Turkish EFL Preparatory Class Students' Attitudes Towards Distance Education[*]

Türkiye Bağlamında İngilizce Hazırlık Sınıfı Öğrencilerinin Uzaktan Eğitime Yönelik Tutumları[*]

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to reveal Turkish EFL preparatory class students' attitudes towards distance education during COVID-19 pandemic with regard to some demographic variables. The participants were 300 students from an English preparatory class in Istanbul, and data were collected using a questionnaire. The gathered data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, independent samples t-test, one-way ANOVA, and Scheffe's Test. The findings demonstrated that the attitudes of students towards distance education were positive and there was a statistically significant difference between the students' attitudes and gender, age, English proficiency level, and computer possession. However, there was no statistically significant difference between their attitudes and Internet usage duration, previous distance education experience, and graduated high school types. In light of the findings, it is suggested that new teaching and testing materials should be adapted and hybrid learning settings could be employed to increase the quality and effectiveness of distance foreign language education in the future.

Keywords: Attitudes, Distance education, COVID-19 pandemic, Preparatory class students

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğrenen Türk öğrencilerinin COVID-19 salgını sırasında uzaktan eğitime yönelik tutumlarını bazı demografik değişkenler açısından ortaya koymayı amaçlamıştır. Araştırmaya İstanbul'da bir İngilizce hazırlık sınıfında okuyan 300 öğrenci katılmıştır ve veriler bir anket aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Elde edilen veriler betimleyici istatistik, bağımsız örneklem t-testi, tek yönlü ANOVA ve Scheffe Testi ile analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, öğrencilerin uzaktan eğitime yönelik tutumlarının olumlu olduğunu ve öğrencilerin tutumları ile cinsiyet, yaş, İngilizce dil seviyesi ve bilgisayara sahip olma durumları arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir fark olduğunu göstermiştir. Ancak öğrenci tutumları ile internet kullanım süreleri, önceki uzaktan eğitim deneyimleri ve mezun olunan

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lise türleri arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir fark bulunmamıştır. Bulgular ışığında, gelecekte uzaktan yabancı dil eğitiminin kalitesini ve etkililiğini artırmak için yeni öğretim ve değerlendirme materyallerinin uyarlanması ve hibrit öğrenme ortamlarının kullanılması önerilmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Tutumlar, Uzaktan eğitim, COVID-19 pandemisi, Hazırlık sınıfı öğrencileri

INTRODUCTION

The importance of reforming the educational environment through the integration of information technology has been a highlighted issue to better comply with the requirements of today's world (Yang, 2020). According to Desai, Hart, and Richards (2008), educational technology can provide the change and growth in learning settings, and impoundment of learning to physical limits of a classroom can be removed. In this vein, one of the present forms of education is distance education.

As a hot topic, distance education has been studied in different contexts, and environmental factors of classrooms affecting the attitudes of teachers and students have attracted the attention of many studies (Ağır, 2007; Azizah & Nugraha, 2021; Farooq & Javid, 2012; Peytcheva-Forsyth, Yovkova, & Aleksieva, 2018). In this sense, a number of studies have specifically focused on stakeholders' attitudes toward improving the quality and quantity of foreign language education (Çakır & Solak, 2015; Erarslan & Zehir Topkaya, 2017; Murphy, Rodriquez-Manzanares, & Barbour, 2011; Srichanyachon, 2013).

With the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic, distance education was not a choice, but an obligation. Thus, a number of studies have been conducted to reveal student and teacher opinions about distance education in different contexts such as Finland (Eela, 2020), Algeria (Benadla & Hadji, 2021), Vietnam (Tran, 2021) and Indonesia (Azizah & Nugraha, 2021). According to the results of these studies, the attitudes towards distance education differed among the participating students and teachers, and these inconclusive results paved the way for more research studies.

Similarly, the implementation of distance education aimed to continue educational activities during the pandemic in Türkiye. However, distance education was a new application for some students, and it was not easy for everyone to adapt to the new mode of instruction as distance education requires technological equipment such as computers and internet connections (Aslan, 2020) in addition to learner concentration and autonomy (Demir & Narlıkaya, 2020). These requirements, inconclusive research results, and the increasing importance of distance education imply that the attitudes of stakeholders need more research (Galloway, 2017). To this end, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the attitudes of English preparatory class students towards distance English education during COVID-19 pandemic in Türkiye?

2. Is there a statistically significant difference between the students' demographic variables (gender, age, English proficiency level, internet usage duration, computer possession, previous distance education experience and high school types) and attitudes towards distance English education during COVID-19 pandemic in Türkiye?

Review of Literature

Using technology in foreign language classrooms plays an important role in interacting with today's digital natives and offers some benefits. To illustrate, using digital content and technology such as computers, mobile phones, and the Internet in the learning process is considered an alternative to traditional learning environments and prepares the appropriate ground for changing existing methods (Morozova, Byzina, Trostina, & Godina, 2020). Also, it can promote positive student attitudes in educational settings (Kaid Mohammed Ali & Rashad Ali Bin-Hady, 2019; Metruk, 2020).

