

## **A Qualitative Study on Effective Distance Language Education: Advantages and Challenges From The Learners' Perspectives**

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### **Abstract**

The advent of digitalisation and the spread of online platforms have transformed the way educational materials are delivered, creating unprecedented learning opportunities. This innovative modality, capable of initiating a paradigm shift, enables students to obtain their education from virtually any location. The main objective of this research study is to investigate and assess the effectiveness of real-time online instruction in the German language. This appraisal includes the standard of instruction, the degree of interaction in the online milieu, and the deployment of Web 2.0 tools, all viewed from the learner's perspective. This research aims to elucidate the experiences and perceptions of students from diverse academic backgrounds who participated in the German language instruction course at a public university during the post-pandemic period. The syllabus was constructed with reference to content development models in distance education. Data collection for the study was achieved via an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interview forms. The study design is rooted in action research. The collected data were examined with the MAXQDA 2022 qualitative data analysis software. The research pinpointed three primary themes from the compiled data: structure related issues on distance education, effective communication in distance education, and viewpoints on Web 2.0 tools. These themes offer an extensive insight into the present scenario and potential future trajectory of online language education.

**Keywords:** Distance learning, Web 2.0 tools, potentials, challenges, German language teaching, communication barriers

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## Introduction

In an era of increasing digitalisation and rapid global change, education is becoming increasingly important. Institutions devoted to education are confronted with the task of reconfiguring their educational offerings to cater to evolving demands and creating inventive strategies to satisfy learner requirements in a digitalized world (Kebritchi et al., 2017). In this context, distance learning has emerged as a promising alternative to traditional face-to-face teaching. Different implementations and uses are encountered in the process of integrating technology with education. In academic discourse, terms such as distance learning, web-based instruction, synchronous and asynchronous distance education, and computer-supported learning frequently appear (Baran et al., 2011). In this study, distance education refers to online education in which a teacher and learners are present in an online course environment simultaneously.

The richness of online platforms, digital resources and interactive Web 2.0 tools has made distance learning more flexible and effective than ever before (Brückner 2011). In the field of social sciences, the predominance of theoretical courses has facilitated the adaptation to distance education, making this period easier to manage (Genç et al., 2020). This situation has led to concepts such as digitalisation and distance learning in educational processes being frequently mentioned in research in the field of education and training.

Kaysi and Aydemir (2017) emphasize the importance of learners' reasons for choosing distance education, particularly highlighting aspects such as temporal and spatial independence, increased interaction among learners, and accessibility of instructors. The authors stress the role of instructors in distance education as facilitators, nurturers, and promoters of quality communication. To this end, using a variety of online platforms in distance education can break the monotony of the course and enhance communication.

Acquiring a foreign language necessitates regular engagement, interaction, and constructive criticism, all of which are critical components in the learning process. As a result, it becomes imperative to identify efficacious methodologies and instruments that can support these aspects within a digital context. Therefore, the current research is designed to delve into the effectiveness of remote learning in the domain of foreign language instruction.

To improve foreign language learners' comprehension and enhance learning, an online whiteboard should be utilized. In this way, distance education can resemble face-to-face education. It is essential for this application to be free and allow for collaborative work. In the current study, the Jamboard program fulfils this requirement. In addition, implementing group work and applications that enhance competition among students is of great importance for motivation and can lead to improved quality. At this point, a platform like Kahoot allows access via both phones and computers,

making it possible to reach a wider audience. In online environments, Zoom is a widely used Web 2.0 tool in Türkiye that enables audio and video data exchange with students.

The study aims to investigate the impact of these online tools and teaching strategies in distance education on the learner experience in a foreign language course. By analysing learners' experiences and perceptions, this study seeks to contribute valuable insights to the literature on distance education in foreign language teaching and learning.

## **Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

### **Distance Education and Foreign Language Learning**

Studies related to distance language education tend to primarily focus on aspects such as the efficacy of teaching language skills, the integration of technology in language instruction, and the encouragement of autonomous learning among learners.

Since the early 2000s, the field of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has entered a new phase related to internet usage, characterized by Web 2.0 and mobile technologies (Benson, 2011). Initially emerging in the form of correspondence education, distance education has gained new dimensions with the widespread use of radio and later television. In today's modern education concept, distance education comes to the forefront as one of the most current and solution-oriented teaching models, as it offers more flexible and accessible opportunities compared to face-to-face education (Kırık, 2014). This type of education seems to be particularly suitable for adult education and higher education institutions.

Distance education models also allow students, individuals, educators, and even educational institutions to continually renew themselves and increase their knowledge base. The importance of distance education models has been proven during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the continuity of education has been maintained in many countries. However, it has not been easy for distance education to reach the point it is at today. To understand this situation, it is enough to look at some lines from an article written in 2011 by Blake.

