To What Extent Are Preparatory School Students Ready for Online Learning?

Hazırlık Okulu Öğrencileri Çevrimiçi Öğrenmeye Ne Kadar Hazır?

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this study is to investigate the opinions of students enrolled at the School of Foreign Languages concerning their readiness for online learning. Sequential mixed method design was used in this descriptive study. The researcher administered the Online Learning Readiness Scale (OLRS) and conducted interview to collect data. As for data analysis, the data obtained from the quantitative part of the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics. For the qualitative part of the research, inductive content analysis was applied to analyze the beliefs of prep school students to ascertain their levels of online learning readiness. The results revealed that prep school students had a moderate level of readiness for online learning. They indicated enhanced computer/internet and online communication self-efficacy and motivation, whereas they often failed to direct and control their own online learning. A final suggestion was that researchers and practitioners should seek to understand better why students generally cannot be successful at directing and controlling their own online learning.

Keywords: Prep class, online learning, online learning readiness, learner control, self-directed learning.

ÖZ: Bu araştırmanın amacı, Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu'na kayıt yaptıran öğrencilerin çevrimiçi öğrenmeye hazır bulunuşluklarına ilişkin görüşlerini incelemektir. Tanımlayıcı nitelikteki bu çalışmada sıralı karma yöntem deseni kullanılmıştır. Veri toplamak için araştırmacı, Çevrimiçi Öğrenmeye Hazırlık Ölçeği (OLRS) ve görüşme soruları uygulamıştır. Veri analizinde ise anketin nicel kısmından elde edilen veriler betimsel istatistikler kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Araştırmanın nitel kısmında, hazırlık okulu öğrencilerinin çevrimiçi öğrenmeye hazır bulunuşluk düzeylerini belirlemeye yönelik inançlarını analiz etmek için tümevarımsal içerik analizi uygulanmıştır. Sonuçlar, hazırlık okulu öğrencilerinin çevrimiçi öğrenmeye orta düzeyde hazır bulunuşluk düzeyine sahip olduklarını ortaya koymuştur. Araştırma sonuçları öğrencilerin gelişmiş bilgisayar/internet ve çevrimiçi iletişim öz-yeterliliğe ve motivasyona sahip olduklarını belirtirken, genellikle kendi çevrimiçi öğrenmelerini yönlendirmede ve kontrol etmede başarısız olduklarını da göstermiştir. Son bir öneri ise, araştırmacıların ve uygulayıcıların, öğrencilerin kendi çevrimiçi öğrenmelerini yönetmede ve kontrol etmede genellikle neden başarılı olamadıklarını daha iyi anlamaya çalışması gerekiyor.

Anahtar kelimeler: Hazırlık sınıfı, çevrimiçi öğrenme, çevrimiçi öğrenmeye hazırlık, öğrenen kontrolü, öz-yönlü öğrenme.

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Online learning has already become popular globally in every field of education as a result of the ubiquity of information and communication technologies regardless of Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, online learning, which is defined as a more student-centered, innovative, and flexible teaching-learning process (Dhawan, 2020), has become an indispensable part of mainstream education as the preferred teaching and learning method immediately after the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, which has upended our lives (Chung, Subramaniam, & Dass, 2020). Online learning, which is considered a panacea, is being used by a large number of higher education institutions in various countries in order to meet the learning needs of a growing and increasingly multicultural student population by providing a wide range of opportunities (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Dhawan, 2020; Rumble & Latchem, 2004).

The forced shift from face-to-face education to online education due to the covid-19 pandemic has generated some challenges in higher education (Rapanta et al., 2020). One important area of inquiry into these challenges is to ascertain the online learning readiness of higher education students, which is a crucial factor in reaping the full benefits of online learning (Bowles, 2004; Chung, Noor, & Mathew, 2020; Hukle, 2009; İlhan & Çetin, 2013; Smith, 2005; Wang et al., 2009; Yeh et al., 2019; Yu, 2018). Online readiness is defined as "being mentally and physically ready for certain online learning experience and actions" (Borotis & Poulymenakou, 2004). As emphasized by So and Swatman (2006), examining the online learning readiness of learners early in the training process is essential for an effective online learning process since students faced urgent transition from the traditional way of English language learning to the digital modes of teaching and learning practices which paved the way for online language learning. Thus, it is important to reveal to what extent students at prep schools have online learning readiness in order to achieve successful and effective results in the online learning, which is now exponentially used in higher education in Turkey.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

In recent years, there has been a conceptual paradigm shift in terms of online learning in higher education. The concept of online learning readiness was first brought forward by Warner et al. (1998), who reflected three different aspects of online learning readiness: (1) a form of delivery preferred by students opposed to face-to-face education (2) students' ability to use Internet and computers for learning, and (3) ability to participate in independent learning. To date, the concept of online learning readiness has been discussed from various aspects in the literature by several researchers (Evans, 2000; Hung et al., 2010; McVay, 2000, 2001; Smith, 2005; Smith et al., 2003). There exist different measurement tools which have been identified, validated and used for assessing the readiness for online learning (McVay, 2000, 2001; Smith, 2005) among which this study employs online learning readiness scale developed by Hung et al. (2010) as it is a hypothetical model that best explains preparatory school students' readiness for online learning. Moreover, the assessment of online learner readiness needed to address a comprehensive set of dimensions that vary widely, such as technical computer skills, internet navigation skills, and learner control over the sequence and selection of resources, which were all missing from the previous instruments. Hence,

despite the fact that similar scales exist in the literature, the five composite dimensions of OLRS are depicted below thoroughly to gauge learners' readiness for online learning.

