UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN ONLINE LEARNING: THE CASE OF ENGLISH PREPARATORY SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN ONLINE LEARNING: THE CASE OF ENGLISH PREPARATORY SCHOOL

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This study aims to investigate student experiences, satisfaction, and the relationship between these two dimensions during the online language learning process at a preparatory school. Student experiences are examined with a focus on instructor support, peer relations, technical support and course activities and materials. Additionally, learner characteristics, such as gender, employment status, language level, achievement, prior online learning experiences, issues experienced in online learning and their relation to student satisfaction are investigated. Both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments were used. A questionnaire developed by the researcher was used in the quantitative data collection stage (n=226). Qualitative data were gathered via interviews conducted individually with 13 students. To analyze the quantitative data, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Qualitative data were analyzed via descriptive content analysis. Learners' perception of the online

learning environment factors was found to be positive, yet students' overall satisfaction with the fully online language learning process was comparatively lower. Correlation analyses showed that there was a significant relationship between learners' view of the learning environment and student satisfaction. Having previous online learning experience and experiencing access problems were found to be significantly related to learner satisfaction. Positive aspects of learning online included not spending time on transportation, studying at the comfort of home and having access to a wealth of online materials while loss of motivation and concentration, lack of social connection to peers and instructors and having too much homework were found to be the negative aspects.

Keywords: Online learning, distance education, learning environment, student satisfaction, student experiences

ÖZ

ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN ÇEVRİM İÇİ EĞİTİM DENEYİMLERİ:
İNGİLİZCE HAZIRLIK OKULU ÖRNEĞİ

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Bu çalışmanın amacı, bir İngilizce hazırlık okulundaki çevrim içi öğrenme sürecinde öğrencilerin tecrübelerini, memnuniyetini ve bu iki boyut arasındaki ilişiyi araştırmaktır. Öğrenci tecrübelerinin içeriğini, öğretim görevlisi desteği, akran ilişkileri, teknik destek ve ders etkinlikleri ve materyalleri konuları oluşturmaktadır. Bunun yanı sıra, cinsiyet, çalışma durumu, dil seviyesi, başarı durumu, önceki çevrim içi eğitim tecrübesi durumu, çevrim içi sürecinde sorun yaşanması gibi öğrenci ile alakalı başlıklar ve bu özelliklerin genel memnuniyet ile olan ilişkisi de çalışma kapsamında incelenmiştir. Çalışmada, hem nicel hem nitel veri toplama yöntemleri kullanılmıştır. Nicel veri toplanmasında, araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen anket 226 öğrenciye uygulanmıştır. Nitel veriler, 13 öğrenci ile yapılan bireysel görüşmeler ile toplanmıştır. Nicel verilerin analizinde betimsel ve çıkarımsal istatistik yöntemleri kullanılmıştır. Görüşme verilerinin analizinde ise betimsel içerik çözümlemesi

yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Öğrencilerin çevrim içi öğrenim ortamına dair algılarının olumlu olduğu bulunmuştur ancak öğrencilerinin tamamen çevrim içi olarak gerçekleşen dil öğrenme sürecinden genel memnuniyetlerinin nispeten daha düşük olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Sonuçlar, öğrencilerin öğrenme ortamı ile ilgili görüşleri ile genel memnuniyetleri arasında önemli bir ilişki olduğunu göstermiştir. Ayrıca, sonuçlar daha önce çevrim içi öğrenim tecrübesine sahip olma ile genel memnuniyet arasında ve erişim sorunları yaşama durumu ile genel memnuniyet arasında önemli bir ilişki olduğunu da ortaya çıkarmıştır. Ulaşım için zaman harcamama, evde rahat bir şekilde öğrenim görme ve birçok çevrim içi materyale erişebilme çevrim içi eğitimin olumlu yönleri olarak öne çıkmıştır. Çevrim içi eğitimin olumsuz yönlerinde öne çıkan başlıkların ise motivasyon ve odaklanma kaybı, akran ve öğretim görevlileri ile sosyal iletişim eksikliği ve fazla ödev verilmesi olduğu görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çevrim içi eğitim, uzaktan eğitim, öğrenim ortamı, öğrenci memnuniyeti, öğrenci tecrübeleri

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMOS Analysis of Moment Structures

CFA Confirmatory Factor Analysis

DE Distance Education

DL Distance Learning

EFA Exploratory Factor Analysis

PAF Principal Axis Factoring

PCA Principal Component Analysis

SESOL Student Experiences and Satisfaction in Online Learning Survey

SPSS Statistical Package for Social Sciences

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the Chapter

This study primarily aims to investigate student experiences during the COVID-19 imposed distance learning process. This chapter presents information on the background of the study, problem statement, purpose and significance of the study, research questions and definition of the terms commonly used in the study.

1.2 Background of the Study

Having started with the correspondence courses in the 19th century (Walker & Kelly, 2007), distance education has provided access to education for many students who did not have the opportunity to receive face-to-face education. Distance education continues to maintain its importance in parallel with the advancements in technology, and currently, computers, the internet, and televised lessons constitute the infrastructural basis of distance education practices.

An abrupt change in the utilization of distance education in formal education programs has been caused by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected billions of people from all around the world. With the uncontrollable spread of the disease all around the world and staggering fatality rates, World Health Organization

(WHO) classified COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2020). Having witnessed the serious results of COVID-19, authorities have implemented different policies in order to control the spread of the disease, such as social distancing, partial or full-time curfews and closure of the public and private institutions including schools. While some countries opted to shut down the schools completely and continue with distance education, some others have decided to restrict the number of face-to-face classes (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020). Statistics indicate that nearly 1 billion students in 130 countries have been affected by the country-wide school closures caused by the pandemic (UNESCO, 2020). In accordance with these developments, Ministry of National Education and the Council of Higher Education decided to close the schools in Turkey as of March 2020, which resulted in millions of students receiving education at home, through their television and/or computers. Although there were attempts to partially open the schools in primary and secondary levels in 2020-2021 academic year, the rising COVID-19 cases made it impossible to continue education face to face. In Turkey, the number of students who had to transition to distance education is approximately 25 million, and 7.2 million of these are university students (UNESCO, 2020).

Most higher education institutions strived to create an online setting and a distance education program for their students so that the problems caused by the lack of face-to-face instruction could be ameliorated, and the learning gap, which is likely to emerge due to the extended periods of school closures, could be prevented as much as

possible. As a result, 7.2 million university students in Turkey experienced online learning, and this is expected to shape the future of education in one way or another.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Even though distance education, with the help of advancing internet, has been going on for decades now, it is the first time for millions of students to continue their education completely on a distance basis, which is mostly conducted in an online format. For those who have to or want to continue their education during COVID-19, distance education has become the only viable solution. While some teachers were prepared to take on the responsibility of teaching online, it can be said that a vast majority had to transfer to distance education with insufficient training, preparation and limited facilities (Dietrich et al., 2020).

Having transitioned to distance education without proper preparation due to the urgency of the COVID-19 health crisis, many aspects of the distance education programs could unfortunately not be deliberated. Therefore, a distinction is made between the carefully designed versus hastily prepared form of distance education. While carefully planned distance learning activities with the help of online communication tools qualify as online education, the learning practices that were created to be a quick solution as a result of the unexpected and immediate problems, such as COVID-19, is termed “Emergency Remote Teaching” (ERT) (Hodges et al., 2020; Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Although ERT is useful in providing the continuance of education under difficult conditions, it also causes some troubles due to the lack of

diligent design that is required to create a well-structured educational program. This confirms the idea that the present education system is not ready and resistant to external dangers (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020).

Regardless of the drastically increasing interest towards online education and the plethora of research into the area, switching to distance education quickly and successfully at such a vast scale has not been possible. A number of technical, curricular and assessment related issues, in addition to the social and psychological challenges were observed. A study conducted by Bozkurt (2020) alerts us towards a need for essential changes and strategic planning in education in order to maintain the continuance of it even under hard and unexpected conditions. Considering the problems experienced in the online learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic (Milosievski et al., 2020), we can say that understanding the students' conditions and experiences in this process is more important than ever before. An elaborate examination and understanding of student experiences and the realities of their situation can enable us to strengthen the resistance of our education system against unexpected challenges.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

Although educational endeavors during COVID-19 are criticized for not carrying the qualities of a distance education program (Hodges et al., 2020), they provide an opportunity to examine and understand the context-specific online learning environment dynamics so that future experiences can be more strongly grounded. In

order to enhance and maintain the quality of online learning programs as they escalate in numbers, it is required to understand student experiences in relation to their online learning environment and the factors that influence their satisfaction. Student satisfaction is accepted to be a significant factor in determining the course quality in online learning (Bayrak et al., 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2008). Furthermore, understanding the factors that influence student satisfaction in distance learning can help the educators improve the online courses and address the students' needs (Kauffman, 2015; Lim & Fraser, 2018; Martín-Rodríguez et al., 2015). To that end, the purpose of this study is to investigate the student experiences and satisfaction in the fully online language learning process. These experiences are aimed to be examined with a focus on the environmental factors, such as peer relations, course activities and materials, instructor support, and online technical support. In addition, variables which are likely to affect student experiences, such as gender, employment status, language level, achievement, prior online learning experiences, access status and other problems experienced during online education are also aimed to be investigated within the scope of this study. Overall, this study seeks to understand how students perceived the major learning environment factors in their online language learning experience and investigate the relationships between the learner experiences and student satisfaction as well as learner characteristics and student satisfaction.

At a time when the world was shaken by COVID-19, teachers and administrators were doing their best to overcome the difficulties in the way of teaching and learning. Nevertheless, no matter how much we strive to provide the best conditions to the students in online learning, it might not compare with face-to-face learning. For that

reason, many institutions suspended their accountability and achievement tests (Zhao, 2020). Similarly, this study does not attempt to evaluate the school's program or its success. Instead, it is aimed to understand students' experiences and satisfaction so that we can be better prepared for the future experiences with online learning.

1.5 Research Questions

Research questions that guided this study are:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of university students regarding their online learning?
2. Is there a significant relationship between university students' perception of their learning environment and learner satisfaction?
3. Is there a significant relationship between learner characteristics and satisfaction with the online learning process?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The importance of distance learning through computers and the internet has drastically increased in the last decades. Online learning industry has grown by 900 % in size in the last 20 years and is expected to triple from 2020 to 2025 (Keegan, 2020). On top of this continuing demand, use of online learning saw an unprecedented increase with the breakout of COVID-19. Indeed, this is the first time that such large groups of students from all around the world are learning fully on a distance basis (Zimmerman, 2020). These developments confirm what Clayton (2007) concluded long ago:

> In the not-too-distant future… Educationalists will be challenged to develop appropriate strategies to deal with new information and communication technology-rich ways of teaching and learning. It appears evident those features explored in learning environment research, the perceptions of students and teachers of the environment, the social and psychological factors, will be as equally important to research in digital environments (p. 165)

It is argued that schools, in its traditional sense, were created at a time when our understanding of the factors that constitute a school, such as learning, teaching, knowledge and skills, were different than that of today's modern world (Zhao, 2020). Schools are often criticized for stripping students of their creativity, curiosity and ability to learn (Holt, 2005). In the face of such criticism both from the educators and students, it becomes imperative to design online education in a way that will help us avoid the mistakes which have been heavily criticized in traditional education. It is commonly accepted that an effective online learning environment is the result of elaborate instructional design and planning (Branch & Dousay, 2015), and for a successful design, it is necessary to get feedback from the students regarding their experiences in and satisfaction of the online learning environment. Herewith, one of the aims of this study is to collect the feedback needed to build a well-designed online language learning environment which is aware of students' needs and demands.

In addition to being convenient and flexible, online learning gains popularity and importance because it ensures that education continues even in times of crisis, such as pandemics, natural disasters, political and social upheavals that are observed on many instances around the world (Cauchemez et al., 2014; Czerniewicz, 2020). As online learning offers the opportunity of learning in cases when receiving face-to-face education is not possible, it is likely that online education will continue to have a

crucial role in students' lives. Therefore, another significance of this study is that it brings online learning environment factors and student satisfaction into light so that the future steps in designing and implementing online courses can be taken informedly in cases of need. In summary, although COVID-19 brought unexpected and somewhat unwanted changes into the educational systems, there are also lessons we can take from these experiences to enhance the learning and teaching practices in the yearned post-COVID times.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Distance education/learning: This term refers to the type of formal education in which learners are separated by space and sometimes time and the connection between resources, learners and instructors is provided through interactive telecommunication technologies (Schlosser & Simonson, 2009, p. 1). Distance education can take place through various media, such as correspondence, television, radio and computers. However, in this study it is used mainly to denote the type of education that takes place with computers and the internet.

Online education/learning: A web-based mode of education in which students reach the educational resources online, and they communicate with each other and the teachers through internet, as well (Tomei, 2010, p. 82). Distance education encompasses online education (Tomei, 2010, p. 166). Online learning is also defined as the form of distance education as utilized by higher education institutions (Simonson et al., 2015). Likewise, the terms "online learning/education" and "distance learning/education" are used interchangeably in this study.

E-learning: The use of Internet technologies to deliver a broad array of solutions that enhance knowledge and performance (Rosenberg, 2001). This term is usually used in the private sector (Simonson et al., 2015).

Traditional/classroom education: The education that takes place when the teacher and the students are physically present in the same classroom and at the same time. It is used synonymously with face-to-face education.

Synchronous learning: This term refers to the type of learning when teachers and students are online simultaneously and are in real-time interaction. (Tomei, 2010, p. 210)

Asynchronous learning: Learning that occurs outside the online live class hours. In the context of this study, students are provided with a syllabus to manage their asynchronous learning hours, and it is a required part of the program.

The Pandemic: This term refers to the COVID-19 pandemic that took hold of many sectors all around the World including education.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter provides information on the main issues and concepts in the field of distance education. More specifically, theories and empirical studies relating to online learning environment factors, such as interaction, course content and technical support are explained to promote an understanding of the scope of this study.

2.2 Introduction

Distance education (DE) has been a commonly used term in our lives with the closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A careful analysis of what constitutes distance education is necessary before delving into a study which aims to understand the dynamics of it. Simonson (2009) defines distance education as a form of formal education which takes place when the learners and the teachers are physically apart. This definition also stipulates that distance education be provided by an institution with the use of interactive telecommunication technologies. Distance learning, on the other hand, is defined as the desired outcome of DE (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2021).

In an older study, upon examining various definitions, Keegan (1980) delineated 6 staples of DE, which are the physical separation of the teacher and students, inclusion of an educational organization in the process, use of technical media, presence of opportunities for dialogue, occasional meetings for instruction and socialization, and a focus on individual learning with the industrialization of education, which de-emphasizes the learning groups. Here, learning groups refer to classes as experienced in traditional education. Incorporating the term "absence of learning groups" in the definition of DE leads to questions regarding the live class meetings which is a commonly used method during COVID-19 online learning process. However, it is commonly accepted that synchronous classes are a part of DE, and live classes are integral parts of synchronous form of DE (Bernard et al., 2004). Although it is possible to find various definitions of distance education, many of them are parallel to each other regarding the main components of it. In brief, the target context of this study meets the criteria to be characterized as distance education as the study is conducted at a university, students and the teachers are physically distant from each other, and lastly online learning technologies are used with institutional support.