As a language learning environment, online instruction is just beginning to enjoy the same popularity already experienced within other disciplines for some time now (Goodfellow & Lamy, 2009; Lamy & Hampel, 2007; Meskill & Anthony, 2010 as cited in Blake, 2011). The term online language learning (OLL) can refer to a number of learning arrangements: a Web-facilitated class, a blended or hybrid course, or a fully virtual or online course (...). (p.19).

As Blake (2011) emphasizes, distance education is just beginning to be popularized in 2011. Perhaps in 2019, in a world that had not experienced the last pandemic, people and educators might not have reached the point they have reached yet. However, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent developments have taken the concept of distance education to another

level, and due to its many advantages, it has become a permanent part of humans' lives (Xie et al., 2020).

Synchronous online education needs to be founded on key learning theories, requiring more than just audio-visual communication. The efficacy of additional tools depends on teachers' didactic expertise and skill in their use (Baran et al., 2011; Koehler & Mishra, 2009). A student-centered approach anchored in these theories can improve distance education quality (Garrison & Anderson, 2003). The constructivist approach places emphasis on student development, learning styles, and reflection on learning processes, thereby prioritizing learning over teaching. Teachers should not only impart knowledge but also provide effective communication and guidance.

### **Web 2.0 Tools**

The theoretical framework of situated learning is rooted in the constructivist approach, which presupposes that learning is structured in real-life contexts with real tasks and social experiences. So according to the constructivist approach, learners construct their own knowledge through their experiences and interactions. The fact that computers and smartphones have internet access to establish unrestricted communication worldwide, along with their advantages over television and radio, has made these devices the most essential tools in education. Computers, smartphones, tablets, and the internet technology connecting them all have reshaped the concept of distance education, making it both a companion and an alternative to traditional education (Başkan & Taş, 2022).

Kılıç (2004) frames the notion of situated learning as it pertains to the capacity of technology to construct a particular reality. As per Kılıç's observation, the transience of anything that remains abstract has been widely recognized by educators; however, it is an undeniable reality that learning that is facilitated through observation and/or everyday experiences tends to remain ingrained in our long-term memory. Within this context, the use of technologies to provide conveniences and learning environments has proven to be facilitative of the learning process. Al-Hail et al. (2023) explored the use of online social networks (OSNs) in a blended learning course and found that students perceived OSNs to be valuable tools in supporting situated learning. The authors noted that OSNs facilitated the creation of a sense of community and provided opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing among students. This, in turn, allowed students to contextualize their learning experiences within their everyday lives and experiences.

The potential of social networks, or Web 2.0, to be utilized in education, despite their informal use, has been noted as a significant aspect in highlighting the objective of initial research endeavors in the field (Ellison, 2008). As posited by Ellison, social media has the capacity to serve as a new host for distance education. It is pointed out that three dominantly used Web 2.0 tools in language education are Zoom, Jamboard and Kahoot.

Greenhow & Lewin (2016) emphasize that Web 2.0 tools, which comprise various applications and platforms, promote collaboration, communication, and active engagement among learners and educators. They hold the potential to transform traditional education methods by revolutionizing how information is created, shared, and accessed, thus empowering learners to become more actively involved in their education. Among these tools, Zoom, a widely used video-conferencing platform, has become an essential resource for educators in a variety of subject areas. Zoom allows for real-time communication and collaboration between educators and learners, making it a powerful tool for language learning. One of the primary advantages of using Zoom in foreign language education is its capacity to facilitate synchronous communication, promoting authentic language practice and interaction. By enabling educators and learners to engage in face-to-face discussions, regardless of geographical location, Zoom helps to bridge the gap between traditional classroom settings and online learning environments (Nurieva & Garaeva, 2020).

In addition to providing a form of audio and video data close to face-to-face education, the participation of the classroom board, which is an indispensable tool in the classroom, in the online environment is a must for the lessons. The integration of online whiteboards such as Jamboard has emerged as a significant development in enhancing teaching and learning experiences (Blue & Tirotta, 2011). Brückner (2011) argues that Web 2.0 tools, known for fostering collaboration, communication and active participation, have emerged as essential tools in foreign language education. They uniquely support dynamic interactions between learners and teachers by overcoming spatial barriers. In line with this perspective, Hockly (2015) highlights the need for educators to strategically design and structure activities. These efforts should take full advantage of the functionalities offered by these digital platforms, especially simultaneous collaboration, immediate feedback, and the integration of multimedia components.

Game-based learning in language teaching is recognized as an effective method for engaging students in the review of course materials. It is essential to create an environment that encourages learners to actively participate and think critically, as this contributes significantly to their academic success (Icard, 2014). In this study, the game-based Web 2.0 tool Kahoot was utilized, which students frequently enjoy engaging with and has demonstrated encouraging outcomes in education. Kahoot is an interactive, game-based learning platform that enables educators to create quizzes, discussions, and surveys, fostering an engaging and dynamic learning environment (Dellos, 2015).

