting and boring." (P3)

"I find it complicated to prepare and apply online exam through the LM System we are using; therefore, I gave assignments regularly to evaluate the student performance. However, I do not know whether students did the assignments by themselves or had someone else to do their assignments." (P2)

Table 3. Preferences of lecturers

Lecturer preferences	Number of the Participants
Blended instruction	P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8
Face-to-face instruction	P3,P9

Blended instruction was preferred by the participants as demonstrated in Table 3 because of the following reasons:

"I think courses which require active student participation and aims to help students gain some skills related to teaching like practicum, teaching language skills should be face-to-face. However, elective and theoretical courses could be online. (P1)

"Courses should be face to face but supported with online follow up activities; since we want our students to be autonomous learners, they should also benefit from distance education."

(P2)

''I certainly prefer blended learning because class hours are not adequate for some faculties. Technology presents opportunities for supporting education out of the class hours.'' (P6)

Table 4. Problems encountered by lecturers in synchronous distance education

Challenges faced by lecturers	Number of the Participants
Problems related to technical infrastructure	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5,P6, P7,P8, P9
Internet connection problems	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
Inadequate number of students attending synchronous classes	P6, P7, P8
Students' unwillingness to verbal participation	P6, P7, P8
Low attendance rate of students	P1, P3
Lack of students' motivation	P6, P7

The participants also mentioned about the problems they encountered in synchronous distance education as illustrated in Table 4. While problems related to technical

infrastructure were at the top, it was followed by internet connection problems, and problems related to student participation respectively. The participants elaborated on the problems they faced as in the following:

"Internet connection problem was among the main drawbacks of online distance education which interrupted my classes." (P4).

"I had problems in connecting to my class very often and it was mainly because of the LM system we used; it had a low bandwidth, and when many of us (lecturers) had online classes at the same time, there was overloading and interruptions, connection problems were inevitable." (P1)

''I think, distance education was implemented for the biggest population ever, the infrastructure of the LM system that we used was not appropriate for such a big population. That is why we had some technical problems at the beginning of process.'' (P7)

''The infrastructure of LM system was not suitable for some technological opportunities; for example, I wanted to use double cameras to help students see me and my print-outs at the same time. But I could not manage it because of the LM system.'' (P6)

Table 5. The reasons of challenges faced by the lecturers during the synchronous distance education

The reasons of problems encountered by the lecturers	Number of the Participants
Lack of lecturer training for distance education	P1, P3,P7,P8, P9
Lack of lecturers' experience in terms of teaching at a distance	P1, P3, P7, P8,P9
Lack of technological knowledge	P7, P8,P9
Skipping to distance education by necessity	P6, P7

Nearly half of the participants inserted that lack of lecturer-training for distance education and lack of lecturers' experience in terms of teaching at a distance were the main reasons for the problems encountered (Table 5). Lack of technological knowledge and skipping to distance education by necessity were also among the reasons according to several participants:

"It was a sudden switch to the online education and I have never delivered online courses beforehand; I had difficulty in adapting to the new situation." (P3)

''Distance education was implemented by necessity because of the Covid-19. Even though I had theoretical knowledge in terms of how to implement an effective synchronous distance education process, I had problems because of inadequate lecturer-training and lack of experience.'' (P8)

Table 6. Solutions preferred by the Lecturers

Solutions preferred by the Lecturers	Number of the Participants
Contacting with faculty online teaching coordinator	P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9
Connecting to the internet from the university for teaching online	P2, P3, P5
Making announcements through students' WhatsApp groups	P1,P5, P6
Teaching out of the class hours	P9
Watching training videos	P7

Table 6 highlights the solutions the lecturers resorted to in order to minimize the problems they faced in synchronous distance education. While majority of the participants contacted with faculty online teaching coordinator, connecting to the internet from the university for teaching online and making announcements through students' WhatsApp groups were also preferred by some of the participants.

Table 7. Emotions experienced by the Lecturers

Emotions experienced by the Lecturers	Number of the Participants
Anxiety	P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8,P9
Stress	P1, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9
Demotivation	P1, P2, P9

Mainly negative emotions were experienced by the participants during synchronous distance education as shown in table 7. While majority of them felt anxious and stressed, three of the participants felt demotivated because of the following reasons:

"I had concerns about the pace of my teaching; I kept asking myself whether I spoke too fast or too slow or whether students understood the lesson since I did not get any feedback from the students during my classes. Therefore, I sometimes felt stressed." (P1).

