

## Online Teaching Experiences of ELT Instructors

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Doi: 10.31681/jetol.770418

Suggested citation: Meç, A., Sağlam Ertem, İ., Şener, B. (2020). Online teaching experiences of ELT instructors. *Journal of Education, Technology and Online Learning*. 3(3), 340-362.

### Article Info

Received : 03.06.2020

Revised : 23.06.2020

Accepted: 17.07.2020

Research Article

### Abstract

Online teaching can be regarded as a central phenomenon among researchers, educators and students globally. Especially after the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, almost all the institutions around the world felt the necessity to deliver such rapid online education to their students, possibly without sufficient preparation. Considering the current educational situation, this study was conducted with 39 participants at a private university in Istanbul, Turkey. The aim of this cross-sectional survey design study is to explore the perceptions of English instructors about online teaching, in terms of the technical, pedagogical and institutional problems they have experienced; therefore, a survey including both Likert Scale and open-ended questions were used to explore these issues in depth. The responses coming from Likert scale questions were analyzed in terms of frequency since the sample size is small. Open-ended responses of participants were analyzed through content analysis. The findings indicate that participants have experienced a lack of technical equipment for virtual classes, an increase in the workload, and a lack of financial support by the institution, despite the high number of participants reporting they got emotional support from their colleagues. Besides, the areas where they find most problematic are being able to create interaction opportunities in virtual classes, students' low motivation, students' lack of autonomy, lack of standardization in the faculty as well as general internet connectivity issues. Despite all the issues, yet most participants reported they have a positive attitude towards online teaching.

**Keywords:** online education, online classroom management, online classroom interaction, emergency remote teaching, pedagogical issues, virtual classrooms, COVID-19 outbreak

## 1. INTRODUCTION

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic since the beginning of 2020, the world has faced unprecedented lockdown measures such as closures in schools, universities and workplaces, and cancellations of events and conferences in response to the contagious virus. Due to these sudden precautions taken worldwide, online education has expanded to a scale that has never

been seen before due to the complete elimination of physical classroom settings (Bozkurt et al., 2020).

Likewise, universities in Turkey have transitioned to online teaching after their completion of preparations for online learning platforms and tools. Though online teaching is not a new mode of delivery for certain universities, many faculty members and students did not have sufficient time and opportunity to orient themselves but rather had to plunge into a series of platforms and online education policies that universities have instated individually (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020).

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

To understand the experiences of English instructors who have recently switched to fully online instruction more profoundly, a literature review was conducted under three concepts: technical issues faced during online teaching, institutional challenges in online teaching, and finally, pedagogical aspects of the phenomenon. Besides, terminology regarding the issue is also included below to familiarize those unaccustomed to the jargon.

### **Terminology of Online Education**

Online education has had three popular designs so far: Blended, Synchronous, and Asynchronous teaching and learning. To these established methods, we can add the category Emergency Remote Teaching.

Blended learning involves the combination of online and face-to-face components where teachers conduct online activities to develop students' comprehension of a skill together with the related practice they conduct in physical classrooms (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004).

On the other hand, synchronous and asynchronous learning modes are only based on online learning. The former takes place in real-time with group of learners via live webinars, instant messaging through the chat box, and virtual classrooms. With its feature of live sessions, it enables a collaborative, interactive and feedback friendly atmosphere of learning. Yet again, although synchronous learning offers these "real-time" opportunities, none of them are as real time as in face-to-face classrooms. For instance, use of chat box is much more synchronous than emails, but participants still must wait for the others to type to communicate. And even in live sessions where cameras and microphones are turned on, - and even if we ignore the internet connection problems and audio-visual quality-, there is a delay of sound and video for millisecond, which affects the quality of communication. Asynchronous learning, however, is

a more learner-centered approach which requires learners to complete courses in their own time and pace through watching pre-recorded videos, webinars, or online courses, and participating in discussion boards, writing emails, and blogs (Hrastinski, 2008).

Another term, which would describe the current situation is “emergency remote teaching (ERT)”, which can be defined as a temporary shift of instructional delivery to create a fully remote educational solution to lockdown circumstances. (Hodges et al., 2020). According to the same research, “the primary objective is not to create a robust educational ecosystem” (Hodges et al, 2020). Nevertheless, time and circumstances will show whether the current ERT focus will trigger a shift towards positioning online teaching and learning as the sole, or at least the dominant education model. Even though this online teaching period can be regarded as ERT, current experiences of involved parties (teachers, students, administrative staff, IT employees, governmental bodies) can be guides for future online education regulations and ameliorations.