Transition to distance education during COVID-19 pandemic reminded some educational benefits and challenges as there have been an increasing number of studies concerning the attitudes of relevant stakeholders. In this vein, university students' attitudes and preferences regarding distance education (DE) during the pandemic have been investigated in different educational contexts. To start with, Unger and Meiran (2020) studied the attitudes of 82 students towards distance education in the first two weeks of online education because of the COVID-19 outbreak in the USA. %75.6 of the participants stated that they were anxious during this process and %91.5 of them indicated that it was not going to be the same as face-to-face education. However, three weeks later, %51.4 of the students were found to be less anxious about distance education, which implies that their attitudes displayed changes in the course of time as they got used to the new mode of delivery. Also, Hussein, Daoud, Alrabaiah, and Badawi (2020) analyzed the attitudes of 45 English learners in the United Arab Emirates and concluded that distance education was effective in terms of time, money and safety issues; however, challenges included distraction, reduced focus and increased workload. In their comparative study, Marjerison, Rahman and Li (2020) indicated that the attitudes of all students towards distance education were positive and there were no significant differences between the attitudes of Sino-foreign cooperative university students and typical Chinese university students. In a similar vein, Kowshick (2020) compared two different university students' attitudes towards distance education in India and stated that the students (%78) from Open University had more positive attitudes than the students (%44) from the formal university. Additionally, Basantia and Village-Karhara (2021) found that the attitudes of theory-based course students towards distance education in India were significantly more positive than those of practi-

cal based course students. Moreover, Al-Qaisy (2021) revealed that the attitudes of all the participating higher education students towards distance education were positive in Jordan context. Furthermore, Benadla and Hadji (2021) analyzed the attitudes of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students towards distance education in Algeria during COVID-19 pandemic. It was found that the attitudes of students were negative and they did not think that they were ready for this system although they were satisfied with time saving aspect of distance education. Finally, Tran (2021) focused on the attitudes of EFL learners and teachers towards distance education in Vietnam. The results indicated that the attitudes of the learners were negative and they had problems due to the increased workload and learner autonomy. The teachers also stated similar complaints such as workload, adopting new teaching styles and problems of handling the classroom through screen.

Due to the inconclusive results in the aforementioned studies, a growing body of research has been conducted in different contexts to offer a more comprehensive picture about DE during the pandemic. To start with, Benhima (2021) explored the attitudes of university students at English department about distance education (DE) during the pandemic period in Morocco. The study adopted a mixed method research design and the data were triangulated through the questionnaires and focus group interviews. It was found that the students appreciated face-to-face education instead of distance education although part-time students revealed favorable attitudes towards DE due to the flexibility of attendance. According to the questionnaire results, WhatsApp, dictionary, and Google were the most commonly used tools. Additionally, majority of the students always had access to the Internet and were neutral about their need for technical assistance. Besides, majority of the students did not prefer Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and displayed dissatisfaction with the performance of their teachers. As for the interview results, the students found DE necessary due to the pandemic circumstances; however, their unfavorable attitudes centered on the lack of materials, teacher involvement, and arrangements (e.g. lack of support and free platforms). In light of the results, the students recommended improving the Internet connection and more teacher involvement in the form of videos and voice recordings rather than uploading materials.

Ismaili (2021), on the other hand, investigated the experiences and satisfaction of 108 ELTE university students regarding DE in Hungary context. The students were found to be satisfied with the online platforms provided by their faculties in terms of accessibility. However, some of the students indicated that DE decreased their interaction with their instructors and peers. In addition, the questionnaire results revealed that lack of prior ICT instruction did not significantly influence their favorable attitudes. These results highlighted the need for improving DE and its potential future in higher education institutions in the post-pandemic era. Finally, Lamanauskas and Makarskaitė-Petkevičienė (2023) investigated the perspectives of university students regarding DE in Lithuanian context. In light of the results, convenience and cost-effectiveness came to the fore

as the main benefits whereas decreased effectiveness in study organization and quality were cited as the main challenges. Despite the challenges, a majority of the students shared positive perspectives about attending DE in the post-pandemic era.

In an attempt to cope with the pandemic, Türkiye also suspended face-to-face education programs and all teaching/learning activities were moved to distance education. In this vein, similar to the aforementioned studies, attitudes towards distance education during the pandemic attracted the attention of scholars in the Turkish EFL context, and these studies came up with different findings (Aktaş, Büyüktaş, Gülle, & Yıldız, 2020; Çakır & Arslan, 2020; Demir & Narlıkaya, 2020; Öneri Uzun, Çakıcı Eş, & Evram, 2020). For example, Öneri Uzun, Çakıcı Eş, and Evram (2020) investigated the attitudes of 128 university students towards distance education and revealed that age, Internet connection problems and suitable environments affected their attitudes; however, there were no significant differences in terms of gender, technology use ability or grade levels. Similarly, Demir and Narlıkaya (2020) focused on the attitudes of 188 university students who took finance and accounting courses, and came up with positive student attitudes. It was also indicated that there was no significant relationship between the students' attitudes and gender; however, there was a significant relationship between their attitudes and class, Internet usage time, academic performance and previous distance education experience. Additionally, Aktaş et al. (2020) examined the attitudes of sport sciences students and concluded that the participants held positive attitudes towards distance education despite some challenges in their social life, exams and assignments. Furthermore, Kuloğlu and Yıldız (2022) revealed that the attitudes of university students towards DE during the pandemic in Türkiye were moderate, their readiness for DE was at a high level, and these two variables were positively correlated. Finally, Çakır and Arslan (2020) stated that the attitudes of university students towards distance education were positive at an average level and there was no significant statistical relationship between their attitudes and gender, age and high school type.

