



Original Article / Orijinal Makale

Online education through the eyes of Turkish EFL instructors:
A study on metaphorical perceptions

İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğreten Türk öğretim görevlilerinin gözünden
çevrimiçi eğitim: Metaforik algılar üzerine bir araştırma

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: 10 May 2022

Revised: 18 July 2022

Accepted: 25 July 2022

Key words:

Online teaching, metaphor analysis, EFL instructors, teaching English online.

MAKALE BİLGİSİ

Makale hakkında

Geliş tarihi: 10 Mayıs 2022

Revizyon tarihi: 18 Temmuz 2022

Kabul tarihi: 25 Temmuz 2022

Anahtar kelimeler:

Online öğretim, metafor analizi, EFL eğitmeni, online İngilizce öğretimi.

ABSTRACT

Online education has been one of the most discussed educational phenomena in literature. However, it has not been a common experience for all shareholders of educational settings until the global pandemic. Compulsory online transmission in educational settings has turned into a common experience for all shareholders of educational practices around the globe rather than an option for traditional classroom-based instruction. The present study aims to explore the perceptions of EFL instructors and faculty regarding their online teaching practices through elicited metaphor analysis. To this end, 75 participants' metaphoric utterances were collected and coded through content analysis according to their gender, general teaching experience, and online teaching experience. Two categories and 17 themes have been identified. The results indicate a nuance between the positive and negative perceptions about online teaching according to gender and online teaching experience and a slight difference between general teaching experience and perceptions. Overall, participants have adopted a negative perception of their online teaching experience.

ÖZ

Çevrimiçi eğitim, literatürde en çok tartışılan eğitim olgularından biri olmuştur. Ancak küresel salgına kadar eğitim ortamlarının tüm paydaşları için ortak bir deneyim olmamıştır. Eğitim ortamlarında zorunlu çevrimiçi aktarım, geleneksel sınıf temelli öğretim için bir seçenek olmaktan çok, dünyadaki tüm eğitim uygulamalarının tüm paydaşları için ortak bir deneyime dönüşmüştür. Bu çalışma, metafor analizi tekniği ile İngilizce öğretim görevlilerinin ve öğretim üyelerinin çevrimiçi öğretim uygulamalarına ilişkin algılarını araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaçla 75 katılımcının metaforik ifadeleri toplanmış ve cinsiyetlerine, genel öğretmenlik deneyimlerine ve çevrimiçi öğretim deneyimlerine göre içerik analizi yoluyla kodlanmıştır. İki kategori ve 17 tema belirlenmiştir. Sonuçlar, cinsiyete ve çevrimiçi öğretim deneyimine göre çevrimiçi öğretime ilişkin olumlu ve olumsuz algılar arasında bir fark olduğunu ve genel

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öğretim deneyimi ile algılar arasında küçük bir fark olduğunu göstermektedir. Genel olarak, katılımcılar çevrimiçi öğretim deneyimlerine ilişkin olumsuz bir algı benimsemişlerdir.

Cite this article as: Benlioğlu, B., & Kesen Mutlu, A. (2022). Online education through the eyes of Turkish EFL instructors: A study on metaphorical perceptions. *Yıldız Journal of Educational Research*, 7(2), 88–100.

INTRODUCTION

Advanced technological innovations have spread all dimensions of human life, including education. Given the rapid changes in online settings, online education has attracted researchers' attention in terms of the differences between traditional classrooms, the means of delivery of the instruction, and possible virtues that seem like a panacea for encountered malfunctions in regular educational settings (Eckstein et al., 2007). Indeed, with the ease of accessing the course material, flexibility in adjusting study pace, and feasibility for enabling self-regulated learning, online education looks promising for shaping the future of instruction. Nevertheless, Cope and Kalantzis (2022) argue that utilizing technological innovations does not automatically indicate a robust reform in education as long as the functions of the textbooks, interaction, and delivery of the instruction remain the same. Therefore, changing dynamics of education call for particular attention since a plethora of parameters are embedded into educational practices, such as pedagogical aspects of the teaching-learning process, human interaction, and experiences.

Previous studies regarding online education primarily focused on the effectiveness, perceptions, and attitudes in a context in which instructing online was an alternative or an addition to face-to-face courses both in language and teacher education programs (Fang et al., 2019; Shin & Kang, 2018). According to The UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, more than a billion learners were affected by the global closures of schools, including higher education, because of the pandemic (UNESCO, 2022). Pandemic restrictions brought about a mandatory shift from face-to-face instruction to online settings. Compulsory online transmission, then, turned into a common experience for all shareholders of educational practices around the globe rather than an option for traditional classroom-based instruction.