As mentioned previously, due to the differences between DE practices before and after the pandemic, a new term called emergency remote teaching (ERT) has been put forward (Hodges et al., 2020; Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). It is argued that ERT offers only temporary solutions while distance education strives to provide permanent solutions as a part of lifelong learning concept (Bozkurt, 2020). Bozkurt (2020) also expresses that ERT arose as an obligation to enable students to continue their education while DE is established as an option among other forms of education. However, it

should be considered that there are many instances when a student's only option is to receive DE due to work or family responsibilities. Moreover, some institutions provide certain courses of a program only online, and students need to take and successfully complete those courses to be able to graduate. Therefore, referring to DE as an option is not always accurate. In brief, it is suggested that theories and practice of DE will continue to be disputable since society, politics, technology and economy continues to transform (Simonson et al., 2015). How the pandemic forced schools to take rapid actions towards providing distance education within the bounds of their facilities is compelling evidence to this opinion. Whether we call it ERT or DE, the need to understand the dynamics of these contexts and improve educational institutions' capacities in this field remains unchanged.

Distance education is claimed to have gone through 3 generations based on the dominant technology employed (Bates, 2005; Peters, 1994, as cited in Aoki, 2012). These are (1) correspondence model relying on print materials and postal mails, (2) use of radio and television broadcasting and (3) use of information and communication technologies (ICT) for content delivery and interaction. The extensive use of computer systems and internet technologies has been the cornerstone of DE in the last decades and shaped the current outlook of the field. Online learning, web-based learning, e-learning and others are among the terms which gained a seat in our lives during the 3rd generation of DE. During the pandemic, online learning/education has been the ultimate term which is used in all levels of education regardless of context. Thus, a decision was made to use online education/learning and distance education/learning interchangeably as the main terms in this study.

2.3 Quality and Effectiveness in Online Learning

Online learning is a unique opportunity for many reasons. In addition to providing educational opportunities to those who cannot attend face-to-face formal education, it becomes a savior in times like COVID-19 pandemic to maintain the perpetuity of education. As online learning became the object of attention with the advances in the technology, questions regarding its effectiveness and quality grew in numbers.

Numerous studies have been conducted comparing the educational effectiveness of traditional and distance learning. Bernard et al. (2004) analyzed 232 studies conducted between 1985 and 2002. These studies focused on the outcome differences between DE and traditional education with a focus on attitude, retention and achievement. Despite having limitations, such as heterogeneity, leading to the non-generalizability of the results, it was found that there was no considerable difference in terms of achievement (Bernard et al., 2004). Even a significant yet small effect of DE over traditional education regarding student achievement was found (Bernard et al., 2004). Lou et al. (2006), in another meta-analysis of 103 studies, found that learning attainment of the students did not change according to the medium. To clarify, undergraduate students attending synchronous live classes did not learn less than the students who were attending face-to-face classes. Another study by Tallent-Runnels et al. (2006) analyzed 68 studies comparing learning outcomes in affective and cognitive domains, and they concluded that both traditional education and DE were enough for learning to take place. That is, in some studies distance learners outperformed face-to-face learners, and in some others vice versa, but the difference was not noteworthy.

Abovementioned meta-analyses and many other research studies underline that online education and face to face education do not have superiority over one another in terms of educational effectiveness (Allen et al., 2004).

Well before these meta-analyses were conducted, Clark (1983) had famously stated that "media are mere vehicles". Clark (1983) argues that rather than the instruction delivery medium, other variables, such as the instructor, instructional methods, content, learner aptitude and others should be the focus of interest in understanding achievement effectiveness. On a similar note, Simonson et al. (2015) state that successful education relies on design, development and instruction rather than being related to geography or time. In support of this point, Ralston-Berg et al. (2015) found that the inclusion of relevant, appropriate and objective-oriented media increases the quality of online courses as perceived by the students. In other words, integrating technology into a course just for the sake of it does not increase its quality.

The fact that both online and face-to-face education can provide effective learning does not mean that transferring the methods used in traditional classes directly to distance learning settings will yield successful results. Even if attempted, this would not be possible due to the differences between the nature of face-to-face and online settings. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies focus on how effective instructional methodologies of in-class education can be adapted for DE (Bernard et al., 2009). Similarly, another study conducted during COVID-19 concluded that educational institutions need to render the design of their programs appropriate for online courses (Adnan, 2020). Research indicates that for online learning to be

effective, carefully designed and planned instruction, which follows a systematic model, is required (Branch & Dousay, 2015). To be able to design and develop online courses as recommended, it is crucial to be cognizant of the factors which play an essential role in determining course quality and effectiveness.

Numerous studies have been carried out to understand the aspects of online courses which influence course quality (Chang & Fang, 2020; Pearson & Trinidad, 2005; Ralston-Berg et al., 2015; Elumalai et al., 2020). In their study, Chang and Fang (2020) divide the factors which influence the effectiveness of online instruction into 5 groups. These are student autonomy, instructor's attitude and methods, software and hardware support, training about the online platforms and evaluation of instruction along with program maintenance. Similarly, Macnish et al. (2003) state that executing e-learning effectively is a complex job, and it includes numerous factors, such as infrastructure, content and assessment quality, learner support systems, assumptions regarding the learning experience and peer support networks (as cited in Pearson & Trinidad, 2005). In the accreditation of distance education courses, institutional context and commitment, curriculum and instruction, faculty support, student support along with evaluation and assessment are the essential components and are used as the quality criteria (Lezberg, 2007). In their quality rubric for online courses, Jaggars and Xu (2016) indicate quality factors to be organization and presentation, carefully prepared objectives and course alignment with these, presence of interpersonal interaction and incorporation of appropriate technology. Similarly, Ring and Mathieux (2002) accept interactivity, collaboration and content authenticity as the criteria for quality in online learning (as cited in, Ally, 2008). Majority of the abovementioned dimensions are not

specific to virtual learning environments and are crucial for any educational setting. However, they are strongly emphasized in online learning studies since if not designed and developed with care, distance education will aggravate low quality instruction and worsen the educational problems experienced in developing countries (Eastmond, 2002, as cited in Walker, 2003). Presence of the abovementioned factors in online courses is not only indicative of quality but also a predictor of student satisfaction in online courses, which is examined below.

2.4. Satisfaction in Online Learning

Studying the associations between students' perceptions of their learning environment and affective outcomes, such as self-esteem, attitude and satisfaction has long been prevalent (Fraser, 2002; Walker, 2003). Learner satisfaction in online courses is particularly focused as it influences several crucial dynamics of educational experiences. Student satisfaction is defined to be the learners' perception of the university experience and the value of education received from an educational organization (Astin, 1993). In other words, degree to which students regard the education they receive worthy of the time, effort and sources they spend constitute their satisfaction. Another definition puts forth that student satisfaction is a short-term attitude which results from the learner's educational experience (Elliott & Healy, 2001). This definition reveals that satisfaction is an attitudinal outcome of the learning experience which is, as expected, shaped by the psychosocial learning environment factors. Lastly, satisfaction is accepted to be the students' evaluation of the quality of education (Allen et al., 2007). A synthesis of these three definitions indicates that

students' perception of their learning environment constitutes their satisfaction or discontent.

In their extensive analysis of British universities, Ramsden and Entwistle (1981) compared students' perceptions of their departments in terms of workload, freedom in learning and good teaching. It was found that students with a positive appraisal of their departments had a positive approach towards studying, and this affirmative attitude led to improved academic performance. Moore and Kearsley (1996) reported that satisfaction status did not predict academic achievement in distance education (as cited in Bolliger & Martindale, 2004). However, it is argued that in online learning, satisfaction promotes motivation, and motivated students have a greater chance for academic success (Bolliger & Martindale, 2004; Martin-Rodriguez et al. 2015). This inference is in line with Ramsden and Entwistle's (1981) findings. Another pertinent concept to satisfaction is retention. Research found that students who regarded their course experiences positively had higher retention rates (Herbert, 2006). In short, learner satisfaction influences several factors, such as motivation, retention, and academic performance. Therefore, satisfaction is commonly accepted to be a measure of educational quality in online learning (Bradford & Wyatt, 2010; Law, 2010; Martin-Rodriguez et al., 2015; Thygesen et al. 2020). In addition to determining quality, knowledge of student satisfaction and experiences can help educators pinpoint the problem areas related to design and implementation (Law, 2010; Pearson & Trinidad, 2005), and institutions can develop and deliver better courses, which will hopefully lead to improved learning outcomes (Blackmon & Major, 2012). Similarly, Palmer and Holt (2009) state that:

> An understanding of the factors that influence student satisfaction with online learning in a particular context can be used as an input to the appropriate design of learning environments, and for the provision of targeted support to students, with an aim to positively influence the student online learning experience. (p.1)

Therefore, it is important to know what factors are influential in understanding learner satisfaction in online learning.

Student life consists of a complex set of connected and overlapping experiences which affect learner satisfaction (Elliott & Healy, 2001; Elshami et al., 2021). Factors influencing students' experiences in online education are multilateral. Allen et al. (2007) argue that satisfaction issue is usually determined even before a student enrolls in a course due to factors related to an individual herself/himself. For instance, a student who feels more comfortable with face-to-face interaction or has self-efficacy problems related to technology is more likely to be less satisfied with the distance learning experience (Allen et al., 2007; Trinidad et al., 2005). Besides, students' academic performances are argued to improve if their preferred instructional setting matches the qualities of the actual setting (Allen et al., 2007; Fraser, 1998; Fraser & Fisher, 1982, 1983). On the other hand, Thurmond et al. (2002) found that learner characteristics, such as computer skills, previous online learning experience and age, did not predict learners' satisfaction with online learning. Therefore, it can be concluded that whether personal characteristics and learner satisfaction are correlated requires further inquiry. Fraser (1981) states that the association between students' perceptions of the learning environment and learner attitudes can be explored by adding an attitudinal scale into the data collection instrument. Likewise, numerous studies found associations between satisfaction and the learning environment via this method (Şahin, 2007; Thygesen, 2020; Trinidad et al., 2005; Zandvliet, 2002).

In his extensive study with two thousand students, Astin (1993) identified 4 factors to be crucial to student satisfaction in university education. These are contact time with faculty and administration personnel, opportunity to reach career advisors, social life on campus and relationships with the faculty and administration members. In another study, campus climate, student-centeredness and effectiveness of instruction were found to be the most influential factors determining learner satisfaction for undergraduate students (Elliott & Healy, 2001). In addition to these, university's image and access to facilities were found to affect learner satisfaction in traditional college education (El-Hilali et al., 2015). Abovementioned studies were conducted in face-to-face education settings. A different set of issues come into play in online learning settings (Bolliger & Martindale, 2004). For instance, campus social life and climate would not be a concern for fully online learners. Instead, technology and interaction related issues are expected to be at the fore of studies focusing on learner satisfaction. Therefore, it is important to fully capture the reality of online learning contexts and reveal a clear picture of what shapes satisfaction in online courses.

Galusha (1998) categorizes the obstacles students face in distance education into 6 groups. These are teacher contact and feedback problems, lack of technical and academic support, feelings of alienation and isolation due to being physically distant, lack of experience in distance learning, cost of education and lack of training in technical issues. Although cost is not a problem in the contexts where college education is free, the others are observed to be emerging issues in online learning settings. In another study, dimensions of user satisfaction are categorized into 6 groups as students, teachers, course, technology, design and setting (Wang & Bagakas, 2003).

Addressing these areas in online education is crucial in maintaining student satisfaction. Below, most explored areas in learner satisfaction research are introduced.

Role of instructors in online learning is reported to be of utmost importance in numerous studies (Bolliger & Martindale, 2004; Eom et al., 2006; Marsh & Roche, 1997; Shea et al., 2006; Sun et al., 2008). Instructor related variables, such as provision of timely feedback, facilitation, communication, accessibility, enthusiasm and attitudes toward DE are found to influence learning as well as satisfaction in online learning (Bolliger & Martindale, 2004; Eom et al., 2006; Sun et al., 2008; Swan, 2001). Another crucial aspect that needs attention in online courses is interactivity. Research shows that interactivity affects learner satisfaction in online courses (Bangert, 2006; Croxton, 2014; Fedynich et al., 2015; Roberts et al., 2005; Shea et al., 2006). Active and engaged learning; cooperation and connection among classmates; regular interaction with the instructors and peers are shown to be indicators of an interactive learning environment (Bangert, 2006; Blackmon & Major, 2012; Uusiautti et al., 2017).

As the main medium of education in online learning, technology has an inevitable and considerable role in understanding learner satisfaction. These factors are related both to the personal qualities of the learners and the technological support provided by the institution. To exemplify, students who were confident about communicating and learning online tended to be more satisfied with their online learning experience (Kerr & Hiltz, 1982; Palmer & Holt, 2009). Similarly, computer anxiety was found to negatively influence satisfaction from online learning experience (Sun et al., 2008).

On the learning environment side of technology-related factors, availability of technical support in times of need were found to be essential for satisfaction in online learning (Johnston et al., 2005; Roberts et al., 2005). Furthermore, facility for accessing information on the learning platform, easy access and visual appeal were spotted to be valuable qualities for online learners (Martin-Rodriguez et al., 2015).

Last but not least, course related factors, such as course organization, clarity of design, content and its usefulness as perceived by the students and presence of supportive learning activities are crucial for both learner satisfaction and learning (Eom et al., 2006; Martin-Rodriguez et al., 2015; Roberts et al., 2005; Swan, 2001). Besides, having a clear understanding of course requirements for successful completion and the relevance of assignments to content are influential criteria for student satisfaction with online courses (Johnston et al., 2005; Palmer & Holt, 2009). Following sections will delve further into these areas.

2.5 Learning Environment in Distance Education

The term ‘learning environment’ encompasses a wide area of variables and denotes the social, physical, psychological and educational context which leads to learning (Fraser, 2012). Similarly, Elken and Wollscheid (2019) define learning environment as the factors which are involved in the learning process. Learning environment is multi-dimensional and contains factors which influence cognitive and affective outcomes of the educational process.

Studies in the field of learning environment can be grouped into 6 main areas, which are (1) student outcome-environment relationship, (2) differences between teachers' and students' perception of the same class, (3) using qualitative research methods, (4) evaluation of educational innovations, (5) determinants of classroom environments (gender, level, class size and others), (6) cross-national studies (Fraser, 2002). Among these, studies focusing on the association between students' outcomes and their understanding of the classroom psychosocial environment has been the strongest line of research (Fraser, 1998, 2002, 2012). That is to say, research studies conducted for assessing learning environments are mostly directed at students. A probable reason for this trend is that students' perception of their learning environment is found to affect their attitudes towards learning and boost achievement (El-Hilali et al., 2015; Pimparyon et al, 2000; Ramsden & Entwistle, 1981; Teh & Fraser, 1994). In support of consulting learners to gather information about learning environments, Fraser (2012) states that students encounter different learning settings and spend enough time in a class to form accurate judgements of the environment. That is, although students are not experts in the subject matter or methodology, they are very good judges of their own learning, and they can provide a valuable source of information in exploring a learning environment.