Although the aforementioned studies came up with positive attitudes towards distance education in different departments during the pandemic, there were also research studies which resulted in negative attitudes in Turkish context (Altuntaş Yılmaz, 2020; Demir, 2020; Yakar & Yıldırım Yakar, 2021). Firstly, Altuntaş Yılmaz (2020) aimed to find out the attitudes of 265 students from physiotherapy rehabilitation department towards distance education during the COVID-19 period. According to the results of the study, the attitudes of students were negative in general and there was no statistical difference between their attitudes and gender and grade. Secondly, Demir (2020) examined the attitudes of students taking mathematics courses through distance education. The author indicated that the attitudes of students were negative and there was no significant relationship between their attitudes and gender, high school type and Internet accessibility. However, there was a statistically significant difference between their attitudes and department, type of connection, daily Internet usage time and

distance education experience. Thirdly, Yakar and Yıldırım Yakar (2021) focused on the attitudes of Education Faculty students towards distance education and their readiness for e-learning. The results demonstrated that attitudes of students were at a low level, close to moderate and grade, department, having computer and Internet connection variables were effective on their attitudes.

Apart from these studies, a number of research studies focused on the relationship between demographic variables (such as gender, age, income, daily Internet usage duration, distance education experience) and attitudes towards distance education (Ateş & Altun, 2008; Çelik & Uzunboyulu, 2015; Öztaş & Kılıç, 2017). For instance, Ateş and Altun (2008) demonstrated that there was no significant relationship between the students' attitudes and grade level, gender and learning styles. However, the attitudes of the students were significantly affected by their experience in using computer, perceived computer competency and previous distance education experience. In addition, Çelik and Uzunboyulu (2015) compared the attitudes of 92 high school students in terms of demographic variables. The attitudes of the students who participated in the study in 2010 did not show any differences in terms of gender but showed differences in terms of monthly income and daily Internet usage duration in that the students with higher monthly income and longer daily Internet duration displayed positive attitudes. However, the attitudes of the students who participated in the study in 2014 did not show any differences in terms of any variable. Finally, Öztaş and Kılıç (2017) investigated the attitudes of university students towards distance education. The study revealed that there was a significant relationship between the attitudes of students and their gender, Internet accessibility and department. However, there was no significant relationship between their attitudes and high school type, age, device preference and previous distance education experience. Similarly, in his quantitative study, Kaban (2021) focused on the attitudes of university students towards DE during the pandemic period in Türkiye. The data were gathered via a scale, and there were 764 participants. It was found that the students' attitudes were at a low level, and there were significant differences in terms of gender and grade level in that the scores of the male students were higher than those of the female students, and the scores of the 4th grade students were higher than those of the other grades. Additionally, the students who had a computer and the Internet connection, and fully attended the online classes obtained higher scores. According to these results, the author recommended more effective planning strategies to improve the quality of DE. Lastly, Koca, Kılıç, and Dadandı (2024) indicated that academic self-efficacy played a partial mediating role in relation to attitudes towards DE and academic life satisfaction. It was also indicated that gender had a moderating role in the mediating effect of academic self-efficacy with regard to attitudes towards DE and academic life satisfaction. As seen in these studies, the relationship between the attitudes of students and demographic variables displays differences, and there is no clear answer about it.

In a nutshell, when the findings of the relevant studies are considered, it appears that there have been inconclusive results. To date, much attention has extensively centered on student attitudes towards distance education. However, there is no clear answer about the effectiveness of distance education as there are different results about attitudes of students towards distance education, and the relationship between attitudes of students and demographic variables shows differences. In some of the studies, they had positive attitudes but in some of them they had negative attitudes and even in some of them they showed neither positive nor negative attitudes. Thus, inconclusive research results and contextual differences seem to make it difficult to draw some conclusions about attitudes of students towards distance education and offer educational suggestions.

In line with the relevant literature, this study has three starting points. First, the increasing importance of distance education requires more research studies in different contexts (Galloway, 2017). Second, what is evident to date is that the bulk of research about attitudes towards distance education has resulted in conflicting results and no body of research has provided a straightforward answer about its effectiveness with regard to various demographic variables. Third, the promotion of distance education in recent years has added a different dimension to foreign language learning/teaching procedures. Therefore, to add a new perspective for the effectiveness and feasibility of distance education in the post-pandemic era in the long run, this study aimed to reveal Turkish EFL preparatory class students' attitudes towards distance education during COVID-19 pandemic period with regard to demographic variables and offer educational implications for further practice.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Participants

This study aims to reveal the attitudes of Turkish EFL preparatory class students towards distance education and find out the relationship between their attitudes and demographic variables such as gender, age, English proficiency level, computer possession, Internet usage duration, previous distance education experience and high school types. Therefore, this study adopted a quantitative research design in order to reach more participants, create a general understanding of behavior, make predictions to larger populations and increase the chances of generalization (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003; Dörnyei, 2007; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012).

The participants were preparatory class students from a private university in İstanbul, Türkiye. They were chosen via convenience sampling (Mackey & Gass, 2005) in that the researcher contacted the participants who were within easy reach. There were 300 participants and the study was conducted in the spring term of 2020-2021 academic year. The students' demographic features are presented in Table 1.