Computer & Internet Self-Efficacy

Computer self-efficacy (Compeau & Higgins, 1995) and internet self-efficacy (Eastin & LaRose, 2000) as two distinct domains merged to form a single domain; that is, computer and internet self-efficacy, a concept suggested by Hung et al. (2010). This concept encompasses skills, attitudes, competencies and knowledge students need to employ to utilize technologies to meet educational demands and expectations in higher education (Mirete et al., 2020). An extensive body of research shows that students with higher levels of computer and internet self-efficacy tend to show high performance on some internet-related tasks for educational purposes, such as uploading or downloading, saving files, ripping, burning, chatting, and applying higher-level skills such as online system management and troubleshooting problems in online learning (Eastin & LaRose, 2000; Mirete et al., 2020; Pellas, 2014; Tsai et al., 2011). Therefore, it can be hypothesized that there is a strong positive and direct relationship between the increased computer and internet self-efficacy and students' high level of satisfaction and engagement (Aldhahi et al., 2021; She et al., 2021; Thurasamy, 2021; Wolverton et al., 2020).

Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed learning is defined as "autonomy and control by the individual who monitors, directs, and regulates actions toward goals of information acquisition, expanding expertise and self-improvement" (Paris & Paris, 2001, p. 89). To reiterate it, self-regulated learners are "metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in their own learning process" (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001, 2011). A growing body of research has demonstrated that successful online self-directed learners can make their own informed decisions to fulfill their own needs at their own pace depending on their existing knowledge and learning objectives (Alotaibi et al., 2017; Bonk & Lee, 2017; Ergen & Kanadli, 2017; Geng et al., 2019; Hung et al., 2010; Song & Bonk, 2016; Yang et al., 2020). In their study, Hung et al. (2010) proposed five items to gauge learners' self-directed learning as follows: the ability to make a study plan for their own needs, seeking help for any challenge(s) they are faced with, good time management, holding their own learning outcomes and learning performance with high expectations.

Learner Control

Hung et al. (2010) delineate the concept of learner control as the ability of learners to sustain learning without being interrupted by other online activities and reviewing the content of online materials considering their learning needs. By adopting an individualized approach, learners are able to decide on the amount of the content, the order, and the speed of learning with full flexibility (Mayer, 2003; Means et al., 2009; Shyu & Brown, 1992). Learner control is found to be directly beneficial to online learning through a wide array of research. A large number of studies undertaken shows that if online learners are empowered to assess their own learning, they become agents of their own learning (Blaschke, 2018; Jung et al., 2019; Lange, 2018; Taipjutorus et al., 2012; Väljataga & Laanpere, 2010; Wang & Beasley, 2002).

Motivation for Learning

Motivation is defined as "the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained" (Schunk et al., 2008, p. 4). A number of researchers have investigated the role of motivation on the willingness of students to learn online. For example, Ryan and Deci (2000) found out that learners with intrinsic motivation had high amount of freedom to decide their own learning direction in an online environment. Similarly, Saadé et al. (2007) identified that the success or failure of online learning is highly dependent on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of the learners. The dimension of "motivation for learning" will greatly facilitate the online learning, retention, and retrieval of information so that learners can fulfill their desires and efforts (Artino, 2008; Bekele, 2010; Buzdar et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2017; Firat, & Bozkurt, 2020; Genc et al., 2016; Horzum et al., 2015; Wei & Chou, 2020; Zhu et al., 2020).

Online Communication Self-Efficacy

Building opportunities for interaction and communication between students and their instructors in Web-based learning is important (Barker, 2002; Bodomo, 2010; Chung, Noor, & Mathew, 2020; Hosseini & Branch, 2015; McVay, 2000; Sun & Hsu, 2012). In essence, the theory of self-efficacy in online communication focused on explaining the adaptability of learners to the online world through asking, reacting, commenting, and debating (Hung et al., 2010). However, in their study, Chung, Noor, and Mathew (2020) pointed out that university students do not feel confident in posing critical thinking questions in online discussions, which indicates that they are not equipped with a high level of online communication self-efficacy. This has directly impacted their preparation for online learning. In a nutshell, Hung et al. (2010) concluded that communication self-efficacy in online learning is a significant aspect in eliminating the barriers to online communication.