Instructional environments are systems of relationships between and among the components of that system, such as the learners, instructor, materials and technology (Simonson et al., 2015). Therefore, studies in the field focus on various factors. In his theory of educational productivity, Walberg (1981) asserts that educational productivity depends on several factors, which are prior achievement, student's age,

developmental level, ability and motivation, quality and quantity of instruction in addition to educationally stimulating classroom environment, home and peer group environments and mass media. A following larger-scale study found that motivation, attitude toward the teacher, amount of homework, class environment, and home environment were associated with educational outcomes and attitudes towards learning (Walberg et al., 1986). It is also confirmed in other studies that students achieved better if their learning environment was compatible with the environment they preferred to have (Fraser & Fisher, 1982,1983; Fraser, 1998). In short, studies consistently prove that student outcomes –both affective and cognitive- are strongly associated with the qualities of the learning environment (Fraser, 2007, 2015).

Due to its association with cognitive and affective outcomes, understanding what constitutes a learning environment and what distinguishes from one another is of utmost importance. In his seminal work, Moos (1974) categorized the factors used to differentiate between various social environments into 3 groups, which are the relationship, personal growth and system maintenance and change. Relationship dimension refers to support and help individuals tend to provide to each other in addition to the extent to which they are involved in the environment (Moos, 1974). Personal development aspect encompasses the opportunities for self-improvement and enhancement of self-esteem (Moos, 1974). That is, in addition to academic gains, having a sense of development on a personal level is essential in social organizations. Lastly, the dimension of system maintenance and change denotes the points, such as the clarity in expectations, orderliness, the extent of control given to learners and being responsive to change (Moos, 1974; Walker, 2003) In short, abovementioned 3 aspects

are argued to set the tone for organizational climate, i.e., the quality of a learning environment, according to Moos (1974). Moos' categorization is a grand scheme encompassing all kinds of social organizations. When we narrow down our scope and focus on educational organizations, we come across several other frameworks which aim to establish what components are crucial both in traditional and online learning environments. The Community of Inquiry model sets forth that "the creation of knowledge in an educational context is a personally reflective and collaborative process made possible by a community of learners" (Garrison & Anderson, 2003). In other words, learners go through a process of critical inquiry for meaningful learning both individually and as a group. In a community of inquiry, learning takes place thanks to the interaction of 3 vital elements, which are cognitive presence, social presence and teaching presence (Garrison et al., 1999). Cognitive presence refers to the extent to which members of the community can construct meaning via continued communication (Garrison et al., 1999). In other words, whether learners are cognitively active and employ higher-level thinking skills is an important aspect of a learning environment. Social presence is defined as the ability of learners to project their personality in the community and exist as a person (Garrison et al., 1999). Put another way, feeling socially present both for course related transactions and socialization purposes is essential for learning environments. Social presence acts as a support mechanism for cognitive presence as it facilitates critical thinking through interaction (Garrison et al., 1999). As the last piece of puzzle, teaching presence brings together all the components of a community of inquiry in a balanced and functional way (Garrison & Anderson, 2003). Teaching presence is defined as "the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing

personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes" (Anderson et al., 2001; Garrison et al., 1999). In other words, the instructor holds numerous responsibilities for a learning environment to be fulfilling and successful. All in all, although the community of inquiry model is more suitable for contexts which focus on higher-level thinking skills, it sets a meaningful basis for understanding the factors in online learning environments.

In another categorization, 4 major factors, which make up the learning environment and influence success in e-learning, are put forward. These are instructor, student, information technology and university support (Selim, 2007). More specifically, instructor's control of technology and attitude towards it, his/her teaching style, students' learning motivation, technical competence and interactive collaboration in e-learning were found to be crucial factors. In terms of technical and faculty support, course content and structure, ease of internet access, effective IT infrastructure and college support for online learning were found to have an essential role (Selim, 2007).

In her model for learning and teaching online, Salmon (2004) proposes a 5-stage model to develop online courses while maintaining success. Salmon's model suggests that learners' experiences be scaffolded in a structured process. As a result of her extensive research, Salmon (2004) indicates that in the first stage, students should be provided with easy access to online courses, and they should be motivated for the course. Second step requires online socialization to boost interactivity and to keep students motivated. The third step, named information exchange, stipulates that online courses be designed according to expected learning outcomes, objectives and necessary

interactions among learners. That is, the third step emphasizes the instructional design and course content. In the fourth step, to strengthen active learning, skills, such as critical thinking, judging and evaluating skills are recommended to be promoted. The last stage focuses on review and re-development of the course via feedback from the students. Students reflect on their experience in terms of networking, technology and their learning. Salmon (2004) states that reviewing can also be done individually after each stage. However, this model seems to be more suitable for courses focusing on higher-level thinking skills rather than the ones aiming to teach basic skills.

Influence of psychosocial learning environment to cognitive and affective outcomes has been proven across different nations, cultures, subject matters and educational levels (Fraser, 1998). Therefore, it is imperative to evaluate and reform learning environments regardless of the level and subject matter if achievement and positive attitudes by the students are desired. Despite the need to examine learning environments across all levels and subject matters, research in some fields is abundant and thorough while it is the opposite in some others. For instance, learning environment studies have flourished some countries and school subjects, such as science and mathematics; however, studies focusing on English classroom environment are still at the bottom of the ladder (Lim & Fraser, 2018). Walker (2003) emphasizes that changes in a learning environment strongly influence the learning outcomes, and changing the medium of instruction from face to face to online is a massive change in terms of environment. He similarly added that a new education paradigm should be taken on "when teaching and learning leaves the four walls of a classroom" (Walker, 2003, p. 2). Therefore, it is only natural that new instruments be

developed to understand online learning environments. Nearly 2 decades ago, it was reported that although more students became a part of distance education, no instruments were developed to examine the psychosocial environments in distance learning as perceived by the students (Jegede et al, 1995; Teh, 1999). Yet, such instruments increased in numbers since then. Below, some of the commonly used online learning environment scales are briefly introduced. Scales of the instruments are explained in the paragraphs only if the content is not self-explanatory by the name, and the scale is not examined further in the following sections.

Earliest example of learning environment inventories focusing on distance education settings, to our knowledge, is the Distance and Open Learning Environment Scale (DOLES) (Jegede et al., 1995). Two different universities were involved in the development of the instrument, and an elaborate 3-step procedure was followed in the development of the scales before the trial process. The scales of DOLES are interactivity, institutional support, technological support, teacher support, task orientation, negotiation, flexibility and ergonomics (Jegede et al., 1995). Task orientation refers to the degree to which activities are clear and well-organized. The extent to which learners and instructors justify their ideas and reflect on each other's opinions is termed as negotiation. Flexibility includes the aspects, such as place, time, pace, curriculum and assessment decisions. Lastly, ergonomics focuses on human performance and well-being regarding tasks, equipment and environment.

Another early example of online learning environment assessment tools is the Constructivist Online Learning Environment Survey (COLLES) (Taylor & Maor,

2000). This instrument was developed in the context of post-graduate professional development programs focusing on mathematics and science education teachers. This scale is administered in two phases, as actual and preferred forms, in order to compare students' actual experiences with the ones they prefer to have. As the name suggests, COLLES aims assess learning environment from the constructivist point of view. The survey measures student perceptions in terms of professional relevance, reflective thinking, interactivity, cognitive demand, affective support and interpretation of meaning.

Another online learning environment survey aimed at higher education contexts is Web-based Learning Environment Inventory (WEBLEI) (Chang & Fisher, 2001). This scale is also developed in and for higher education contexts and contain 4 main scales, which are emancipatory activities, co-participatory activities, qualia, information structure and design activities. Emancipatory activities scale focuses on whether students can reach learning activities at their own convenience, are offered with chances to efficiently use their time in their own pace and can decide when and how to learn. Co-participatory activities scale focuses on aspects, such as reflection, flexibility, quality, interaction, collaboration and feedback. Qualia refers to subjective qualities of the learning environment from an individual's perspective. Enjoyment, confidence, achievement, boredom and frustration are factors related to qualia. The last scale in WEBLEI focuses on information structure and design activities in the course. Content relevance and validity, balance, navigation, accuracy and affective aspects are all considered within the scope of the last scale.

Next instrument on online learning environments is called Technology-Rich Outcomes-Focused Learning Environment Inventory (TROFLEI) (Aldridge et al., 2004). Unlike the first two instruments, TROFLEI focuses on secondary education settings. Also, TROFLEI is designed at a setting where technology is just a facilitator rather than the medium of instruction. That is, a traditional education setting that utilizes e-mails, online forums and Internet in general is taken as the setting in the development of the instrument. TROFLEI's scales are related to student cohesiveness, teacher support, involvement, investigation, task orientation, cooperation, equity differentiation, computer usage and young adult ethos (Aldridge et al., 2004). Aldridge et al. (2004) explain the scope of these scales as below. Student cohesiveness refers to how much students know, help and support one another. Involvement denotes to what extent students are attentive and participative towards the course. Next, the extent to which students utilize their problem solving and inquiry skills are assessed via the investigation sub-scale. Task orientation sub-scale reveals the degree of importance of completing the course activities to reach the goals. Equity refers to whether students feel treated equally by the teacher. Based on students' ability, interest and learning, teachers might need to differentiate their methods to address learners' needs, and this aspect is assessed in the differentiation part. The last sub-scale, young adult ethos, focuses on to what degree teachers treat students as young adults and give them responsibilities.

Online Learning Environment Survey (OLES) is another instrument which assesses the difference between students' actual and preferred learning environments (Trinidad et al., 2005). This survey also aims to investigate the differences between male and

female learners' perceptions of the online learning environment as well as the differences between students' and teachers' perceptions. Students from both secondary and higher education constitute the focus group of this study, and seven sub-scales are developed as a result. These are teacher support, student autonomy, student interaction and collaboration, personal relevance, authentic learning, computer usage and asynchronicity (Trinidad et al., 2005). Asynchronicity focuses on to what degree asynchronous nature of the course promotes reflective thinking. As can be understood from the similarity of sub-scales with the ones in other instruments, focus areas of OLES are incorporated from pre-prepared instruments. To understand whether the learning environment affects student satisfaction, and enjoyment scale was adapted and placed into the instrument.

Another frequently cited and commonly used instrument is Distance Education Learning Environment Survey (DELES) (Walker & Fraser, 2005). This instrument was developed for tertiary level asynchronous distance education settings to investigate their psychosocial environment. DELES includes 6 scales which are instructor support, student interaction and collaboration, student autonomy, personal relevance and authentic learning (Walker & Fraser, 2005). Another scale was added to assess students' enjoyment of their distance learning experience and investigate associations with the environmental factors, if any.

Finally, Online Learning Environment Survey (OLLES) was developed to assess efficiency and effectiveness online learning environments based on the psychosocial atmosphere (Clayton, 2007). The sample participants with which the scale was

developed were all older than 24 years. OLLES contains 7 scales, each of which includes 7 items. These scales are titled computer competence, student collaboration, tutor support, material environment, information design and appeal, active learning and reflective thinking (Clayton, 2007). Computer competence is thought to be a crucial skill influencing students' perspective of the online learning environment. Being a logistical point, material environment refers to the extent to which software and hardware are sufficient and user-friendly. Active learning denotes the learning support and ongoing feedback students receive from the computer activities. The degree to which learning materials are clear, interesting and visually appealing is assessed via the information design and appeal scale. Lastly, reflective thinking scale focuses on the inclusion of reflective activities in the learning process and the students' enjoyment of it.

2.5.1 Interaction in Distance Education

Interaction is a vital component of educational experiences, both in distance and traditional contexts. Interaction is defined as "the transactions taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment, from people to objects to ideas" (Dewey, 1938, p. 43). Wagner defines interaction as the "reciprocal events that require at least two objects and two actions, and interaction occurs when these objects and events mutually influence each other." (1994, p. 8). In short, definitions of interaction focus on the role of environment in shaping learners' experiences. As mentioned below, many theories of education and psychology emphasize the role of interaction in learning.

Social cognitive learning theory puts forth that learning occurs when the individual, environment and behavior interacts in a social context (Bandura, 1986). That is, individuals acquire knowledge and behavior by engaging in activities, getting feedback and taking part in interactions with others (Bandura, 2001). It is observed that if interaction lacks among the parties of the learning experience, distance learners might feel isolated, frustrated and anxious (Mood, 1995). Therefore, course-relevant contact with peers and instructors is essential to maintain a learning environment that induces achievement and satisfaction in DE (Bernard et al., 2004). However, interaction is also one of the most problematic areas in online learning.

In addition to being a condition for learning to occur, interaction is necessary to keep the students at university. In his theory of social integration, Tinto (1975, 1987) explains that students' academic and social integration reinforces their commitment to the institution, and thus prevents dropouts. According to this theory, a lack of accord between the individual and his/her institution's intellectual climate and social systems is argued to result in voluntary dropouts at higher education levels. That is, both interaction among students and the instructor's efforts to integrate students into the academic system are crucial to keep student committed to their educational experience. As well as encouraging retention at universities, interaction offers many other benefits. Advantages of interactive learning can be listed as enhancing learner interest, increasing the level of cognitive processing, developing cooperation skills, promoting teacher involvement, integrating curriculum and enhancing learner-instructor collaboration (Baker-Albaugh, 1993). Similarly, Holmberg (1995) states the purposes of communication to be:

- To motivate students and increase their interests
- To facilitate learning by applying knowledge and skills
- To develop students' thinking via teacher's feedback
- To assess student progress

Thanks to the advantages it offers, interactivity supports achievement outcomes (Bernard et al., 2009). However, it is also noted that interaction does not magically improve education, and forcing it into a program can harm the educational quality instead of promoting it (Simonson et al., 2015). Therefore, quality of interaction is viewed to be superior to the quantity of it in promoting cognitive engagement and meaningfulness (Bernard et al., 2009). In brief, relevance and quality of interaction should be considered while integrating it into a program.

Interaction can take two forms in online education as formal and informal (Rhode, 2007) Formal interaction is integrated into the course design and is related to the course itself while informal interaction refers to the contact outside the course (Rhode, 2007). However, based on the parties involved in interaction, various types of it are suggested. These classifications mainly focus on formal interaction that occurs in distance education. Moore (1989) suggested three types of interaction observed in DE, which are learner - content interaction, learner - learner interaction, and learner – instructor interaction. Later, three more types were added to the literature as content-content, teacher-content and teacher-teacher (Anderson & Garrison, 1998). The recognition of more types of interaction is argued be a result of the transition from the 1st and 2nd generations of DE to the 3rd generation, where technological systems can provide a greater extent of interaction (Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010).

Providing students with high-quality and relevant interaction opportunities with instructors, content and learners is the ideal situation. Yet, it is argued that maintaining such a learning environment is costly and require unsustainably extensive amounts of time commitment from the students and teachers (Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010). At this point, Anderson's (2003) Interaction Equivalency Theorem offers a functional solution. Interaction Equivalency Theorem states that students can learn meaningfully and be satisfied as long as one of the three forms of Moore's interaction types is at a high level (Anderson, 2003). That is, if one of the learner-learner, learner-instructor and learner-content interaction is maintained at high levels, learning and satisfaction can be secured. In their extensive meta-analysis, Bernard et al., (2009) found that learner-content interaction had a distinguishing effect when combined with either learner-learner or learner-instructor interaction. In other words, combining learner-content interaction with either learner-learner or learner-instructor interaction is found to significantly increase achievement. A later study similarly found that learner-content interaction was the strongest predictor student satisfaction in online learning (Kuo et al., 2014). Although student-content interaction is found to have significant effects, this may change according to the context. Miyazoe and Anderson (2010) argue that mode of learning and subject orientation are the factors that need to be considered while deciding which interaction type to promote. To explain, whether a course is delivered face-to-face or online and whether the subject is skill or knowledge oriented determine the interaction type best suited for that setting. For instance, some consider online learning as having more potential for interaction as students have more time for reflection before responding, (Baglione & Nastanski, 2007). However, this is a debatable point of view due to limited or non-existent real-time interaction in DE;

therefore, further inquiry is needed. To sum up, interaction is a fundamental element of learning; therefore, online environments' potential for interaction should be exploited in appropriate amounts and types for a satisfactory DE experience.