To wrap up, the major aim of the present study is to explore the effect of Web 2.0 tools, i.e. Zoom, Jamboard and Kahoot on German as a foreign language learners in an online course. More specifically, the study aims at finding out the role of teaching techniques and of Web 2.0 tools in the viewpoint of learners. The aim of this study is to identify and analyse the opinions of learners of German as a foreign language regarding the education they receive in online environments, the quality

of communication in the online environment, and the platforms used. Thus, the study tries to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the participants' perspectives on online learning-teaching environments and the feasibility of learning German as a foreign language within these contexts?
2. What experiences do participants have concerning the use of Web 2.0 tools in distance education?
3. What are the main challenges faced by participants in distance education?
4. What suggestions do participants offer for maintaining distance education more effectively?

## **Method**

### **Method and Design**

In this study, practical action research (Schmuck, 2006), which focuses more on how research is conducted and how it is designed to address and solve specific problems (Christensen & Johnson, 2008) is preferred. Action research is usually considered in 3 models: operational, collaborative and critical reflection. Operational action research can often be thought of as a cycle following a series of steps such as "planning, acting, observing, reflecting". Operational action research is chosen because it is considered that we could obtain more meaningful data in terms of the results of the study.

Thus, this study includes a 16-week distance learning period. After receiving feedback from students and colleagues during and after the pandemic, the idea of creating a course content for foreign language teaching in distance education was born. Based on these insights, a 16-week course was designed and the content was developed by taking into account the issues that students suffered from during the pandemic. Then the study was initiated. Throughout the study, feedback was received from the students every 2 weeks and the content and the cycle of the study were adapted according to the purpose. Necessary additions and subtractions were synthesized accordingly. The action research process continued. It was specifically chosen by the researchers because it has a structure compatible with action research due to the nature of distance education.

In this study, the research action was chosen to comprehensively explore various aspects of the experiences and quality of education of learners studying German in a simultaneous online environment, based on their responses to interview questions.

### **Setting and Participants**

This study took place in a synchronous German language distance course at Istanbul University Cerrahpaşa, Continuing Education Center during the 2021-2022 academic year. The course

was 6 hours per week, it was a 16-week course and it was conducted via Zoom. Each lesson was 40 minutes and 120 minutes in total.

Participants of the study constituted 10 Turkish learners of German as a foreign language. They belong to different age and occupational groups. Their proficiency level was A1. In this qualitative research, participants were deliberately chosen from those who can best embody the research problem (Creswell, 2014). Criterion sampling, a type of purposive sampling method, was employed for participant selection in this study. The sample was chosen among the enrolled learners of this distance language course. The participants also chosen on the voluntary basis. The significance of participant levels in data collection and attaining reliable data saturation is emphasized in qualitative research, although it is typically noted that there should be no more than 10 participants (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The data collection instruments of the study were an open-ended questionnaire form and a semi-structured interview. The main purpose of the data collection instruments was to find out the participants' experiences about foreign language learning in distance education, their suggestions about web 2.0 tools and challenges and barriers they encountered. In the present study, ensuring validity and reliability was of utmost importance. To achieve this, the question pool, which was developed based on the research questions, underwent an evaluation in terms of meaning, clarity, and content appropriateness. Two field experts, one language expert and one distance education expert, were consulted, and their opinions guided the necessary revisions. In cases where participants found any questions unclear or difficult to understand, further revisions were made. The final version of the open-ended questionnaire form and a semi-structured interview was established with the assistance of both experts and participants.

Once the data had been collected and transcribed by using Voiser, the researchers separately coded the dataset. The coded data was then compared and thematized to identify patterns and trends, ultimately contributing to the study's overall validity and reliability. The collected data were analyzed with MAXQDA 2022 qualitative data analysis software. To analyze the data obtained from the interview forms and interviews, the content analysis technique will be employed (Saldana, 2015). This approach involves identifying the primary meaningful segments of the collected data, ascertaining the conceptual significance of each segment (Miles et al., 2014), and subsequently coding the identified sections (Saldana, 2015).

The data were collected after the participants completed the 16-week online German as a foreign language course via Zoom. First, the open-ended questionnaire was sent to all participants using Google Forms. In order to triangulate the data, an additional semi-structured interview was

conducted individually with each participant benefiting from Zoom. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour.

In adherence to the necessary ethical principles, all stages of this study, ranging from planning to publication, were conducted with utmost diligence. Upon the completion of the planning phase, the required institutional approvals were secured. The participants were informed that their involvement in the study was voluntary, and they were provided with a confidentiality statement along with a clear explanation of the study's objectives. Lastly, participants were asked to verify the accuracy of the data collected, and all findings from the study were comprehensively presented in the research report. In this paper, participants will be referred to as “P” followed by numbers. For example, P1 refers to the first participant in the study group.