Although there has been a plethora of research regarding the assessment of undergraduate students' online learning readiness levels at different departments at various universities in Turkey, there is a dearth of research regarding the issue in a prep school context in Turkey. For example, Kalkan (2020) conducted a study to identify to what extent students from other departments such as Sport Sciences, History, Literature, and English Language and Literature were ready for e-learning. "The Scale of E-Learning Readiness" instrument adapted and developed by Yurdugül and Demir (2017) was used in this study. The results showed that there was a significant difference among learners in terms of "Computer Self-Efficacy", "Online Communication Self-Efficacy", and "Learner Control". According to the findings, students in the English Language and Literature department have greater degrees of readiness for e-learning than students in other departments because they use e-learning modalities more frequently than students in other departments. In the same vein, Demir and Eren (2021) carried out a study to examine the online learning readiness of students at a public and private universities. "University Students E-Learning Readiness Scale" developed by Demir (2015) was employed in the study. The participants consisted of first-year associate degree students (n=1392) enrolled in English I course during the fall semester of the 2020-2021 academic year. Based on the findings of this study, it was determined that students' readiness for online learning was excellent. The findings also demonstrated that students had remarkably high levels of readiness in the "Internet self-efficacy," "online

communication self-efficacy," "computer self-efficacy," "self-directed learning," and "learner control" sub-dimensions, and low levels of readiness in the "motivation for e-learning" sub-dimension.

Furthermore, in their descriptive study, Cobanoglu and Cobanoglu (2021) aimed to scrutinize readiness levels of students from various departments for online learning based on a variety of factors. The researchers applied the adapted Turkish version of Online Learning Readiness Scale OLRS), which was originally developed by Hung et al. (2010) in their study. The findings obtained from quantitative data indicated that student teachers' readiness for online learning was satisfactory. There were, however, significant differences among student teachers in terms of their departments, access to the Internet, perceived information and competency of communication technology use. If preparatory schools in Turkey intend to design a sound English preparatory program in such a challenging time and onwards, online learning readiness levels of prep school students must be considered to provide better quality education. The target population of this research study is especially prep school students because they are at the very beginning of their university life. It will be vital to get promising results from online learning to improve teaching and learning English during the preparatory education. To elaborate, as online learning seems to be the dominant learning paradigm, students need to be prepared for a virtual learning environment at universities. Adapting to technology-assisted language learning in the early stages of their academic careers will help them become more effective language learners. In this sense, this research study aims to explore the degree to which preparatory school students are ready for the forced shift to online learning. The results of the study will shed more insights into the online learning process spurred by the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic. They will assist stakeholders (i.e., policymakers, administrators, curriculum designers, instructors) with establishing more innovative, inclusive, sustainable, and accessible teaching and learning methods and strategies.

Method

Research Design

Believing that researchers need to be free of mental and practical limitations placed by the "forced choice dichotomy between post-positivism and constructivism" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 27), the study holds pragmatic worldview. In addition, a sequential explanatory mixed methods study was used in the study in which quantitative data is collected in a first instance followed by qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2013) to investigate the preparatory school students' online learning readiness by forming the following overarching research questions.

RQ1. What is the online learning readiness of preparatory school students?

1.1. What are the espoused beliefs of preparatory school students about their computer- internet self -efficacy?

1.2. What are the espoused beliefs of preparatory school students about their self-directed learning?

1.3. What are the espoused beliefs of preparatory school students about controlling their own learning in an online context?

1.4. What are the espoused beliefs of preparatory school students about their motivation for online learning in an online context?

1.5. What are the espoused beliefs of preparatory school students about their online communication self-efficacy?

RQ2. Do preparatory school students' beliefs about online learning process differ significantly in terms of their gender, previous online learning experience, internet connection and program type (compulsory or optional)?

Setting and Participants

During 2020-2021 Academic Fall Semester, 217 preparatory school students 121 of whom were female (55.8%) and 96 of whom were male (44.2%) enrolled at a state university School of Foreign Languages involved in the study.

Research Instrument and Procedures

The study was conducted after getting approval from the ethical committee of the university. The "Online Learning Readiness Scale" developed by Hung et al. (2010) was considered in the study due to its multidimensional structure and relevance of the factors identified for preparatory school students. However, the scale adapted and translated into Turkish by Yurdugül and Sırakaya (2013), was used as a quantitative data collection tool in the study as participants were at A1-A2 level. The 5-point Likert type OLRS ranging from 5 (Strongly agree) to 1(Strongly disagree) was given to the participants via Google Docs during one month period in November 2020. Participation in the study was voluntary. The scale with 18 items comprised of five different dimensions, namely, computer/internet self-efficacy (3 items), self-directed learning (5 items), motivation for learning (4 items), learner control (3 items), and online communication self-efficacy (3 items).

Furthermore, an online focus group interview with 35 students via Zoom was utilized as a qualitative data collection technique to delve into the findings obtained from the quantitative phase of the study besides the applicability of the data collection technique (Gibbs, 2012) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher hosted, as a moderator, 5 group meetings with 5-7 interviewees via Zoom, which has a 40-minute time limit. The interviews for each participant lasted approximately 10 minutes. The total time recorded was reported as 225 minutes. Their participation was truly on a voluntary basis, and their answers were kept anonymous. The interviews were in participants' native language. Watching and listening to the recorded meetings, the researcher translated the interviews into English and transcribed them as texts. The interviews and their transcriptions took nearly three weeks to be completed. The following interview questions were asked to explore how preparatory school students were ready for the forced shift to online learning.