In the rest of the paper, among the terms mentioned above, “online teaching” will be used as an umbrella term to encompass ERT.

### **Technical Issues in Online Teaching**

Students’ experience in online teaching in terms of technical issues has been investigated by different studies so far (Pastor, 2020; Hara, 2020), and there are studies which have looked into both students’ and teachers’ experiences as well (Olt & Teman, 2018; Webb et al., 2017). Unfortunately, there are not many studies which solely focus on teachers’ experiences regarding the issue.

Infrastructure failure, especially in synchronous online education, is one of the most common problems faced by many learners and teachers. In a study which was conducted in University of Wyoming (Olt & Teman, 2018), these problems were investigated through ethnographic research. Issues reported by both students and teachers were mostly related to hearing problems during virtual classes, not being able to communicate as well as in face-to-face, sound and video quality and many others. As stated by Olt and Teman (2018), these seemingly trivial problems occur in many different institutions and have a dramatically negative effect on the both learners’ and teachers’ attitude towards online education, which eventually leads to a decrease in motivation for learning and teaching. When it is compared to face-to-face education, online education bears the risk of not being able to provide even the basic prerequisites for effective

learning due to the fact that there are many variables which can cause a communication breakdown in online education.

Webb et al. (2017), also find similar issues in the delivery of online sessions regarding the infrastructure. The most common problems mentioned in the study, which investigates training in the use of online library resources in a university, were related to audio settings, audio quality and internet connectivity problems.

It can be said that, as the literature review indicates, the issues regarding the infrastructure (internet connection, audio-visual quality problems) are the most common and most determining factors which undermine the efficacy and efficiency of online education.

As claimed by Bates (2001), governments and educational institutions should take the necessary measures to address these problems through proper financial investment. Amelioration in the internet infrastructure and in the learning management systems could easily solve the most common problems faced in online education and can greatly improve the effectiveness of it.

### **Institutional Issues in Online Education: Emotional Well-being and Workload**

Although issues faced by teachers which could be based on institutional causes are many in number, within the scope of this study emotional well-being -which is caused by financial difficulties and workload are chosen as the foci.

Tynan et al.'s qualitative study (2015) investigate the increased workload in online teaching in depth. The study was conducted in four Australian universities where fully online and blended learning were implemented. The findings of the study reveal many sides of the issue. Overall, it is concluded that e-teaching has increased their workload. In the interviews, participants note the increase in contact hours with students, technical issues, lack of support from IT departments, complexity encountered in the management, implementation, and moderation of online instruction platforms as the main reasons for this increase in workload.

In a quantitative study by Cenkseven-Onder and Sari (2009), the correlation between workplace-related stress and the emotional well-being of teachers was emphasized. It is stated that in the study that, the emotional well-being of teachers should be supported by the administration and general school climate, since emotions are key determinant of effective teaching and thus learning. Cenkseven-Onder and Sari (2009), citing from Mauno et al. (2009) in their work, also highlights that the overall work satisfaction of teachers is deeply affected by loyalty to the institution, which can be ensured by providing a favourable job environment,

An ideal working environment is one wherein the teacher's motivation is high, providing teachers with financial security is another determining factor (Kızıltepe, 2008). According to this quantitative study, institutions' inability or unwillingness to offer satisfactory salaries and adequate fringe benefits to their instructors are among the main reasons of demotivation of teachers. Given that the online education and current lockdown conditions carry the risk of increasing the stress and demotivation levels, it potentially affects their emotional well-being. Another institutional issue faced by teachers in online education is the increase in job stress due to increase in academic workload. In Mamun et al.'s quantitative study (2015), it is stated that e-learning environments have begun to replace traditional teaching practices. However, online learning requires a more student-centered approach, in which learners are expected to be more autonomous in keeping the track of the instruction. As cited by the same study (2015), this creates an increase in the work-related responsibilities of teachers and causes them to feel more stressed (Anderson et al., 2002). This may be explained with students' lack of autonomy in undertaking the responsibilities of online learning.

In Lorenzetti's (2004) report, it is stated that although online teaching may not possess more workload than traditional face-to-face teaching, the amount which is required for uninterrupted time in online studies is much higher. In a traditional classroom, a student may consult to the instructor before, during or after the given task more easily, but when it is adapted to online environment, in which more asynchronous work should be done, it creates a burden for the teachers because then they need to reply to many emails coming from students at different times of day. In the report, one of the suggestions is that these contact hours with students should be negotiated in order to avoid this workload.