Before comparing the newly experienced phenomenon with the traditionally accustomed one, it is critical to understand what has happened from various perspectives of the experiencers to make comprehensive meanings. Considering that comparing one medium to another in instruction delivery makes little meaning before understanding the perceptions of the experiencers (Johnson et al., 2020), eliciting metaphorical explanations of the practitioners about the current online education may pave the way for valid and reliable upcoming research. Given the virtues of metaphor

analysis for providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in question, this study investigates EFL instructors' perceptions of online education experiences in Turkey.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the pandemic restrictions, education has shifted from face-to-face to online immediately worldwide. The immediate shift in the instruction delivery has been acknowledged as emergency remote teaching (Hodges et al., 2020) and conceptualized as a rapid change in the delivery of instruction due to crises (Cameron-Standerford et al., 2020). Following the circumstances, emergency remote teaching has been an obligation rather than a choice (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020), enabling practitioners and learners to experience online education discussed so far in the literature (Beatty & Ulasewicz, 2006; Britt, 2006; Kucuk & Richardson, 2019; Li & Akins, 2005).

At the initial phase of online teaching, instructors reported that they had been undergoing a learning process of teaching with all dimensions, such as implementing new ways to measure achievement (Johnson et al., 2020), finding solutions to enhance student interaction and motivation (Lockee, 2021; Mahmood, 2021), and being more flexible in terms of deadlines of upcoming assignments (Vaughan et al., 2013). However, reflections regarding online educational settings have been reciprocated with mixed perceptions. For instance, Paudel (2021) conducted a survey design study with 280 participants to obtain perspectives from higher education instructors and students. The results indicated that online contexts are beneficial for conducting research studies and getting connected to academic stuff around the globe while rather challenging for having created time management issues and feelings of isolation among users.

Most of the research studies about the perception of online education accumulate on learners' perspectives (Bagriacık Yılmaz, 2019; Wei & Chou, 2020) and little focus on the instructors' experiences. In a study, instructors' preferences for facilitative online education and the synchronous courses were found neither effective nor useless, indicating a mixed perception of distance video-conferencing tools' benefits (Martin et al., 2020). In a similar vein, Walker and Koralesky (2021) indicated that both undergraduate students and their instructors were in consensus on dimin-

ished affective engagement while cognitive engagement was enhanced via recorded course content. Mixed perceptions were reported as a result of Kunal and Nayak's (2020) and Moralista and Oducado's (2020) survey-design findings. Disadvantageous themes have been found as lack of social interaction, scarcity of nonverbal communication clues, issues related to students' responsibilities and motivation, time management issues, and technical issues (Kim & Freberg, 2018; Orhan & Beyhan, 2020), data privacy (Almahasees et al., 2021), assignment security (Abduh, 2021), lack of digital literacy among faculty members (Almazova et al., 2020). On the other hand, positive perceptions were also mentioned as virtual learning environments are more effective in getting to know the students and instruction, increasing student engagement, and improving cognitive presence and content engagement (Manegre & Sabiri, 2020). Besides, the e-learning option is metaphorized as a "rainbow bridge" for providing accessibility (Seale, 2006).

Ramlo (2021) conducted a Q study to elicit perspectives from university instructors regarding online education to hinder the loss of meaning encountered in Likert-type survey designs. The results indicated three distinct perspectives; "Techies who like to teach" refers to the ardent supporter of online education; "Overwhelmed as human beings" to the ones who were trying to contour a clear line between personal lives and teaching duties; and "It's about what cannot be done online" was the group supporting the idea that online contexts were abortive both for educational success and interpersonal skills (Ramlo, 2021, pp. 255–256). It is noteworthy that even the most technology-supporter group stated that online versions couldn't be substituted for face-to-face education for providing hands-on experience, especially in applied courses. In another study, faculty members were asked to elicit ten words regarding the shift from face-to-face education to online. The most frequent words uttered by eighty-three faculty members were "challenging" ($f=15$), followed by "concern" ($f=14$), and "anxious" ($f=10$) (Cameron-Standerford et al., 2020). Nonetheless, participants were supposed to connote the rapid change in the form of delivery rather than focusing on the incipient opportunities born within the new context, which might be the reason for the biased negative answers.