1. Do you think you are competent at using computer software and Internet? How and in what ways?

2. Do you think that you are successful in planning, controlling and monitoring your own learning? How and in what ways?

3. How do you control your own learning during online learning process?

4. To what extent are you motivated for online learning?

5. Can you interact easily with your instructor and classmates on online platform? Why? Why not?

Reliability and Validity

The composite reliability of the OLRS revealed a Cronbach's alpha score of $\alpha=.75$, which indicated an acceptable reliability for the survey to be used in the study (Büyüköztürk, 2002). Additionally, Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients calculated for the sub-dimensions are .72 for computer/internet self-efficacy, .78 for self-directed learning; .67 for learner control, .70 for motivation for learning, and .82 for online communication self-efficacy.

In order to ensure the validity of the study, the interview questions, which were framed in accordance with the OLRS items, were checked by an expert with PHD in ELT, and the final form of the questions was reached under the direction of the expert's opinions and suggestions. To minimize or avoid the threats to the study, the researcher followed the steps recommended by Polit and Beck (2010), such as standardizing the conditions under which the research study will be carried out; obtaining as much information as possible about the participants; deciding when and where the study will be conducted, and choosing an appropriate research design.

Data Analysis

The data gathered by conducting OLRS were analyzed using SPSS 23. In order to find answers to the first research question, descriptive statistics such as frequency and mean values of the items were calculated and presented to reveal the participants' views about online learning readiness. In addition, the Mann-Whitney U statistical test, which is an alternative to parametric tests like the t-test due to the lack of conditions of normality (Nachar, 2008), was used to reveal whether statistical differences appeared in their views based on gender, having a previous online learning experience and their type of internet connection and program. In addition, the inductive content analysis technique was used to analyze the data that emerged from the focus group interviews to support the findings of the quantitative data.

Ethical Procedures

I declare that the research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. Before the research started, the researcher applied the ethics committee for ethical approval. The study was approved with the Meeting Date and Number 02.10.2020/07 by the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Bursa Uludag University. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. The author received no financial support for the authorship, research, and publication of this article.

Results

The overall result of the study indicated a moderate level of readiness for online learning at a tertiary level. Considering that the lowest point that could be gotten from the OLRS is 18 and the maximum point is 90, students' overall score on their online learning readiness levels is found to be 62.58, which is between "Neutral" (*M*=54) and "I agree" (*M*=72) being mostly closer to "I agree".

Preparatory school students' readiness for online learning was analysed with respect to their computer-internet self efficacy, self-directed learning, controlling their own learning, motivation for online learning and online communication self-efficacy. Table 1 displays the descriptive results of the participants' beliefs about computer-internet self-efficacy.

Table 1

The Descriptive Statistics of Participants' Beliefs on their Computer-Internet Self-Efficacy

Items	N	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	X
Computer- internet self efficacy							3.51
3. I feel confident in using the Internet (Google, Yahoo) to find or gather information for online learning.	217	21.2	52.5	18.9	5.1	1.8	3.84
2. I feel confident in my knowledge and skills of how to manage software for online learning.	217	7.8	41.0	34.1	14.7	2.3	3.37
1. I feel confident in performing the basic functions of Microsoft Office programs (MS Word, MS Excel, and MS PowerPoint).	217	10.6	35.0	34.6	14.7	5.1	3.31

Based on the results in Table 1, 73.7% of students agreed that they felt confident in using the Internet to find or gather information. On the other hand, nearly half of the participants (48.8%) felt confident in their knowledge and skills of how to manage software for online learning, whereas 34.1% were hesitant. Similarly, 45.6% of them agreed and 34.6% of the participants were hesitant that they felt confident in performing basic functions of Microsoft Office programs. With regard to their hesitance about not feeling confident in their knowledge and skills of how to manage software for online learning, female interviewees (*N=10*) expressed their opinions about the issue as seen in the extracts below:

> ST3: "Online learning in pandemic is a new experience for me. As I haven't had experience attending classes online via mobile phone before, I am not good at utilizing some online applications such as Kahoot, Quizzes etc.; therefore, I fall behind the class in joining and demonstrating high performance during the quizzes and activities."

> ST10: "I get stressed when we are doing quizzes on Quizlet. I think our male friends are more advantageous than us. I believe they are more adapted to a competitive environment because they are already familiar with computer games".

As for the hesitance about not feeling confident in performing basic functions of Microsoft Office programs, the following extracts reveal how female students *(N=8)* consider this issue.

ST16: "I believe that I do not feel comfortable using Google Docs in the Google classroom. As some of my friends have done homework and projects with Microsoft Word and PowerPoint before, they are more familiar with these practices..."

ST9: "Doing homework online through Google Docs makes me nervous. Preparing homework online is not appropriate for me. I'm trying to get used to doing homework online".

Table 2 presents the descriptive results of the participants' beliefs about self-directed learning.

Table 2

The Descriptive Statistics of Participants' Beliefs on Their Self-Directed Learning

Items	N	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree %)	Strongly Disagree (%)	X
Self-directed learning							3.13
5. I seek assistance when facing learning problems.	217	14.7	41.5	22.1	14.3	7.4	3.41
4. I carry out my own study plan.	217	10.6	32.3	31.8	15.7	9.7	3.18
8. I have higher expectations for my learning performance.	217	16.6	27.2	26.3	16.6	13.4	3.17
7. I set up my learning goals.	217	7.4	37.8	27.2	15.2	12.0	3.12
6. I manage time well.	217	6.9	24.0	26.7	24.4	18.0	2.77

As can be seen from table 2, among the five dimensions of OLRS, participants rated lowest on self-directed learning (*M*=3.13). 56.2% of prep school students agreed that they sought assistance when facing learning problems. Moreover, nearly half of the participants agreed that they carried out their own study plan (42.9%), had higher expectations for their learning performance (43.8%), and set up their learning goals (45.2%). However, a considerable number of participants were also hesitant about managing their own learning and disagreed with the aforementioned statements. With regard to time management, although 30.9% of the participants agreed that they could manage time well, 42.4% of them disagreed with this statement.