All in all, deterioration in teacher's emotional well-being due to job related stress, financial insecurity and increase in workload found in online teaching are important elements which have been handled in many research studies so far. In this section of literature review, they were collected under the same heading, because they are institution-based issues. They require intervention by the school administration itself, rather than by leading teachers to act on solving the issues individually or through non-official meetings among colleagues. And hopefully, this study will address the gap in the literature in terms of the in-depth exploration of teachers' online teaching experiences regarding institutional issues, given that not many studies have investigated the problem.

## **Pedagogical Issues in Online Education**

In the literature, there are many studies which investigated student experiences in online education (Sriwichai, 2020; Chen, Dobinson & Kent, 2020; Trespalacios and Uribe-Florez, 2020; Zhao and Mei, 2016; Cakir, Karademir & Erdogdu 2018). However, the number of studies that looked into the pedagogical issues from the teachers' perspective is scarce.

Comas-Quinn's mixed-method study (2011) has investigated teachers' perceptions of online teaching. The results of the surveys, interviews and observations of the researcher show that switching to online education requires more work on the form of interaction and the content which leads to dealing with gaining necessary technical knowledge on both learners' and the teacher's side, problems of classroom management, anxiety of students.

The present study, therefore, will address the gap in the literature in terms of teachers' experiences of pedagogical issues as well.

### **Aim of the Study**

This study is aimed to explore English instructors' viewpoints of online teaching experiences. This study reveals both numeric and verbal data regarding online teaching experiences of the 39 participants by addressing the research questions below:

*RQ1: "Do ELT instructors experience technical, pedagogical and institutional issues during online teaching?"*

*RQ2: "What are instructors' experiences of online teaching?"*

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The study is designed as a cross-sectional survey design. Creswell (2012) described this design as when "the researcher collects data at one point in time" (p. 377). This type of design is preferred for the current study, since it can measure attitudes, behaviour or opinions of the participants in a short amount of time, even with limited resources (Creswell, 2012).

### **Setting**

This cross-sectional survey design study, which aims at exploring the experiences of English instructors who switched to fully online teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic, was

conducted at a private university in Istanbul, Turkey. The university provides two types of English language programs. The first one is an English preparation program, which can be regarded as an intensive English course for the students who are expected to complete their faculty education in English. The English preparation program, which takes one full academic year, meets accredited standards of English instruction, and at the end of the course, students are expected to gain a B2 level of English and basic academic language skills. The other one is English for Academic Purposes. In this program, students who have completed English Preparation program successfully or have been admitted to the departments as proven by their internationally accepted English level test scores, take English for Academic Purposes courses. In these courses, students are expected to obtain several academic skills such as presentation skills, research report writing skills, contextualization skills as well as necessary skills for possible future occupations.

### **Sampling**

Convenient sampling is used to reach the participants. After the development of data collection tool and transferring it to online platform, the link was shared with instructors through personal and collaborative online communication platforms. Among 52 instructors reached, 39 agreed to complete the online survey.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study teach in these two types of English Programs – English Preparation Program and English for Academic Purposes Program. The participants were selected randomly. A total of thirty-nine instructors participated in this study. As this is a small scaled study, the number of participants can be considered sufficient in terms of data collected. Eighteen of the participants are members of English for Academic Purposes School and twenty-one participants are the member of English Preparation Program. Eighteen of the participants have experience in blended teaching context, in which some of the lessons are delivered face-to-face, some are through online components. Twenty of the participants have no experience related to online teaching of any kind. Only one participant has experienced full online teaching context before.

## **Data Collection Tool**

The data collection tool which was developed by the researchers have 29 questions in total. The first three parts of the survey are aimed at collecting basic demographic data and investigating previous online teaching experience. Part 4 consists of 12 5-scale rating questions, in which current online teaching experience is measured in terms of technical, institutional and pedagogical issues faced during current online teaching experience. In Part 5, 6, 7 and 8 these issues are further investigated through open-ended questions to get a deeper understanding.

## **Validity and Reliability of the Instrument**

To ensure the face and content validity of the survey, an expert in the field of English Language Education was consulted, and certain items were excluded or added to the survey after consultation. Reliability Analysis of the survey was conducted in SPSS and the Cronbach Alpha coefficient was found .725, which shows the internal consistency of the tool.