Data Collection Tools, Procedures and Data Analysis

The data were collected through a demographic information form and a questionnaire developed by Orhan and Çeviker Ay

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Table 1: Demographic Features of Students

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	148	49.3
	Male	152	50.7
	Total	300	100.0
Age	18	106	35.3
	19	114	38.0
	20+	80	26.7
	Total	300	100.0
English level	A2	52	17.3
	B1	121	40.3
	B1+	63	21.0
	B2	41	13.7
	B2+	23	7.7
	Total	300	100.0
Internet usage time	1-5 hours	25	8.3
	6-8 hours	88	29.3
	9-11 hours	127	42.3
	12+ hours	60	20.0
	Total	300	100.0
Computer possession	Yes	245	81.7
	No	55	18.3
	Total	300	100.0
Previous distance education experience	Yes	156	52.0
	No	144	48.0
	Total	300	100.0
High School	State	225	75.0
	Private	75	25.0
	Total	300	100.0
Type of high school	Anatolian High School	114	38.0
	Religious Vocational High School	37	12.3
	Science High School	39	13.0
	Vocational High School	38	12.7
	Basic High School	37	12.3
	Social Sciences High School	35	11.7
	Total	300	100.0

Table 2: Reliability of the Questionnaire (Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient)

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.96	36

Table 3: Normality Test

Test	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Total Scale	3.84	0.57	-0.57	0.54
Context Size	3.75	0.69	-0.76	0.92
Input Size	3.83	0.59	-0.54	1.08
Process Size	4.02	0.59	-0.81	1.38
Product Dimension	3.77	0.71	-0.99	1.32

(2017). The original language of the questionnaire was Turkish and it was administered in Turkish in this study as well. There are five-point, Likert-type statements as follows: (1) "I definitely disagree", (2) "I disagree", (3) "I neither agree nor disagree", (4) "I agree" and (5) "I completely agree". There are 36 statements and four sections, namely context evaluation, input evaluation, process evaluation and product evaluation. Table 2 presents the reliability of the questionnaire and Table 3 presents the normality test results.

As seen in Table 2, the questionnaire appears to be reliable since the value is .96 and this value is acceptable for a reliable questionnaire (Büyüköztürk, 2010). Also, the Kurtosis and Skewness values obtained from the questionnaire scores, between +3 and -3, are considered sufficient for a normal distribution (Hopkins & Weeks, 1990). According to Table 3, it was accepted that the data showed a normal distribution. Finally, ethical permission was granted by the ethical committee of the university, and the data collection tools were prepared in MS Word form. Due to the pandemic, data collection procedures were carried out online via Google Forms. The data collection procedure was implemented between 01.02.2021 and 30.03.2021.

The data were analyzed using SPSS 22.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program. Because the data showed normal distribution, descriptive statistics, independent sample t-test and one-way variance (ANOVA) analyses were conducted to reveal whether the attitudes of Turkish EFL preparatory class students towards distance education differ according to the demographic variables. T-test was chosen to compare the means between two independent groups (gender, computer possession, prior DE experience, and high-school type) whereas ANOVA was chosen to compare the means among three or more independent groups (age, linguistic proficiency, and internet usage duration) (Dörnyei, 2007).

Table 4: Findings of Context Dimension

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Absolutely agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. The aims of the curriculum are in harmony with the needs of the students.	n	5	14	70	159	52	3.80	0.84
	%	1.7	4.7	23.3	53.0	17.3		
2. The aims of the curriculum are in harmony with the expectations of the students.	n	8	33	74	135	50	3.62	0.98
	%	2.7	11.0	24.7	45.0	16.7		
3. The curriculum is suitable for students' English language levels.	n	2	10	65	149	74	3.94	0.81
	%	0.7	3.3	21.7	49.7	24.7		
4. The duration of the curriculum is sufficient to achieve the objectives of curriculum.	n	13	22	68	123	74	3.74	1.05
	%	4.3	7.3	22.7	41.0	24.7		
5. The curriculum is complementary to the other courses.	n	8	39	81	121	51	3.56	1.00
	%	2.7	13.0	27.0	40.3	17.0		
6. Distance learning English classes can improve English language knowledge.	n	9	16	69	130	76	3.83	0.97
	%	3.0	5.3	23.0	43.3	25.3		

Table 5: Findings of Input Dimension

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Absolutely agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
7. The portal provides adequate resources for English listening skill that is intended to be developed.	n	5	24	77	140	54	3.71	0.91
	%	1.7	8.0	25.7	46.7	18.0		
8. The portal provides adequate resources for English writing skill that is intended to be developed.	n	2	27	68	140	63	3.78	0.90
	%	0.7	9.0	22.7	46.7	21.0		
9. The portal provides adequate resources for English speaking skill that is intended to be developed.	n	9	29	82	128	52	3.62	0.98
	%	3.0	9.7	27.3	42.7	17.3		
10. The portal provides adequate resources for English reading skill that is intended to be developed.	n	4	15	80	133	68	3.82	0.89
	%	1.3	5.0	26.7	44.3	22.7		
11. The portal provides adequate resources for English grammar that is intended to be developed.	n	2	9	75	149	65	3.89	0.80
	%	0.7	3.0	25.0	49.7	21.7		
12. The learning resources / materials used on the portal are of high quality.	n	5	11	51	145	88	4.00	0.87
	%	1.7	3.7	17.0	48.3	29.3		
13. The course content offered is qualified.	n	2	8	62	146	82	3.99	0.81
	%	0.7	2.7	20.7	48.7	27.3		
14. The number of tests in the portal is sufficient.	n	5	13	77	135	70	3.84	0.89
	%	1.7	4.3	25.7	45.0	23.3		

FINDINGS

Students' Attitudes towards Distance Education

The questionnaire consists of four different parts; context, input, process and product. Therefore, the findings of the questionnaire were separated according to these parts. The results of the first part are provided in Table 4.