A considerable number of the interviewees (*N=12*) mentioned about failing to prepare a self-study plan by themselves, as displayed by the comments below:

ST19: "I always tell myself "make a plan" but then I change my mind. Unfortunately, I am studying in unplanned way. I leave homework to the last minute and sometimes I forget to do it".

ST15: "I am making the plan of the week, but I cannot put it into practice. There is always an obstacle to me. We are a crowded family. I share my room with my sister. She prevents me from being organized".

As indicated below, some of the interviewees (*N*=7) explained why they had doubts about having higher expectations for their learning performance.

ST6: "I had high expectations at first to learn English, but as the duration of staying at home increased because of Covid-19 pandemic, the stress level increased and my expectations from life started to run out".

ST25: "I started with high expectations at the beginning of the semester. However, as the assignments increased and I could not cope with them during the semester, my expectations started to disappear".

Moreover, five of the interviewees mentioned their uncertainty in setting up learning goals for themselves:

ST29: "I am studying optional prep school. I didn't set a goal for myself from the very beginning. I'm trying to enjoy it".

ST35: "I cannot determine my learning goals on my own. Someone should help me in this regard. Maybe you can help us.

Additionally, the interviewees (*N=8*) reported having difficulty in time management in online tasks, as indicated in the following extracts:

ST31: "Since we cannot keep up with the speed of the instructors and the intensity of the subjects, we do not have the chance to revise subjects. As Zoom has a 40-minute limitation, we, students and instructors, always race against time".

ST21: "We are overloaded with too many tasks each week and this makes our time management difficult."

Table 3 shows the descriptive results of the participants' beliefs about controlling their own learning.

Table 3

The Descriptive Statistics of Participants' Beliefs on Controlling Their Own Learning

Items	N	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree %)	Strongly Disagree (%)	X
Learner control (in an online context)							3.28
11. I repeated the online instructional materials on the basis of my needs.	217	17.1	49.8	18.4	10.6	4.1	3.64
9. I can direct my own learning progress.	217	12.00	36.9	29.5	13.8	7.8	3.31
10. I am not distracted by other online activities when learning online (instant messages, Internet surfing).	217	9.2	30.0	18.4	26.7	15.7	2.90

Table 3 indicates that 66.9% of the participants agreed that they repeated the online instructional materials based on their needs. Nevertheless, although nearly half of the students agreed (48.9%) that they could direct their own learning progress, a notable number of students were hesitant about the issue (29.5%). Another significant finding is that 39.2% of the participants claimed that they were not distracted by other online activities, whereas 42.4% stated that they were distracted by other online activities during online learning.

As for directing learning progress, seven students specified that they were unsure about how to direct their own learning progress online as follows:

ST10: "We are not in control of our learning process. We learn what is imposed on us. We do not have a chance to choose or sort. We are not the decision-makers".

ST13: "There is a coursebook and curriculum to follow. The topics to be covered week by week are determined in advance. So I do the exercises in the book. I do not go out of the coursebook. I don't know if I have to use extra resources"

With regard to the issue of distracters, 11 students opined that they were not distracted by other online activities as indicated in the following extracts:

ST26: "The functions, such as chat, break-out rooms, screen sharing, raising a hand, annotation etc., do not distract me; on the contrary, they draw my attention. Sometimes I daydream. When someone asks something or the teacher gives someone a say, it makes me awake".

ST17: "When the teacher enters any other relevant site at that moment, it becomes catchy in terms of visuality and audibility and makes the learning more interactive".

On the other hand, 14 students expressed that they were distracted easily by other online activities.

ST32: "Distractions during online lessons disturb me a lot. For example, if someone leaves his or her camera on and moves or does something, or if they forget to mute themselves, and there are noises coming from behind, I get distracted very quickly and I cannot easily come back to myself".

ST1: "What bothers me the most is the messages sent to the WhatsApp groups. Someone constantly sends out irrelevant messages and makes me break away from the lesson".

Table 4 displays the descriptive results of the participants' beliefs about their motivation for online learning.

Table 4

The Descriptive Statistics of Participants' Beliefs on Their Motivation for Online Learning

Items	N	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	X
Motivation for learning (in an online context)							3.94
12. I am open to new ideas.	217	34.6	53.9	7.4	3.2	.9	4.17
14. I improve from my mistakes.	217	18.9	62.7	15.7	1.8	.9	3.96
13. I have motivation to learn.	217	15.7	49.3	26.3	6.9	1.8	3.70
15. I like to share my ideas with others.	217	17.1	39.6	28.6	10.6	4.1	3.54

The results revealed that the most agreed dimension for online learning was about the participants' motivation for learning (*M*=3.94). In this respect, the participants mostly agreed that they were open to new ideas (88.5%), learned from their mistakes (81.6%), had motivation to learn (65%), and liked to share their ideas with others (56.7%). Their high motivation was also reported by the interviewees (*N=25*), as exemplified in the following extracts:

ST4: "Online group discussions enable us to create new ideas, to think creatively and to give us a different perspective. That's why I am open to new ideas".