Unfortunately, due to time limitation, no pilot study was conducted before the actual data collection process.

## **Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistical analysis is used to analyze the data coming from the questions in Part 1, Part 2, Part 3, and questions 1-12 in Part 4. Frequency of responses are calculated. When analyzing the data provided by the rating questions (5 item Likert scale: from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) in Part 4 (1-12), neutral answers were not taken into consideration. Significance in differences between two opposite sides are found by combining Strongly Agree with Agree responses, and by combining Strongly Disagree and Disagree responses.

For questions 13-16, in order to determine the significance, initially, all the responses are analyzed and keywords such as “connection” or “interaction” were detected. Then, synonymous or similar words are selected from responses and collected under different categories. Finally, frequency of responses was calculated, and most frequent answers are thought to be significant and revealed in the results and findings chapter.

## **4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The results will be presented under two sections: First, data coming from 5-point Likert Scale questions; and then data coming from responses to open-ended questions will be demonstrated.

## Instructors' Technical, Institutional and Pedagogical Experiences in Online Teaching

The results of these 5-item Likert Scale Questions are aimed at the research question below:

*RQ1: "Do ELT instructors experience technical, pedagogical and institutional issues during online teaching?"*

Part 4 of the survey includes sets of questions based on a 5 item Likert scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree) and its data results are evaluated under three main themes: What has been provided by the institutions regarding online teaching (Qs 1, 2, 3, 4), teachers' workload (Qs 5, 6, 8), and overall well-being of the instructors in online teaching (Qs 9, 10, 11, 12). All the neutral responses are disregarded and upper (strongly agree/ agree) and lower (strongly disagree/ disagree) bends data results are taken into consideration to analyze overall responses.

Table 1

Frequency of 5-item Likert Scale Responses

|                                    | Questions  | Agreement | Neutral | Disagreement |
|------------------------------------|--|-----------|---------|--------------|
| Technical Issues                   | Teachers' technical resource availability was verified | <b>38</b> | 0       | 1            |
|                                    | Technical resources were provided                      | 16        | 8       | 15           |
|                                    | Technical training provided                            | <b>35</b> | 3       | 1            |
| Pedagogical & Institutional Issues | Pedagogical training provided                          | <b>22</b> | 8       | 9            |
|                                    | Expectations of institutions' not increased vs F2F     | 17        | 8       | 14           |
|                                    | Workload not increased vs F2F                          | 5         | 3       | <b>31</b>    |
|                                    | Financially supported by institution                   | 19        | 6       | 14           |
|                                    | Emotionally supported by institution                   | 15        | 12      | 12           |
|                                    | Emotionally supported by colleagues                    | <b>33</b> | 5       | 1            |

The first four questions in part 4 reveal the data regarding the institutional assistance asked and provided to instructors. While 38 participants respond that their institution asked whether they need any technical equipment for online teaching, 16 participants agreed or strongly agreed that they have been provided with necessary technical equipment. This shows although the institution asked after the availability of technical equipment for online teaching, only half of the instructors have received assistance. However, when they are asked about whether they have been assisted with technical knowledge, 35 participants strongly agree or agree that they have received technical knowledge. This significant agreement decreases again with the

responses given to the ‘pedagogical training provided’. While 22 participants agree on having received pedagogical training, 9 participants disagree with this item.

In part 4, questions 5, 6, and 8 indicate the workload instructors experience during online teaching. When instructors are asked whether any measurements have been taken against the potential workload that can stem from online teaching, the number of participants agreeing and disagreeing with the item is close; 14 participants agree, and 17 participants disagree. Also, the questions 6 and 8 compare the virtual and face to face classes’ management in terms of workload. The overwhelming majority of participants (31) stated that virtual classroom management is more difficult than face-to-face classroom management. Q7 in part 4 is also omitted due to its ambiguous data value.

The last four questions (9, 10, 11, 12) in part four reveal the data regarding the overall well-being of the instructors; whether they are emotionally and financially supported by their institution during online teaching period. While 19 participants state that they are supported financially, 14 participants claim that they are not supported. This slight difference is also applicable to the question about emotional support they receive from their institution. While 15 participants state that they are emotionally supported, 12 participants respond that they are not supported emotionally. However, when they are asked if they are emotionally supported by their colleagues throughout online teaching, 33 participants said yes. And with the last item questioning their capability of online teaching overall, 34 participants consider themselves as capable of teaching online.