As seen in Table 4, item three has the highest mean score (M: 3.94) and it shows that the students thought that the curriculum was suitable for their English language levels. Item six has the second highest mean score (M: 3.83), which means that the participants agreed that distance English learning improved their English language knowledge. However, item five has the lowest mean score (M: 3.56) and it was about the rela-

Table 6: Findings of Process Dimension

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Absolutely agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
15. Questions can be asked easily to the instructor of the course.	n	6	4	43	118	129	4.20	0.88
	%	2.0	1.3	14.3	39.3	43.0		
16. Instructors are trying to find easy ways to teach the subject.	n	6	8	64	115	107	4.03	0.93
	%	2.0	2.7	21.3	38.3	35.7		
17. Instructors are implementing the curriculum in accordance with its purpose.	n	1	17	50	132	100	4.04	0.87
	%	0.3	5.7	16.7	44.0	33.3		
18. Instructors are using appropriate teaching methods to the subject.	n	2	3	50	150	95	4.11	0.76
	%	0.7	1.0	16.7	50.0	31.7		
19. Instructors are using the materials effectively.	n	2	11	60	139	88	4.00	0.84
	%	0.7	3.7	20.0	46.3	29.3		
20. They try to solve the problem if any troubles appear during the courses.	n	5	12	44	138	101	4.06	0.89
	%	1.7	4.0	14.7	46.0	33.7		
21. The course materials and tests offered on the portal are used in a way to strengthen the subject.	n	3	5	52	165	75	4.01	0.76
	%	1.0	1.7	27.3	55.0	25.0		
22. Exams are hold without any problems.	n	20	25	61	114	80	3.70	1.15
	%	6.7	8.3	20.3	38.0	26.7		
23. The instructors teach the subject clearly and explicitly during the videos presented on the portal.	n	5	11	54	142	88	3.99	0.88
	%	1.7	3.7	18.0	47.3	29.3		

tionship between the curriculum and the other courses. Finally, item two has the second lowest score (M: 3.62) and it shows that the curriculum did not meet expectations of the students to some extent.

The findings of the input dimension are offered in Table 5. The table demonstrates that item 12 (M: 4.00) and item 13 (M: 3.99) have the highest mean scores. This demonstrates that the students thought that the quality of the materials and the content of the courses were good enough. However, item nine (M: 3.62) and item seven (M: 3.71) have the lowest mean scores and it shows that there were some resources to improve English speaking and listening skills, but these were not at a desired level.

The findings of the process dimension items are provided in Table 6. According to the table, item 15 (M: 4.20) and item 18 (M: 4.11) have the highest mean scores and it can be claimed that the students did not hesitate to ask questions to the instructors and agreed that the instructors used the appropriate teaching methods. Also, item 15 has the highest mean score in all of questionnaire and it shows that most of the students had favorable attitudes towards asking questions to the instructors. However, item 22 (M: 3.70) has the lowest mean score and it demonstrates that the students had some problems while having their online exams.

The last part of the questionnaire included the product dimension, and the findings are presented in Table 7. According to the table, item 36 has the highest mean score (M: 4.02) and it indicates that the students found distance English education beneficial for themselves. Also, item 34 has the second highest mean score (M: 3.94) and it demonstrates that distance English education improved the students' communication skills. However, item 30 has the lowest mean score (M: 3.53), which implies that distance English education did not improve memorization strategies of the students at a desired level.

Relationships between Attitudes and Demographic Variables

Independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine the relationship between gender and attitudes towards distance education. The results are presented in Table 8.

According to Table 8, in overall scores, there was a statistically significant difference between gender and attitudes towards distance education ($p < 0.05$) in that male students (M: 3.92) had more favorable attitudes than female students (M: 3.76). Also, there was a statistically significant difference between the attitudes of students and their gender in the product dimension. However, there was no statistically significant difference between attitudes and gender in the context, input and process dimensions.

One-way ANOVA test was conducted to reveal the relationship between the students' attitudes towards distance education and age. According to Table 9, overall scores demonstrated that there was a statistically significant difference between the

Table 7: Findings of Product Dimension

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Absolutely agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
24. At the end of the courses, the students have reached the intended level of English.	n	20	27	62	138	53	3.59	1.09
	%	6.7	9.0	20.7	46.0	17.7		
25. The curriculum has improved distance learning skills.	n	7	18	69	141	65	3.80	0.93
	%	2.3	6.0	23.0	47.0	21.7		
26. Curriculum has developed the vocabulary learning strategies.	n	12	30	72	109	77	3.70	1.08
	%	4.0	10.0	24.0	36.3	25.7		
27. I think the curriculum has reached its objectives.	n	4	20	91	136	49	3.69	0.87
	%	1.3	6.7	30.3	45.3	16.3		
28. Curriculum has improved the ability to guess the meaning of unknown words in the texts.	n	8	30	71	127	64	3.70	1.00
	%	2.7	10.0	23.7	42.3	21.3		
29. I am glad to complete these courses.	n	12	17	53	144	74	3.84	0.99
	%	4.0	5.7	17.7	48.0	24.7		
30. Curriculum has improved memorization strategies.	n	19	26	87	114	54	3.53	1.08
	%	6.3	8.7	29.0	38.0	18.0		
31. Curriculum has improved the ability to read and understand the texts.	n	7	9	64	160	60	3.86	0.85
	%	2.3	3.0	21.3	53.3	20.0		
32. At the end of the courses, the students have reached the level to express themselves by writing in English.	n	5	15	73	126	81	3.88	0.92
	%	1.7	5.0	24.3	42.0	27.0		
33. At the end of the courses, students have learned how to use appropriate vocabulary when needed.	n	8	16	96	123	57	3.68	0.93
	%	2.7	5.3	32.0	41.0	19.0		
34. At the end of the courses, the students improved their ability to communicate in English.	n	7	13	49	154	77	3.94	0.90
	%	2.3	4.3	16.3	51.3	25.7		
35. The curriculum has increased the interest in English.	n	15	24	59	122	80	3.76	1.09
	%	5.0	8.0	19.7	40.7	26.7		
36. I think that this curriculum is beneficial to me.	n	8	6	59	127	100	4.02	0.92
	%	2.7	2.0	19.7	42.3	33.3		