ST33: "Our teacher's tackling with our pronunciation mistakes and the pronunciation exercises we do help us not to make the same mistakes again".

ST24: "I find break-out rooms very useful. We can easily share our ideas there with each other".

Table 5 shows the descriptive results of the participants' beliefs about their online communication self-efficacy.

Table 5

The Descriptive Statistics of Participants' Beliefs on Their Online Communication Self-Efficacy

Items	N	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	X
Online communication self-efficacy							3.70
17. I feel confident in expressing myself (emotions and humor) through text.	217	24.9	44.7	21.2	6.9	2.3	3.82
16. I feel confident in using online tools (email, discussion) to effectively communicate with others.	217	19.8	49.8	21.2	7.4	1.8	3.78
18. I feel confident in posting questions in online discussions.	217	15.2	40.1	29.5	10.1	5.1	3.50

It is evident in table 5 that more than half of the students felt confident in expressing themselves through text, in using online tools to communicate with others effectively (69.6%) and in posting questions (55.3%), as mentioned in the following extracts.

ST2: "I think I express myself better by writing. For this reason, I often use chat. Thus, I express my opinions comfortably".

ST28: "Normally, I'm shy. I could not easily ask questions in face-to-face education, but I can do it easily online with the "raise hand" function or I can write it to the "chat" feature if my voice does not go to the other party. I think the features in ZOOM appeal to me".

Preparatory school students' beliefs about online learning process were also examined in terms of their program type, gender, previous online learning experience and internet connection type. Based on the Mann-Whitney U test results, whether the participants' English preparatory program was compulsory (*N*=158) or not (*N*=59) revealed a significant difference between their beliefs about their online readiness regarding only one item which was about repeating the online learning materials based on their needs (*U*=3775.500, *p*=.021). To clarify, the participants without the compulsory preparatory program (*MR*=124.01) repeated the online learning materials

based on their needs more than those with the compulsory preparatory program (*MR*=103.40).

9 participants with optional preparatory program reported their revision of the online learning materials based on their needs as follows:

> ST22: "My department is Maritime and Port Management. I do not worry that I will learn the grammar and rules of English in the best way. By the end of the year, my only goal is to be able to speak English fluently. For this reason, I repeat the "Practice" part of the online application of the coursebook in my spare time".

> ST11: "My department is Econometrics. I will not have the chance to be exposed to English again in four years like my friends with compulsory program. My aim is to get the maximum benefit from the program during this period. For this purpose, I try not to miss any lesson and to repeat the subjects after the lesson. I do the extra activities in the application. I watch the video parts of the coursebook with expressions in everyday language over and over and I repeat those expressions myself".

Table 6

The Difference between Male and Female Participants regarding Their Online Learning Process

The items	Gender	*N*	Mean Ranks	*U*	*Z*	*P*
1. I feel confident in performing the basic functions of Microsoft Office programs (MS Word, MS Excel, and MS PowerPoint).	Male	96	118.11			
	Female	121	101.77	4933.500	-1.994	.046
2. I feel confident in my knowledge and skills of how to manage software for online learning.	Male	96	120.36			
	Female	121	99.99	4717.500	-2.520	.012
16. I feel confident in using online tools (email, discussion) to effectively communicate with others.	Male	96	118.47			
	Female	121	101.49	4899.000	-2.135	.033
17. I feel confident in expressing myself (emotions and humor) through text.	Male	96	118.05			
	Female	121	101.82	4939.500	-2.009	.045
18. I feel confident in posting questions in online discussions.	Male	96	125.64			
	Female	121	95.80	4210.500	-3.655	.000

The Mann-Whitney U test results displayed in table 6 revealed that male participants (*MR*=118.11) felt more confident in performing basic functions of Microsoft Office programs than the female ones (*MR*=101.77). Similarly, the males (*MR*=120.36) felt more confident in their knowledge and skills of how to manage software for online learning than the females (*MR*=99.99). As for communication self-efficacy, the males (*MR*=118.47) felt more confident in using online tools to communicate with others than the females (*MR*=101.49). In addition, the males (*MR*=118.05) felt more confident in expressing themselves through texting than the females (*MR*=101.82) and the males (*MR*=125.64) felt more confident in posting questions in online discussions more than the females (*MR*=95.80).

Males expressed a considerably higher amount of comfort in using digital tools as clarified by some interviewees below (*N=15*):

ST3: "I am interested in computer technologies. I know the Microsoft Office programs like the back of my hand. I was on the project team of the school in high school. We made lots of PowerPoint presentations, prepared visual materials with graphics."

ST19: "Last year, we were using the zoom in our lessons. I was curious about it. I learned almost all its features by watching YouTube videos. In fact, our teachers were asking for my help when something went wrong in the lesson.

ST 34: "I could not get used to online education. It looks very artificial to me. It's not like the interaction in the classroom. For example, I cannot use chat or ask questions comfortably as I feel like I am sabotaging the lesson. I think boys are better at these issues than us and they are quite comfortable. We are afraid that we will do something wrong, and they do not have such anxiety".