When instructors of an undergraduate program were asked about their metaphors regarding online education, the answers reflected a negative connotation such as, "online teaching is a challenge setter ($N=19$)," "online teaching is a depriver ($N=14$)," and "online teaching is a consumer of time ($N=11$)" (May & Short, 2003a). The authors discuss the metaphors' power that enables the delineation of cognitive and behavioral attitudes of the creator and suggest "gardening in cyberspace" as a valuable and beneficial metaphor when understanding and reflecting on online teaching practices (May & Short, 2003b). While the online teaching efforts of university members have mainly discussed

the technological competencies of users, online education practices of university instructors and faculty should be considered with affective dimensions, and it is invaluable to analyze experiences from multiple perspectives to reach the multilayered form of teaching online (Cutri & Mena, 2020).

Considering the literature, this study aims to scrutinize EFL instructors' and faculty's perceptions of the concept of "online teaching" using metaphors. In this context, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the conceptual metaphors for EFL instructors/faculty about the concept of "online teaching"?
2. To what extent are EFL instructors'/faculty's conceptual metaphors about the concept of "online teaching" gender-related?
3. To what extent are EFL instructors'/faculty's conceptual metaphors about the concept of "online teaching" teaching experience related?

METHOD

Metaphor Analysis as a Research Tool

Metaphor analysis is a fruitful tool in education research since knowledge pieces covert in known and unknown perceptions can be elicited to conceptualize new ways of understanding. Hence, yet unnamed experiences can be brought to light in education with metaphor elicitation to explore cognitive and behavioral patterns (Fabián, 2013). Indeed, human "thoughts and actions are guided by a conceptual system that is metaphorical in nature" (Kirby & Harter, 2003, p. 31), and human thought can be extracted through metaphors those act as a cognitive tool when delineating the information process (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Given the power of eliciting definitions and explorations of the transitions undergone, metaphors are frequently used in studies to label and conceptualize educational change (Low, 2008). Thus, researchers have been utilizing metaphor elicitation techniques to get better insights and interpret the beliefs and perceptions of teachers (Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Saban, 2006; Thornbury, 1991), preservice teachers (İnceçay, 2015; Koc, 2013), and learners (Alejo-González, 2022; Ishak, 2019; Kesen, 2010). To this end, a phenomenological qualitative research design was adopted, which is characterized as obtaining in-depth information about the participant group's reactions and experiences through metaphors (Yoos, 1971).

Participants and Research Setting

English language instructors working in university preparatory programs ($N=55$) and faculty from English language teaching programs ($N=21$) participated in the study. All 75 participants were volunteers, and they had background information about generating metaphors. The participants' ages ranged from 27 to 55. An online form including demographic information (age, gender, teaching institution, teaching, and online teaching experience) and

one metaphor elicitation task was administered to collect the data. The participants were asked to answer the metaphor elicitation task that had the prompt “Online teaching is.... . Because....” following Lakoff’s (1993) Elicited Metaphor Analysis (EMA) technique. To simplify the task requirements and prevent confusion, researchers deliberately designed the prompt as “online teaching” instead of “teaching in emergency remote context” since conceptual distinction might still be vague for some practitioners.

DATA ANALYSIS

One of the most critical concerns for metaphor studies has been acknowledged as the trustworthiness of the findings since subjective interpretations are embedded into the analysis procedure (Armstrong et al., 2011). To diminish those concerns and triangulate the research, follow-up interviews were conducted with participants to establish validity. Content analysis was used to identify central themes and categories (Stemler, 2000).

RESULTS

In Table 1, 27 metaphors grouped under the “positive” category were generated by the participants for the notion of “online teaching.” A total of 8 themes emerged for the positive metaphors. It is seen in Table 1 that the theme “opportunity” had the highest number of metaphors ($n= 13$), while the themes “variety” and “assistance” had the lowest number of positive metaphors. Each theme and related metaphors will be examined in detail in the following section based on frequency and percentage.

Easiness

In Table 1 that under the theme “easiness,” 4 different metaphors were represented by 5 participants. The metaphors “time-saving machine,” “fish in the sea,” “source of comfort,” and “convenience” all imply that the participants involved in online teaching perceive this experience as an easy way to conduct their lessons. It is important to note that the participants used the metaphor “time-saving ma-