Table 8: T-test Results for Gender

		n	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig.
Context Dimension	Female	148	3.68	0.71	0.06	0.10
	Male	152	3.81	0.66	0.05	
Input Dimension	Female	148	3.78	0.58	0.05	0.11
	Male	152	3.89	0.60	0.05	
Process Dimension	Female	148	3.95	0.65	0.05	0.06
	Male	152	4.08	0.53	0.04	
Product Dimension	Female	148	3.65	0.77	0.06	0.00
	Male	152	3.88	0.62	0.05	
Total Scale	Female	148	3.76	0.59	0.05	0.01
	Male	152	3.92	0.53	0.04	

Table 9: ANOVA Results for Age

		n	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Sig.	(Scheffe)
Context Dimension	18	106	3.92	0.63	0.06	.003	18 and 20+
	19	114	3.70	0.66	0.06		
	20+	80	3.59	0.76	0.08		
	Total	300	3.75	0.69	0.04		
Input Dimension	18	106	3.97	0.56	0.05	.004	18 and 20+
	19	114	3.81	0.54	0.05		
	20+	80	3.68	0.67	0.07		
	Total	300	3.83	0.59	0.03		
Process Dimension	18	106	4.06	0.61	0.06	.018	
	19	114	4.09	0.54	0.05		
	20+	80	3.86	0.62	0.07		
	Total	300	4.02	0.59	0.03		
Product Dimension	18	106	3.89	0.72	0.07	.015	
	19	114	3.78	0.60	0.06		
	20+	80	3.59	0.81	0.09		
	Total	300	3.77	0.71	0.04		
Total Scale	18	106	3.95	0.58	0.06	.004	18 and 20+
	19	114	3.85	0.48	0.05		
	20+	80	3.67	0.63	0.07		
	Total	300	3.84	0.57	0.03		

Table 10: ANOVA Results for English Level

		n	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Sig.	(Scheffe)
Context Dimension	A2	52	3.63	0.72	0.10	.06	
	B1	121	3.82	0.65	0.06		
	B1+	63	3.86	0.58	0.07		
	B2	41	3.53	0.80	0.12		
	B2+	23	3.72	0.76	0.16		
	Total	300	3.75	0.69	0.04		
Input Dimension	A2	52	3.73	0.66	0.09	.14	
	B1	121	3.91	0.56	0.05		
	B1+	63	3.89	0.53	0.07		
	B2	41	3.68	0.58	0.09		
	B2+	23	3.79	0.72	0.15		
	Total	300	3.83	0.59	0.03		
Process Dimension	A2	52	4.08	0.57	0.08	.10	
	B1	121	4.06	0.59	0.05		
	B1+	63	4.04	0.44	0.06		
	B2	41	3.78	0.73	0.11		
	B2+	23	3.99	0.70	0.15		
	Total	300	4.02	0.59	0.03		

Table 10: Cont.

		n	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Sig.	(Scheffe)
Product Dimension	A2	52	3.82	0.56	0.08	.01	B1+ and B2
	B1	121	3.83	0.67	0.06		
	B1+	63	3.88	0.59	0.07		
	B2	41	3.51	0.82	0.13		
	B2+	23	3.46	1.11	0.23		
	Total	300	3.77	0.71	0.04		
Total Scale	A2	52	3.83	0.51	0.07	.03	B1 and B2
	B1	121	3.90	0.54	0.05		
	B1+	63	3.92	0.48	0.06		
	B2	41	3.62	0.64	0.10		
	B2+	23	3.71	0.79	0.17		
	Total	300	3.84	0.57	0.03		

ages of the students and their attitudes (p < 0.05). Scheffe Post Hoc Test was also conducted, and it was found that the students who were 18 (n: 106) had more positive attitudes than the students who were 20+ (n: 80) in the context and input dimensions as well as the overall scores. However, there were no statistically significant differences between the attitudes and age in the process and product dimensions.

One-Way ANOVA test was conducted to reveal the relationship between the students' attitudes towards distance education and their English language levels. According to the results in Table 10, there was a statistically significant difference in the overall scores (p < 0.05). Scheffe Post Hoc Test was also applied, and it was seen that there was a statistically significant difference between the attitudes and English levels in the product dimension in that B1+ level students had more positive attitudes than B2 level students. However, there were no statistically significant differences between the attitudes and English levels in the other dimensions.

One-Way ANOVA test was conducted to reveal the relationship between the students' attitudes towards distance education and their Internet usage duration. According to Table 11, there was not a statistically significant difference (p > 0.05). However, there was a statistically significant difference between the attitudes and Internet usage duration in the context dimension (p < 0.05). The students who used the Internet for 12+ hours a day (n: 60) had more positive attitudes than the students who used it for 1-5 hours a day (n: 25).