Table 7

The Difference between the Participants with Pre-Online Learning Experiences and without Pre-Online Learning Experiences regarding Their Online Learning Process

The items	Pre-online learning experience	*N*	Mean Ranks	*U*	*Z*	*P*
1. I feel confident in performing the basic functions of Microsoft Office programs (MS Word, MS Excel, and MS PowerPoint). (MSWord, MS Excel, MS Power Point)	Yes No	90 127	101.43 119.68	4754.000	-2.209	.027
6. I manage time well.	Yes No	90 127	116.32 98.67	4785.000	-2.098	.036

The results in table 7 revealed that the participants without pre-online learning experiences (*MR*=119.68) felt more confident in performing basic functions of Microsoft Office programs than the experienced ones (*MR*=101.43). Furthermore, the experienced ones (*MR*=116.32), while learning online, managed their time better than the inexperienced ones.

With regard to feeling more confident in performing basic functions of Microsoft Office, 12 participants without pre-online learning experiences expressed their views as stated below:

ST7: "I don't necessarily need to have an online learning experience to use Microsoft Office programs. I already knew "word, excel". The only new thing I've learned is to send homework in Google classroom via Google docs. Actually, I didn't have difficulty in learning it as I was already familiar with Microsoft Office programs".

10 participants with pre-online learning experience mentioned about how they manage time well as indicated below:

ST24: "I am more experienced in managing time since I received online education last spring. Zoom is limited to 40 minutes and my eye was constantly on time, sometimes I reminded the teacher that there was the last 10 minutes. If I had questions, I was asking in accordance with time. This year I also pay attention to the same things. I can manage time. For example, some friends miss the deadline for some assignments or cannot complete them because they are not

able to manage time well. They either ignore the assignments or leave it to the last moment. Thank God I have never experienced such situations"

Table 8

The Difference between the Participants with Limited and Limitless Internet-Connection regarding Their Online Learning Process

The items	Internet-connection	*N*	Mean Ranks	*U*	*Z*	*P*
3. I feel confident in using the Internet (Google, Yahoo) to find or gather information for online learning.	Limited Limitless	37 180	83.97 114.14	2404.000	-2.907	.004
15. I like to share my ideas with others.	Limited Limitless	37 180	87.74 113.37	2543.500	-2.373	.018
17.I feel confident in expressing myself (emotions and humor) through text.	Limited Limitless	37 180	90.84 112.73	2658.000	-2.053	.040

The Mann-Whitney U test results also indicated significant differences as for three items depending on the participants' internet-connection facilities. The results in table 8 showed that the participants with limitless internet connection (*MR*=114.14) felt more confident in using the Internet to find information than the ones with limited internet-connection (*MR*=83.97). Furthermore, the participants with limitless internet connection (*MR*=113.37) liked to share their ideas with others while learning online more than those with limited connection (*MR*=87.74). Similarly, the participants with limitless internet connection (*MR*=112.73) felt more confident than those with limited internet-connection (*MR*=90.84) in expressing their thoughts through text.

The following extracts might shed light on the reasons of the participants with limitless internet connection (*N=25*) feeling confident as follows:

> ST17: "I can easily access the website and the information source I want on the internet. I have no worries that my internet package will run out because it is unlimited".

Discussion

In line with Wei and Chou (2020), who suggested that online learning perceptions of college students profoundly and positively impacted their readiness for online learning, the study highlighted the importance of detecting online learning readiness level of students in higher education to improve the preparation, development, and implementation of online educational resources. As for the participants' readiness, the study revealed that prep school students at the tertiary level had a moderate level of online learning readiness, which is consistent with the findings of the studies by Chung, Subramaniam, and Dass (2020) and Çakır and Horzum (2015).

The first sub-research question, which sought to find out the beliefs of preparatory school students about their computer- internet self–efficacy, revealed generally moderate results. As also reported in the studies conducted by Chung, Noor, and Mathew (2020) and Hung et al. (2010), a large number of prep school students felt

confident in using the internet to find or gather information. Similarly, the interviewees attributed their capability of using technology to their frequent exposure to technological tools.

The second sub-research question, which was formed to reveal the participants' beliefs about their self-directed learning, indicated that prep school students displayed the lowest mean scores among the five sub-dimensions. Unfortunately, a substantial number of participants were undecided about how to prepare a satisfactory study plan, set up their learning goals and manage their time well. This finding contradicts those of Cigdem and Yildirim (2014) and Kırmızı (2015), which indicated that tertiary education students had higher level of readiness in the dimension of self-directed learning. Qualitative findings with regard to the aforementioned points corroborate the findings of Mishra et al. (2020) and Chung, Noor, and Mathew (2020), who reported that making online learning personalized is the most important skill that needs to be developed by students.