Table 1. Positive Category Themes for Online Teaching Metaphors

Category	Theme	Metaphor	f	%	
Positive	Easiness	1. Time-saving machine	2	5,9	
		2. Fish in the sea	1	2,9	
		3. Source of comfort	1	2,9	
		4. Convenience	1	2,9	
	Surprise	1. Fascinating tool	3	8,8	
		2. A box of surprises	1	2,9	
	Opportunity	1. Innovation	1. Innovation	4	11,8
			2. Future	1	2,9
			3. Enjoyment	1	2,9
			4. Plan B	1	2,9
			5. Flexibility	1	2,9
			6. Good option	1	2,9
			7. Promise	2	5,9
			8. Jolly joker	1	2,9
			9. Enthusiasm	1	2,9
	Comfort & freedom	1. Vacation	1. Vacation	1	2,9
			2. Convenience	1	2,9
			3. Comfort zone	1	2,9
			4. Wonder	1	2,9
			5. Flexibility	2	5,9
	Variety	1. Engagement	1	2,9	
	Cruciality	1. Necessity	1	2,9	
		2. Must	1	2,9	
	Endlessness	1. Freedom	1	2,9	
		2. Flexibility	1	2,9	
	Assistance	1. Bridge	1	2,9	
	Total		27 metaphors	34	100

chine” in the interview so that it was easier for them to prepare the materials and present the topics to be covered through online teaching.

Surprise

The metaphors under the theme “surprise” include “fascinating tool” and “a box of surprises.” From the perspectives of 3 participants, online teaching is associated with being glamorous and impressive. Such a resemblance might be attributed to EFL teachers’ positive experiences with online teaching. When asked to elaborate on their metaphors, the participants stated the following:

Online teaching is fascinating because it is fastidious

Online teaching is a fascinating tool as it has many unexpected opportunities

As for the metaphor “a box of surprises,” the participant clarified the reasons why she produced this metaphor as follows:

Online teaching is a box of surprises. When you see a box of surprises, you get excited, and you can never be sure of what you will see once you open it. Moving from this association, I can say that online teaching is the same as it makes you feel excited and curious all the time.

Opportunity

We see in Table 1 that the theme “opportunity” has the highest number of metaphors (n=9) and frequency (13). The participants who implied that online teaching is an opportunity used the metaphors “innovation,” “future,” “enjoyment,” “plan B,” “flexibility,” “good option,” “promise,” “jolly joker,” and “enthusiasm.” The metaphor “innovation” had the highest frequency among the other metaphors under the “opportunity” theme. We can assume that online teaching is a breakthrough for the participants using this metaphor. Developing such a metaphor could be attributable to participants’ having the experience of online teaching for the first time in their teaching careers. When asked to elaborate on the rationale behind using this metaphor for online teaching, the participants stated the following:

Online teaching is innovation, it is the future, and the future is technology.

Online teaching is an innovation because it makes you use all available online tools.

Another metaphor that is associated with online teaching is “promise.” From the perspectives of 2 participants, online teaching is a “promise,” and the reason for such an analogy is as follows:

Online teaching is a promise because it will take over the solid throne of “classroom teaching” entirely in the future.

Other metaphors with the same frequency are “future” (n=1), “enjoyment” (n=1), “plan B” (n=1), “flexibility” (n=1), “good option” (n=1), “jolly joker” (n=1), and “enthusiasm” (n=1). We can conclude that for the participants developing these metaphors, online teaching has positive connotations

as it facilitates the teaching process while providing teachers with excitement, various options, and resilience.

Comfort and Freedom

In Table 1, the theme “comfort and freedom” has the second-highest frequency with five metaphors. The metaphor “flexibility” developed by 2 participants implies the chances that online teaching creates both for the teachers and learners. The participants

state the reasons for such an analogy as follows:

Online teaching is flexibility because you have many alternatives to teach.

Online teaching is flexibility in many ways because you can implement many kinds of online/digital tools that would enhance teaching and students’ online interaction. Also, as a teacher, you can teach whenever you want as long as you have a good internet connection.

The other metaphors under this theme, namely, “vacation,” “convenience,” “comfort zone,” and “wonder,” all seem to imply that the teacher needs to do less in online teaching as compared to face-to-face teaching. Participants’ choice of these metaphors might also be attributed to participants’ feeling exhausted with traditional classroom teaching procedures.

Variety

Under the theme of “variety,” we see only one metaphor (engagement). During the interview, the participant stated the following to clarify why she developed this metaphor:

Online teaching is engagement because you do many things and use various tools at the same time.

Cruciality

The theme “cruciality” consists of two metaphors: “necessity” and “must.” For the participants using these metaphors, online teaching seems requisite. Using these metaphors could be explained, given the changes in language education in recent years. Seeing the profound change towards involving more educators, learners, and opportunities, the participants imply that online teaching is requisite, not an option. The participants commented on their choice of these metaphors in the interview as follows:

Online teaching is a must because of the technological developments; we have to indicate it in our lives and schools.