### **Findings of Open-ended Questions**

The findings of the data coming from open-ended questions address the second research question, by fully investigating their experience in depth:

*RQ2: “What are instructors’ experiences of online teaching?”*

Table 2, below, shows the most frequent responses of participants regarding their in-depth experience of the issues during online teaching. The issues found will be explained in the subheadings below along with sample quotations from participants.

Table 2

Frequency of issues experienced by participants

| Issue  | Frequency |
|--|-----------|
| Internet Connectivity and Audio-Visual Issues        | 33        |
| Learner Motivation, Autonomy and Interaction         | 22        |
| Lack of Standardization and Communication in Faculty | 5         |
| Financial Issues                                     | 11        |
| Increased workload                                   | 3         |

### **Internet Connectivity and Audio-Visual Issues**

As Table 2 above indicates, internet connection-related problems are one of the most common issues experienced by participants. For instance, about the connectivity. issues, participants stated the responses below:

“As useful as technology is, it can be unreliable at times. Internet connection might be a problem sometimes due to overload and I am not sure whether an actual fix on that is possible, at least as far as the educational institutions are concerned.” (Participant 25)

“I was disconnected due to poor internet/system being overloaded.” (Participant 2)

“I disconnect or sometimes my connection gets slow.” (Participant 8)

According to participants, students’ not turning on their cameras and microphones was also a problem:

“Students who avoid using their microphone and camera. I wish I could enable students’ microphone and cameras. Not having visible students as they refrain from turning cameras on [was an issue].” (Participant 1)

### **Learner Motivation, Autonomy and Interaction**

Many participants reported issues regarding the lack of learner motivation, interaction during class-time and lack of learner autonomy during their online teaching experience. To illustrate:

“You can’t follow body language and you may not take necessary measures to help students. Students are still worried and not motivated. They don’t even have fun in class, they don’t enjoy their English routines. I think this is quite normal in such an atmosphere. I don’t feel secure. Getting students to actively participate is really difficult in online classrooms.” (Participant 7)

“Students are not used to it [online classes] and they are not autonomous.” (Participant 28)

"Students seem to be taking online lessons for granted. They can revisit sessions by watching the recordings or else they may keep quiet throughout sessions even maybe doing other things and just keeping the struggling teacher on the screen. Most probably our learners don't associate themselves with autonomy in any way." (Participant 39)

“Creating interaction with and among students is almost impossible. Interaction is limited.” (Participant 18)

### **Lack of Standardization and Communication in Faculty**

Participants reported that they experienced issues regarding lack of standardization and communication in terms of implementation of online teaching. For example;

“Lack of guidance as to what we were expected to actually do during online lessons. Constant change of decisions. Pressure to report when still trying to adapt showed a lack of trust and support.” (Participant 37)

“Communication problems; now it takes a bit longer to get things done than before. Lack of communication about changes happening at the institution.” (Participant 22)

### **Financial Issues**

11 participants stated that due to COVID-19 pandemic situation, they work from home and therefore they suffer from financial concerns caused by cut of benefits and use of personal resources for schoolwork. For instance:

“The institution doesn't consider the fact that we work more than ever and cuts our meal cards while our expenses at home increase and we pay for internet connection. We are emotionally down and feel our effort to help students is exploited.” (Participant 10)

The “University taking away benefits without any prior notice” was also reported as an issue affecting teacher moral (Participant 33).

### **Increased Workload**

The increase in the workload during online teaching was also mentioned by a number of participants:

“We work regardless of time. The institution thinks that we teach each section for 1 hour a week but doesn't see the fact that we prepare materials, give feedback, grade assignments 7/24.” (Participant 11)

“[Online teaching] is tiring, not satisfying, [it] needs to be improved about the tools we have been using.” (Participant 13)

## **Positive Attitude Towards Online Teaching**

Despite the problems they experience during online teaching, 13 of the participants reported positive thoughts on online teaching in general. For instance, one of the participants responded as below:

“I am getting used to it, I think there are definitely some advantages. If online education continues and the process becomes more efficient, I believe it can be enjoyable for teachers and beneficial for students. When classroom education resumes, I will continue to use some elements of online teaching (the blackboard system)” (Participant 18)

Also, 7 of the participants are hopeful that it is going to be better with time and the incorporation of lessons learned.