2.5.1.1 Instructor Support and Competencies

There are two approaches to delivery in online learning as self-paced and instructor-led learning (FAO, 2021). Self-paced online learning is characterized by students' freedom to learn at their own pace, and it can be accompanied by social interaction and collaboration facilities. On the other hand, in instructor-led approach, learning is organized and managed by an instructor. Learners depend on the guidance and facilitation of a teacher in instructor-directed approach. Although self-paced courses might be useful for experienced online learners who are good at directing their own learning, instructors have a vital role for the learners whose experiences in the subject matter and in online learning are limited (FAO, 2021).

Keegan (1986) states that with transition from traditional learning to DE, the communication between learners and instructors disappear, and institutions should work to maintain this communication in distance learning to coordinate teaching and learning actions. In other words, although teaching and learning online removes the need for learners and instructors to be in the same location at the same time, the need for a facilitator does not disappear (Bates & Khasawneh, 2007; Paechter et al., 2010). For instance, due to the limited contact with peers and instructors in the distance learning environment, learners might feel lost, stressed and unmotivated. At this point,

instructors are helpful in guiding students to complete courses on time and ease their stress caused (Galusha, 1998). Moreover, instructors aid students in gaining motivation and facilitate learning (Bolliger & Martindale, 2004). In short, presence of a competent instructor who can guide the learners in a distance learning environment is essential.

Theory of transactional distance is useful to understand the relationship between learners and instructors in distance education. This theory argues that distance education is not only characterized by a geographic and/or temporal partition of learners and instructors (Moore, 1997). Transactional distance is the communicative and psychological distance that occurs between the learners and instructors (Moore, 1997). That is, when the transactional distance is large, it means that students and instructors are psychologically and communicationally distant from each other. As transactional distance is not dependent on geography or time, it can also be observed in face-to-face education (Moore, 1997), yet studies focus rather on DE contexts. Moore specifies three factors that influence the extent of transactional distance. These are program structure, instructional dialogue and learner autonomy. Structure refers to the course objectives, instructional strategies and evaluation methods (Moore, 1997). Whether these are flexible and can be adjusted according to learner needs determines the extent of transactional distance. Second factor, dialogue, refers to the educational interaction between learners and instructors and is stated to have a positive denotation (Moore, 1997). As mentioned previously, some courses are conducted without an instructor (FAO, 2021), and in some others, despite the presence of an instructor, the dialogue is limited, and this is argued to widen the transactional distance. Lastly,

whether learners are autonomous is argued to impact transactional distance. Moore (1997) explains that when learners can manage the educational process independently, they do not need a dialogic process as much as non-autonomous learners do, and they can function without a clearly defined structure. Therefore, the extent of the transactional distance does not pose a problem with truly autonomous learners. In brief, the theory of transactional distance offers 3 dimensions that need to be considered while planning the interaction between the learners and instructor.

When teaching with technology to students who learn at a distance, instructors need different competencies than that are required while teaching face-to-face (Simonson et al., 2015). Indeed, it is believed that instructors' acquiring new skills determines the success in online learning (Yuksel, 2009). Desired online instructor qualities and skills might change according to the learner profile, subject matter and instructional design. According to Webster and Hackley (1997), technological competence, teaching style and attitude and mindset of the instructors affect the success of online learning and learners' attitude. Another study found that students' judgment of their teachers' online teaching expertise and the support provided by the instructor predicted student achievement and satisfaction (Paechter et al., 2010).

Instructor support is a relative term and consists of various aspects. Feedback is one of the commonly mentioned points pertaining to instructor support. Feedback is a way for instructors to connect with the learners and convey an evaluation of their performance and suggest ways to improve (Muirhead, 2004). Feedback also allows students to monitor their progress and guide them towards reaching the course

objectives (Joiner et al., 2020). Study revealed that when teachers fail to provide timely and clear feedback and share instructions and messages, learners feel confused, anxious and frustrated (Hara & Kling, 2003). Research also found that provision of timely and useful feedback increased student perception of instructor effectiveness and led to higher levels of satisfaction from the online learning experience (Şahin, 2007; Thurmond et al., 2002; Young & Norgard, 2006). Also, students who were provided with timely and regular feedback by the instructor had higher learning expectations, reported better mastery and invested more time in learning with technology (Bates & Khasawneh, 2007).

Another essential role of online instructors is to establish their presence in the course (Shea et al., 2006). The concept of teaching presence is a critical component of the community of inquiry model, which has previously been explained. Teaching presence encompasses the actions of designing, facilitating and directing the educational process (Anderson et al., 2001). Garrison et al. (1999) argue that instructors can maintain the teaching presence by regularly communicating with learners, providing consistent feedback and modeling a critical discourse. Research shows that learners find it valuable when instructors are accessible (Şahin, 2007) and actively involved in the learning process (Dziuban et al., 2004; Young, 2006; Young & Norgard, 2006). Another study found that students in classes where learner-instructor interaction was high received higher grades than the ones in classes where interaction took place at a lower level (Jaggars et al., 2013). Additionally, tutors' personality, sincerity and making themselves known to the learners are found to be essential for satisfaction and success in online learning (Rosell-Aguilar; 2007; Thurmond, 2002). Lastly,

maintaining an effective communication with learners, such as responding quickly, is stated to be a distinguishing quality of supportive online instructors (Dziuban et al., 2004; Rosell-Aguilar, 2007; Choy et al., 2002).

In the online learning world, where most things are novel to the learners, students deal with many ambiguities. Therefore, instructors are expected to step in and make the process less intimidating and more manageable for the learners. Research shows that from the start of the course, learners want to know the course goals and objectives (Mood, 1995) and the requirements for success (Palmer & Holt, 2009). An organized learning environment where expectations are communicated clearly is found to be a priority for many learners (Youngblood et al., 2001). Therefore, instructors should allocate time and effort to ensure that all the learners are cognizant of what is expected of them.

2.5.1.2 Peer Relations

Interaction among learners is one of the noted forms of interaction that takes place in DE. (Moore, 1989). Learner-learner interaction provides students with the chance to collaborate on educational tasks, and thus supports learning (American Psychological Association [APA], 1997). In online learning, peer interaction takes place in several forms. Posting on the moodle, communicating via discussion forums and e-mails, participating in the break-out room activities in synchronous online lessons, group projects and informal interactions that occur outside the context of the class are a few examples. Interaction among learners is argued to enhance learning thanks to cognitive

elaboration, distributed cognition and peer cooperation (Abrami et al., 1995, as cited in Lou et al., 2006). That is, learners can engage deeper with the content, and they can have a chance to learn the points that they would not be able to learn by themselves if they interact with peers. In addition to stressed benefits of peer interaction on learning, research found that a striking majority of learners value peer interaction over other forms of interaction (O'Reilly & Newton, 2002). That is, students are in need of connecting with others even if they prefer to learn at a distance.

It is enounced that "most valuable activity in a classroom of any kind is the opportunity for students to work and interact together and to build and become a part of a community of scholars and practitioners" (Jonassen et al., 1995, p. 7). By collaborating on educational tasks and sharing their ideas with each other, it becomes possible for students to establish an online community (Song et al., 2004). However, online learning settings are criticized for lacking a sense of community (Song et al., 2004). Sense of community is defined as the feelings of belonging to a group and having social and emotional connections with other group members (Unger & Wandesman, 1985). Rovai (2002a) states vital elements of a sense of community to be: "mutual interdependence among members, connectedness, trust, interactivity, and shared values and goals" among the members of a group (p. 321). A shared sense of community among online learners connects them to one another as well as the instructor and content (Moore, 2014). That is, having a chance to express themselves and set out their personalities enable learners to feel as a member of their class, and lifts off the distance between them and the subject matter. The instrument developed by Rovai (2002a) for measuring the sense of community in asynchronous learning

settings included two dimensions, which are social connectedness and shared learning expectations by the learning parties. That is, the sense of community can be established when learners' contributions enhance the shared knowledge source, and social interactions lead to fostered spirit of community (Rovai, 2004). To put it in other words, learners should engage both academically and socially with each other for a sense of community to emerge.

Research found that students who felt a strong connection to other learners have higher levels of satisfaction in DE (Rovai, 2003). Similarly, students who interacted more with their peers online were found to attain higher levels of achievement (Lai et al., 2019). Another study showed that the stronger students perceived the sense of community in their online learning context, the higher they perceived their learning (Rovai, 2002b). That is, a stronger sense of community boosted both perceived and actual achievement of learners. In sum, enhanced peer interaction and a sense of community positively influence both achievement and learner satisfaction and prevent feelings of isolation, which is a commonly encountered problem in DE (De Simone et al., 2001; Lai et al., 2019; Rovai, 2002b; Rovai, 2003). It should be noted that studies mentioned above were conducted, to a large extent, in asynchronous learning settings. Asynchronous communication enables students to work at different times and places. This situation causes some concerns and criticism as students feel that simultaneous sharing of ideas and knowledge is missing (Britt, 2006). On the other hand, synchronous communication via audio-visual media is argued to enable a clear and timely transfer of messages unlike the asynchronous mode (Themeli & Bougia, 2016).

Walker and Kelly (2007) found that undergraduate students were more eager to share their work with other learners compared to graduate students. Additionally, learner-learner interaction is emphasized to be valued more by undergraduate students (Croxton et al., 2014). It is argued that the reason for this trend can be traced to the other responsibilities that occupy graduate learners' time (Tello, 2007). Tello (2007) states that adult learners who have work, family and other school responsibilities prefer asynchronous forms of interaction, such as the discussion forums. Therefore, while designing an online course, it is important to be aware of the student profile before deciding which type of interaction to capitalize on. An online course with intense learner-learner interaction may not yield the expected positive achievement outcomes and satisfaction unless it is well-suited to learner needs.

2.5.2. Course Content

Learners' interaction with content is marked as one of the three important types of interaction along with learner-learner and learner-instructor interaction (Moore, 1989). Moore (1989) qualifies learner-content interaction as the "defining characteristic of education" and states that students' knowledge and cognitive structures are shaped by their interaction with the content (p. 1). Similarly, others also express that learner-content interaction forms the foundation of any educational experience as it renders learning possible (Tuovinen, 2000; Vrasidas, 2000). In line with these views, course quality and design are found have a big role in determining learners' satisfaction from the online learning experience (Martin-Rodriguez et al., 2015; Song et al., 2004; Sun et al., 2008), and course content is found to stand as the most crucial element shaping

learners' perception of the online course quality (Peltier et al., 2007). Furthermore, increase in the time spent on interacting with the content is found to positively affect learner success (Zimmerman, 2012). Despite its importance, learners' interaction with the content has not been researched sufficiently (Xiao, 2017; Zimmerman, 2012).

Ertmer et al. (2011) state that student-content interaction takes place when learners do the course readings, contact with multimedia materials, complete the course assignments and take part in online course discussions. Keaton and Gilbert (2020) define learner-content interaction as the internal discussion students have when they come across with course-related information during their learning experience. That is, any aspect of an online course that has an informative function and requires learners to do individual cognitive processing can be counted as a part of the content. In a word, the scope of content is very broad. In their study, Peltier et al. (2007) concluded that learners' perceptions of the course content were influenced by factors, such as learner-learner interaction, learner-instructor interaction, course delivery technology, instructor support and course structure. In short, learners' evaluation of the course content does not stand in isolation from the other elements that encircle it.

Studies focusing on course content tackle various aspects of it based on their program structure and nature of the subject matter. For instance, it is important for some courses to focus on enabling learners to use their skills in real life. Applied skills are crucial to be addressed in teacher training, marketing and nursing courses. However, for theoretical subjects, such as mathematics and physics, it is important that learners have access to quality materials and lectures which facilitate understanding. To give another

example, in the field of social sciences, discussions are essential for learners to grasp the concepts and develop an understanding of the related issues. Similarly, teaching a foreign language is viewed to be different from teaching other subjects (Borg, 2006). Jones and Young (2006) state that socialization, collaboration and active participation are the key areas that need to be emphasized while teaching a foreign language online. Therefore, online language courses should pay attention to promoting the activities that require learners to work together.

Peltier et al. (2007) investigated the relationship among the different dimensions that influence how learners perceive the course quality in a business school. Course content was found to be the single most influential factor, and it included aspects, such as the quality of assignments, coverage of the subject area, relevance and currency of the content, range of challenges and the promotion of problem-solving and applied skills (Peltier et al., 2007). Another study established that the most influential factor explaining learner satisfaction included items related to course development and evaluation (Martin-Rodriguez, 2015). More specifically, this dimension focused on the alignment between learners' expectations and course content as well as the cohesion between course objectives and content (Martin-Rodriguez, 2015). Furthermore, whether students deemed the information in the course sufficient was included as a point of inquiry in this study. In support of the consistence between course objectives, learner expectations and course content, Ralston-Berg et al. (2015) found that the inclusion of relevant, appropriate and objective-oriented media increases the quality of online courses as perceived by the students. In other words, when learners interact with the content, they should have a clear idea of why they are

doing what they are doing. On a deeper look into the content quality, Özkan & Köseler (2009) revealed that learners judge the quality by whether content is up-to-date and ample, lectures and presentations are easy to understand, and illustrations are clear.

Regarding the course design, clarity is one of the commonly highlighted issues. It is argued that an online program should clearly establish its expectations and provide guidelines so that students know how to participate in the course and reach the learning goals (Grant & Thornton, 2007, Kim et al., 2014). To that end, details of assignments, grading rubrics and policy and other course requirements should be shared with the students in a timely and accessible manner. Another important aspect related to content is addressing the needs of different learners by maintaining variety in course activities offering choices (Ausburn, 2004). When learners can choose from different topics or activities that serve the same purpose, their learning needs can be better addressed, and they can find a chance to engage deeper with the content. Lastly, authentic course activities are recommended to be used as they are comparable to real life experiences and enable learners to incorporate their own beliefs and values, which promotes effective learning (Gedik et al., 2013). For instance, in a language course, learners can be provided with role-play activities which they are likely to come across in real life. Thus, they can feel that what they are learning is relevant and beneficial for them. To conclude, there are many points to consider while developing online course activities and materials. Most of these aspects apply to both traditional and online education, yet it is essential that content suitable for online education be planned, developed and aptly integrated into the program so that the content delivery issues resulting from the

removal of physical and temporal togetherness of learners and instructors can be eliminated.

2.5.3 Technical Support

Distance education necessitates the use of mediatory devices, such as print, electronic or others, that will enable the educational transactions (Moore, 1973). These devices serve as a bridge between the content, instructors and learners. In online learning, computers, the Internet and software systems have the central role as the media of instruction. Computers have been used for language learning purposes since 1960s (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). However, computers have changed substantially since then, and the addition of new technologies and updates transformed the face of online learning compared to mid-90s.