## Results

This chapter of the study presents the findings from the interviews and survey following the data analysis. Three primary themes emerged regarding the research questions. These themes encompass structure related issues on distance education, effective communication in distance education, and views on Web 2.0 tools. These themes will be discussed in detail in parallel with research questions. Quotes from the participants will be presented to support the themes.

When the participants' perspectives on online learning-teaching environments and the feasibility of learning German as a foreign language were asked, the first theme that was emerged was structured related issues on distance education. The categories associated with this theme, structural issues pertaining to distance education, are enumerated as follows:

Technical issues, learning and teaching specific reviews, online environment-based reviews, space and time efficiency and comfort zone related issues, online adaptation related issues. Beginning with the category of technical issues, the following codes can be expressed based on the data garnered from participants: shorter but more frequent classes, ease of access, ease of course repetition, stable system, inadequacy of smartphone for distance education.

**Table 1.** First theme: Structured related issues on distance education\*

Theme	Categories	Codes
Structure related issues on distance education	Technical issues	Shorter but more frequent classes Ease of access Ease of course repetition Stable system Inadequacy of smartphone for distance education
	Learning and teaching specific reviews	Suitable for foreign language teaching Ease and efficiency of learning Practice on authentic material The problem of not being able to read lips while learning German
	Online environment-based reviews	Varied and fun activities



Space and time efficiency and comfort zone related issues	Need to share camera for class Ease of access to online resources and dictionary Independent of space
Online adaptation related issues	Time saving Providing home comfort Lack of motivation due to a feeling of comfort Adaptation problem to online environment Providing the opportunity to have a voice in the online environment Equal opportunity in education Low sense of cyber presence Feel uncomfortable speaking in online environment Individualized learning

\* The codes in the following tables are listed in top-down order according to their frequency in the data set.

Lesson durations are subject to a myriad of factors including the student count, the level of difficulty presented by the course, and the students' span of concentration. Effective communication can be facilitated in smaller classes, yet the home environment can lead to easily dispersed attention of students, contingent upon the comfort or discomfort present. It has been discovered that intervals between lessons in German classes conducted via distance education should be more frequent and that the duration of lessons should fall within a range of 30 to 45 minutes.

Regarding technical issues, topics such as problems sourced from internet connections and platform interfaces have been explored. It was highlighted that there is no necessity for easy information access and the need for everyone in the classroom to commence from the same source, which reveals the advantages of the diversity present within distance education. When examining issues originating from infrastructure, it was observed that not every participant shares the same infrastructure. Although problems sourced from internet connections may exist, it was noted that overall, these issues are not prevalent. It was proposed that a more vibrant and animated platform interface would provide increased motivation for individuals.

While the ease of accessing lesson records was determined to be beneficial for continuity, it was also conveyed that watching the lesson record is productive for learning the lesson and reviewing it post-lesson. However, in private lessons, it was stated that advantages present in one-to-one lessons are non-existent. Another advantage of recorded online education is the asynchronous access it offers to resources and the lesson. Alongside this, it has emerged that computer literacy, or readiness in the realm of computers, benefits such a practice of distance education. This code serves to illustrate the situation more effectively:

"The access to information is easy. Yes, because, frankly, in the classroom environment, we all have to start from the same source. That is, we need to have the same book or, say, its photocopy in front of us, but we didn't have such problems here. We knew how to connect comfortably from the computer, that was nice" (P1).

The codes that emerged for another category titled learning and teaching specific reviews include: suitable for foreign language teaching, ease and efficiency of learning, practice on authentic material, the problem of not being able to read lips while learning German.

It is believed that exercises conducted with distance education are beneficial and particularly suitable for learning a foreign language. Additionally, it is pointed out that being in a continuously structured learning environment both facilitates learning and increases retention. However, as in face-to-face education, the importance of interaction and physically being with students is also emphasized. Applications used in distance education are considered a reasonable study and learning method. The necessity of using videos and dialogues for speaking practice was voiced by participants; generally, learning a language is thought of as an act conducted with people and is easy to do digitally on the internet. However, it was noted that following mouth movements from a computer screen can be challenging because this difficulty also affects the learning of pronunciation. A striking example for this category was put forth by participants:

"It has an impact, but overall, regardless of the application used, I think it is a reasonable study and a learning method, or rather if you ask me, I at least find myself productive" (P6).

Another category is online environment-based reviews. This category includes the following codes: varied and fun activities, need to share camera for class, ease of access to online resources and dictionary.

