Online language learning in times of crisis: Hindrance or opportunity?

Seher Balbay [a] (iD), Gökçe Erkan [b] (iD)

[a] Middle East Technical University, Turkey.
[b] Middle East Technical University, Turkey.

Article Info	Abstract
Keywords: Emergency remote teaching Distance education Pandemic period language learning Student perspectives Research Article	The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many changes to the way teachers teach and students learn. Although there is a surplus of research on online education, the transition period to online education is also worth investigating. This study set out to explore language learners' perceptions of how they were impacted by emergency remote teaching (ERT). All the participants were students attending an English medium university in Turkey. The mode of teaching, changes in teacher-student and student-student interaction, online tools and materials used in the courses were investigated by a comprehensive self-developed online survey and the data were triangulated later by semi-structured interviews conducted with the volunteering participants. Most found the transition to ERT demanding, particularly the loss of face-to-face interaction; however, some students benefited from being able to better regulate their own learning process thanks to the recorded lectures and online materials. Students also appreciated receiving regular feedback from instructors about their progress.

1. Emergency Remote Teaching

This study explores how students attending English language courses in the spring semester of 2020 switched to an online mode of instruction. The study considers students' needs both physically, technologically, and psychologically, during the adaptation period to the sudden transition to online education. To be able to explore this specific situation through this study, recent literature published on the similar situation would provide a wider scope of perspective.

A thorough review of the literature suggests that while most students would prefer face-to-face instruction, others found the online mode beneficial in terms of it being self-paced, self-regulated, and requiring self-motivated learning (Delaney et al., 2010; Diebel & Gow, 2009; Garrison, 2009; Kim et al., 2005; Song, et al., 2004; Tichavsky et al., 2015) . There is a surplus of evidence to support that online education can prove to be as beneficial as face-to-face education in the literature (Driscoll et al., 2012; Young, 2006).

When studying the ERT that the COVID-19 pandemic enforced, the literature on online education at large should be explored. Online education literature would help understand what major shifts in educational practices and attitudes the change in the medium of instruction brings about to the concept of education at a larger scale. As can be observed in any country or culture, the online mode of instruction was much different from that of what both students and instructors had been used to, yet it should be acknowledged that it is not an innovation that was introduced with the pandemic period. Online education has already started playing a major role especially in higher education. One of the studies that focused on the role of online educational tools and their effect in taking students out of their comfort zone was conducted by Bond, Feyver and Pitt (2004). They found out that the online mode of instruction definitely took students out of their comfort zone which resulted in completely giving up on asking for support by voicing their

needs. They state that the method of providing access to online materials plays a significant role in this particular finding. Online education has been the focus of many studies that concentrated on the effectiveness in teaching, and the attitudes of students and instructors. Yet, most studies conclude that the negative attitude is challenged by instructional technologies training and effective teaching is not impossible through online education, hence online education requires meticulous planning (Hodges et al., 2020; Ko & Rossen, 2010; Means et al., 2014; Pu, 2020).

With information technologies (IT) support, once it is ensured that the students do not reject the online education system altogether, they can be encouraged to integrate the online course materials, and hence build confidence. While they emphasize that when presenting materials, the expectations of students are important, in ERT that the pandemic brought about, the higher education institutions did not have the time to explore student expectations of media to present course materials, which created another challenge on top of the panic experienced by both instructors and students caused by the sudden, unexpected and unprecedented case. In fact, Gacs, Senta and Spasova (2020) dwell on similar differences between crisis period online education and planned online education with specific reference to language teaching. They state that emergency online education can provide ample data which can be enlightening when preparing for planned online education. The quality of expectations might not be as high as planned online education, when evaluation, digitalisation of course content, accessibility of educational materials and the objectives of programs are considered. Yet, still, emergency remote teaching periods are still quite useful in shedding light to planned online instruction (Gacs, Senta & Spasova, 2020).

Online English Language Teaching (ELT) due to the pandemic has been a new experience for all higher education institutions throughout the world. Most challenges posed are similar even in different educational contexts of remote cultures and countries (Pu, 2020; Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020). Neither the students nor the instructors were fully prepared to switch to online education. Teaching is a profession well-known with the requirement of preparedness. That the teachers were not ready for the transition created a stress factor for the students on top of the impossibility of meeting their peers and meeting their teachers face-to-face when the pandemic started (Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020).

It is not unforeseen that the pandemic and compulsory home confinement that came with the pandemic led to anxiety mostly in higher education institutions. Baloran (2020) conducted a cross-sectional study examining the emotional reactions of the students when faced with online education due to the pandemic. Students at higher education institutions are reported to have benefited significantly from non-medical preventions taken and promoted by the government. Yet, according to Baloran's research, there was an apparent unwillingness towards moving to online or blended education. The findings of the study conducted by Hartshorn and McMurry (2020) agree with Baloran's study in that, due to the health-related stressors, education lost its priority in students' lives. In addition, they state that in their research the students reported to have experienced more anxiety compared to their instructors.

The stress the pandemic brought about is undeniable and has been the focus of a surplus of recent studies conducted on students. For instance, Wang et al. (2020) claimed that compared to non-student participants, students suffered to a greater extent during the pandemic and schoolwork comprised %47.46 percent of all the challenges that contributed to their pandemic period stress factors. In Wang and his colleagues' study, the participants underscored increased schoolwork because of the technological expectations which required quick adaptation skills.