Independent-samples t-test was conducted to reveal the relationship between the students' attitudes towards distance education and their computer possession. According to the results in Table 12, in overall scores, there was a statistically significant difference between the attitudes and computer possession (p < 0.05). The students who had their own computer (n: 245) showed more positive attitudes towards distance education than the students who did not have their own computer (n: 55). Also, this difference was significant for the

context, process, and product dimensions. However, there was not a statistically significant difference between the attitudes and computer possession in the input dimension.

Independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine the relationship between the students' attitudes towards distance education and previous distance education experience. As seen in Table 13, there was no statistically significant difference between the attitudes and previous distance education experience (p > 0.05).

Finally, independent-samples t-test was administered to reveal the relationship between the students' attitudes towards distance education and high school types that they graduated from. According to Table 14, there was no statistically significant difference between the high school types and attitudes towards distance education (p > 0.05).

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to reveal the attitudes of Turkish EFL preparatory class students towards distance education during COVID-19 pandemic and demonstrated that the participants held favorable attitudes. In this sense, the findings of this study corroborate a number of findings in the relevant literature. In line with previous studies (Aktaş, et al., 2020; Al-Qaisy, 2021; Azizah & Nugraha, 2021; Çakır & Solak, 2015; Demir & Narlıkaya, 2020; Erarslan & Zehir Topkaya, 2017; Farooq & Javid, 2012; Ismaili, 2021; Lamanauskas & Makarskaitė-Petkevičienė, 2023; Peytcheva-Forsyth, Yovkova, & Aleksieva, 2018), this study also revealed that the participants held positive attitudes towards distance education. However, the findings of the current study do not support some of the previous research. To illustrate, Altuntaş Yılmaz (2020), Demir (2020), Benadla and Hadji (2021), Tran (2021), Benhima (2021), and Kaban (2021) revealed that the attitudes of the participants towards DE were negative or at a low level while Kuloğlu and Yıldız (2022), Srichanyachon (2013) and Yakar and Yıldırım Yakar (2021) came up with moderate attitude scores.

Table 11: ANOVA Results for Internet Usage Duration

		n	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Sig	(Scheffe)
Context Dimension	1-5 hours	25	3.45	0.82	0.16	.04	1-5 hours and 12+ hours
	6-8 hours	88	3.68	0.61	0.07		
	9-11 hours	127	3.81	0.69	0.06		
	12+ hours	60	3.85	0.68	0.09		
	Total	300	3.75	0.69	0.04		
Input Dimension	1-5 hours	25	3.59	0.69	0.14	.09	
	6-8 hours	88	3.81	0.53	0.06		
	9-11 hours	127	3.91	0.61	0.05		
	12+ hours	60	3.81	0.60	0.08		
	Total	300	3.83	0.59	0.03		
Process Dimension	1-5 hours	25	3.99	0.72	0.14	.95	
	6-8 hours	88	4.00	0.53	0.06		
	9-11 hours	127	4.04	0.62	0.05		
	12+ hours	60	4.01	0.59	0.08		
	Total	300	4.02	0.59	0.03		
Product Dimension	1-5 hours	25	3.54	0.89	0.18	.38	
	6-8 hours	88	3.76	0.56	0.06		
	9-11 hours	127	3.81	0.76	0.07		
	12+ hours	60	3.78	0.72	0.09		
	Total	300	3.77	0.71	0.04		
Total Scale	1-5 hours	25	3.65	0.69	0.14	.26	
	6-8 hours	88	3.82	0.47	0.05		
	9-11 hours	127	3.89	0.60	0.05		
	12+ hours	60	3.86	0.58	0.07		
	Total	300	3.84	0.57	0.03		

Table 12: T-test Results for Computer Possession

		n	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig.
Context Dimension	Yes	245	3.79	0.68	0.04	.02
	No	55	3.56	0.66	0.09	
Input Dimension	Yes	245	3.85	0.60	0.04	.38
	No	55	3.77	0.55	0.07	
Process Dimension	Yes	245	4.05	0.59	0.04	.04
	No	55	3.87	0.60	0.08	
Product Dimension	Yes	245	3.81	0.71	0.05	.03
	No	55	3.58	0.68	0.09	
Total Scale	Yes	245	3.87	0.57	0.04	.03
	No	55	3.69	0.53	0.07	

Table 13: T-test Results for Previous Distance Education Experience

		n	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig
Context Dimension	Yes	156	3.81	0.65	0.05	.08
	No	144	3.68	0.72	0.06	
Input Dimension	Yes	156	3.88	0.59	0.05	.18
	No	144	3.78	0.60	0.05	
Process Dimension	Yes	156	4.02	0.60	0.05	.83
	No	144	4.01	0.59	0.05	
Product Dimension	Yes	156	3.82	0.67	0.05	.21
	No	144	3.71	0.75	0.06	
Total Scale	Yes	156	3.88	0.56	0.04	.20
	No	144	3.80	0.58	0.05	

Table 14: T-test Results for High School Types

		n	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig.
Context Dimension	State	225	3.75	0.67	0.04	.87
	Private	75	3.74	0.74	0.09	
Input Dimension	State	225	3.82	0.59	0.04	.63
	Private	75	3.86	0.61	0.07	
Process Dimension	State	225	3.99	0.59	0.04	.27
	Private	75	4.08	0.61	0.07	
Product Dimension	State	225	3.73	0.74	0.05	.14
	Private	75	3.87	0.59	0.07	
Total Scale	State	225	3.82	0.58	0.04	.30
	Private	75	3.90	0.53	0.06	