Necessary, because our lives depend on technology, and it is a must to catch the technology by using online teaching.

Endlessness

The participants who claimed to perceive online teaching as “endlessness” used the metaphors “freedom” and “flexibility.”

Online teaching is flexibility because as the teacher, you can teach whenever you want as long as you have a good internet connection.

Online teaching is freedom because brick walls do not restrict you

Assistance

For the theme “assistance,” we see only one metaphor. For the participant developing the metaphor “bridge,” on-line teaching seems to unite two concepts. The participant’s clarification of the metaphor displays the reason why he associates “bridge” with online teaching:

Online teaching is a bridge between education and computer use. It has made teachers linked to using online sources and tools.

Difficulty and Failure

The theme, as presented in Table 2, “difficulty and failure” with the second-highest frequency includes the metaphors “challenge,” nightmare,” “scapegoat,” “poem,” and “ambiguity.” Among the metaphors in this category, “challenge” has the highest frequency (n=4). From the perspectives of 4 participants, online teaching is best represented as a “challenge.” Implying a negative perception of “online teaching,” “challenge” may be preferred by the participants as online teaching demands teachers to cope with many issues which they may not be very familiar with (handling

technical difficulties, designing online teaching tools or finding ways to make learning interactive). When asked to elaborate on the reasons for using the metaphor “challenge” for online teaching, the participants stated the following:

Online teaching is challenging because in our country, we have different kinds of students coming from different socio-economic families, and it is difficult to handle such differences in online education.

Online teaching is a challenge because it requires much time to prepare for the lessons.

Online teaching is a challenge because there might be a lot of unexpected problems.

Another metaphor in this group is “nightmare.” The reason for using this analogy seems to stem from the participant’s unpleasant experiences in online teaching and becomes more apparent with the explanation provided by the participant during the interview:

Online teaching is a nightmare as there are problems most of the time, and it is difficult to handle them.

The metaphors “scapegoat,” “poem,” and “ambiguity” also imply the negative perceptions of the participants as

Table 2. Negative Category Themes for Online Teaching Metaphors

Category	Theme	Metaphor	f	%
Negative	Difficulty & failure	1. Challenge	4	9,8
		2. Nightmare	1	2,4
		3. Scapegoat	1	2,4
		4. Poem	1	2,4
		5. Ambiguity	1	2,4
	Frustration	1. Cold meal	1	2,4
		Lack of real communication	1. Complexity	2
	2. Ineffective tool		8	19,5
	3. Iron curtain		1	2,4
	4. Ghost		1	2,4
	5. Hardship		1	2,4
	6. Boredom		2	4,9
	7. Fatigue		1	2,4
	Lack of technology literacy	1. Demanding machine	2	4,9
		2. Difficulty	2	4,9
		3. Ambivalence	1	2,4
	Technical problems	1. Stressor	1	2,4
		2. Death	1	2,4
		3. Frustration	1	2,4
		4. Trouble	3	7,3
	Ambiguity	1. Unknown path	1	2,4
	Limitation	1. Imposition	1	2,4
Darkness	1. Cave	1	2,4	
	2. Ambiguity	1	2,4	
Disparity	1. Inequity	1	2,4	
Total		32 metaphors	41	100

they refer to uncertainty and intricacy both for the learners and teachers from the perspective of the participants.

Frustration

We see the metaphor “cold meal” under the theme of “frustration.” The participant using this metaphor rationalizes her choice as follows:

Online teaching is a cold meal. You become disappointed when you see it.

Lack of real communication

The theme “lack of real communication” stands out among the other themes in the negative category of metaphors developed for “online teaching.” The metaphor “ineffective tool” has the highest frequency (n=8) and implies that online teaching does not produce the desired outcome for the participants using this metaphor. The following comments by the participants during the interview session clarify the rationale behind associating online teaching with “ineffective tool”:

Online is an ineffective tool since we have no eye contact with students, so we don't understand whether they understand the lesson or not. Students are too passive, just listening to the lesson, and there is no comment from them. Interaction between students and teachers is too low.

Online teaching is an ineffective tool because there is no real communication between students and the teacher.

Online teaching is not an effective tool because students struggle with focusing on the screen for long periods and do not interact with each other as much as they should.

Other metaphors which refer to a lack of real communication include “complexity,” “iron curtain,” “ghost,” “hardship,” “boredom,” and “fatigue.” Among the explanations for the metaphors developed by the participants, clarifications about “iron curtain” and “ghost” indicate the negative feelings of how helpless the participants feel about online teaching.

Online teaching is an iron curtain as there is almost no human action.