"It was only me who spoke during the class hours and being the only speaker and not seeing or hearing the students made me feel anxious." (P2)

"It was only me whose camera was switched on; while I could not see the students, they could see me on the screen. Moreover, the online classes were recorded; they were on the LM system so that students could watch whenever they wanted. All these made me feel stressed; I had to be very careful about my body language and my utterances. I felt like I was monitored and under pressure during the online classes." (P3)

"Very limited interaction and participation of only a small group of students demotivated me" (P1)

"Because of the connection problems we often experienced, I felt anxious before each online class; I had concerns whether I would be able to connect or whether my camera or microphone would work. (P5)

"I felt stressed when I did not get any reaction from the students and realized that they were not eager to participate." (P4)

When participants were asked about the quality and quantity of interaction during online classes, all of the participants agreed that student-lecturer and student-student interactions were very limited and insufficient:

"The interaction was mostly written; when I wanted my students to switch on their cameras or mics they often rejected stating that their devices did not work or were absent. This made me demotivated and I did not ask them to switch on their devices in the subsequent classes. When I asked questions, they answered through the chat box." (P2)

"The students avoided speaking; they even avoided asking questions. When I asked them whether they had any questions related to the class, they mainly wrote that everything was clear and ok on the chat box." (P3)

"Unfortunately, I could not observe student performance (their speaking performance); teacher talk time was too much and students were only listeners." (P4)

Table 8. Attempts to facilitate interaction and student participation by the lecturers

Attempts to facilitate interaction and student participation by the lecturers	Number of the Participants
Giving assignments which require students to discuss and comment	P1, P2, P3, P5, P8
Using other digital platforms like canvas, WhatsApp	P2, P6, P8
Sharing additional course materials, games and useful links in order for them to practice English	P4, P6, P9
Using different facilities of Learning Management System such as Forum	P8

Table 8 shows attempts to promote interaction and student participation by the lecturers. According to the table, majority of the participants gave assignments which require students to discuss and comment. Other digital platforms like canvas and WhatsApp were also used by several participants in order to ensure student interaction and participation. Some participants claimed that they shared additional course materials and useful links in order for them to practice English. Lastly, different facilities of Learning Management System such as Forum was used by one of the participants.

Finally, all of the lecturers asserted that majority of the students did not benefit from online education because of the following reasons:

"Since majority of the students did not have the digital devices necessary for distance education, Online distance education was far from being beneficial for the students." (P5)

"Since the students were not able to participate actively in online classes and avoided asking questions, misunderstandings occurred especially related to assignments. Several students could not fulfil what they were expected to do." (P3)

''Students were not prepared to be taught at a distance and there was not effective training in terms of how to use the online system. Furthermore, the instructors' support was probably not enough to guide students.'' (P7)

Additionally, as it can be understood from the following citations, the lecturers who teach vocational English out of ELT department indicated that lack of students' motivation or students' negative attitudes towards learning English affected synchronous distance education in a negative way.

'' The students were not motivated enough to follow the classes in a synchronous way, they did not feel the existence of a lecturer on the other side of the computer.'' (P7)

''Students' motivation was very low to learn English because they did not think that they would use English out of the classes. In addition to demotivation, the students had many other responsibilities related to their own major. As English was a nonmajor class for the faculty that I teach for, it was not a priority for my students.'' (P6)

The Results for the Qualitative Analysis of Student Open-Ended Surveys

The first item of the open-ended survey was about comparison of distance education and face-to-face instruction in terms of advantages and disadvantages. Following results were revealed as the advantages of distance education as a result of the qualitative analysis of 22 open-ended surveys.

Two biggest advantages of DE indicated by the students are being economical as the students were not required to pay for commuting, sheltering or food and the flexibility of time and space which provide students with the equal education opportunities. Additionally, being able to reach course materials and content out of the classroom and whenever they wish, having adequate time for assignments and self-study and not having commuting problems are also revealed as the advantages of DE. The students also added that instructors' efforts made DE effective.

As for the disadvantages of DE the students uttered following statements:

- It is not as effective as face-to-face instruction,

- There was not a warm relationship between the instructors and students; the interaction was limited,

- Having disconnection with the courses because of not having (stable) internet connection,

- The students do not regularly attend the classes because of the lack of motivation and it was difficult to do the requirements of being a student in a DE process.

- It was difficult to use the LM system

- As DE is implemented through technological devices, it may affect the students' concentration negatively because of distracting factors.

- It was difficult for the instructors to follow each student's professional development.

In addition to DE, the advantages and disadvantages of face-to-face instruction were also asked to the students. As the biggest advantage of face-to-face instruction, they indicated that they participate into the courses more actively in a traditional classroom environment and it provides them with more opportunities to ask questions to the instructors and exchange opinions with the classmates. Additionally, classroom environment was thought to be better in order to have stronger and more sincere relationships with the instructors and other students. On the other hand, not being able to reach course content or watch the course recordings out of the class was seen as the disadvantage of face-to-face instruction.