“I love teaching online with all its up's and downs. However, this current situation is not a regular "online" teaching experience. It is one created out of crisis and trauma. In a proper setting many of the issues that are causing these problems could be overcome with proper infrastructure and curriculum.” (Participant 2)

“Despite all the negativity, I can manage online teaching as much as it is possible.” (Participant 17)

All in all, participants reported many issues in many different areas of online teaching. Yet, despite all the negativities, many participants were able to adapt to this emergency situation and they believe it will be better in the future.

## **4. DISCUSSION**

### **Technical Issues in Online Teaching**

Results of data coming from both the 5-point Likert Scale are in parallel with the findings of the previous literature which focused also on teachers' experiences. The most common technical issues experienced by instructors are internet connectivity problems, audio and video related problems, and students not turning on their cameras and microphones. Students' unwillingness to share their video or audio could also be traced back to violation of privacy, since all the virtual classrooms are recorded, as enforced by the institutions' decision to compensate for the lack of attendance requirement and to promote self-paced learning for those who miss the classes, and can be watched by other students in the same class. Also, anyone who is present in the virtual class can easily record the lesson with easily accessible digital recording software and share it. This issue, actually was highly debated in German educational circles and

shaped Germany's stance during the pandemic. Since there were strict regulations for the protection of data privacy, the use of online tools created conflict among educators (Kerres, 2020).

Apart from the issue above, infrastructural problem is also a factor affecting In Olt and Teman's (2018) and Webb et al.'s (2017) study, connectivity and audio-visual problems were found among the most common ones. This issue has also a social dimension. Due to differences in the socio-economic status, or from a wider perspective, social inequality, not all of the students have the same resources for proper online education (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Therefore, as asserted by Bates (2001), governments and educational institutions should work on these technical issues, which will greatly improve the efficacy of online education.

### **Institutional and Pedagogical Issues in Online Teaching**

Emotional well-being and support, and loyalty and trust in administrative cycles is highly important in effective teaching and learning, as Cenkseven-Onder and Sari (2009) point out. The findings of this study demonstrate that participants experience challenges in these aspects. Even though Likert scale results show that participants feel emotionally supported by their institution, open-ended data results, which will be discussed below, show conflicting results. Many participants reported that they have financial challenges due to administrative staff's decisions during the period, which may also affect their emotional well-being. However, many participants also stated they received emotional support from their colleagues. This can explain the significant difference between the percentage of feeling emotionally supported by the institution and teachers' colleagues. In other words, participants' emotional well-being is nurtured thanks to solidarity networks between colleagues. This result, again, proves the significance of a community of practice, which can be described as groups of people sharing a common goal who improve their skills or knowledge by interacting with each other at regular times (Wenger & Wegner-Trayner, 2007). As they suggest, experiences shared in informal conversation between the members of the community of practice, and in our case the instructors, can function as a platform where knowledge is shared to inform practice, solidarity is fostered in these networks as well, also increases their emotional well-being.

Findings of the present study regarding the workload in online teaching are also aligned with the findings of other studies in the literature. Participants consider online teaching to be more labor intensive than face-to-face teaching. Mamun et al.'s study (2015), for instance, highlights that teachers' work-related responsibilities increase in online teaching, which also increases

their stress. Tynan et al.'s study (2015), which finds the increase in workload due to technical issues, increased contact hours with students, and the moderation of online platforms, also has similar results with this study.

Students should be trained to be autonomous learners and control their own learning practices. Certain programs for basic computer and academic skills should be designed and integrated into the curriculum. In Mamun et al.'s study (2015) it can also be observed that students depend on their teachers profoundly. A new concept of education and delivery system should be adopted, and students should initiate and lead their own learning processes.

### **Instructors' Experiences in Online Teaching**

Results coming from the open-ended part of this study, especially, fills a greater gap in the existing literature, due to the lack of studies which focus on teachers' experiences of online teaching. Yet again, as Lorenzetti's report (2004) and Olt and Teman's study (2018) highlights, the open-ended results show that teachers also have communication and interaction problems in online teaching.

### **Interaction**

Lack of interaction among instructors, between instructors and students as well as among students is mentioned by many participants in the study. As at hinted above, the communities of practices (Wenger & Wegner-Trayner, 2007) between instructors are important to sustain interaction. However, since they are not necessarily formal channels of interaction, they might not be sufficient to address the issues experienced in the administrative or institutional level. As reported, participants in the study reported a lack of communication and constant changes in standards in terms of online teaching.