With the onset of the pandemic, Hartshorn and McMurry (2020) found out that speaking was the skill in which less language development was observed. Wang et al. (2020) also stated that the participant students in their research reported to have developed speaking skills much less during online education because the opportunities to develop speaking skills were rather limited. Wang et al. (2020) add that some of the participants did not differentiate between skills but agreed on stating that learning a language online was not efficient independent of how proficient students are in technology integration. The limited opportunities to develop speaking skills during online education are also referred to in Aksal's 2011 study. Yet, online education should not be continued at the expense of meaningful and consistent communication both among students and between the students and instructors (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000). While speaking with the interface of the videoconferencing program can not be compared to face-to-face interaction, such communication can also lend itself to misunderstandings (Tichavsky et al. 2015). The misunderstandings will not be that frequent as the videoconferencing programs advance and provide more options of conveying messages, such as the chat box, raising hand icon, and other emoticons. To increase student motivation, interaction plays a major role in especially language classes (Baker, 2010; Paechter & Maier, 2010). The need for interaction is also emphasised by Akbana et al. (2020). They state that instructors and institutions should be open to discover new channels of communication to design more interactive online classes. While new technological investments can give way to more interaction, Akbana et al. (2020) also emphasize the importance of digital training for instructors as well. Digital training bears importance not only to have student-teacher interaction, but also to track student performance, to provide effective feedback, to create an online presence, and to help build self efficacy in students (Sumardı & Nugrahanı, 2021). Aksoy (2020) in his study where he compares Turkey to other parts of the world in online education emphasizes the importance of student-student interaction as well as teacher-student interaction.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The research aimed at finding the answers to the following questions:

- What were the challenges for the School of Foreign Language students during the emergency remote teaching period?
- What were the instructional preferences of the students of School of Foreign Languages during the emergency remote teaching period?
- What were the expectations of School of Foreign Languages students from their instructors during the emergency remote teaching period?

The study was conducted with a mixed method design which followed a sequential explanatory framework according to Creswell's (2013) types of mixed method research in which the quantitative data was collected through a self-developed survey and it was followed with individual interviews with volunteering participants. The researchers developed a survey with mostly Likert type questions. The survey questions were discussed with six other researchers and the wording of some questions was refined. The expert paneling helped the researchers avoid the use of unclear expressions and formulate more specific statements. One such example of a revised question is: instead of "I miss my classmates", "I miss the interaction with my classmates" was preferred. The clarification information in the parentheses of question 10 and 17 were added. Question 10 was revised as follows: I had the technical knowledge to cope with the

necessities of emergency remote teaching (e.g. using the microphone and camera of my phone or computer/ hardware-related tasks). Question 17 was revised as follows: I often feel frustrated because of problems with technology while learning online (e.g. being cut off on Zoom; not being able to reach materials/ tasks, etc.).

The survey was later piloted on 20 students and revised and edited according to the feedback received. The researchers administered the survey in two classes, one being from the Department of Basic English (DBE) and the other from the Modern Languages Department (MLD). Later the researchers collected oral feedback as to which questions were not clear to the participants and what else the participants would like to be asked. The feedback provided was used to make minor vocabulary changes in the wording of some statements and helped guide the researchers with the formulation of the interview questions. This online survey prepared on Google forms was administered immediately after the end of the emergency remote education semester, the spring semester of 2019-2020 academic year, to around 8000 students attending the School of Modern Languages. It was important that the experience students had was still fresh in their minds so that they could recall particular emotional reactions or certain practices of online teaching. The online survey started with an informed consent notice that let the participants know that participation in the survey was voluntary and that the data provided by the students was going to be used for research reasons only and it was not going to be shared with third parties for other reasons. The survey data was anonymous. However, if the participants chose to share their phone numbers for the interviews, they could do so without writing down their names. In the online survey, one of the questions asked if the participants would volunteer to be interviewed. 90 participants volunteered and shared their phone numbers. The researchers conducted individual interviews with them. The interviews were then recorded and transcribed. Later the transcriptions were uploaded and analyzed on MAXQDA qualitative data analysis program (VERBI Software, 2019) by coding the content. The researchers came up with codes when going over the interviews. When they had doubts or disagreements as to which code the content fell under, they resorted to an external researcher familiar with the focus of the study and the research setting.

2.2. *Participants*

The sampling was done according to the convenience sampling method, which is also known as 'availability sampling'. It is a non-probability sampling method with which data is collected from participants who are available (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). There was not a purposeful choice of participants according to their age, gender, or educational background. All the participants were enrolled in a course offered by the School Foreign Languages. 819 participants responded to the online questionnaire. 65.3% of the participants were students at the freshman English department, the Modern Languages Department, and 34.6% of the participants were students at the preparatory school, the Department of Basic English. Among the students at the DBE, there were no students whose level of English is below pre-intermediate, still the survey questions were also presented to the students in Turkish as well to make sure that both foreign and Turkish students fully understand the questions, and do not misunderstand some questions because of their reading comprehension proficiency in the target language they were studying. Among the MLD student participants who took the survey, 77.1% were students of the freshman academic English courses. 21.7% were students of the academic presentation skills course, the other participants were students of the business English course and students of other languages such as French, Chinese, Italian, Spanish and German. 86.6% of the participants were between the ages 18-21.