Online teaching is like a ghost because the ghost sees and hears you, but you only hear him.

Lack of technology literacy

The metaphors under the theme of “lack of technology literacy” emphasize the participants’ abilities to use digital environments. Holding a negative attitude, the participants compare online teaching to a “demanding machine,” “difficulty,” and “ambivalence.”

Online teaching is a demanding machine because it's a technically complex process, and it involves the use of a variety of gadgets.

Online teaching is a difficulty because I'm not capable of using electronic tools and the internet effectively.

Technical problems

To imply the technical problems that may occur during

online teaching and inhibit the teaching and/ or learning process, the participants associate online teaching with the metaphors “stressor,” “death,” “frustration,” and “trouble.” Participants using these metaphors imply that online teaching could be failing due to technical problems. For this particular reason, the concept of online teaching is best represented by death, disappointment, and annoyance. The explanation provided by the participant for the metaphor “death” clarifies the reason for such a choice as well as implies the lack of institutional support for online teaching.

Online teaching is death. Most schools in Turkey do not have the necessary technical infrastructure and well-trained, tech-savvy instructors.

Ambiguity

We see only one metaphor under the theme of ambiguity. The metaphor “unknown path” may have stemmed from unspecified procedures used in online teaching. Having a negative attitude towards online teaching, the participant clarifies her choice of this metaphor as follows:

Online teaching is an unknown path because teachers cannot be sure of students' progress. They cannot be sure of the procedures to be followed.

Limitation

Though some of the participants in the current study perceived freedom and flexibility, online teaching is perceived as a limitation by the participant using the metaphor “imposition.” Being somewhat discouraging, this metaphor implies the constraints of online teaching. The explanation by the participant during the interview provides a strong rationale for the choice of this metaphor.

Online teaching is an imposition because teachers are not the ones to make decisions.

Darkness

The metaphors “cave” and “ambiguity” fall under the theme of darkness. A seemingly interesting metaphor—cave—is clarified by the participant as follows:

For me, online teaching is like a cave where I am reading in the dark.

Using this metaphor, the participant reveals his negative perception of online teaching. Such a resemblance could be attributed to such reasons as lack of institutional support and lack of technology literacy.

Disparity

For the theme “disparity,” we see only one metaphor. Using the metaphor “inequity,” the participant draws attention to a different perspective of online teaching. The clarification provided by the participant during the interview is as follows: *Online teaching is inequity because not all students have access to technology.*

Table 3 displays the positive metaphors produced by both female and male participants. While female participants’ metaphors fall under all the themes in the positive

Table 3. Positive Category Themes and Gender Distribution

Category	Theme	Metaphor	Females	Males	
Positive	Easiness	Time-saving machine	2		
		Fish in the sea	-	1	
		Source of comfort	1		
		Convenience	1		
	Surprise	Fascinating tool	3		
		A box of surprises	1		
	Opportunity	Innovation	4		
		Future		1	
		Enjoyment	1		
		Plan B	1		
		Flexibility		1	
		Good option	1		
		Promise			
		Jolly joker	1		
		Enthusiasm	1		
		Vacation	1		
	Comfort & freedom	Convenience	1		
		Comfort zone		1	
		Wonder	1		
		Flexibility		2	
		Variety	Engagement	1	
		Cruciality	Necessity	1	
	Endlessness	Must	1		
		Freedom	1		
Assistance	Flexibility		1		
	Bridge		1		
	Total		24	10	

category, male participants' metaphors fall under only three categories (opportunity, comfort and freedom, and endlessness). Male participants in the current study seem to associate "online teaching" with "future," "flexibility," "promise," "comfort zone," and "bridge." In contrast, female participants seem to have a more extensive repertoire of metaphors for "online teaching." The metaphor "source of comfort" in the positive category stands out as the only metaphor used by both female and male participants. Among the metaphors used by male participants, "promise" and "flexibility" display a higher frequency as compared to the other metaphors in the positive category. We also see in Table 3 that the metaphor "innovation" has the highest frequency ($n=4$) among all the other metaphors generated by female participants. The metaphor "fascinating tool" displays the second highest frequency in the positive category of metaphors.