The second question of the open-ended survey aimed to reveal students' opinions about the assessment process of DE. Even if one of the students indicated that there was too much homework, most of the students thought that there were adequate and effective assignments for assessment and this provided them with the opportunity of refreshing their knowledge (n=12) and the benefits of the formative assessment with continuous assignments were revealed with the following quotation:

> ''Even though much more time was needed to complete the assignments, we searched more and revise the subjects to do our assignments and this helped to reinforce the subjects we had been taught; furthermore, submitting assignments and project works instead of having online exams helped us keep our focus on the lectures. On the other hand, having online exams may have been problematic because of the technological problems.''

They also stated that although the assessment process differed based on the lecture and instructor, most of the instructors did their best for an effective DE and a fair assessment process. As for the feedback, a small number of the students would like to have more (n=2) by writing following statement:

> *''I could not get effective results as I do in face-to-face instruction. I could not have a contact with the instructor when I received unexpected assignment scores and because of not having adequate feedback, I could not improve my knowledge enough.''*

As known, learning and teaching a foreign language is not a single-sided process; so, the students were asked whether they did anything to conduct their learning process effectively and improve their language skills or not. Except for only one student, all of the students stated that they did additional activities to improve their language skills. More than half of the students emphasized that they had English reading practice by means of (online) books, news, articles and magazines (and analyzed the content) and watched movies and documentaries in English. The other activities conducted by the students in DE process are listening practice by means of mobile applications, podcasts and news reports, having (online) speaking practice (with native speakers), listening to English songs and checking the lyrics, preparing for/ revising the course subjects to have a more effective learning process, following social media accounts and using applications related to English, keeping a diary and memorizing English words.

When students were asked whether they received support from their lecturers related to learning and evaluation process at satisfactory level during the online education process, more than half of the students (n=14) claimed that the lecturers were supportive enough to help them during the process. Majority of them stated that they could easily contact with the lecturers and get quick responses to their questions. One of the participants (P2) asserted that lecturers frequently made announcements about issues related to assignments, class requirements, evaluation etc. Another participant (P8) added that the lecturers cared about the problems they faced and provided guidance related to how to improve themselves in terms of grammar, writing etc. On the other hand, the lecturer support was not at satisfactory level according to some participants (n=8). One participant (P3) indicated that she could not get detailed feedback related to several assignments even though she asked for the feedback. Moreover, P11 indicated that some lecturers did not turn back to the student e-mails while some others did.

The participants were also asked whether online classes were effective. Only seven participants stated that they benefited from online classes. While eight participants found them partially effective, online classes were not effective according to the other seven participants. Among those who found online classes beneficial, two participants claimed that distance education was something new for both the lecturers and students; still, they could learn from the online classes and they did not fall behind even though they were not exposed to face to face education. Other reasons included having too much time to study since they did not have to travel between university and home, time flexibility, and assignments and course materials which helped students to get benefit from the classes.

According to some participants (n=8), some classes were beneficial while some others were not. This was partly because of the lecturer' teaching style and partly because of the nature of some classes. Some lecturers ensured student participation through in-class exercises and regular assignments, which students found beneficial. On the other hand, students did not benefit much from classes like speaking since they could not have much chance to speak because of the limitations of the LM system they used and connection problems. Rest of the participants (n=7) claimed that they did not benefit from the online classes because of the following reasons: internet connection problems, problems related to technical infrastructure, not having access to the internet. In addition, lack of face-to-face contact with the teacher had also a negative effect on students' learning. One participant (P9) stated that he experienced constant connection problems, and he was hesitant about asking questions to the lecturers during the online classes. According to P13 classes especially speaking classes which require active participation were not effective since they could not participate and speak during the classes because of constant connection problems which interrupted the classes.

The participants experienced various emotions during online distance education. Anxiety, stress, feeling relaxed were the mostly reported emotions by the participants. Nearly half of the participants (n=10) felt anxious or stressed during the online education process, while two participants were depressed. Rest of the participants (n=10) indicated that they felt relaxed during the online education process. The main reason for negative emotions included uncertainty the Covid-19 pandemic brought as some participants claimed that they were curious about when to switch to face-to-face education and when this pandemic would come to an end as being in quarantine also created stress among some participants. One

participant (P1) claimed that she was anxious especially for after pandemic period. Since she was exposed to online education, she wondered whether she could socialize easily when face-to-face education started. Moreover, practicing English while being in quarantine with family members was not much possible for her. Other reasons for negative emotions were: lack of internet access, internet connection problems, and too many assignments. When it comes to positive emotions reported by the participants, the main reason for why some students (n=10) felt relaxed was that they attended to the classes from their home. One student (P12) indicated that he felt relaxed as he was far from the classroom environment which was more likely to create stress. Another participant (P8) stated that it was more comfortable to attend to the classes from home as she could listen to the lecturers from her bed in her pyjamas.