The second aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between the demographic variables of the participants (gender, age, English proficiency level, Internet usage duration, computer possession, previous distance education experience and high school types) and their attitudes towards distance English education. Echoing Öztaş and Kılıç (2017), and Kaban (2021), this study found that there was a statistically significant relationship between the attitudes of the participants and their gender. However, a number of studies (Al-Qaisy, 2021; Ateş & Altun, 2008; Çelik & Uzunboylu, 2015; Kowshick, 2020; Srichanyachon, 2013; Peytcheva-Forsyth, Yovkova, & Aleksieva, 2018; Öneri Uzun, Çakıcı Eş, & Evram, 2020) came up with contrasting results stating that there was no significant relationship between gender and attitudes towards distance education. The second demographic variable was age. Similar to Öneri Uzun, Çakıcı Eş and Evram (2020), it was found that there was a significant relationship between the attitudes of the students towards distance education and their age. However, the results of some studies (Çakır & Arslan, 2020; Öztaş & Kılıç, 2017; Peytcheva-Forsyth, Yovkova, & Aleksieva, 2018) contrasted with this finding since there was no significant dif-

ference between the attitudes towards distance education and age in these studies. Another demographic variable was daily Internet usage duration and it was found that there was no significant relationship between the attitudes towards distance education and daily Internet usage duration, which differs from previous research (Çelik & Uzunboylu, 2015; Demir, 2020; Demir & Narlıkaya, 2020). The next demographic variable was computer possession. In parallel with Yakar and Yıldırım Yakar (2021), and Kaban (2021), there was a significant difference between the attitudes and computer possession in that the ones who had computers had more positive attitudes than the ones who did not. However, Srichanyachon (2013) came up with contrasting results indicating that there was no significant difference between the attitudes and computer possession.

In the current study, the participants' previous distance education experience was another demographic variable. Similar to Öztaş and Kılıç (2017), and Ismaili (2021), there was no significant relationship between the attitudes and previous distance education experience. In contrast, Ateş and Altun (2008), Demir and Narlıkaya (2020), Demir (2020) and Eela (2020) indicated that there was a significant relationship between the

participants' previous online learning experiences and attitudes. Finally, high school types were investigated in relation to attitudes towards distance education. Similar to Çakır and Arslan, (2020), Demir, (2020), and Öztaş and Kılıç (2017), it was found that there was no significant relationship between high school types and attitudes towards distance education. However, Al-Qaisy (2021) stated that there was a significant relationship between the attitudes and high school types of the participants.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS and SUGGESTIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of Turkish EFL preparatory class students towards distance English education during the pandemic with regard to some demographic features. This study results bear some similarities and differences with those of previous research, which implies that there is still a need for conducting studies about stakeholder attitudes towards distance education for an effective implementation. However, it should be noted that this study was conducted during COVID-19 pandemic and the data collection procedures were carried out online. In this sense, attitudes of different stakeholders (students, teachers, parents, administrators, inspectors, authorities) should be studied in the post-pandemic era and data can be collected in face-to-face settings rather than online settings. In this way, a bridge can be built between the studies conducted before, during and after the pandemic, long-lasting effects of distance education can be followed in a deeper sense, and integration of more parties could add a different dimension to feasibility of distance education. Also, existing materials can be adapted to meet the needs and expectations of digital learners and facilitate online delivery of instruction. Apart from teaching materials, testing materials should also be adapted because in case of emergency in the future, the quality of online testing materials could be improved to serve the needs of stakeholders. Finally, hybrid learning settings could be employed and virtual classrooms could be promoted to increase the awareness of students and teachers.

As for distance English education, some items in the questionnaire had the lowest mean scores in different dimensions. Put specifically, the curriculum was not found to be complementary to the other courses and the aims of the curriculum were not stated to be in harmony with the expectations of the students at a desired level. These findings imply that online English courses should be well-designed so that they match with each other and meet the expectations of students. If content and procedures of different online courses do not accord with each other, the unity across the curriculum may not be achieved and some problems may occur in standardization. Another issue is related to improving English listening and speaking skills. Since the participants indicated that the resources were not effective in improving their listening and speaking skills, educators, curriculum makers and material designers should devise new audio-visual materials which can be easily used in online learning environments. Otherwise, students may show progress in some aspects such as grammar and vocabulary but have difficulty in improving their communication skills. The other item was about online exams and it appears that there is a need for questioning the quality and fairness of online testing procedures. In this sense, a number of precautions should be taken and new online testing tools should be piloted and promoted for online English courses. Finally, memorization strategies seem to be overlooked in online learning environments. For this purpose, English teachers could offer some opportunities for online learners to develop their learning skills and guide their learners about how to make use of online platforms to improve their memorization strategies as well.

Finally, this study has some limitations. First of all, this study was conducted at a university in Türkiye. Thus, the results of the study cannot be generalized to other contexts and students with different age, language levels and school types can be investigated in different countries for comparative purposes. Secondly, this study adopted a quantitative research design and further studies can be conducted with a qualitative or mixed-method research design to shed light upon the hidden dimensions of distance education across contexts. Last but not least, different data collection tools such as interview, observation, online diary and material evaluation checklist can be employed to triangulate data.

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