In Table 4, the negative category of metaphors has nine themes and 41 metaphors, 12 of which male participants use. Of the 41 metaphors implying negative perceptions of online teaching, 29 metaphors are used by females. The

metaphors used only by male participants are "scapegoat," "stressor," "death," "frustration," "trouble," and "cave." Of the six metaphors used only by male participants, four metaphors fall under the theme of "technical problems." We can assume that for 6 of the participants in the current study, online teaching is associated more with technical problems than other negative themes such as frustration, ambiguity, or difficulty. It might be noteworthy to mention that 12 of the female participants seem to emphasize the "lack of real communication" theme with the use of metaphors such as "complexity," "iron curtain," "hardship," "boredom," "fatigue," and "ineffective tool." In contrast, only four male participants seem to associate online teaching with a lack of honest communication between the teacher and the learners.

The metaphors "challenge," which has the highest frequency of all the metaphors used by only female participants, implies the problems that female participants have about online teaching. The metaphors "demanding machine," "complexity," and "difficulty" used by only female

Table 4. Negative Category Themes and Gender Distribution

Category	Theme	Metaphor	Females	Males	
Negative	Difficulty & failure	Challenge	4		
		Nightmare	1		
		Scapegoat		1	
		Poem	1		
	Frustration	Ambiguity	1		
		Cold meal	1		
	Lack of real communication	Complexity	2	4	
		Ineffective tool	4		
		Iron curtain	1		
		Ghost	1		
		Hardship	1		
		Boredom	2		
		Fatigue	1		
		Lack of technology literacy	Demanding machine	2	
			Difficulty	2	
			Ambivalence	1	
	Technical problems	Stressor		1	
		Death		1	
		Frustration		1	
		Trouble		3	
		Ambiguity	Unknown path	1	
	Limitation	Imposition	1		
	Darkness	Cave		1	
	Disparity	Ambiguity	1		
		Inequity	1		
		Total		29	12

participants also indicate the hardship that female participants seem to be going through in online teaching.

It is clearly seen in Table 5 that the online teaching experience accounts for the perceptions of EFL instructors about online teaching. We see those teachers with up to 5 years of online teaching experience have positive perceptions

of online teaching, while participants with no online teaching experience display a negative attitude. While participants with online teaching experience seem to associate online teaching more with “source of comfort,” “good option,” “convenience,” and “freedom,” instructors without online teaching experience seem to have a smaller repertoire for positive

Table 5 Category Distribution according to the experience

Category	1-5 years of teaching experience	1-5 years of online teaching experience
Positive	1. Convenience	1. Source of comfort
	2. Flexibility	2. Good option
		3. Convenience
		4. Freedom
		5. Challenge
Negative	1. Cold meal	
	2. Unknown path	
	3. Poem	
	4. Iron curtain	
	5. Hardship	

metaphors. Participants without online teaching experience associate online teaching more with “cold meal,” “unknown path,” “poem,” “iron curtain,” and “hardship” and less with “convenience” and “flexibility.” Years of teaching experience generally seem not to influence participants’ development of a positive attitude toward online teaching, as the number of negative metaphors outnumbers positive metaphors.

DISCUSSION

The present study used metaphoric statements of EFL instructors and faculty to understand online teaching experiences. Positive and negative categories were identified after the elicited metaphor analysis coded by two researchers. The positive category contained 27 metaphors subsumed under eight codes, while the negative one outnumbered the former, including 32 metaphors under nine codes. In total, 45,3 % of the participants connotated the teaching online with favorable utterances, as 54,7 % of them had more adverse concepts.

Opportunity ($f=13$) was the most frequent metaphor among other positive codes. This result aligns with scholars’ recommendations who attribute the online settings to an array of opportunities even though pedagogical considerations were damaged since the remote teaching transition was faster than expected (Morreale et al., 2021). Gregersen et al. (2021) conducted a large-scale study to elaborate on the well-being of foreign language teachers all around the globe. They found that sixty-nine teachers regarded teaching online as an opportunity for personal growth. This theme also was found to be the most significant advantage for educators in teaching online by Meirovitz et al. (2022). In addition to professional development, Manegre and Sabiri (2020) reported that teaching English on virtual online platforms as a foreign language was more effective than face-to-face teaching by more than half of the participants regarding learning pace and motivation increase. Similar virtues regarding online instruction were stated by thirteen ELT instructors in the Turkey context, claiming to go online had more advantages than drawbacks (Şener et al., 2020).

Comfort and Freedom ($f= 6$) was the second most frequent positive code for online teaching. The comfort and freedom code metaphors indicated a comfort in life quality with flexible teaching options. Interestingly, previous studies are void of comfort-freedom associated perceptions with online teaching; instead, the term comfort is annotated with technology-related perceived comfort, a feeling of ease when using technology in instruction (Culp-Roche et al., 2020; Graziano, 2018; Luhach et al., 2022; Uerz et al., 2018). Freedom was at stake for some teachers, especially in their personal lives, due to the increased workload (Gregersen et al., 2021). On the other hand, faculty and university members adopted a more emancipatory side in teaching online, associating the process with “academic freedom” (Perrotta & Bohan, 2020, p. 55).