Following, Moore's (1989) tripartite classification of the forms of interaction, Hillman et al. (1994) offered a fourth type, which is called the learner-interface interaction. Interface is the "point or means of interaction between the learner, his or her content, instructor and fellow learners" (Hillman et al., 1994, p. 32). Learner-interface interaction is defined as the "process of manipulating tools to accomplish a task" (Hillman et al., 1994, p. 34). To be able to manipulate the pertinent tools, online learners and instructors need to possess certain knowledge and skills.

Issues students face related to online technologies in distance education are multifold. Among these, insufficient technical support, impractical and problematic teaching platform and poor stability are commonly reported issues (Chang & Fang, 2020;

Galusha, 1998). Both learners and instructors suffer when necessary technical information, tools and skills are not procured prior to the commencement of the online learning experience. It is argued that when learners do not have the necessary skills to use communicate via the technological medium spend their valuable time trying to figure out this system rather than learning the subject matter, which is an ineffective use of resources (Hillman et al., 1994). Therefore, learners should acquire the skills needed to use the technological media before interacting with the instructors, content and other students (Hillman et al., 1994). In other words, before learners start an online course, they should have the digital literacy to interact through the specific platforms used in their institution.

Even if a learner is capable of interacting online by using necessary tools and software, a glitch in hardware, software or the Internet brings the educational process to a temporary yet disappointing halt. When learners experience problems related to access to technology and prerequisite technical knowledge, their overall satisfaction from the online course is found to decrease (Hara & Kling, 2003). Moreover, Selim (2007) states that for learners' success and adoption of online learning, it is critical that institutions establish a rich and reliable infrastructure with adequate resources. In addition, having reliable equipment and being familiar with the relevant technology are necessary for learner success in online learning (Belanger & Jordan, 2000). Research found that students who were trained in how to use the online systems expected higher outcomes, perceived better mastery and had higher self-efficacy beliefs compared to the students who were not trained (Bates & Khasawneh, 2007). In brief, students who successfully use the technical media can reach the content, submit

assignments, take the online exams, interact with others and solve the minor technical problems themselves easily without feeling overwhelmed, and this level of comfort is expected to positively influence learners' performance as well as perception of the distance learning experience.

In order to avoid technical problems, another point that should be considered is having a practical and simple interface for the course. User-friendliness and design of the course interface are found to be crucial elements of learner satisfaction in online learning (Özkan & Köseler, 2009). It is argued that information on course websites should be displayed in a logical sequence, and the design should be consistent and engaging (Belanger & Jordan, 2000). Ally (2008) explains that course interface should enable learners to make sense of the information provided. Therefore, crowding the website with information in an unorganized manner should also be avoided (Harrison, 1999). All in all, in addition to providing technical support, institutions should aim at solving problems before they arise by maintaining the ease of use and instructing the digital skills when necessary.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter provides information related to the design, setting and participants of the study as well as the instrumentation, data collection, data analysis and the limitations of the study.

3.2 Research Design

In the conduct of this study, a survey developed by the researcher was administered to understand student experiences and satisfaction with regard to predetermined areas. Survey research method was used as it makes it possible to reach large groups of people. Upon the analysis of the survey data, multiple open-ended interview questions were formed in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the students' experiences along with their reasons. Thus, this thesis study embraces a mixed method research design. Mixed methods research is defined as the studies which collect, analyze and interpret both quantitative and qualitative data in the same study or a group of research studies which investigate the same phenomena (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). Qualitative data can be of use in supplementing, validating or illuminating the quantitative data which is collected from the same setting (Miles et al., 2014). Similarly, the role of the qualitative data in this study is supplementary, and it aims to help illuminate student experiences in more detail. Tobin and Fraser (1998) state that

significant success in the field of learning environment has been achieved owing to combining quantitative and qualitative methods.

Depending on the sequence of quantitative and qualitative data collection steps and the purpose of using them, mixed methods design is grouped into 6 categories (Creswell et al., 2003). Among these, this study falls into the category of sequential explanatory design as the quantitative data collection stage was followed by the qualitative one, and the latter one aimed to help the explanation and interpretation of data collected through the former one. In this sense, the aim of the second data collection stage was to complement our understanding of student experiences in a broader perspective. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) state that using qualitative and quantitative methods together provide a better insight into the research area than using only one of the two methods. Similarly, Jick (1979) argues that using mixed methods design enables researchers to benefit from the strengths of different design methods while minimizing their limitations. Accordingly, one-on-one interviews with students aimed procure personal opinions of students who are from different backgrounds and language levels. The semi-structured and open-ended interview questions had the potential to uncover dynamics which might have been missed in the survey study.

Another one of the most noted benefits of using multiple methods, in addition to many others, is mentioned to be triangulation (Greene et al., 1989; Jick, 1979). Triangulation is defined as using mixed methods with balancing biases in order to enhance the validity of the research (Greene et al., 1989). Thus, although the quantitative analysis

of the survey data is the focus of this study, interviews are built into the study both to intensify the inquiry and to look at student experiences from different standpoints.

3.3 Setting of the Study

This study is conducted at an English preparatory school of a state university located in Turkey. For majority of the students, it is their first year at the university, and they are learning the language since the instruction in their departments are fully or partially (30%) English-medium. Students who learn English in the same class come from different faculties, such as engineering, medicine, business administration, architecture, law, political science and others. The preparatory school aims to equip students with the necessary English language skills in reading, listening, speaking and writing so that they can continue their education in their departments. Students have to pass a proficiency exam before they can start their departments.

The school had prior experience with distance learning which can be said to have facilitated the sudden transition to online learning as a whole school. Starting with the 2020-2021 academic year, the curriculum of the English preparatory school was revised and adjusted to fit the conditions of the online learning process. For instance, the number of online synchronous lesson was set as 12 for all levels. Students were expected to complement this program with an 8-hour weekly individual study plan, which was provided to them in the form of a syllabus. In pre-Corona times, students had to attend 20-25 lessons every week based on their language levels. Thus, it can be said that a program was conducted during COVID-19 so that students could still learn

the expected set of skills without being exposed to screen too much. As students were expected to direct their studies at home, there was a heightened reliance on student autonomy. To help students be independent learners, the school provided additional informative sessions and workshops based on voluntary participation throughout the whole COVID-19 imposed distance education process.

Coursebooks that were used before the emergence of COVID-19 were at use during the DE period, and students were expected to have these materials for both the synchronous and asynchronous parts of their courses. In addition to the coursebooks, instructors prepared videos and written materials to support the students' language development in the asynchronous learning hours. These materials were shared with the students through the learning management system. Face-to-face online lessons were conducted through an online videoconferencing tool named Microsoft Teams. This system holds the properties most videoconferencing tools do, such as screen sharing, file sharing, writing on a whiteboard and the breakout rooms, which facilitate group work. Another system that is used commonly during the online learning period was a Moodle platform specifically designed for the university. Moodle is an acronym for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment and allows students to reach the files needed for schoolwork, such as the syllabi, assignments and extra learning materials. In addition, students can follow the course-related announcements, submit homework, take quizzes and exams on this system. Lastly, class size in online education was 20-25 in each course, which is similar to the numbers in traditional education.

3.4 Participants

The participants of this study were 226 English preparatory school students studying in the target school. As the pilot study showed that the survey response rates were quite low, a purposive sampling, which could have decreased the participant numbers even further, was avoided in the main study. All the students registered in the preparatory school were sent e-mails to take part in the study, and their participation was on voluntary basis. That is, convenience sampling method was employed in this research. The sampling ratio of the survey was found to be 16.38%.

Information regarding the demographics of the students were obtained with a questionnaire which was placed at the beginning of the survey. Of the students who filled out the survey, 136 (60.2%) was female, and 90 (39.8%) was male. The ages of the students ranged between 17 and 44, and the densest age population was between the ages of 18 and 21 (93.9%). The mean age of the 226 students was found to be 19.61. In terms of the last graduated education level, 209 students (92.5%) were high school graduates, 10 of them (4.4%) were bachelor's degree graduates and 4 of them (1.8%) were associate degree graduates. The remaining 3 participants (1.3%) marked the "other" option. Participants were found to be majoring in various faculties. For instance, 69 (30.5%) were Engineering and Natural Sciences students, 36 of them (15.9%) were Business School students, 33 of them (14.6%) were the students of the Faculty of Law, 33 of them (14.6%) were Political Sciences students, 28 of them (%12.4) were students at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, 15 of them (6.6%) were Architecture students, 5 (2.2%) were Medical Faculty students, and

another group of 5 (2.2%) were Aeronautics and Space Sciences students. One of the remaining 2 students was a master student at the Institute of Social Sciences, and the other one mistakenly wrote “School of Foreign Languages” as the faculty. As for the working statuses of the students, 210 of them (92.9%) stated to be not working, 14 of them (6.2%) stated to be working part-time and 2 (0.9%) of them stated to be working full-time. The demographic information of the participants can be seen in table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Demographic Information of the Participants

		f	%
Gender	Female	136	60.2
	Male	90	39.8
	Total	226	100
Age	17	2	.9
	18	42	18.6
	19	86	38.1
	20	70	31.0
	21	14	6.2
	22 and above	12	5.3
	Total	226	100
Graduation Status	High School	209	92.5
	Associate Degree	4	1.8
	Bachelor’s degree	10	4.4
	Other	3	1.3
	Total	226	100
Faculty	Engineering and Natural Sciences	69	30.5
	Business School	36	15.9
	Law	33	14.6
	Political Sciences	33	14.6
	Humanities and Social Sciences	28	12.4
	Architecture	15	6.6
	Medicine	5	2.2
	Aeronautics and Space Engineering	5	2.2
	Institute of Social Sciences	1	.4
	Total	225	99.6
Working Status	Not Working	210	92.9
	Working Part-time	14	6.2
	Working Full-time	2	.9
	Total	226	100
TOTAL		226	100

The language level in which the students started the preparatory school is another feature which was investigated in the questionnaire. Of all the participants, 87 (38.5%) started at the beginner level, 100 (44.2%) started the school at the elementary level, 20 (8.8%) started at the pre-intermediate level, and lastly 19 (8.4%) started at the intermediate level. Beginner and elementary level starters make up the majority of the preparatory school student population; therefore, the change in the percentages of higher and lower language levels is representative of the population characteristics. Lastly, students were asked about their previous online learning experiences, and 149 of them (65.9%) stated not to have received online education previously while 77 students (34.1%) experienced online learning before. Majority of the experienced online learners stated to have received online education in the last year of high school due to COVID-19 school closures.

In the qualitative data collection stage, 35 students were invited via e-mails to take part in the interviews. 13 of these students responded positively, and they were interviewed individually. These 35 students were selected based on the gender and language level criteria to be representative of the sample. Of the 13 interviewees, 7 were female and 6 were male. As for the language levels, 5 of them started at the beginner, 4 of them started at the elementary, 2 of them started at the pre-intermediate and another 2 of them started at the intermediate level. In terms of the employment status, 1 of the interviewees stated to be working part-time, and the remaining 12 stated not to be working. Lastly, in terms of previous online learning experience, 11 interviewees stated having prior OL experience while 2 of them indicated not having such an experience.

3.5 Instrumentation

For this study, a scale named Student Experiences and Satisfaction in Online Learning (SESOL) was developed by the researcher. In order to delineate the framework of the study, the literature on student experiences and learning environments was reviewed, and it was seen that studies focus on different aspects of distance learning, such as student autonomy, personal relevance of content, authenticity of learning, teacher support, interactivity, peer relations, computer competence, institutional support, course structure, flexibility and others (Aldridge et al., 2004; Chang & Fisher, 2001, Clayton; 2007; Jegede, Fraser & Curtin, 1995; Taylor & Maor, 2000; Trinidad et al., 2005; Walker, 2003). The review of previously used instruments showed that these surveys were not fit to be directly used in the context of this study. Furthermore, many of the abovementioned studies were not available online, so their content and suitability could not be checked. Therefore, the development of a new instrument focusing on the relevant areas with appropriate items for the target universe of this study was needed. Thus, a survey focusing on the areas of (1) course activities and materials, (2) technical support, (3) instructor support, (4) peer relations and (5) satisfaction was created. As explained in the literature review, course content can have multiple meanings; therefore, for clarity of meaning, the title "course activities and materials" is chosen to be used in this study instead of "course content". General satisfaction scale was included in order to judge its association with the other factors influencing the distance learning process.

The items were presented in a 5-point Likert scale format (1: Strongly Disagree to 5: Strongly Agree). In addition, at the beginning of the survey, a 20-item questionnaire was placed in order to collect information about participant demographics and distance education experiences. The nature of DE-related questions placed in this part was not suitable to be formatted as 5-point Likert scale items. Therefore, they were presented in a different part of the survey. These items were related to students' previous DE experiences, suitability of their home environment for distance learning, passing grades, nature of communication with their peers and others. Lastly, 2 open-ended questions, which ask about students' likes and dislikes pertaining to their distance education experiences, were included. These questions were aimed at revealing the points that influence students' DE experiences but could have possibly been overlooked by the researcher. Later, positive and negative aspects of distance language learning experience were further examined with the questions asked in the interviews.

In order to ensure the face and content validity, the initial form of the survey was sent to 5 instructors, who were working at the preparatory school and 1 professor in the field of education who was working at another university. Upon their feedback, changes were made before administering the pilot study. A 42-item Likert scale emerged at the end of the first phase of scale development. The survey was developed and administered in Turkish to make sure that students understood the questions correctly. Students were informed before taking the survey that the study aimed to collect data only from the Turkish-speaking students. Before, putting the survey at use with the pilot study, 3 students were contacted for the final check. Students were kindly asked to take the survey and report how much time it took to complete the survey,

whether there were any disturbing questions and whether the instructions and items were easily understandable. No problems were reported, and the instrument was finally ready for the pilot study.

3.5.1 Pilot Study

Conducting a pilot study is crucial in enhancing the efficiency and quality of the main study (In, 2017). As the data collection instrument was developed by the researcher, and was not tested in any other study previously, a need to conduct a pilot study arose. The pilot study was aimed at explaining the factor structure of the scale and determining the internal consistencies of the sub-scales. After making sure that there were no visible issues with the survey, the students were contacted to participate in the pilot study. As it was not possible to contact the students face to face, they were reached via messages through the learning management system. Although many students were contacted this way, it was observed that the response rates were low. Therefore, nearly 15 instructors were contacted to disseminate the survey in their classes. Combining these 2 strategies proved useful, and 202 responses were collected over the span of two weeks.

Of the pilot study participants, 118 (58.4%) were female, and 84 (41.6%) were male. Ages of the participants ranged between 18 and 32, and 182 participants (90%) were between the ages of 18-20. As for the last graduated education level, 193 (95.5%) of the students stated to be high school graduates. Remaining 9 students (4.5%) were either bachelor or associate degree graduates. For the employment status, 186 students

(92.1%) stated to be not working while 13 students (6.4%) stated to be working part-time, and 3 students (1.5%) were working full-time. The number of the students according to their starting language level was 78 (38.6%) for beginner, 94 (46.5%) for elementary, 20 (9.9%) for pre-intermediate and 10 (5.5%) for intermediate level. Lastly, 152 students (75.2%) reported not having any distance learning experience previously while 50 students (24.8%) stated to have experienced online learning before. A question regarding their faculties were not asked in the pilot study and was later added in the main study for analysis purposes. It can be said that in terms of gender, densest age range, last graduated education level and employment status and the starting language level, the ratios in the pilot study were substantially similar to the main study. Following the data collection in the pilot study, an exploratory factor analysis, whose details are explained below, was conducted.