The use of online resources and dictionaries provides a distinct advantage in distance education. Materials are easily accessible and access to multiple course materials simultaneously and in a synchronized manner is possible. In addition, in such a foreign language learning process, it was pointed out by the participants that the activities should be diverse and enjoyable. This situation arises when various web 2.0 tools are used together or as needed. However, the absence of gestures and facial expressions when the camera is off can be a disadvantage in terms of emotional communication. On the other hand, it was mentioned that having the camera on increases efficiency. The clarity of the sound is another important factor and the necessity of repetition for practicing in language learning emerges as another significant factor. A striking example on this subject:

"In my opinion, it went efficiently, because really, even in normal face-to-face classes, lots of resources like different videos, listening skills are being utilized. We already work on these things. But it was also possible to do this online from our perspective" (P3).

Another category under this theme appears as space and time efficiency and comfort zone related issues. This category includes the codes of independent from space, time saving, providing home comfort, and lack of motivation due to a feeling of comfort.

Relating to structural factors in distance learning, the following can be stated: Participants have reported certain issues, despite the time and spatial efficiency offered by remote learning, often

related to the comfort zone. Participants believe that remote learning is not always as effective as physical education. However, remote learning does provide students with a more flexible option in terms of time and space. Participants appreciate the benefits of studying in a comfortable environment at home. Students may experience problems with lack of motivation and issues with concentration. Also, despite different opinions on matters such as sharing records, the preference for asynchronous learning is seen as a positive feature. A striking example on this topic is as follows:

"When there's no need to go to school or even a course, my day becomes much more free and I know I can comfortably fit in activities that I usually squeeze in. It offers some comforts within its timeframe. Being at home, of course, I mean I make my own food, I don't have to eat out, no commute. I can use everything at home because it's a familiar environment, a comfortable environment, that probably has a positive effect on me" (P2).

The final category of the first theme of the study, online adaptation related issues, includes the following codes: adaptation problem to online environment, providing the opportunity to have a voice in the online environment, equal opportunity in education, low sense of cyber presence, feel uncomfortable speaking in online environment, individualized learning,

In online education, adaptation problems can occur. Socializing by writing or expressing oneself using a pseudonym is an advantage of online education for introverted students and serves as a platform for these participants to express themselves. However, feeling comfortable and integrating into the online environment can also be a significant disadvantage. Transition to the online environment over time and returning from this environment to social life can sometimes be challenging. Technical glitches and distracting factors can also negatively affect the learning process. However, it is essential to note that online education offers advantages related to self-discipline and prioritizing students' individual learning. The difference in adapting to technology depending on age groups is also an issue to consider. A striking example on this issue is as follows:

"I can especially say this, especially for people my age, technology represents a bit more fun. Because before these meetings or classes, devices like the internet, computer, tablet, phone were used for games or series, and this was one of the problems I faced when I first switched to online education during the pandemic when I was in high school (...)" (P3).

When participants' suggestions for maintaining distance education more effectively and the main challenges faced by participants in distance education were asked, effective communication in distance education theme was emerged. This theme is divided into two categories: interaction related views and learning and teaching specific reviews. Looking first at interaction related views category; codes such as classroom interaction, active learning and more interactive, use of gestures and facial expressions, teacher-student awareness in distance education.

**Table 2.** Second theme: Effective communication in distance education

Theme	Categories	Codes
Effective communication in distance education	Interaction related views	Classroom interaction  Active learning and more interactive Use of gestures and facial expressions Teacher-student awareness in distance education
	Camera related views	The use of cameras depends on classroom/home dynamics Supporting the use of cameras Encouraging the student Making the teacher feel comfortable  No forced opening of the camera  Developing camera phobia

In the theme of effective communication in distance education, it is emphasized that interaction between students is crucial. In online education, making the subjects interesting and students comfortably expressing themselves is an important factor. When the group size is small, participation problems do not occur. In interactive lessons, students need to be active. In foreign language classes conducted online, it is important that there is two-way communication between the teacher and the student. Interactive methods such as role-play and the use of gestures and facial expressions can help students learn in a more realistic manner. Emotional expression and eye contact hold a significant place in online education. The learning process should be simple and interactive.

"It does affect, I think. Even though not too much. I mean, you hear the voice but there's also eye contact. It's more beneficial especially during the lecture, I think. But as I said, if the other person does not open their camera, there's no meaning for you to have yours on at this point. You're looking at, like staring blankly at the board at the end of the day but if they are there, of course, I would open it, like I said it's something that needs to be sorted out at the beginning of the course" (P4).

The example below highlights the importance of gestures and facial expressions in teaching foreign languages through distance education:

"(...) Maybe that may have been slightly lacking but still with the tone of voice and so on. This was somehow opened up, right? But maybe that, you know gestures and facial expressions, that dramatization, maybe not being conveyed as it would be in a class environment could be a negative thing, a disadvantage" (P3).

