

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT EXPERIENCES OF METU FLE STUDENTS DURING THE COVID-19 ONLINE EDUCATION PROCESS

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the academic engagement experiences of the Middle East Technical University (METU) Foreign Language Education (FLE) students during the COVID-19 online education process. For this purpose, a phenomenological study was carried out as a qualitative research design. The study sample consists of ten undergraduate METU FLE students. These participants were selected through a purposive sampling technique. To collect data, semi-structured interviews were held with the participants and audio-recorded with the participants' permission. Content analysis was utilized to analyze and interpret the collected data by developing themes, sub-themes, and codes. The outstanding results include that the pre-service FLE teachers had both positive and negative experiences during the online education process. To begin with, the pre-service FLE teachers had positive experiences during online education in terms of effective learning, time efficiency, and flexibility opportunities of the process. On the contrary, most of the participants highlighted their negative experiences during online education related to concentration problems, stressfulness, need for self-regulation, the inexperience of instructors, and lack of class interaction, motivation, and socialization. Besides, the pre-service FLE teachers highlighted the factors that affected their academic engagement during the online education process. The factors that increased the participants' academic engagement include keeping camera on during lessons, facilitative instructors, autonomous learning, and technological facilities. On the other hand, the factors that decreased students' academic engagement involve keeping the camera off, having technical obstacles, instructors' attitude and teaching style, home environment, and the lack of interaction and interest.

Lastly, the suggestions taken from the participant pre-service FLE teachers include using varying methods during lessons to appeal to all and avoid getting bored, arranging course hours appropriately to provide time for learners' needs, having a common course policy among instructors, and increasing student involvement in the whole process. These results are believed to be beneficial for future actions in terms of effectively designing and carrying out online education processes. As a result of this study, two of the four major subthemes that have been reached are negative experiences and positive experiences about online education, and some of the participants had opinions about both, which goes hand in hand with the findings by Erarslan and Arslan (2019). Additionally, it was found that participants talked about their experiences, such as lacking classroom interactivity, socialization, motivation, and they also highlighted how those experiences negatively affected their academic engagement levels. This result contradicts another research by Pittaway and Moss (2014), which found that pre-service teachers' academic engagement has risen. Nonetheless, findings of this research coincide with those conducted by Özüdoğru (2021). In her study, Özüdoğru (2021) finds that the participants face psychological and physical problems caused by online education, which negatively affects their academic engagement levels, and supports the results of this study.

Keywords: Online education, academic engagement, university students.

References

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