Interaction between students and teachers and among students themselves, is another issue. The role of being embedded in a community of practice is significant here again (Wenger & Wegner-Trayner, 2007), in the learner's case. Unfortunately, when compared the face-to-face education, the interaction between learners and teachers is limited, and the dynamics of the community of practice is more abstract. Besides, from Vygotskian view, without the benefits of collaboration between peers, they cannot learn from each other and the acquisition of strategies and knowledge is more difficult (Scott & Palinscar, 2013), therefore the teachers' job is made more challenging in online teaching. Scott and Palinscar (2013) further claim that, especially in asynchronous teaching, the implications of socio-cultural theory is harder to

implement due to lack of physical or even virtual collaboration between peers and they suggest transforming online teaching into a more collaborative medium is crucial.

### **Learner Autonomy**

As mentioned in the Literature Review section, online teaching requires even more learner autonomy, compared to face-to-face teaching (Hrastinski, 2008), given that the teacher is not as readily available for students as in face-to-face classrooms. The issues faced by teachers due to the lack of learner autonomy are reported by many participants in the study, which brings us to its significance. As cited by Little (2008), Holec (1981) explains that learner autonomy is essential for the learner to construct and personalize “universal knowledge.” It can be claimed that students will need the “self-regulation” of knowledge through construction to benefit fully from online teaching, and the lack of it can be more problematic for instructors due to lack of “physical” interaction with learners in “physical” classrooms.

In as much as online teaching can be a great opportunity for the learners to gain autonomy, by being more independent from the teacher having the role of “explainer,” the learning process towards the goal of gaining autonomy can be challenging, as stated by the participants.

### **Learner and Teacher Motivation**

Students’ lack of motivation is another key issue faced by participants, according to the results. Given that student motivation is one of the most significant aspects of L2 learning (Dörnyei, 1994), any threat to student motivation endangers the efficacy of learning, thus creates a problem on the teacher’s side as well. According to the same article, self-efficacy is important in building student motivation, this is acquired socially through observing peers and getting praise by them. Therefore, it can be also said that student autonomy, student interaction and student motivation are interconnected, which is also present in the responses of the participants in this study. If one of them is at risk, the other pillars are also affected by it.

Although participants’ overall thoughts about online teaching are reported as positive, their mentioning the increased workload in their online teaching experience, which, among other factors, may affect their teacher motivation is significant. Since teacher motivation is related to a number of factors such as “student motivation, educational reform, teaching practice and teachers’ psychological fulfilment and well-being” (Han & Yin, 2016, p.2), therefore it cannot be considered as independent from student motivation as well. And also, well-being is interconnected with teacher motivation (Richardson & Watt, 2010), which also creates coherence between the Likert Scale and open-ended data results of the study.

All in all, it can be stated that the findings of this study fill the gap by bringing teachers' perspective into the field of online teaching in the literature. Besides, the findings carry importance as the elements found significant grounding in the extant theories of second language acquisition and learning.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS**

This study is aimed to discover the technical, pedagogical and institutional issues experienced by tertiary level ELT teachers during emergency remote teaching due to COVID-19 lockdown, in-depth. Although this period cannot be regarded as a pre-planned switch from face-to-face to online teaching, and therefore some issues might be more or less unique to emergency online teaching, the findings could act as guide for future online education regulations.

Since the sample size is not extremely large, the results may not fully apply to other contexts. Similar studies to be conducted in similar contexts and a more valid and reliable data collection tool would be necessary in order to extrapolate the given findings more broadly.

Another limitation of the study can be the lack of in-depth interviews which may be conducted with a focus group, to triangulate the data. However, due to pandemic situation, it was impossible to do face-to-face interviews. Since online interviews may not yield to results which are as robust as face-to-face ones, this option was eliminated.

All in all, the importance of technical infrastructure, student interaction and autonomy, emotional well-being, financial security, and a balanced workload of teachers in online teaching is highlighted thanks to this study. It will hopefully be guiding in the future of online ELT education in Turkey, at the tertiary level.

### **Suggestions for Further Research and Implications for Practice**

As mentioned above, this study is conducted in two different ELT departments (Preparatory School and Academic English Skills Program) of the same private university, more extensive replication studies will be quite useful to reach more reliable results both from instructors' and students' perspectives. Main implications for practice based on this study's findings can be listed as below:

1. It is vital for institutions to improve their online platforms technical infrastructure and provide both teachers and students with technical equipment to increase the efficiency of online learning

2. Student interaction, motivation and autonomy are highly important in online education. Certain ways to create more interactive synchronous lessons should be prioritized.
3. Student autonomy is even more essential in online learning. Students must gain autonomy to benefit fully from online learning
4. Emotional well-being must be supported among teachers and students, especially during online teaching periods, wherein communication channels are fewer compared to face-to-face teaching.
5. Potential increase in teachers' workload in online teaching must be considered and measurements must be taken every level to maximize teacher performance thus efficacy of online learning.
6. Financial security during online education periods must be prioritized, since it also has potential to affect teacher's emotional well-being, and thus efficacy of online teaching.