3.5.2 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

In order to reveal the underlying themes that formed student experiences and to ensure that all items meaningfully contribute to the study, an EFA was administered for the 42 items in the pilot study. Before delving into the details of the analysis, the assumptions of EFA were checked. KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy was found .93, which is qualified as "marvelous" to conduct the analysis (Kaiser & Rice, 1974). Bartlett's test of sphericity was checked and found appropriate for the factorability of the correlation matrix (BTS value= 6955,926, $p < 0.001$) (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The assumption of normality was checked with skewness, kurtosis, Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests, histograms, Q-Q plots, and it was observed that the

normality assumption was slightly violated according to the histograms and Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests; however, skewness and kurtosis levels of all the items were between +3 and -3. Nevertheless, it is recommended not to use skewness and kurtosis values when the sample size is large (Field, 2009, p. 139). Therefore, data were treated as distributed non-normally. In cases where the normal distribution of data is not provided, using principal factors methods is recommended as they do not require assumptions concerning the distribution of data (Fabrigar et al., 1999). Therefore, Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) was chosen as the extraction method. Factor correlation matrix (See Table 3.2) exhibited values greater than .32, which suggests that factors are correlated entailing the use of oblique rotation methods (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Thus, rotation with promax was chosen in order to avoid the negative values extracted by the direct oblimin method.

Table 3.2

Factor Correlation Matrix

Factor	1	2	3	4	5
1	1.00	.42	.63	.62	.37
2	.42	1.00	.44	.46	.46
3	.63	.44	1.00	.44	.57
4	.62	.46	.44	1.00	.41
5	.37	.46	.57	.41	1.00

As a result of the factor analysis of 42 items, 6 factors were extracted accounting for 63.54% of the total variance. In order to increase the variance explained and to have a parsimonious instrument, the items with communalities lower than .350 were eliminated. The communality values of the eliminated items were .286 (item 5), .303 (item 9) and .329 (item 15), respectively (See Appendices B and C). Item 42, which

was expected to measure overall satisfaction, had a lower communality value (.49) compared to the other items measuring overall satisfaction. When examined closely, it was observed that this item's thematic relation to satisfaction was rather vague. Therefore, item 42 was also removed. Stevens (2002) suggests interpreting items whose factor loadings exceed .4. Therefore, item 4, item 8 and item 18 were also excluded from the questionnaire as they did not load on any factors on the pattern matrix when the coefficients lower than .4 were suppressed. After the removal of the abovementioned 7 items, 6 factors were extracted, which is one factor more than what was expected to be obtained. Divergence from the initially envisioned form of the questionnaire took place as the items related to the "technical support" were divided into 2 separate factors. When examined closely, it was seen that one group of the factors were related to "the ease of access to the online systems and the help provided when needed" while the second set of items were related to "whether students use or can use the Moodle". As students are obliged to use the online systems for exams and homework, asking questions regarding whether they utilize these might prove irrelevant and might have changed the factor structure of the instrument. Since the items related to students' use of the online systems are found irrelevant considering the purpose of the study, items 14, 16 and 17 were removed, as well.

Having encountered items that thematically diverged from what is aimed to be investigated, all the items were qualitatively evaluated again to make sure that all of them contributed to the purpose of the study. The items that were excluded for thematical reasons were marked as "incompatible" in the EFA Analysis Table (Appendix B). Item 27 was removed on the grounds that it measures students'

judgment of the instructor's digital skills rather than whether the instructor showed support. Item 24 was taken out as it was similar in meaning to item 28, which renders it redundant. Item 26 was taken out as it is similar to item 25, and it was thought that instructors can be supportive without providing additional materials as the program itself contains enough resources as it is. Items 30 and 36 were removed as they had factor loadings on all 5 factors which were above .4. Items 30 and 36, which had loadings on 5 factors, were marked as cross-loading on the EFA Examination Table (Appendix B). Although there were other items which had loadings on 4 or 5 factors, further removal of any items resulted in disruption of the factor structure. After a qualitative analysis, these other items were found to be thematically related to the sub-scales they belonged to. Therefore, no further item deletions were made on that basis. Lastly, the correlation matrix was examined and item 40, which had a significance value of over .05 in the correlation matrix, was dismissed to avoid singularity as suggested by Field (2000). After removing the abovementioned items, the determinant of the correlation matrix was examined, and it was found to be 1.52x10-10, which is below the recommended level of 0.00001 (Field, 2009). This result caused a concern for multicollinearity of the data. Hair et al. (2010) argues that the multicollinearity of the data is wanted to a certain extent as the aim is to reveal interrelated sets of items. Yet, the correlation matrix was examined for values greater than .9 and none was observed. Field (2009) argues that multicollinearity is not a concern for Principal Component Analysis (PCA) unlike PAF, which was used for this dataset. Contrary to what Fabrigar et al., (1999) argues regarding the use of PAF with non-normal data, it is also stated in the literature that multivariate or univariate normality is not an assumption of neither PCA nor PAF. (Pituch & Stevens, 2016, p. 363). Therefore, EFA

was undertaken again by using PCA, and the outcomes regarding the extracted factors and the items which loaded on these factors were the same as in PAF. Thus, a decision was made to continue with the results of the EFA. Using PCA increased total variance explained from 69.35 to 75.11. Lastly, the number of nonredundant residuals greater than .05 were checked from the reproduced correlations table and found to be 15%, which is below the critical threshold of 50% (Field, 2009, p. 662). As can be seen in the pattern matrix (See Table 3.3), factor loadings of all the items exceed the cut-off value of 0.5, which suggests that unidimensionality of the sub-scales are secured (Hair et al., 2010). In conclusion, EFA of the pilot study data resulted in 5 factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. 5 dimensions of SESOL contain 26 variables and can be delineated as shown below (See Appendix C for the full final version in Turkish and Appendix D for the English version):

1. Instructor Support (8 items): Support provided by the instructor, such as being available, being timely in responding, giving timely and clear feedback on students' work, conveying the expectations and creating an environment conducive to learning.
2. Peer Relations (6 items): Nature of communication among the classmates and their sense of being part of a classroom.
3. Course Activities and Materials (5 items): Students' perception of the usefulness and sufficiency of the course activities and materials.
4. Technical Support (4 items): Support provided to access the online systems and in cases of problems. Convenience of using the online platforms, such as the videoconferencing tool and the Moodle is also investigated with this sub-scale.

5. General Satisfaction (3 items). Overall satisfaction of the students with their online learning experience at the preparatory school.

Table 3.3

EFA Pattern Matrix for the SESOL Items

	Instructor Support	Peer Relations	Course Act. & Mat.	Online Systems	General Satisfaction
20. The instructor answers my questions in a timely manner.	.96				
21. The instructor's answers are enough to solve my problems.	.92				
23. The feedback my instructor gives for my homework is clear and informative.	.88				
22. The instructor gives feedback to my homework in a timely manner.	.80				
19. I can reach the instructor when I have an issue.	.71				
29 The instructor clearly explains what I need to do within the scope of the lesson.	.70				
25. The instructor gives me advice on how to improve my language skills.	.70				
28. The instructor provides a comfortable environment during the live lessons where I can express myself.	.65				
35. I think I have good relations with my classmates.		.84			
33. I think I have many things in common with my classmates.		.84			
32. My classmates answer my questions.		.83			
31. My classmates help me when I need.		.83			
34. My classmates are willing to help one another.		.81			
37. I think I can trust my classmates		.73			
3. In the online lessons, there were activities which improved my language skills.			.88		
2. Resources used in the lessons facilitated my learning.			.82		
1. Various resources, such as slides additional exercises, videos, games, websites and others were used in the online lessons.			.73		
6. The homework was sufficient in quantity.			.60		
7. The homework I was assigned helped me improve my English.			.58		
11. The information about the use of online platforms was clear and understandable.				.88	
10. Necessary information about the use of online platforms was provided.				.82	
12. It was easy to use the online platforms.				.72	

Table 3.3 (continued)

13. When I experienced a problem while using the online platforms, I could get help.	.58	
39. I like learning with distance education.		.90
41. Learning a language from a distance offers me many opportunities.		.78
38. I am satisfied with my distance learning experience at the English preparatory school.		.75

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring. Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization.[a]
a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

Reliability of the factors were checked by using Cronbach's alpha, and the results of the reliability tests can be seen in Table 3.4. Inter-item correlations of the variables were checked for each factor, and it was found that all values are greater than .50 and lower than .90, which shows that the instrument is considerably reliable.

Table 3.4

Cronbach's Alpha Values of the Factors in the Pilot Study

Factor	Number of items	Reliability coefficient
1. Instructor Support	8	.94
2. Peer Relations	6	.93
3. Course Activities and Materials	5	.90
4. Online Systems	4	.87
5. General Satisfaction	3	.88

3.5.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

In order to confirm the component structure of the questionnaire, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted by using the statistical software named Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) version 24 (Arbuckle, 2016). The 26-item questionnaire, which was obtained from the EFA, was applied again in the same school, with a different group of students. 226 valid responses were received in the second phase of

the data collection to be used in the CFA and in the analysis of the main study. Maximum likelihood was selected as the estimation method. One of the assumptions of this method is the normal distribution of the data. Thus, all 26 items were individually tested for normality, and it was observed that Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk test results for all items were significant ($p < .05$) which led us to reject the assumption of normal distribution. Then, skewness and kurtosis values were checked. Although there are several opinions on the cut-off value, Hair et al. (2010) and Byrne (2010) agree that to ensure normal distribution, skewness value should be within +2 and –2, and kurtosis value should be within the boundaries of +7 and -7. When checked, it was observed that skewness and kurtosis indices of all the items were within these threshold values. Thus, the assumption of normality was accepted based on the skewness and kurtosis values. It is stated that data obtained from Likert scales are usually skewed towards one side, which is confirmed by our findings of the significance value (Barnes et al., 2001). However, Barnes et al. (2001) also added that minor violation of the assumption of normality does not indicate that data cannot go through procedures such as the maximum likelihood method. Similarly, Hair et al. (2019) argue that large sample size, which is 226 in this study, lessens the negative impact of nonnormal data distribution on the analysis. Furthermore, Norman (2010) contend that parametric tests can be used with data that are not normally distributed as parametric tests are found to be robust in cases of violations of normality. Therefore, it was decided to continue with the CFA and the following descriptive and inferential analyses.

Brown (2015) divides the fit indices used for CFA into 3 groups and recommends employing at least one index from each group in the report. In line with this, several goodness-of-indices were used in order to assess the model fit of the data. These are Comparative Fit Index (CFI; Bentler, 1990), Normed Fit Index (NFI; Bentler & Bonett, 1980), Non-normed Fit Index (NNFI; Bentler, 1990), Root Mean Square Error Approximation (RMSEA; Steiger & Lind, 1980), Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR) and Relative Chi-Square (CMIN/DF). Initially, the calculation on AMOS was conducted without allowing any error covariances, and it was observed that many of the fit indices failed to meet the expected criteria; therefore, error covariances between items 1 and 2, 4 and 5, 9 and 10, 13 and 14, 11 and 14, 18 and 19, and lastly 22 and 23 were allowed. Considering that the items whose error terms were correlated belong to the same factors, this decision was regarded allowable.

For the data to be a close fit to the hypothesized model, CFI, NFI and NNFI values are suggested to be above .95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). However, for CFI and NFI, values above .90 are also stated to be acceptable (Bentler & Bonnet, 1980; Bentler, 1990; Hu & Bentler, 1995; Kline, 1998). Among the fit indices used in this study CFI, NNFI and RMSEA allow the correct models to be accepted even if the sample size is small (Sivo et al., 2006). However, NFI is found to be sensitive to small sample sizes (Hooper et al., 2008). Although the sample size in this study is sufficient to conduct the intended analyses, it does not qualify as being large (n: 226). Considering the cut-off values for these three indices and the sensitivity of NFI to small sample sizes, the results indicate an acceptable model fit. (CFI: .93; NFI: .87; NNFI: .92).

For RMSEA, Browne and Cudeck (1993) state that values below .05 indicate a good fit while the values between .05 and.08 signal to a moderate fit. It is also argued that RMSEA values below .08 signify a good fit (MacCallum et al., 1996). Similarly, Steiger (2007) states that RMSEA values must be below .07 for the data to support the proposed model. The RMSEA value obtained in this study is .073 and satisfies the criteria to retain the factor structure. For SRMR, Hu and Bentler (1999) find values smaller than .08 to indicate the model to be acceptable. The SRMR value of .068 obtained in this study shows that the model is a good fit. Reporting the chi-square was avoided since chi-square values are highly influenced by the sample size (Kenny & McCoach, 2003; Kline, 1998; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). Instead, the relative (normed) chi-square value (CMIN/DF), which considers the sample size in the calculation, was checked, and it was found to be below the cut-off value of 3 (CMIN/DF: 2.19), which indicates a good fit (Hair et al., 2010).

As exhibited in Figure 3.1 all the factors were allowed to covary, and each item had loadings only on one factor. Hair et al. (2010) argues that the minimum factor loadings of the items should be .5, and it should preferably take a value of .7 or higher. Thus, factor coefficients were examined, and it was found that values ranged between .60 and .93, which means that the items sufficiently explain the underlying dimensions, and the convergent validity is present. Furthermore, the correlation values among dimensions should be examined to ensure the discriminant validity. It is suggested that these correlation coefficients do not exceed the threshold of .85 (Kline, 2005). As indicated on Figure 3.1, the highest correlation parameter among the dimensions is .68, which satisfies the criterion for discriminant validity. In conclusion, the CFA

confirmed the factor structure which was envisioned at the beginning of the study and at the EFA stage.