2.3. *Data Collection*

The data were collected through a self developed survey whose Likert type questions can be seen in Table 1. The demographic questions provided data on the participants as reported in the 'Participants' part. The survey was prepared by three researchers working at the same institution in three different departments, all of which offer English language courses. The researchers referred to their own experience and interaction with the students as well as the administrative experience of the university with online teaching through consulting the academicians with administrative roles. The semi-structured interview questions were shaped according to the results of the survey. The Ethics Committee approval for both the survey and interview questions was issued (235 ODTU 2020) by the university's Ethics Committee. The interviewers made notes during the interviews which were all held on the phone or on video conferencing tools depending on the preference of the participant. Below are the semi-structured interview questions that helped gather more in-depth data:

- What did/didn't you like about the emergency remote teaching period?
- What didn't work effectively during emergency remote teaching?
- What did you find to be effective/ functional/ useful/ practical about the emergency remote teaching period?
- What do you think would have worked better?

The interviewers were research assistants fluent in both the native tongue of the participants and in English, who were trained interviewing for academic research. The Turkish interviews were translated by the researchers who are both experienced English language teachers. They asked which language the participants preferred to be interviewed in and proceeded accordingly. The interviewers were very sensitive with the way they approached the interviewees. They tried to sound friendly and sincere and started the conversation with small talk first, but when doing so they avoided comments that would guide the interviewee to provide socially accepted answers. The researchers, who are instructors, avoided being engaged with the participants, who are students, not to yield biased data because of unequal school context power relations. The interviewers were sensitive not to use judgmental or sexist language, not to collect socially expected data.

2.4. *Data Analysis*

The data collected by the survey was analyzed through descriptive statistics. The interview notes were analyzed through thematic analysis with MAXQDA 2018. The interviews provided "rich and detailed data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 5). During data analysis, first the issue was identified, next it was coded, and the codes were merged to generate themes as Peel (2020) suggested for thematic analysis stages. Braun and Clarke (2021, p. 343) suggest that the researchers are active in creating the themes, hence themes do not "emerge" from codes, but researchers have themes "in their heads". Thus, they suggest that researchers generate initial themes from codes, which was the method of analysis of data in this study. During the interpretation stage of the thematically coded data, the findings were contextualized.

3. **Results**

3.1. *Quantitative Research Results*

According to the survey results, most of the participants had the necessary technological means, such as computers (93.3%), earphones (91.4%) and smartphones (97.6%) when the ERT started. However, only 0.4% of the students had cameras.

83.6% of the participants were familiar with the university Moodle system, and 98.3% of them actively used WhatsApp; however, the videoconferencing tools such as Microsoft Teams, Blackboard, Collaborate, Google Meet, Cisco Webex, BigBlueButton, Skype or Discord were unknown to most participants. Among these, Skype was the most known with 82.4% and Zoom was the next with 36% of the participants, but the other video conferencing tools were familiar to less than 5% of the participants.

Considering the online learning tools, 35.4% of the participants were familiar with the open coursewares of universities available online, 79.9% were familiar with TED Talks, 47% with Udemy, 58% with Khan Academy and 20% with Coursera.

The below table shows the mean scores and standard deviation of the Likert type questions in the questionnaire.

Table 1.

Likert type questions about the transition to ERT.

Likert-type Items	M	SD
9. I had a smooth transition from in-class learning to emergency remote education.	3.1	1.4
10. I had the technical knowledge to cope with the necessities of emergency remote teaching (e.g. using the microphone and camera of my phone or computer/ hardware-related tasks).	2.7	1.6
11. I was well prepared for emergency remote learning in terms of my experience with online learning tools.	3	1.3
12. My university provided me with technical equipment when I needed them.	3.1	
13. I feel more comfortable with emergency remote learning now than when I first started doing it.	2.8	1.4
14. Emergency remote teaching has become an extra chore on top of my daily life.	2.9	1.4
15. I needed frequent technical support while using online education tools.	3.1	1.5
16. I have access to technical support while using online education tools.	2.9	1.2
17. I often feel frustrated because of problems with technology while learning online (e.g. being cut off on Zoom; not being able to reach materials/ tasks, etc.).	2.9	1.4
18. I missed face-to-face education.	2.6	1.8
19. I prefer online learning to face-to-face learning.	3.3	1.7
20. Online learning is more advantageous than face-to face-learning.	3.3	1.6
21. The workload of online courses has been overwhelming.	2.9	1.4
22. Online learning is more stressful than face to face learning.	2.8	1.5
24. I feel demotivated in online classes.	2.7	1.5
25. Online learning cannot replace face to face education.	2.7	1.7

26. Teachers and students communicate better in class than they do online.	2.8	1.7
27. I miss the interaction with my classmates in the actual classroom atmosphere.	2.7	1.7
28. It is easier to learn in face-to-face settings.	2.7	1.7

According to the descriptive analysis of statistical data, 44.4% of the students perceived the transition to the ERT period to be smooth while 36.4% of them did not consider it to be smooth. The remaining 19.2% was neutral about this item. More than half of the participants (51,7%) stated being equipped with the technical knowledge required to cope with the necessities of the ERT. Regarding the online learning tools, there was a variation in the responses. 37.7% of the students thought they were well-prepared for these online learning tools; on the other hand, almost a similar number of students (38.7%) stated not being prepared for the same tools. 23.7% was neutral. This may be due to not being familiar with the tools to be used.