The findings of the study revealed that prep school students were also hesitant about directing their own learning progress, which is in parallel with the studies by Schunk and Usher (2012) and Taipjutorus et al. (2012) that learners should have a say on *what* to learn, *how to* learn and *to what amount* they would learn. Furthermore, one of the most striking findings of the study was that two types of learners emerged: the ones who argued that they were distracted by some other online activities easily and the others who argued that they were not distracted by them easily. The former group claimed that they were distracted by some other online activities such as going to break out rooms, screen sharing, annotation etc. easily because there were too many distracters around them like the noise coming from outside and/or the other family members, WhatsApp messages, chat notifications, classmates who unmute microphones etc. This finding is similar to the findings of Hung et al. (2010) and Chung, Noor, and Mathew (2020). On the other side, the latter group proposed that they were not so easily distracted by such digital distractions. On the contrary, they think such practices draw themselves to the lessons, as can be seen from interview extracts.

The study also aimed to investigate the participants' beliefs about their motivation for online learning, which indicated the highest mean score among the five constructs. Prep school students generally opined that they were open to new ideas, learned from their mistakes, had motivation to learn, and liked to share their ideas with others in virtual classes, as implied in the findings of the studies by Alsancak-Sırakaya and Yurdugül (2016), Çakır and Horzum (2015), Chung, Noor, and Mathew (2020), Cigdem and Ozturk (2016), Tang and Lim (2013), and Torun (2020).

The last sub-question aimed to delineate the participants' beliefs on their online communication self-efficacy. The results demonstrated that prep school students felt confident in expressing themselves through typing and using online tools to communicate with others effectively and they felt confident in posting questions online via "raising hand" and using the chatbox. This result is in line with the one reported by Dhawan (2020) and Hung et al. (2010), who found that online applications such as Zoom and Google Meet allowed learners to utilize program functions effectively during virtual classes thanks to user-friendly program features.

Based upon the second main research question, the study revealed some points in need of clarification regarding the students' habit of repeating the content of the online learning materials based on their needs. To be more precise, the participants studying at the preparatory program optionally surprisingly repeated the online learning materials based on their needs more than the ones with compulsory preparatory program. As understood by the interview results, the participants without compulsory preparatory program were having fun while learning English, and they wanted to spend the whole year with maximum benefit as they would not be heavily exposed to the language for the upcoming years in their departments. This finding is in line with the findings of Knowles and Kerkman's (2007) study, in which the overwhelming majority of students had relatively intrinsic motivation towards online learning.

Unlike the findings of the study by Chung, Subramaniam, and Dass (2020) and Hung et al. (2010), which indicated no significant difference in terms of gender variable, the results in this study showed significant differences in gender in favor of male participants. The male participants in this study asserted more confidence in performing basic functions of Microsoft Office, in their knowledge and skills of managing pieces of software for online learning, using online tools to communicate with others, expressing themselves through texting, and posting questions in online discussions compared to their female counterparts, which was also reported in the studies by Alsancak-Sırakaya and Yurdugül (2016), Çetin (2008), İpek and Acuner (2011), Tekinarslan (2008). Male participants' success in these areas might be ascribed to their special interest in Information and Communications Technology (ICT), which also explains why they sustain high academic performance during the gamified quizzes and activities.

Furthermore, more than half of the participants in this study were without pre-online learning experience and expressed their content in that they felt more confident in performing basic functions of Microsoft Office programs. Their number was more than that of the experienced ones and they stated that they were already familiar with some basic elements of Microsoft Office programs which indicated the similar results with the study by Chew (2010). Unlike the result of the study by Aliyyah et al. (2020), in which teachers applied question and answer (Q&A) and lecture method due to time limitation of ZOOM, the participants with pre-online learning experience believed that they managed their time better than the inexperienced ones while learning online due to their familiarity with the time constraint of Zoom

With regard to the type of internet connection, the participants with limitless internet connection felt more confident in using the Internet to find information, in expressing their thoughts through text and they also liked to share their ideas with others while learning online more than the ones with limited internet-connection. This finding is also supported by Chung, Subramaniam, and Dass (2020) and Aliyyah et al. (2020), who mentioned that limited broadband, which is less conducive to learning, posed a great challenge for students to participate in online classes. As understood by the interview results, the participants can easily exchange ideas and rehearse with each other for hours without worrying that their internet package will run out while doing their online speaking practice and assessment tasks.

Conclusion and Implications

Along with technological infrastructure, the quality of course content and learning platforms, the level of students' online readiness appeared as one of the vital factors of online learning to obtain the better quality of learning in this online process which has become common practice for university students and lecturers.

Although students underwent an unexpected kind of EFL learning due to the severe impact of Covid-19 on education, the study indicated that learners of English at a preparatory school felt almost confident in using Web 2.0. tools, and they were motivated to communicate and learn in an online context. However, the study also signified the importance of empowering them to become independent learners by guiding them into planning their own learning properly. Thus, it is important that instructors increase prep school students' awareness about taking more responsibility for their own learning. Accordingly, self-assessment tools can be designed for every unit to enable students to regulate their own learning. In addition, instructors should encourage students to collaborate with them and with their peers whenever they are confused in and out of class by using online communication tools.

This study has several limitations that can provide a basis for future studies. The data gathered were limited to the students' beliefs in this study; thus, further studies can be conducted by examining the recordings of online virtual classes to reveal more representative results in a higher education context. Furthermore, further research can also be conducted to examine the opinions of students and lecturers from other universities to view the issue from a broad perspective by including more stakeholders.

Conflicts of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest in this study.

Author Bio

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