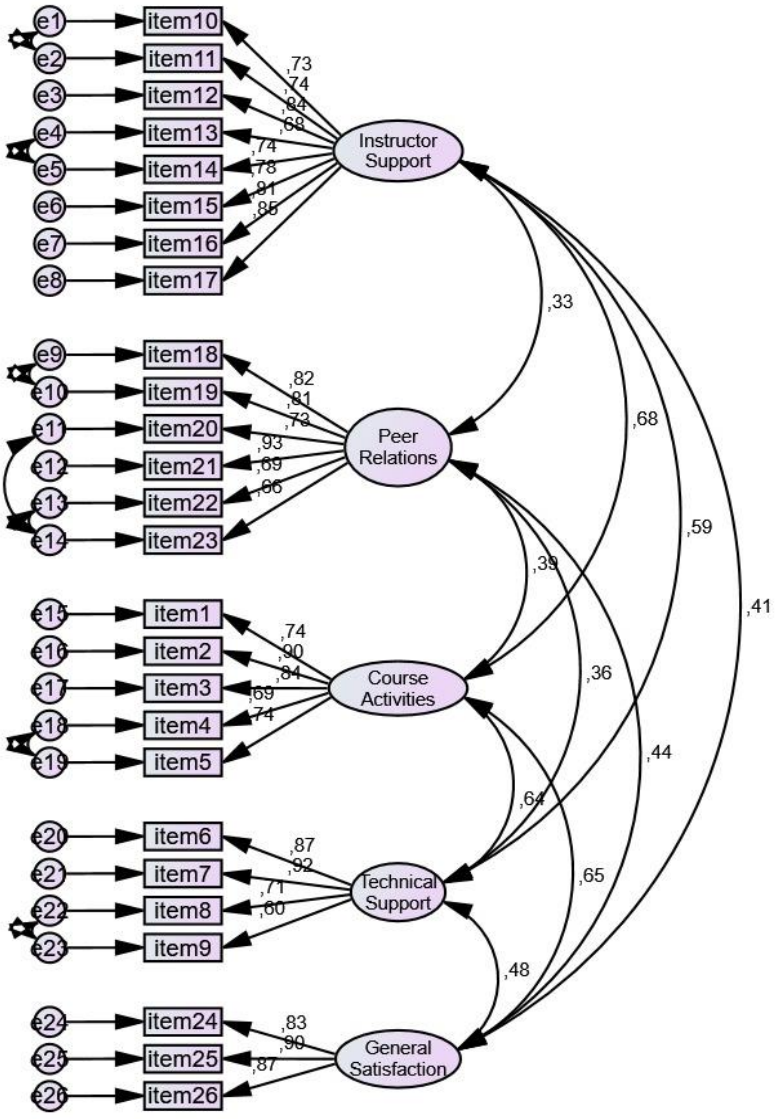

Figure 3.1 Structural model for the 26-item SESOL. CFI: .93; NFI: .87; NNFI: .92, RMSEA: .073; SRMR: .068; CMIN/DF: 2.19

3.5.4 Reliability Analysis of SESOL

Lastly, reliability of the factors was checked using Cronbach's alpha (1951). Internal consistencies of all 5 dimensions were found to be satisfactory with a reliability coefficient of .89 for Course Activities and Materials, .87 for the Use of Online Systems, .93 for Instructor Support, .91 for Peer Relations and .90 for General Satisfaction. Moreover, overall reliability of the 26-item scale was found to be .94. These values indicate that the scale is reliable. Item-total correlations of the 5 dimensions were also examined, and it was seen that values ranged between .62 and .84, which satisfies the expectation that all items shall contribute to the consistency of the scale.

3.5.5 Interviews

Following the quantitative analysis data, 6 questions were formed in order to get an in-depth account of student experiences and to ask them their opinions on how their experiences could be improved. Findings of the quantitative data analysis guided the formation of the interview questions. Upon the formation of the questions, 1 professor of education and 1 instructor was consulted to assess the validity of the interview questions. No amendments were required based on the feedback. The interview questions aimed reveal why learners scored the instructor and technical support related items higher compared to peer relations, which was the lowest scored learning environment factor. Furthermore, to have a better understanding of the general satisfaction dimension, students were asked about the positive and negative aspects of their online learning experience. The interviews were semi-structured in nature, which

means complementary questions were asked when further elaboration was needed from the students. 35 students were contacted through their e-mail addresses, which they had provided when they were taking the survey. 13 students responded positively to be interviewed. It was openly stated that their participation in the interviews was on voluntary basis, as taking the survey was. These interviews were conducted on an online videoconferencing platform. Students were reminded that they can keep their cameras on or off based on their decision. Upon students' verbal confirmation, the calls were voice recorded to be later used in the analysis. Information regarding the interviewees' characteristics is provided in the Participants section. The interviews were conducted in Turkish. Each interview took 8 - 15 minutes, and the following questions were asked to the learners in the interviews:

1. How is your communication with your classmates? According to you, what strengthens in-class communication and interaction?
2. How do you assess the support provided by your instructors? According to you, what are the instructor-related factors that positively influence the online learning experience?
3. What is your experience like with the distance learning platforms, such as the videoconference tool and the learning management system?
4. How do you evaluate your overall distance learning experience? What could improve general satisfaction in your opinion?
5. What are the positive aspects of your online learning experience?
6. What are the negative aspects of your online learning experience?

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

Before starting to collect data, required permissions were obtained from Ethics Committee of Middle East Technical University (METU) and the university where the data was collected. As it is decided not to share the name of the university where the data collection was done, the pertaining permission is not shared. The researcher can be contacted in case of related inquiries. The permission granted by METU can be seen in Appendix A. Another permission was received from the directorate of the preparatory school. Data were collected in an online environment through Google Forms due to the pandemic conditions. Students' informed consent was required to be able to participate in the survey. The voluntary participation form was attached at the beginning of the survey and can be seen in Appendix C.

For the pilot study, students were contacted individually through the messages on the learning management system. However, response rates were low. Therefore, instructors were kindly asked to announce the study in their classes to increase the number of participants. Once the predetermined number of students was reached, the pilot study survey was closed. To collect data in the main study, all of the students at the target school were sent an e-mail. In order to prevent students who participated in the pilot study from responding to the main study, a warning was placed in the e-mails and at the beginning of the online survey. As survey response rates were found insufficient, a reminding e-mail was sent, and several instructors were contacted to inform the students of the study and share the survey link in their online classes. Data collection procedure for the qualitative part of the study is explained in section 3.5.5 Interviews.

3.7 Data Analysis

For the quantitative data analysis, version 25 of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 25) and version 24 of Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS 24) were used. Two sequential sets of data analysis were conducted on SPSS. First, exploratory factor analysis of the pilot study was carried out. Both Principal Component Analysis and Principal Axis Factoring were used as the extraction method in the EFA, and the same results were obtained in terms of factor structure. Next, descriptive and inferential analyses of the main study data were executed. In the descriptive analyses, frequencies, percentages, mean, median and standard deviation values were used to analyze the items and factors obtained from the CFA. Mean scores of the dimensions were taken as the reference in the inferential analyses. One-way repeated measures analysis of variance and Pearson correlation test were used for inferential analyses. AMOS was used to execute the confirmatory factor analysis on the main study data. This phase was conducted after the exploratory factor analysis and before the main study quantitative data analysis on SPSS.

For the analysis of the interviews, the descriptive content analysis method was used. In this analysis, the aim is to present the findings in an organized and interpreted way (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). As such, recorded student interviews were listened again, emergent themes, experiences, and anecdotal information were noted. Since each question asked in the interviews focuses on a different theme, these questions delineate the thematical framework of the analysis of the quantitative data.

3.8 Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study is the non-generalizability of the findings since the data were collected from a single school in a university from the students who are receiving the same type of education. Another reason which prevents the generalizability of the results is the method of sampling used in this study, which is based on convenience. Second limitation of the study is that online learning was a requirement for the participants of this study rather than being a voluntary choice. This situation is likely to influence students' approach to online learning and thus the results of the study. Therefore, future studies focusing on voluntary distance learners are encouraged.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter presents the findings obtained from the questionnaire and student interviews. Both descriptive and inferential analyses are used for the questionnaire, and content analysis is employed for the interviews. A summary of these findings can be found at the end of this chapter

4.2 Students' Perceptions of their Online Learning Environment

Upon the completion of confirmatory analysis, it was concluded that 5 factors containing 26 items were obtained. A descriptive analysis of these items is performed and displayed in a descending order based on the mean score in Table 4.1.

Table 4. 1

Descriptive statistics of the SESOL items

Items	*N*	*Mn*	*Mx*	*Mean*	*Median*	*SD*
10-I can reach my instructor when I have a question or issue.	226	1	5	4.51	5	.84
11-Instructor answers my questions timely.	226	1	5	4.42	5	.93
14-Feedback is clear and informative.	226	1	5	4.33	5	.98
17-Instructor clearly communicates what is expected of me within the course.	226	1	5	4.32	5	.93
12-Instructor's answers are enough to solve my queries.	226	1	5	4.32	5	.94
13-Instructor gives timely feedback to my homework.	226	1	5	4.25	5	1.05
6-I could reach necessary info to access the online platforms.	226	1	5	4.24	5	1.00
15-Instructor gives me advice on how to improve my English.	226	1	5	4.23	5	1.05
16-Instructor creates a safe environment where I can express myself.	226	1	5	4.22	5	1.04

Table 4.1 (continued)

1-Various learning resources were used.	226	1	5	4.12	4	.96
7-Information provided to reach online platforms was clear and sufficient.	226	1	5	4.09	4	1.05
8-It was easy to use the online systems.	226	1	5	4.08	4	1.03
19-My classmates answer my questions.	226	1	5	3.91	4	1.11
18-My classmates help me when I need it.	226	1	5	3.88	4	1.11
9-I could get help about online systems when necessary.	226	1	5	3.81	4	1.19
3-Activities useful for language learning were done.	226	1	5	3.81	4	1.08
2-Resources were useful for learning.	226	1	5	3.71	4	1.13
5-Assignments helped me improve my English.	226	1	5	3.58	4	1.17
21-My classmates are willing to help one another.	226	1	5	3.48	4	1.24
4-Assignments were enough in quantity.	226	1	5	3.48	4	1.18
22-I think I have good relations with my classmates.	226	1	5	3.38	3	1.20
23-I think I can trust my classmates.	226	1	5	2.92	3	1.23
20-I think I have a lot in common with my classmates.	226	1	5	2.87	3	1.20
24-I am satisfied by my experience at the prep school.	226	1	5	2.77	3	1.41
26-Learning a language at a distance offers many opportunities	226	1	5	2.58	2	1.46
25-I like learning at a distance.	226	1	5	2.44	2	1.45
Valid N (listwise)	226					

Pimentel's (2010) interpretation of the intervals of 5-point Likert scale were used in explaining the findings of this study. According to Pimentel's intervals, values between 1-1.79 mean strongly disagree; values between 1.8-2.59 mean disagree; values between 2.60-3.39 mean neutral; values between 3.40-4.19 mean agree, and lastly values between 4.20-5 mean strongly agree. When the mean and median values are examined, it can be observed that the highest scored items are related to the dimension of instructor support. Indeed, the first six items with highest scores belong to this category. Item 10 has a mean value of 4.51, which is the highest score in the whole data set. The lowest scored item related to instructor support is item 16 with a mean value of 4.22 and is placed in the 9th row. That is, learners strongly agree that their instructors provided them with the necessary support during online learning. Following instructor support, items related to technical support, course activities and materials and peer relations are observed in the middle rows of the Table 4.1. In fact,

majority of the items related to peer relations found a place towards the end of the table, yet items 19 and 18 are around the middle of the table with mean scores of 3.91 and 3.88, respectively. That is, students regarded some aspects of the peer relations relatively highly compared to the other low scored items, such as 20, 22 and 23. To clarify, items related to feeling of community among peers, such as "I can trust my classmates" and "I have good relations with my classmates" have particularly low mean values, which indicates that learners help each other and communicate for course-related issues, yet they do not have warm relationships which constitutes the sense of community among them. In support of this finding, questionnaire results demonstrated that 100% of the students (n=226) used a platform, such as a chat group, where they could communicate with their classmates. It is stated that learners used such communication tools mainly in order to be informed of the assignments, do the group projects, share course materials and socialize.

In technical support, item 6 is the highest (M=4.24, SD=1.00), and item 9 is the lowest (M=3.81, SD=1.19) scored item, which means that learners find the technical support efficient. In the dimension of course activities and materials, item 1 has the highest (M=4.12, SD= .96) and item 4 has the lowest (M=3.48, SD= 1.18) mean values among all the items. That is, learners found the course activities and materials satisfactory. 3 items with the lowest mean scores belong to the same category, which is general satisfaction. Respectively, items 24, 25 and 26 have mean values of 2.77, 2.44 and 2.58. It can be inferred from the results that learners are not satisfied with their online language learning experiences.

Table 4.2

Means and Standard Deviations of SESOL Items

	M	*SD*	*N*
Instructor Support	4.33	.79	226
Technical Support	4.06	.90	226
Course Activities and Materials	3.74	.92	226
Peer Relations	3.41	.98	226
General Satisfaction	2.59	1.31	226

Following item-by-item analysis, mean values of each dimension were calculated to get a general snapshot (See Table 4.2). Unsurprisingly, among the learning environment factors, instructor support was scored the highest by the students (M=4.33, SD=.79), and this was followed by technical support (M=4.06, SD=.90), course activities and materials (M=3.74, SD=.92), peer relations (M=3.41, SD=.98) and general satisfaction (M=2.59, SD=1.31), respectively. The mean value of instructor support indicates that learners strongly agree that their instructor provided the necessary support in online education. Also, learners find the technical tools easy to use and the technical support provided to them sufficient. Next, the mean value of 3.74 show that learners agree to the efficiency of the course activities and materials they were presented with in online learning. Following course activities and materials, peer relations exhibited a mean value of 3.41, which means that the relationship between learners are neither too positive nor too negative. Last but not least, the mean value of 2.59 for general satisfaction implies that learners are not satisfied with their online learning experience.

In order to see whether the mean differences between these 5 dimensions are statistically significant, a one-way repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) has been conducted. In the confirmatory factor analysis stage, the rationale to continue with parametric analyses were explained based on an analysis of each item one by one. Upon the transformation of items into variables based on their mean values, another normality test was performed to see whether the assumption of normality was met for each factor. Although Shapiro-Wilk test results were significant ($p < .05$), which directs us to reject the normality assumption, it was observed that for all 5 dimensions, skewness and kurtosis values were within the thresholds of + 2, - 2 for skewness and +7, -7 for kurtosis (Byrne, 2010; Hair et al, 2010). Norman (2010) argues that ANOVA is robust against the violations of normality assumption when the sample sizes of sub-groups are more than 5. Moreover, Carifio and Perla (2008) suggest that it is appropriate to use parametric tests, such as ANOVA or Pearson correlation with scores obtained from the Likert scales, such as means and standard deviations. Therefore, normal distribution of data was assumed, and further parametric tests were allowed accordingly. Another assumption of the one-way repeated measures ANOVA is sphericity, which "refers to the equality of variances of differences between treatment levels" (Field, 2009, p. 459). Mauchly' test showed that sphericity assumption was violated, $\chi 2(9) = 99.96$, $p < .05$. Then, Greenhouse-Geisser value was checked, and it was found to be greater than .75 ($\varepsilon = .83$). Therefore, Huynh-Feldt correction was used to interpret the findings. The results indicate that there are statistically significant differences between the mean values of the learning environment factors, $F(3.36, 755.62) = 187.83$, $p < .05$, $\eta 2 = .46$. To explore which factors had significantly different means between each other, post hoc tests with Bonferroni adjustment were

conducted. Table 4.3 displays the pairwise analysis between the dimensions of SESOL. It is apparent from the table that mean differences between each pair is significantly different from one another. That is, students perceived some aspects of their online learning experience to be considerably more favorable than the others.