48,1% of the students expressed that they felt more comfortable with online learning by the end of the ERT period. 35.3% of the students still disagreed with this idea while 16.6% was undecided. For quite a number of students (44,8%), online education became an extra chore on top of their daily lives. For 36.5% of the participants, however, this was not the case.

When asked about whether frequent technical support was needed during the ERT, 37.9% of the participants agreed while a higher percentage of students (47.7) responded that they did not need frequent assistance. When they needed technical support, 34.9% of the students had access to it while 29.5% did not. When faced with a technical problem, 43% of the students expressed feeling frustrated but 37.7% was not affected that much.

The results also show that by the end of the ERT period, around half of the participants stated missing face-to-face education while some did not agree. Similarly, slightly more than half of the students (51.6%) prefer face-to-face education to online education while 37.6% expressed their preference for online education. Some 10.9% of the students were still undecided. There is consistency in the results when participants were asked about whether online learning is more advantageous compared to face-to-face education. While 51% of the participants marked their preference for disagreement, 33.9% showed their preference for agreement and 15.1% for neutral.

Considering the workload of online courses, 41.1% of the students regarded it to be overwhelming while a similar number of participants (36.1%) stated the opposite. 22.8% was undecided.

49.4% of the students perceived online learning to be more stressful than face-to-face learning. On the other hand, 35.5% did not think so and 15.3% were undecided about the same item.

Almost half of the participants (49.9%) marked feeling demotivated in online classes while 33% stated the opposite. The percentage of students who felt neutral about feeling demotivated was 17.1. Below is a table representing the results for this question.

53.7% of the participants think that online education cannot replace face-to-face education while 35.6% disagree with the idea. 10.7% of the students were still undecided about this item. Similar results were obtained about communication in online classes. While 53.5% of the participants think that teachers and students communicate better in online classes, 39.4% disagree with this statement. 7.1% of the participants were neutral regarding the same item. Consistently, 55.1% of the participants expressed missing the

interaction with classmates in the face to face classroom atmosphere. Regarding the same item, 36.2% disagreed and 8.8% was neutral.

Finally, about half of the students (51.9%) considered learning in face-to-face environments to be easier while 35.4% did not think so. The percentage of the participants who were neutral about this item was 12.6.

As can be understood from the statistical data, students are mostly undecided about the effectiveness of the ERT period. One of the main reasons suggested for this result in the interviews was the different practices of teachers in the courses. While some instructors dealt with the challenges of the ERT well and improved their digital skills by investing time and effort in developing their knowledge of educational technology tools, some tried to survive by just sharing slides, forming class WhatsApp groups, or sending out documents and emails. This led to an imbalance in the materials shared with the students, and unfair ways of teaching and learning. Due to this imbalance, while some students were exposed to an ERT instruction which was handled more professionally, the others complained about the difficulty their instructors had, hence were not as satisfied as others when it comes to the sudden switch in the mode of instruction. This is why it is difficult to say whether students favor face-to-face or online education or not. The survey results gain much more meaning when interpreted in the light of the interview data as the participants made more detailed comments about causations in the ERT period.

3.2. Qualitative Research Results

To answer the first research question about what the participants liked about the emergency remote teaching period, many students reported being happy about being at home enjoying the freedom provided by the welcoming atmosphere. They stated that being together with their loved ones especially during the pandemic made them feel safe. Some of the participants responded to the interview questions as follows: "I am happy at home. We did not know about this illness. Being at home together with my loved ones made me happy." Another participant said: "I was quite comfortable at home. My mom, dad and my brother, we were all at home. I felt safe and comfortable." However, the same environment was sometimes distracting as well, since there were siblings or even parents in the same or the next room trying to log into online sessions or meetings. one of the participants stated: "Although everybody was in one room at home and the environment was noisy, I felt free to eat what I wanted to eat or sit wherever I wanted to. It was home anyway!" Another student expressed himself as follows: "The university was less noisy. At home, family members talked a lot, the doorbell rang, people next door had kids shouting. Sometimes it was quite distracting." Apart from the home environment, it was also mentioned by the students that they benefited a lot from being able to follow revisable materials such as pre-recorded videos at their own pace, whenever they wanted. Another student also made similar comments representative of the many others: "I don't like the pandemic, but I like being at home. In class, you must take notes very carefully, sometimes, we miss things but at home, when we miss points, we could watch the videos again. Some friends even recorded the live sessions with their phones. We shared a lot of sessions together."

However, for some students with relatively poor time management and metacognitive skills, it was difficult to concentrate and prepare for exams during the ERT. One such student put it very simply: "Unfortunately, we did not know what to study and how to study. We were sometimes lost." Another negative comment on the sudden and imposed shift in study habits is: "I do not like studying on my own. When we were at school, we came together with friends and roommates and studied together. Now we can't do this, so I got lower grades. I am not happy this way."