Lastly, the participants were asked which mode of teaching and learning they would prefer: online, face-to-face or blended. Half of the participants (n=11) preferred face-to face education while only one participant opted for online education. Less than half of the participants (n=10) reported that they would prefer blended education. Majority of those who opted for face-to-face education claimed that it was easier to contact with the lecturers and the classes were more effective for the students in face-to-face education. On the other hand, the participants who were for blended education agreed on that field courses (courses related to language learning and teaching) should be taught face-to-face whereas courses related to educational sciences could be taught online. Some participants (n=3) added that technology should be integrated into education in this technological era and they should not fall behind the technological developments. Therefore, some theoretical classes could be taught online according to them.

Discussion and Conclusion

For the purpose of answering the research questions posed by the researchers, qualitative data collection tools including semi-structured interviews and open-ended survey were employed by the researchers. The interview with the faculty members revealed that disadvantages of the synchronous distance education outweighed the advantages of it. While advantages mainly included access to rich media-content, spatial flexibility, and not having to pay for accommodation and transportation, which was acknowledged in the studies conducted by Bakan-Kalaycıoğlu et al. (2022), Ironsi (2021), disadvantages were more

prevalent according to faculty members. Very limited (mostly written) lecturer-student interaction and not getting any reaction or feedback from the students during the online classes were the major drawbacks of online distance education according to the participants. However, it should be noted that lack of interaction between the lecturer and students was partly because of the LM system used by the university; as mentioned above in the method section, the lecturer was not able to see and hear students immediately, he/she had to get student approval in order to turn on their cam or microphone, which was mainly resulted in rejection by the students. Less student-teacher interaction was reported as a drawback also in the study conducted by Moralista and Oducado (2020) as they found that there was a high degree of depersonalization in online education according to the faculty members. Another reason for limited interaction was students' not having internet access and technological tools to follow online classes according to the participants. Similarly, Sari and Nayır (2020) highlighted that students' not having internet access and technological tools was among the drawbacks of online education as stated by the faculty members.

Furthermore, it was difficult for the faculty members to evaluate student performance with assignments since they did not consider them as reliable tools as they never knew whether students did the assignments or got help from others. Likewise, faculty members in the study of Moralista and Oducado (2020) revealed that academic dishonesty including cheating and plagiarism was more common in online education. Online classes were also found burdensome by the faculty members because teacher talk time was too much and online classes required good preparation for the lessons. In a similar vein, Bakan-Kalaycıoğlu et al., (2022) found that preparing for online classes was more burdensome for faculty members as they had to redesign their lessons in accordance with online education.

When the faculty members were asked about their preferences for the future, majority of them preferred blended learning despite the challenges they experienced. However, they suggested that face-to-face instruction should be supported with online instruction as the technology had its own blessings and was a necessity in the current era. In their study, Aksoğan and Çalış-Duman (2020) and Bakan-Kalaycıoğlu et al., (2022) concluded that blended learning was a better alternative to online instruction. The participants were also asked which problems they encountered during online instruction and the reasons of them. Problems related to technical infrastructure and internet connection were the most frequently reported challenges by the participants, which were followed by

low student participation. Similar problems were reported in the studies carried out by Sari and Nayır (2020) and Karademir, Yaman, & Saatçioglu, (2020). Moreover, almost all of the participants experienced anxiety and stress during online instruction especially because of lack experience in online distance education, too much teacher talk time during the classes and frequent internet connection problems, which was also acknowledged in the study carried out by Karademir et al., (2020).

In order to eliminate problems especially the ones resulted from technical infrastructure and internet connection, majority of the faculty members contacted with the faculty online teaching coordinator. Moreover, making announcements through whatsapp groups was common among the participants. Since lack of interaction between students and the instructor was among the major disadvantages of online education, the instructors used other digital platforms like canvas, whatsapp in order to facilitate interaction. In addition, they gave assignments requiring student participation through discussions and comments. Similarly, Karademir et al., (2020) found that the instructors used different digital platforms in order to compensate for online instruction.