Moreover, distance learning can play a role in promoting a situation prone to creating camera phobia:

" (...) My room is generally used as a sort of storage space. I was not in the room a lot this year because I stayed in the dormitory. Behind me, you can already see pillows, quilts, etc., there are clothes on top. So why does this bother you? (...)" (P8).

When participants' suggestions concerning the use of Web 2.0 tools in distance education were asked, views on Web 2.0 tools was emerged as a theme. The categories of this theme are: Zoom related views, Kahoot related views, Jamboard related views. Speaking of the first category, Zoom related views, the codes in this category are: stable running and ease of use, possibility of screen control with remote access, recording and retrieval of records, encouraging group work through the use of breakout rooms.

**Table 3.** Third theme: Views on Web 2.0 tools

Theme	Categories	Codes
Views on Web 2.0 tools	Zoom related views	Stable running and ease of use Possibility of screen control with remote access Recording and retrieval of records Encouraging group work through the use of breakout rooms
	Kahoot related views	Being fun Supporting competition in the learning environment Providing reinforcement and repetition Providing instant feedback Offering game-based learning Distraction due to competition and leading to the wrong answer Facilitating language learning
	Jamboard related views	Ease of use Simultaneous use and support group Providing the possibility of repetition Opportunity to express anonymously in online classs Difficult to use from smartphone

In regards to Web 2.0 tools, the stable running and ease of use of Zoom is a significant factor. When compared to Skype, its ability to accommodate more people and being suitable for large groups are reasons for its preference in terms of user experience. Zoom has many advantages, particularly for education and meetings. Features such as screen sharing, student screen control, and recording are well-liked by users. Also, the usage of breakout rooms in Zoom, a feature that does not exist in Skype, is seen as beneficial for education as it allows working both individually and in small groups. However, some users have mentioned that the interface is complex and they have experienced some software issues. The preference of other tools like Google Meet over Zoom is thought to be because they integrate with Google accounts and create a more comfortable user experience by establishing a digital identity.

An example of why Zoom is ahead of other alternatives is as follows:

"Let's put it this way, it has many alternatives. We generally work remotely. Sometimes we use Teams, sometimes Google, but I can say that Zoom is by far the best among them. Additionally, the ability to divide into groups is a big plus. Besides that. The ability to share instantly and less connection issues. I can say it's a few steps ahead of the others. That's why Zoom is the right choice in my opinion. Both for education and for meetings. I think this is an important opinion in this regard" (P4).

Another participant talked about the functionality of breakout rooms in this way:

"I think they are great because even in an environment where there's a lot of people, even if our number is not that much, group work can still be done. Being able to go down to 12-person environments, it allows you to express how well you understood the lesson (...)" (P5).

The second category, Kahoot related views, includes the following codes: supporting competition in the learning environment, providing reinforcement and repetition, providing instant feedback, offering game-based learning, distraction due to competition and leading to the wrong answer, facilitating learning.

Based on the data obtained about Kahoot, it stands out for being fun and facilitating learning. It has been noted that Kahoot strengthens users' memory and can be used as resources such as libraries or dictionaries while learning a new language. With its gamification feature, it's stated that student motivation increases and the competitive environment encourages learning. However, time constraints and competition can distract attention and cause anxiety in some students. These are other prominent features of Kahoot. It's emphasized that the use of Kahoot in the learning environment is beneficial and effective and can boost students' self-confidence.

A notable comment on this subject was as follows:

"I love Kahoot. Both from a student's perspective and a teacher's perspective because it's fun. Of course, it inevitably introduces a competitive environment, but I don't think it's a bad or negative thing for adults. I look at it from a fun perspective. You're competing with yourself. It's enjoyable and sometimes classes can get monotonous (...)" (P3).

Moreover, the benefits of reinforcing learning through gameplay are underlined by some of the participants. The following quote illustrates the point:

"I was already taking tests in class, but how much was I really studying? We're online, we're at home. Nobody felt like studying at home, but it created a small competitive environment for reinforcing what you learned. It reinforces a lot. For instance, I was learning that day. Then you say let's make a Kahoot, like a quiz. It's small, not as boring as a quiz and it doesn't suffocate you" (P7).

The final category of the said theme is Jamboard related views. The emerged codes for Jamboard are: ease of use, simultaneous use and support group work, providing the possibility of repetition, opportunity to express anonymously in online class, difficult to use from smartphone.

Users see it as an advantage that the teacher can explain something on Jamboard, and suggest that a separate page be opened for each student. With Jamboard, notes can be made tangible in a digital environment, providing the opportunity to go back and look at the lessons again. The use of anonymous names creates a positive impact by reducing competition among students. However, difficulties in accessing from a phone and small screen sizes are stated as the platform's disadvantages.

Also, difficulties such as opening too many pages and not everyone being able to edit the same page were experienced.