When it comes to what the participants did not like about the ERT, the biggest concern of students during ERT was technology related problems. Lack of technical equipment, internet connection problems and sometimes power outages were the main sources of frustration. However, there were few students who were more tolerant of such technical obstacles. One of the participants complained as: "First, I did not have a good computer. I suffered a lot. Then I arranged something and this time the internet was bad, lots of bandwidth problems. The exams were exhausting. I know these are normal but still sometimes, it is really difficult to tolerate them."

A common theme that emerged in the analysis of the qualitative data was ERT's being timesaving. As the participants did not have to commute everyday to and from the university, they saved a great deal of time. One participant expressed the time management during the ERT as an asset: "I got up very late, just five minutes before the lesson. I sometimes followed the lesson in my bed with my laptop. This was great! When I had a long break, I even slept!" Another participant also agreed with saving time during the ERT:"My home is quite far away from the university so every morning, I spent two hours on the road to reach the school and two hours to go back in the evening but in the pandemic, we did not need to so I saved a lot of time."

Another positive comment made by the students was that they appreciated their teachers' effort to reach out to them trying to arrange online meetings to address their individual needs and weaknesses. The students expressed feeling happy or comfortable when their teachers were more tolerant of deadlines especially when they experienced some technical obstacles. One of the participants said: "Some of our teachers were helpful. They tried to help us and arranged extra meetings. We sometimes asked for deadline extensions. Some accepted this. This was a different time and we were quite tired. Everybody was giving a lot of homework and tasks. Teachers' help made us comfortable." This other participant is also representative of many similar appreciative comments made by students: "I could not attend a session this term because of the internet connection. I wrote an email to my instructor and she gave me explanations and extra materials. She even extended my deadline. This showed me that she cared for me."

The participants were also happy about receiving higher grades. For many, ERT led to an increase in their grades. However, for some others, the grade inflation was frustrating leading to "undeserved grades". Some of the participants said that the ERT period increased their overall GPAs. Some other participants were critical because they did not think that the grading was done fairly through online evaluation methods. A. said: "It is not fair! Some people had very high grades. They increased the curve points and we received lower grades and lower letters in the course." Another complaint is as follows: "Very unsuccessful students got good, even very high grades. Their course grades are underserved. This is unfair."

Similar to the results gained from the statistical analysis of survey results, the interview data also show that the students were not happy about the lack of interaction during ERT, which is the first theme. They even said, "Discussions were one way- just from [the] teacher or lecturer". This non-interactive environment was one reason for demotivation in online classes. Interaction continues outside class in face-to-face education. Therefore, almost all students mentioned missing the campus. Feeling psychologically detached and lonely made them more pessimistic about the current situation. To cite one participant directly: "In class, we talked a lot but in online lessons, we did not. We listened to the instructor." Another comment is: "The teachers talked a lot. In the middle of the lesson, I was sleepy. I lost my motivation in some courses." On interaction with peers S. stated that it was not just the lessons that lacked interaction, but it was the fact

that she was alone at home and she needed the motivating campus atmosphere a lot during the ERT. One other direct quotation from a similar complaint is as follows: "I never had such a bad time before. I was at home alone. My dad is a doctor, and my mum is a nurse. They were at the hospital and I was alone at home. Such a pessimistic time! No people to talk to. I missed my campus."

Regarding teaching and learning in the online world, students asked for variety in online sessions. They expected their instructors to be using online tools more in their classes. Interestingly, some students, though in minority, mentioned that it was hard to remember the passwords of the different programs or platforms preferred by the teachers. The participants of the study also mentioned repeatedly in the interviews that when they felt the need for further reference materials in their courses, they resorted to other online sources. T stated: "We really had 1 or 2 teachers who were skillful in the online world. Some only used slides and shared their screens to show their notes. This does not help. We needed extra support." A similar comment by another student is: "Teachers had to learn to teach in the online world. It is different. We did not have any communication in some courses while the online sessions have breakout rooms, chat options, etc. Some instructors did not know how to use the digital tools." Some students complained about the difficulty to communicate with their instructors, for example one of them said: "Our class teacher was old, and she even did not use the email regularly and effectively. We could not reach her so easily. We asked other friends, and instructors for help. We also used our friends' class notes for the exams. Anyway, she retired at the end of this period."

The second theme that emerged from the qualitative data is testing implications of ERT. The study results have important implications regarding exams and the assessment system as well. One main concern of students was the teachers' different attitudes towards exams. Cheating was a big issue raised in the interviews. Some teachers' indifference to the issue of cheating and others' being strict during proctoring led to some unjust practices. The distrustful attitudes of their instructors were usually a source of frustration for students. Participant F. said: "In online exams, I believe there is always cheating but some instructors are very careful, and we can't cheat but some instructors leave us free. There were always some classes with very high grades in the midterms as their teacher did not warn the students much."

In the faculties, lecturers preferred to use various assessment platforms. Many freshman students stated that "many innocent students got falsely flagged as cheaters/'plagiarizers' by the [assessment] system", which was a "punishment for honest students". Besides, just to prevent cheating, the instructors chose to make the exam questions more challenging and even cut down on the time allocated for completing the exam. In addition, it was also stated by the students that grading was harsh, which was demotivating as well. U. stated that: "The exams were difficult, really difficult. We had more questions and less time to answer them. This is insane. It is not testing but punishment for honest students."