As stated previously, in addition to the interviews for the perceptions of faculty members, open-ended surveys were implemented to the students in order to reveal their opinions about distance education process. According to the results, more disadvantages than advantages in terms of distance education were indicated by the students. Even if the participants stated that DE provided them with a more economical way of receiving education, flexible study hours and the opportunity of reaching course materials and content whenever they wish, most of them thought that DE was not as effective as face-to-face instruction and there was not adequate interaction between instructor and students, and students and students. These results are parallel with the results of Alan et al. (2020) and Ozudogru (2021) who revealed similar advantages and disadvantages of teaching at a distance. The reason why DE was found ineffective by some of the participants might be mostly based on the emergency shift from face-to-face instruction to DE. Because there was not adequate time neither for the faculty nor for the students to receive training about the DE. The Covid 19 outbreak made that shift compulsory and the readiness level was not able to be considered by the authorities. On the other hand, as stated by the students, some of the participants did not have required technological facilities to conduct their learning process. LM system may also be among the effective factors that affected learners negatively. As

stated by the lecturers, the students might have felt demotivated because of some factors such as not being seen by the instructors during the synchronous classes. The study conducted by Ur Rahman (2020) for the perceptions of English Language instructors showed that most of the instructors teaching English at a distance thought that the students had lack of motivation during DE process. No matter how you teach, it should not be ignored that motivation is an important factor for teaching/learning a foreign language (Noels et al., 2019).

As for the second item of the open-ended survey, students' opinions about the assessment in DE process was revealed. Most of the instructors implemented formative assessment conducted by the frequent assignments. Even if some of the students thought that the homework was too much, most of them were in favor of being assessed through various assignments. In a teaching/learning environment where the students cannot be tested in a face-to-face manner, the importance of formative assessment should be taken into consideration. Additionally, it is the feedback which may enrich the effectiveness of formative assessment. Similarly, Senel and Senel (2021) also reveal that the students are generally satisfied with the quality of formative assessment in a DE environment and they are more satisfied with being assessed by the assignments with feedback. Also, as stated by the students, the frequent assignments and feedback may help students keep their connection with the virtual learning environment. Considering Keller's (2000) ARCS (Attention, Relevance, Confidence, Satisfaction) model, it may be stated that the students will be aware of the balance between their current situation and the objectives of the courses by receiving feedback from the instructors and this may lead to confidence and satisfaction that may affect students' motivation, as well.

As known, educational process is not limited only to the instructors or students; no matter how it is implemented; either virtual or face-to-face. It is a tripartite process including institution, instructors and students. Whereas the readiness of institution and the guidance of instructors have crucial importance, the role and efforts of the students do not fall behind. In the open-ended survey, the students were asked about their personal endeavor to support their learning. The number of participants who supported their learning process through written, visual or auditory materials was more than half. When the results of this item are considered with the result of the item which asks students whether DE is effective or not, it is seen that more than half of the students thought DE as an effective learning process (either

partially or totally). This may be based on lecturers' readiness, technological knowledge, guidance and teaching style as well as on the students' participation into the virtual learning environment and personal efforts they make in order to strengthen their learning in a more autonomous way.

All in all, a distance education environment has three parties which are institution, lecturers and students. Requirements and roles should be clear for each. Effective distance education is possible with the strong cooperation of the related parties. Considering the findings revealed as a result of qualitative analysis of lecturers' interviews and students' open-ended surveys, following pedagogical implications may be considered:

- The institutions should fulfill the requirements in terms of planning the educational process, technological infrastructure and lecturer training.

- The lecturers should be aware of their potential educational and technological knowledge and have the capability of adapting their teaching style in a virtual learning environment.

- As learning a foreign language cannot be thought without students' practice, their active participation should be encouraged by the lecturers.

- The motivation of the students should be fostered by means of the content which is appropriate for students' needs, level, readiness and expectations.

- Formative assessment may be implemented in order to keep students' connection with the virtual learning environment.

- Foreign language teaching cannot be considered without feedback; so the students should be provided with feedback to show them the strong and weak sides of their learning process.

- The lecturers should guide the students about using related learning management system, doing and submitting their assignments and supporting their learning process out of the classes.

- The students should also be aware of their own roles and responsibilities as well as their strength and weakness in regards to their learning.

Ethical Committee Permission Information

Name of the board that carries out ethical assessment: Dicle University Ethics Committee

The date and number of the ethical assessment decision: 21.10.2021/163

Author Contribution Statement

Sevim GÜNEŞ*: Conceptualization, literature review, methodology, implementation, data analysis, and writing.*

Fatma KAYA*: Conceptualization, literature review, methodology, implementation, data analysis, and writing.*

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