An additional comment related to this category is as follows:

"(...) If a page is opened per student for an activity such as a writing activity, it would be very efficient. Even if there are 500 people in the class, 500 pages can be opened. Everyone follows their own page and after the activity, the teacher can go to each page individually and show the mistakes, and everyone can check each other (...)" (P6).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

It is posited that, based on the findings, a comprehensive understanding of causality in synchronous distance education can be achieved, subsequently offering valuable insights for educational research, foreign language research, technology research, and practitioners.

The academic literature indicates that structural and technical issues often emerge concurrently in the context of distance education (Erbaş, 2021; Sari & Nayır, 2020; Fojitik, 2018). While there are various reasons for these issues, it is plausible to suggest that the rapid and unprepared shift to distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a parallel increase in these problems. Contrary to the findings in the literature (Aktan-Acar et al., 2021; Saykili, 2018; Mellati & Khademi, 2020), participants in this study reported encountering fewer structural problems. In other words, when education is not implemented as an emergency remote teaching but conducted through a structured distance education method, both instructors and students exhibit high levels of readiness. It should also be noted that participants' previous experiences with distance education practices have had an impact on this outcome, and their accumulated experiences undoubtedly play a significant role. Consequently, this can be considered one of the strengths of the study. According to participants' statements, the distance education was conducted in accordance with the technical dynamics of distance education. The researchers' experience with distance education and Web 2.0 tools is significant in this context. This situation underscores the crucial role of the instructor in distance education and their ability to motivate students. Moreover, as students learn to use the applications during the process, they contribute to a more positive distance education experience.

One of the greatest advantages of distance education is the time-saving aspect. Distance education eliminates disadvantages such as long journeys to reach the educational institution and the fatigue associated with it. In their study titled "Students' perceptions on distance education: A multinational study," Fidalgo et al. (2020) highlighted features such as self-paced study, time and space flexibility, and time-saving. The phrases "saving time and space" appear in this study as a positive aspect of distance education, showing parallelism with the mentioned study. However, an important point identified in the study and that should not be overlooked is that, in addition to these benefits, spending time in the same environment for both work and relaxation continuously can be a

factor that reduces some students' motivation. Considering that work and relaxation are compartmentalized in daily life, and that students in distance education also live with their families, studying in their bedrooms affects the concept of their private space, emerging as a sociological phenomenon. However, it should not be forgotten that this situation may be related to self-regulation, because while some individuals have trouble turning this into their advantage, others are experiencing it.

In their study titled "The difference between emergency remote teaching and online learning," Hodges et al. (2020) underline that as class size increases, it becomes difficult to implement this and the instructor reaches a point where it is not possible to provide quality feedback. The same situation has emerged positively in our study. Our findings emphasize the necessity of having a small class size, class durations should be between 40-70 minutes, and more frequent breaks should be given. It is suggested that the student and the teacher should decide together on the class duration. Due to the distraction at home, it is recommended that the class duration should be between 30-45 minutes. Having class recordings is advantageous, but it is thought that they should be deleted after a certain period.

In discussions about effective communication in distance education, the importance of interaction among students has been emphasized. In online education, the interest of the subjects and the ability of students to express themselves comfortably increase interaction. It has been noted that interactive lessons provide efficient communication. The need for teachers to involve students in lessons and for students to be active has been underscored. According to Pryor, while students need to interact with each other to create productive learning environments, educators who engage students in interaction report greater satisfaction from their teaching (Pryor, 2020). Participation in a synchronous hybrid class can pose a challenging situation for students (Johnson & Brescia, 2006). An environment where students can interact with their peers should be created. In addition to participating in classroom discussions and activities, it is shared that students need to engage with the content to demonstrate what they know. Students should ask questions and present ideas in in-class discussions. Educators are aware of the value of non-verbal communication in their classrooms, and learning opportunities occur in peer-to-peer interaction (Castelli & Sarvary, 2021; Pryor, 2020).

In a study conducted by Kayode (2018), a strong positive impact was found between effective communication practices and tools and students' cognitive engagement in distance learning programs. This research, which included a broad sample of 450 instructors from three public universities in Malaysia, indicates that effective communication directly enhances cognitive participation. Students responded positively to the integration of the platform with Web 2.0 tools and the beneficial communication features provided by the instructor. It was suggested that certain challenges present in face-to-face education could be mitigated through these tools. Therefore, it can be inferred that



distance education, by offering a distinct communication model, brings a new dynamic to classroom and peer interactions.