The third theme that emerged is feedback implications of ERT. In the interviews, students emphasized that they value feedback and they expect to receive more of it. However, some stated not receiving much feedback or "none" in some cases during the ERT period. Students stated that they did not feel ready for being assessed when they were not given feedback on their progress. In the interviews, some students also expressed their resentment for not being able to reach their instructors when they needed them desperately. They used the words "uncaring" or "unresponsive" to describe their perceptions of their instructors in such cases. On receiving feedback one of the students claimed the following: "I sent my class instructor many emails. She did not respond to them, very unresponsive! I did not know what to do. She did not care for us.

This is disrespectful." A similar representative dire quotation is from another participant: "I did not know how my writing was. I needed feedback but I did not receive any. It was before the exam day and I received my paper back with some small notes, which did not help me at all. I think I would have better grades if I received good feedback."

Students also reported that they expect to see consistency regarding scheduling the synchronous classes among the instructors of the School of Foreign Languages. They stated that even though there was a fixed timetable, the flexibility of the online world enabled some instructors to constantly change the time of their classes. Announcing this change just before the actual class time was even more frustrating for those students who had to share their computers with their siblings or parents.

4. Discussion

This study investigated the ERT period in which higher education worldwide had to switch modes and become online suddenly without the preparation of students or instructors ahead of time. The present study researched the needs and challenges of the students of the School of Foreign Languages at a prestigious and highly populated state university in Turkey where the total number of students is about 8000 including the ones who take preparatory year and the ones in their departments taking academic English and elective courses from the School of Foreign Languages.

With the pandemic, the sudden shift to online education distressed not only instructors but also students. Being panicked, instructors might not have anticipated the anxiety their students experienced; however, both the literature and the findings of the present research reveal that tolerance understanding is most expected at such times when all stakeholders of education are feeling less sure about what tomorrow would present that would change the planned instructional tools and interactions. Flexibility to adapt is a requirement that is needed more than ever for students in the transition periods. On a positive note, these skills of flexibility may have been the most beneficial gain for the students who experienced the ERT period due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Seckin et al. (2020) conducted a quantitative study on the perception of the ERT period online education and face-to-face education in a tertiary level educational institution, too. One of the constructs in their data collection scale was about the psychosocial context of the university students. They compared online education and face-to-face education and found out that students have a negative attitude and resistance towards online education as well.

It is apparent that online education integration is indispensable to the future of education and the pandemic has taught the world that unprecedented emergency situations are a reality in which higher education can still survive in. What is indispensable for any institution is good planning before going online. Not only teachers but also students should have all the necessary information related to the course including the course schedule, materials, the online platform(s) to be used and assessment. A recent study that compares the ERT with online teaching compares them and states that the main difference is in planning. Hence, in online teaching, the already prepared course material with the right infrastructure might lend itself to education as effectively as in face-to-face (Al-Azawi, 2021). Agility is a skill that stands out in this planning process for the ERT (Rahmadi, 2021). In the present study, one of the concerns raised by the participants was related to the good planning of the courses in general. Some participants pointed out the need for more guidance about assessment which is the cornerstone in the teaching and learning process. Not being clear about how they would be assessed was a great stressor for many students. With good planning, everything including the assessment procedures should be made clear from the beginning of crisis times so that students would know what and how to study.

Another recurring response that came up in the interviews was that no matter if it is ERT or regular online courses, it is evident that students ask for their online sessions to be recorded so that they can access them for further reference. Most students stated that it is practical that the online synchronous sessions are accessible on an online educational platform for further reference if need be.

Apparently, online education has its own challenges as well. One of these challenges stands out in assessment. It is ineffective to do assessment in the same format as in face-to-face settings. Administering tests online has many drawbacks and is, therefore, frustrating both for students and instructors. Therefore, any educational institution planning to go online should be prepared for alternative assessment tools to replace face-to-face exams. In addition to alternative assessment tools, it is also important to learn about and invest in the best proctoring procedures when online exams are inevitable such as the summative assessments or language proficiency exams.

The data in this study reveals that interaction is the key to success in any language program. Therefore, it is vital that both instructors and institutions look for ways of increasing interaction in the classes. The need for channels for communication among the instructors, students and peers, is also reported to be a common finding of the document analysis of ERT papers Akbana et al. (2020) report. While for institutions, it can require investment in some new technology and equipment, for instructors, this may mean learning about new digital platforms and investing in learning about new educational technologies and improving digital skills. All the students in the current study mentioned lack of interaction as one of the biggest reasons for their motivation in the lessons. The study by Seçkin et al. (2020) also yielded similar results and highlighted the importance of interaction in online education. The participants in their study emphasized the lack of interaction and immediate feedback as common factors for their demotivation in online classes. The students stated being negatively influenced by the lack of socialization with their peers in the online world as well. Therefore, teachers should look for ways of increasing interaction in online classes.