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### İngilizce Öğretmenlerinin Çevrimiçi Öğretim Deneyimleri

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#### Özet

Covid-19 salgınının ardından, okulların muhtemelen yeterince hazırlık yapamadan acilen çevrimiçi eğitime geçiş yapmak durumunda kalmasıyla, çevrimiçi eğitim daha da önem kazandı. Bu çalışma, İstanbul'da özel bir üniversitede 39 katılımcıyla gerçekleştirildi. Çalışmanın amacı, İngilizce öğretmenlerinin çevrimiçi eğitim sırasında yaşadıkları teknik, pedagojik ve kurumsal sorunları keşfetmektir. Bu amaca yönelik Likert ölçeğine göre tasarlanmış çoktan seçmeli ve ayrıca açık uçlu sorulardan oluşan bir çevrimiçi anket yoluyla veri toplanmıştır. Çalışma, çevrimiçi eğitimde öğretmenlerin algıları bakımında literature katkı sağlamaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** çevrimiçi eğitim, çevrimiçi öğretim algıları, çevrimiçi sınıf yönetimi, çevrimiçi sınıfta etkileşim, çevrimiçi öğretimde teknik sorunlar, acil uzaktan eğitim, çevrimiçi öğretimler pedagojik hususlar, sanal sınıflar, COVID-19 salgını

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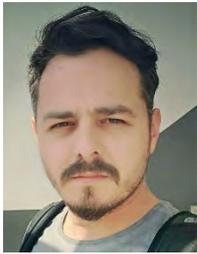
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## Appendix: Sample Questionnaire

### Teacher Experience of Online Teaching

This questionnaire is a part of an action research and it is aimed at collecting data regarding the experiences of ELT teachers in online teaching. Your responses will only be used for research purposes and will not be shared with any third parties.

#### PART 1: What is your teaching context?

- A. Prep School
- B. General English Language and/or Skills
- C. Vocational English and/or Skills
- D. Academic English and/or Skills

#### PART 2: Are you currently teaching online?

- A. Yes
- B. No

#### PART 3: Have you ever taught online before?

- A. No
- B. Blended (Face to face + Synchronous / Asynchronous Online Component)
- C. Fully online

#### PART 4: Please answer the questions regarding your current online teaching experience. (5: Strongly Agree, 1: Strongly Disagree)

1. My institution has offered to provide me with necessary technical equipment (internet connection, laptop, camera etc.)
2. My institution has provided me with necessary technical equipment (internet connection, laptop, camera etc.)
3. My institution has provided me with necessary technical knowledge (how to use online tools, virtual classroom etc.)
4. My institution has provided me with pedagogical/academic help regarding how to teach online.
5. My institution has taken measurements against the potential increase in teachers' workload. (reducing class hours/office hours/offering extra help)

6. My institution's expectations from me have increased compared to face-to-face teaching workload.
7. I think online teaching is more difficult than face-to-face teaching in terms of workload.
8. I think online teaching is more difficult than face-to-face teaching in terms of effective teaching/learning.
9. I think online teaching is more difficult than face-to-face teaching in terms of assessment.
10. I feel I am currently financially supported by my institution.
11. I feel I am currently emotionally supported by my institution.
12. I feel I am currently emotionally supported by my colleagues.

PART 5: Please write short answers for the questions below.

13. Considering your recent online teaching experience, what was the most difficult technical issue you've faced?
14. Are you still experiencing the issue?
15. If no, how was it solved?
16. If yes, what do you think causes it to continue?
17. Considering your recent online teaching experience, what was the most difficult pedagogical issue you've faced?
18. Are you still experiencing the issue?
19. If no, how was it solved?
20. If yes, what do you think causes it to continue?
21. Considering your recent online teaching experience, what was the most difficult institutional/workplace issue you've faced?
22. Are you still experiencing the issue?
23. If no, how was it solved?
24. If yes, what do you think causes it to continue?
25. How would you describe your recent online teaching experience in general?