Lack of real communication ($f=16$) is the most frequent code in the present study. The literature is replete with reported experiences regarding interaction breakdowns in online education. For instance, Cantürk and Cantürk (2021) studied English language teachers’ metaphors for online teaching in instruction and classroom management. The results indicated that the most frequent metaphor was related to interaction problems, while online education was deemed a requirement for health concerns during the pandemic. Similarly, Kaban (2021) found that university-level teachers’ metaphoric statements merged under the theme “uselessness” along with students’ and parents’, indicating a negative attribution to online education. In another study, Farah and Sholikhah (2021) compared students’ and teachers’ metaphors for online language learning and teaching in the university context. Among fifty-four codes from students’ perspectives, only ten coding references were found as positive. Teachers espoused a neutral position ($f= 6$) while positive and negative perceptions were equal ($f=4$, each). Interaction problems were also uttered as “talking to the void” (Casacchia et al., 2021) and “longing to see learners’ reactions” (Meirovitz et al., 2022). In their review study, Carrillo and Flores (2020) asserted that interaction was the most significant recurrent theme among studies that focused on the perceptions of educators and learners. This deduction has been verified in the present study.

The second most frequent theme was “Difficulty and Failure” in the negative category, indicating a perceived challenge for the participants. Kulal and Nayak (2020) mentioned similar concerns stemming from a lack of technical support that had such a critical influence in determining options for the delivery of instruction that it could be the only reason for opting for face-to-face instead of online. In a study conducted by Karakaya et al. (2021), English language educators from several institutions in Turkey were asked to assess the online teaching process, and “difficult” was identified as the most significant result (28.7%). The current findings for difficulties are aligned with the literature in attribution to socio-economic factors and time management issues (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020), increased workload (Ersin et al., 2022), and the ambiguity embedded in the process (El-Soussi, 2022).

One of the most important findings revealed in this study is the distribution of the identified categories according to the teaching experience. Positive metaphoric codes outnumbered the negative ones in the instructors and faculty with more online teaching experience. Similarly, Ateş and Altun (2008) stated that having experienced online education significantly shaped the attitudes toward online education since the preservice teacher group had altered their perceptions from negative to positive after the treatment designed in their study. Moreover, it has also been reported that online teaching anxiety is statistically significant with online teaching experience (Akban & Dikilitaş, 2022). This finding resonates with the present study’s result,

in which experienced teachers articulated positive metaphorical statements while the inexperienced group alluded to more negative thoughts.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The present study explored EFL instructors' and faculty's reflections on online teaching experiences through metaphor analysis. Easiness, surprise, opportunity, comfort and freedom, variety, cruciality, endlessness, and assistance were identified as positive ones, while difficulty and failure, frustration, lack of real communication, lack of technology literacy, technical problems, ambiguity, limitation, darkness, and disparity themes occurred as an indicator of negative perceptions. Generated and analyzed conceptual metaphors indicate that the online teaching experiences of the participants have been unfavorable. The most significant reasons for unpleasant experiences have been identified as a lack of interaction and challenges. When the gender distribution for the themes is analyzed, female participants seem to have more negative metaphoric statements than their male colleagues. In addition to the gender differences in perceived experiences, online teaching experience contributes to the positive reception, while teaching experience loosely affects the same category in a general sense.

Even though qualitative design enables us to reach more descriptive information for the possible reasons for the outcome, it still has limitations. This study is limited to 75 participants. Further studies could be carried out with a broader group of participants to reach more generalizable results. Additionally, this study only attempted to explore EFL teachers' metaphorical perceptions in view of specific categories, gender, and teaching experience. However, there are other variables that may help us to develop better insights into participants' perceptions of online education through metaphors. For this very specific reason, further studies could also focus on such variables as attitudes toward technology and the daily use of digital tools.

Ethics: There are no ethical issues with the publication of this manuscript.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Financial Disclosure: The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

Etik: Bu makalenin yayınlanmasıyla ilgili herhangi bir etik sorun bulunmamaktadır.

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış bağımsız.

Çıkar Çatışması: Yazarlar, bu makalenin araştırılması, yazarlığı ve/veya yayınlanması ile ilgili olarak herhangi bir potansiyel çıkar çatışması beyan etmemiştir.

Finansal Destek: Yazarlar bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

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