Aksoy's (2020) study which gives an overview of the ERT period from different parts of the world and Turkey also concludes that the importance of peer interaction in online education is undeniable and should not be overlooked. Interaction also encompasses teacher-student interaction. The study conducted during the ERT period in Indonesia on pre-service language teachers also concluded with a similar result emphasizing the importance of feedback in online education (Sumardı & Nugrahanı, 2021). This may also require teachers to create an online presence. Students expect their teachers to be active in and out of their virtual classes following their work, checking emails regularly and giving timely and constructive feedback. It is also important that teachers be aware of the importance of providing feedback and search for alternative ways of giving online feedback as feedback bears significance not only for improving one's language skills but also for increasing students' self-efficacy. The form of feedback may differ, but students value the time they spend with their instructors, so from the data collected in the interviews, it was concluded that the participants would favor online one-to-one sessions or online office hours where teachers and students will be engaged in sincere communication.

5. **Conclusion**

In the present study, it was concluded that particularly at higher level institutions, for online English language instruction to be effective, the continuous professional development units should consider helping the faculty update their knowledge and skills that would ease the online, distant or hybrid education so that course materials are accessible online and exercises are available on online platforms. The same suggestion is made in the analysis of Akbana et al.'s document analysis of ERT publications (Akbana et al., 2020).

Bozkurt (2020) also emphasizes the importance professional development bears in supporting the teachers to meet teaching and student needs during times of major medium of instruction change, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The transition period bears importance in that it will shed light as to what needs to be taken into consideration in online education, and what the needs and expectations of the students are in online education. The study focused specifically on psychological and technical support students received and on the actual practices of teaching and learning during the ERT. It was found out that students needed to be well-equipped technologically whereas not all of them were, they expected feedback on their performance, and they needed a standard and fair assessment system. The students also asked for material to be provided in multiple modes, and that the material is available online so that they refer to it at their own pace in their own time. In addition to the course material provided by the institution, outside resources gained importance in the ERT period as well.

It is very probable that online education is to stay. As stated by Harasim (2000, p. 59), "Online learning is no longer peripheral or supplementary; it has become an integral part of mainstream society". The ERT period was a learning opportunity for many stakeholders in the education system. Some conclusions have been drawn and lessons are taken at the end of the first round of online teaching. First of all, any institution who is planning to go online should plan in advance. The technical infrastructure should require good planning both for teachers and students. If need be, technical assistance or guidance should be provided for both parties. Institutions should enrich their repertoire of online materials. Students should be provided with not only documents but also videos that they can revisit whenever they need to.

It is also important to set the standards for the exams and announce them prior to test administration. Both teachers and students should be clear about the rules and regulations beforehand. This is not only true for high-stake exams such as the language proficiency exam but also for any in-class quizzes or midterms. It is an undeniable fact that online test administration is challenging due to the challenges about technology related obstacles and the difficulties of proctoring. Therefore, some predetermined midterms, finals or quizzes might be replaced by alternative performance-based tools of assessment, such as projects or take-home assignments, such as e-portfolios. The institutions are also to search for and invest in effective online proctoring programs and set standard proctoring rules and regulations for fair administration of online exams.

As witnessed during ERT, teachers should be equipped with some digital literacy skills to be able to cope with the challenges of online teaching. Therefore, institutions should integrate continuous professional development sessions or activities for teacher empowerment. Similar to exams, teacher feedback is one way of showing students' progress in their language development. Therefore, a component of these teacher empowerment sessions should be on providing more effective and constructive feedback. Additionally, especially during times of crisis, such as the COVID 19 pandemic, students need to be supported more. As face-to-face office hours are not possible, online sessions should be held by the instructors to be able to help the students with their stress and weaknesses.

Now that the future of education has changed with the triggering factors the pandemic enforced on face-to-face education, the institutions when planning to go online are expected to have technology integration in their curriculum, and when setting the circumstances of planned online integration, the needs, preferences, expectations, perceptions, and preparedness of students are to be taken into consideration. These would differ based on the particularities of each educational setting. While this study is limited with only one

institution under inspection, the findings of this research have relevance for other educational institutions as the current institution is one of the well-established universities with a long history in English-medium instruction. The pedagogical insights gained from this study can shed light to other School of Foreign Languages at English medium higher education institutions especially when preparing their strategic plans on building effective learning environments. As it is clear from the literature in the field, technology is here to stay and in the future of education, it is not going to be technology, per se, which may replace teachers, but teachers who can use technology efficiently will replace those who do not.

References

Akbana, Y, Rathert, S. & Ağçam, R. (2021). Emergency remote education in foreign and second language teaching. *Turkish Journal of Education, 10* (2), 97-124. https://doi.org/ 10.19128/turje.865344

Aksal, F. A. (2011). Action Plan on Communication Practices: Roles of Tutors at EMU Distance Education Institute to Overcome Social Barriers in Constructing Knowledge. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology, 8*(2), 33–47.

Al-Azawi, M. A. (2021). Transferring to emergency remote teaching: opportunity, challenges, and risks. *IJASOS- International E-Journal of Advances in Social Sciences*. https://doi.org/10.18769/ijasos.876866

Baker, C. (2010). The Impact of instructor immediacy and presence for online students affective learning, cognition, and motivation. *Journal of Educators Online, 7*(1), 1-30.