The use of cameras and microphones in distance learning has been a significant focus. While virtual meetings can provide necessary social interaction (Aleman & Sommer, 2020), some students may be reluctant to use cameras (Castelli & Sarvary, 2021). Our study emphasizes respecting students' preferences in this regard. It's important to have the camera on, but it shouldn't be mandatory. Factors like visibility of gestures and clarity of voice are crucial, especially in language teaching. Sound is more important than image, and teachers should tolerate students' mistakes without criticism. Effective communication also involves giving students the right to speak and ensuring questions are resolved. Despite mandatory camera use in some cases, students may resist due to personal issues or environmental factors. In group studies, a monologue situation can arise if some students do not actively participate. However, written communication can also be effective in distance education, especially for introverted students.

The incorporation of Web 2.0 applications in educational methodologies has been recognized as a substantial advantage, primarily due to the creation of a stimulating and enjoyable learning milieu for students. This assertion is substantiated by a multitude of studies in academic literature that have utilized a variety of Web 2.0 tools, thereby augmenting the pleasure and engagement in the teaching process (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016; Nurieva & Garaeva, 2020; Arslan & Coştu, 2021; Perez, Manca & Fernández-Pascual, 2023). The current research analyzes opinions on the use of Web 2.0 tools, with a particular focus on the features and user experiences associated with the Zoom and Kahoot applications.

Zoom's stable performance and ease of use were positively evaluated by users. When compared with Skype, Zoom's capacity to support more users simultaneously and its suitability for large groups were stated as reasons for preference. Features of Zoom such as screen sharing, student screen control, recording, and private messaging were seen as advantages by users. While the user interface may be complex for some users, it was generally stated to be useful. When examining users' experiences with the Kahoot application, the fun structure of the application, memory enhancement and learning reinforcement features stood out. The gamification feature was found to increase user motivation, while the competitive environment was also found to enhance learning. However, it was also noted that the time constraints and competitive environment could cause anxiety for some users. The group creation feature was suggested as a way to use Kahoot more efficiently. Furthermore, it was emphasized that Kahoot creates an encouraging effect in the learning environment instead of competition, and that games are beneficial in language learning.

### **Recommendations**

Numerous researchers have highlighted that effective communication indeed transpires not merely through verbal expressions, but rather through the integration of verbal and non-verbal communication. When considering the premise that a successful class is dependent on an efficient communication process, it becomes apparent that the communicative interaction between teachers and students needs to transcend mere verbal interaction. In this context, the notion that educators and learners should not distinguish online classrooms from face-to-face education is crucial. The opening of communication channels, either at the camera or microphone level, could amplify the quality of communication. The practitioners should not underestimate the features of virtual classes.

An effective learning environment in remote education can be achieved when both students and instructors possess multimedia skills and adequate distance learning equipment. Appropriate equipment includes a computer compliant with modern requirements, a web camera, a headset with a microphone, which are basic remote learning necessities. In addition to proper hardware, it's also important that learners are comfortable from an ergonomic point of view and own ergonomic furniture such as a desk and a chair. This can reduce the physical and psychological strain on those who spend long periods in front of a computer, further emphasizing the importance of comfort and wellbeing in the distance learning experience.

As the current research suggests, there are significant challenges associated with the transition phases into and out of distance education and training. It is vital that subsequent efforts focus on formulating robust strategies and curating resources to support learners in the midst of these transitions. In addition, an exploration of the relationship between previous distance learning experience and readiness for online pedagogy could be illuminating. For both students and educators unfamiliar with the nuances of distance learning, a deeper understanding of this relationship could provide valuable guidance.

### **Policy Implications**

While web tools hold a significant role in the educational environment, the broad training offered across all disciplines in universities might occasionally neglect the unique needs and requirements of foreign language educators due to variations in subject-specific goals and objectives. Consequently, there is an urgent need for comprehensive analysis and research concerning synchronous remote foreign language education and the use of web 2.0 tools. Given this perspective, it's anticipated that this study will make a substantial contribution to the literature.

Within the OECD (2018) Skills Framework, there is an emphasis on imparting skills to students pertaining to "adaptation to changes in future digital realms" and "creating new values." In the context of the ATSC21 Skills Framework, themes such as "knowledge in a domain,"

"interdisciplinarity," "practice-based endeavors," and "innovative approaches/assessments in classrooms" emerge as focal points. Under the 21st Century Skills Framework (P21) (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2015), the importance of skills such as "communication," "collaboration," "productivity," and "innovation" is underscored. Insights gathered from research aim to decipher challenges encountered by foreign language teachers during synchronous online educational processes, the efficiency of distance education, perspectives on web 2.0 tools, and opinions regarding the sustainability of distance education. In its present form, this article aligns with the general objectives and policies of the journal and aspires to contribute to the refinement of technology-backed foreign language policies.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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### **Credit Author Statement**

The authors contributed equally to this study. Contribution of the authors is as follows: Author 1: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigating, Validation, Writing, Software, Data Curation. Author 2: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigating, Validation, Writing, Software, Data Curation.

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