Baloran, E. T. (2020). Knowledge, attitudes, anxiety, and coping strategies of students during covid-19 pandemic. *Journal of Loss and Trauma, 25*(8), 635-642. https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2020.1769300

Bond, C. S., Fevyer, D. & Pitt, C. (2004). Student reactions to online tools for learning to use the Internet as a study tool: Outside the comfort zone? In R. Atkinson, C. McBeath, D. Jonas-Dwyer & R. Phillips (Eds), Beyond the comfort zone: Proceedings of the *21st ASCILITE Conference*. Perth, 5-8 December.

Bozkurt, A. (2020). Koronavirüs (Covid-19) pandemi süreci ve pandemi sonrası dünyada eğitime yönelik değerlendirmeler: Yeni normal ve yeni eğitim paradigması. *Açıköğretim Uygulamaları ve Araştırmaları Dergisi, 6*(3), 112-142. https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/auad/issue/56247/773769

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. http://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 18*(3), 328-352. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. SAGE Publications Inc.

Delaney, J., Johnson, A. N., Johnson, T. D., & Treslan, D. L. (2010). *Students' perceptions of effective teaching in higher education*. St. John's, NL: Distance Education and Learning Technologies.

Diebel, P. L., & Gow, L. R. (2009). A comparative study of traditional instruction and distance education formats: student characteristics and preferences. *NACTA Journal, 53*(2), 8-14

Driscoll, A., Jicha, K., Hunt, A. N., Tichovsky, L.P., & Thompson, G. (2012). Can online courses deliver in-class results? A comparison of student performance and satisfaction in an online versus face-to-face introductory sociology course. *Teaching Sociology, 40*(4), 312-331.

Gacs, A., Goertler, S., Spasova, S. (2020). Planned online language education versus crisis-prompted online language teaching: Lessons for the future. *Foreign Language Annals.* 53(2), 380-392. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12460

Garrison, D. R. (2009). Implications of online and blended learning for the conceptual development and practice of distance education. *International Journal of E-Learning & Distance Education, 23*(2), 93-104.

Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2000). Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education, 2*(2-3), 1-19

Harasim, L. (2000). Shift happens: Online education as a new paradigm in learning. *The Internet and Higher Education, 3*, 41-61.

Hartshorn, K. J., & McMurry, B. L. (2020). The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on ESL learners and TESOL practitioners in the United States. *International Journal of TESOL Studies, 2*(2), 140-156. https://doi.org/10.46451/ijts.2020.09.11

Hodges, C. B., Moore, S., Lockee, B. B., Trust, T., & Bond, M. A. (2020, March 27). The Difference Between Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Learning. https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning

Kim, K.-J., Liu, S., & Bonk, C. J. (2005). Online MBA students' perceptions of online learning: Benefits, challenges, and suggestions. *The Internet and Higher Education*, *8*(4), 335-344. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2005.09.005

Ko, S. & Rossen, S. (2010). Teaching Online: A Practical Guide (Third edition). Routledge.

Means, B., Bakia, M., & Murphy, R. (2014). Learning online what research tells us about whether, when and how. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Paechter, M., & Maier, B. (2010). Online or face-to-face? Students' experiences and preferences in e-learning. *The Internet and Higher Education, 13*(4), 292-297. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2010.09.004

Pu, H. (2020). 'Implementing online ELT in the time of crisis: ordeal or opportunity?'. *ELT Journal, 1*(4), 345-348.

Rahmadi, I. (2021). Teachers' technology integration and distance learning adoption amidst the covid-19 crisis: a reflection for the optimistic future. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, 22* (2), 26-41. https://doi.org/ 10.17718/tojde.906472

Seçkin, Z., Elçin, A. & Doğan, O. (2020). A Quantitative Investigation of University Students' Perceptions Concerning the Learning Processes amid the Pandemic of COVID-19. *Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey*

Üniversitesi Sosyal ve Ekonomik Araştırmalar Dergisi, 22 (39), 187-205. https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/kmusekad/issue/58846/799301

Song, L., Singleton, E. S., Hill, J. R., & Koh, M. H. (2004). Improving online learning: Student perceptions of useful and challenging characteristics. *The Internet and Higher Education, 7*(1), 59-70. https://doi.org/ 10.1016/j.iheduc.2003.11.003

Sumardı, S, Nugrahanı, D. (2021). Adaptation to emergency remote teaching: pedagogical strategy for pre-service language teachers amid covid-19 pandemic. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, 22*(2) , 81-93. https://doi.org/10.17718/tojde.906553

Tichavsky, L. P., Hunt, A., Driscoll, A., & Jicha, K. (2015). "It's just nice having a real teacher": Student perceptions of online versus face-to-face instruction. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 9*(2). https://doi.org/10.20429/ijsotl.2015.090202

VERBI Software. (2019). MAXQDA 2020 [computer software]. Berlin, Germany: VERBI Software. Available from maxqda.com.

Wang, C., Pan, R., Wan, X., Tan, Y., Xu, L., Ho, C. S., & Ho, R. C. (2020). Immediate psychological responses and associated factors during the initial stage of the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) epidemic among the general population in China. I*nternational Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17*(5), 17-29.

Young, S. (2006). Student views of effective online teaching in higher education. *American Journal of Distance Education, 20*(2), 65-77. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1538928