Table 4.3

Pairwise Comparisons of SESOL Factors

(I) SESOL factors	(J) SESOL factors	*MD (I-J)*	*SE*	*p*
Instructor Support	Technical Support	.27*	.05	.00
	Course Act. & Mat	.59*	.05	.00
	Peer Relations	.92*	.07	.00
	Satisfaction	1.73*	.08	.00
Technical Support	Instructor Support	-.27*	.05	.00
	Course Act. & Mat	.32*	.06	.00
	Peer Relations	.65*	.07	.00
	Satisfaction	1.46*	.08	.00
Course Act. & Mat	Instructor Support	-.59*	.05	.00
	Technical Support	-.32*	.06	.00
	Peer Relations	.33*	.07	.00
	Satisfaction	1.15*	.07	.00
Peer Relations	Instructor Support	-.92*	.07	.00
	Technical Support	-.65*	.07	.00
	Course Act. & Mat	-.33*	.07	.00
	Satisfaction	.81*	.08	.00
General Satisfaction	Instructor Support	-1.73*	.08	.00
	Technical Support	-1.46*	.08	.00
	Course Act. & Mat	-1.15*	.07	.00
	Peer Relations	-.81*	.08	.00

4.3 Learning Environment and Satisfaction

It was established in the literature review that learner satisfaction is influenced by numerous factors, including elements related to the learning environment and the

learners themselves. Data related to learning environment was collected with a focus on 4 dimensions, which are instructor support, technical support, course activities and materials, and peer relations. Pearson correlation method was used in the analysis. First, the relationship between instructor support and learner satisfaction was checked, and the results showed that there was a significant relationship between support provided by the instructor and learners' status of satisfaction, $r = .39$, $p < .01$. That is, the more learners felt supported by the instructor, the more satisfied they felt. Following this analysis, the relationship between technical support and satisfaction was examined, and it was found that the two dimensions were significantly correlated, $r = .47$, $p < .01$. In other words, based on whether students found the online platforms easy to use and technical support available, their satisfaction increased or decreased. Next correlation analysis was conducted for the course activities and materials, and satisfaction factors, which indicated that there was a significant relationship between these two dimensions, $r = .60$, $p < .01$. Students who found the course activities and materials efficient and useful tended to be more satisfied with the online learning. Lastly, the relationship between peer relations and learner satisfaction was examined, and it was observed that there was a statistically significant relationship between these two constructs, $r = .47$, $p < .01$. That is, learners who viewed their relationship with classmates to be positive were more satisfied overall. The highest correlation was found to be between the course activities and materials dimension and learner satisfaction ($r = .60$). The extent of the relationship between technical support and satisfaction was the same as the degree of relationship between peer relations and satisfaction. ($r = .47$). Lastly, the lowest correlation was observed between the dimensions of instructor support and general satisfaction ($r = .39$) In brief, although

the degree of the correlations varied, all the learning environment factors examined in this study were proven to be significantly related to learner satisfaction.

4.4 Learner Characteristics and Satisfaction

This section aims to explore whether there is a significant relationship between learner satisfaction and factors, such as gender, employment status, language level and achievement. Pearson correlation method was used to analyze these relationships. Initially, correlation analysis between gender and satisfaction was conducted, and the result demonstrated that there was not a relationship between learners' gender and their satisfaction with the online learning, $r = .00$, $p > .05$. Next, correlation analysis based on the employment status was carried out. There were 3 groups of students in terms of working status as "not working", "working part-time" and "working full-time". Correlation analysis result indicated that the relationship between learners' working status and their satisfaction from the online learning experience was not significant, $r = .06$, $p > .05$. That is, whether students worked or not did not correlate strongly with how they perceived their online learning experience. Next, the relationship between learners' language level and satisfaction was investigated. There were 4 different language levels when students started the school. The result showed that language level was not significantly related to students' satisfaction rate, $r = .02$, $p > .05$. Following the language proficiency, learners' achievement scores went through a correlation analysis. For achievement scores, learners' last level passing grade was considered, and learners were categorized into 3 groups as the ones who got a grade between 80-100, 64.5-80 and 64 and below. 64.5 was specifically selected as it is the minimum passing grade to the next level. Achievement of students were also found

not to be related to their satisfaction, $r = -.03$, $p > .05$. That is, higher achievers do not get more satisfied with their educational experience and vice versa. In summary, none of the learner characteristics examined in this study, i. e., gender, employment status, language level and achievement, has a statistically significant relationship with learner satisfaction.

4.5 Encounters with Online Learning and Satisfaction

Both the questionnaire and the interview questions aimed to highlight students' encounters with online learning, including the positive and negative experiences. 34.1% of the students (n=77) stated that they had previous experience with online learning before starting the preparatory school while 65.9% of them (n=149) did not experience distance learning before. Majority of the learners stated to have studied online during the last year of their high school due to COVID-19 restrictions. The remaining minority experienced online learning in their previous university studies or in private courses. A correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the relation of previous online learning experience to satisfaction. The analysis indicated that there was a significant relationship between previous distance learning experience and learners' satisfaction, $r = .22$, $p < .01$. Another point that was investigated regarding online learning experiences was access problems to distance education. 54.4% of the participants (n=123) stated to have experienced access problems while 45,6% of them (n=103) did not have such issues. Student responses in the questionnaire focus on several access issues, such as internet connection failure, unexpected electricity cuts, old and slow computers, lack of computers for all the students in their household and not having enough rooms for all the students at home. Among these, internet

connection issues were the most frequently reported one. Although the problems students experienced during online learning are many, when asked whether they have a suitable environment to join the live online classes, 88.5% of the students (n=200) responded positively while 11.5% of them (n=26) stated that they did not have a suitable setting. All the 26 students stated that they had a crowded family, and they shared the room with others, especially with siblings who were also learning online. A higher number of students responded positively (n=212, 93.8%) when asked whether they have a suitable setting to do their homework. 6.2% of the students (n=14) expressed that they did not have an appropriate environment to complete their homework, and the reasons were related to not having a computer, having a crowded household and family's interference with spending too much time with the computer. Lastly, the relationship between having access problems to online learning and satisfaction was analyzed, and it was seen that learners who experienced problems in accessing distance education were significantly less satisfied, $r = -.27$, $p < .01$. In conclusion, nearly one third of the learners reported to have experienced online learning before, and nearly half of all the learners noted having experienced access problems. Correlation analyses showed that the relationships between previous distance learning and satisfaction as well as having access problems and satisfaction were significant.

4.6 Findings of Student Interviews

Following the analysis of items and scales of SESOL, 6 interviews questions were formed, and 13 students were interviewed to expand on the findings of the quantitative analyses. Students' responses to the questions were analyzed via descriptive content

analysis method. In the descriptive analysis, data are summarized and interpreted based on the predetermined themes in order to present the findings in an organized manner (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In the content analysis stage, data, which went through the descriptive analysis stage, are exposed to a more extensive procedure; therefore, a more detailed understanding can be obtained (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). Interview questions were related to students' perception of the support provided by the instructors, their relations with their classmates, experiences with the online learning tools and platforms, and lastly the positively and negatively perceived aspects of the whole process.

4.6.1 Instructor Support

Of the 13 students interviewed, 11 of them openly stated that they were very satisfied with the support their instructor provided during online learning. Being able to reach the instructors outside the class hours was an important opportunity students emphasized in their answers. Students especially stated that some of them were shy to turn their cameras on and speak during the lessons, or the class hour was not enough for everyone to ask their questions. Therefore, learners benefitted from it when instructors communicated with the students outside the class hours and answered inquiries. Although there were not many negative comments regarding instructor support, a learner who found the support she received from her instructor to be poor indicated that:

> My current instructor does not want us to send him/her e-mails or reach them. As we are not in face-to-face education, we cannot ask our questions easily. Sometimes we do not know how to do homework. Thus, it affects us badly when some information remains unclear.

Next aspect of instructor support which was appraised by the student was the instructors' approach towards learners. Being, understanding, tolerant, friendly and sincere were among the qualities that were noted by the students who perceived instructor support highly. One student conveyed that:

> If an instructor establishes a sincere environment, courses become more productive, and people turn on their cameras willingly. When we cannot build a warm relationship with the instructor, no matter how good our relations with our classmates are, we will have difficulties in the course because there will be a distance between us and the instructor.

That is, this student emphasized the key role of instructors in making the classes effective as well as building rapport with the learners.

Another aspect the students highlighted in their interviews was the provision of extra materials, homework or useful websites by their instructors. 7 students who indicated to appreciate his/her instructor's support mentioned that their instructor sent them additional study materials, recommended books and websites they can benefit from or assigned extra homework. A learner expressed his appreciation in these words:

> Our instructor helped us a great deal. She gave us extra homework and provided grammar lectures that was not a part of the weekly syllabus. I remember talking about how to be successful in speaking, pronunciation and writing a paragraph in a limited time. I am thankful to my teacher for her effort.

That is, learners needed additional support, and they found it effective when their instructor made an extra effort to support their language learning process.

Lastly, another point emphasized in student interviews was the feedback issue. One student indicated that although she was happy about the instructor, feedback was given late, and she felt she received low grades compared to other classes she had been in.

Another learner noted that she really benefitted it when the instructor gave long and detailed feedback to her portfolio tasks. Students were also asked to elaborate on the points that they thought could be done by the instructors to improve their experiences. A student stated:

> I have not tried the break-out rooms in my previous classes, but we use it frequently in my present class, and I think it is really nice, especially for practicing speaking. Of course, the people we are matched with in the group also influence the effectiveness. When everybody turns off their microphones, you also do not want to do anything, but the application itself is really good.

Another student mentioned that some learners were not outgoing enough to take the floor to speak, so teachers should pay attention to making everyone in the class participate and speak equally. Overall, instructor support was viewed to be sufficient and satisfactory by the learners, and contact outside the class hours, approach towards learners, provision of extra materials, and giving timely and detailed feedback was among the most emphasized points.

4.6.2 Peer Relations

Students were asked to describe the nature of their relationship with the classmates in the interviews. 7 students indicated that they had favorable relations with their classmates in at least one of the classes they had been in. Other 6 students noted that although they communicated with each other on course related topics, it was very limited, and they did not have any other relations with classmates besides the course. One student who stated to have good relations with her friends commented that:

> It does not matter whether the courses are online or face to face when you have people with whom you can get along. I have not been to Ankara yet, but I made many friends from there. They invite me over, and I invite them, but we haven't been able to realize it, yet.

The same person also indicated that her classmates organized get-togethers where they could meet online and talk on topics not related to the course. Other two students noted that they came together with their friends in different platforms and played online games, which helped strengthen the bond among the classmates. Students who reported to have good relations with peers indicated that their friends helped one another on course related topics. For example, they shared the useful apps or webpages they found, they discussed the quiz questions, gave feedback on each other's essays and talked about the assignments. A student who did not qualify his relationships with friends to be strong noted that:

> We usually talk on WhatsApp in group chat, not one-on-one. There is only one classmate who I talk to in private chat, but we only talk at exam times. I mean, I have friends whom I would not recognize if I saw them on the street. We do not know each other so well.

Another student voiced a related concern about not being able to get to know the classmates as they do not turn their cameras on during the live classes. A learner stated that many of her classmates preferred to keep silent during online lessons and communicated only through text rather than the camera and microphone. She added she felt hesitant to speak English for fear of being judged by the classmates because she did not know them well, and others were also not speaking much. In short, there were both students who acclaimed his/her communication with classmates and the ones that found their relationships superficial.

Students' opinions on what strengthened the communication among classmates were also received. Some students believed that instructors had a crucial role in setting the class atmosphere and encouraging learners to interact with one another while others

claimed that learners themselves were responsible for how their relations turned out with their peers. When asked what would reinforce the relations among classmates, students mentioned that group assignments and projects were helpful in that respect. One student noted that:

> I think what strengthens in-class communication the most is group project assignments. When we have a group assignment, we communicate with the group members on the points we could not understand well… Nobody would have talked to each other if it were not for the project assignments.

Similarly, using the break-out rooms during classes was claimed to be beneficial. Furthermore, getting together online with classmates for socialization purposes outside the class hours was recommended by learners. Lastly, although there were students who argued that it would be better for communication if everyone turned their cameras on, some others argued that they do not like to be pushed to turn their cameras on.

4.6.3 Online Learning Platforms

Online platforms are examined under the factor of technical support in the questionnaire. All the students who participated in the interviews stated that the videoconferencing tool and the Moodle was purposive and easy to use. A student indicated that she could get herself acquainted easily with these systems even if she did not concern herself with technology so much. Another student commented that: “I could adapt easily to these platforms as we live in the age of technology”. Especially, being able to share files, record videos and write messages in the chat box while in the class were the liked aspects of the Microsoft Teams tool. Being able to reach everything related to the course in an organized way on the Moodle was also regarded positively by one of the students. Although there were positive comments from all the

interviewees regarding the online learning platforms, it was also conveyed that many learners experienced connection problems, which prevented them from participating in the classes and taking the exams. Students reported that the voices and images of speakers had occasionally frozen, or they had become totally unable to join the class session. In sum, systems used by the school were highly acclaimed by the learners, yet infrastructural problems pertaining to internet connection negatively affected the use of these systems.

4.6.4 General Appraisal

In an attempt to get a more comprehensive understanding of what influenced learner satisfaction, learners were asked to express what the positive and negative aspects of online education were for them. Students were also asked to briefly describe the qualities they liked, and they would like to change about online learning in the last section of the survey, these are also summarized. Although a few students stated that they were neutral against online learning, the commonly mentioned positive and negative aspects can be found below.

4.6.4.1 Positive Aspects

A very commonly mentioned advantage by students was avoiding the time spent on transportation, which enabled learners to spare more time for their studies and hobbies. Among the interviewed students, there was one married and one working person. These two students, as well as others, stated that not having to waste time for transportation provided them with the opportunity to plan their time flexibly to

participate in the classes, do the assignments and tend to other responsibilities they had. A student also noted that he would normally spend 1000 Turkish Liras a month on transportation, which he could save as the education continued online.

Being able to receive education at the comfort of their home was stated to be another advantage by the learners. Some students indicated that they could express themselves more easily online because they were introverts. A learner commented: “Some students can be a little timid, but thanks to online education, they can perform better because they adapt more easily when they feel secure at their home”. Another student similarly noted that “It is not always possible to go out during the pandemic, I acquired social phobia because of this. Trying to speak during live classes decreased my social phobia.” That is, learners could access opportunities to socialize even if it was not possible to do it face to face.

Lastly, some learners noted that they could reach various online language learning resources they were previously unaware of. In other words, students observed that learning online provided them with easy access to a wealth of course materials and similar content. In short, advantages of online learning as perceived by the learners can be categorized into 4 groups, which are less time spent on transportation, decrease in college expenses, studying at the comfort of home and being able to reach numerous course materials easily.

4.6.4.2 Negative Aspects

While explaining the unfavorable sides of online education, learners usually tended to compare it face-to-face education. Students mentioned that it was easier to learn face-to-face as the instructors could understand learners' problems from their expressions, and they could do more speaking when in class. Moreover, a learner added that it was possible to engage more deeply with the content in face-to-face education, yet in online classes, learning was more superficial.

Another frequently mentioned issue was having to spend quite a lot of time in front of the computer both for the live classes and assignments. A student stated that he experienced physical problems, such as back pain, headache or eye problems, in addition to mental ones, such as not being able to concentrate, being distracted easily and not comprehending what the instructor said. Another student commented that:

> It is not as good as face-to-face education. When I cannot make an eye contact with the instructor, what he/she says does not get through to me. I get distracted easily. There is also psychological distress resulting from the pandemic, it also causes these problems.

Yet another learner noted that he could not maintain motivation to participate in the classes ardently and added: "As the instructor could not see us, I was playing with my phone". A student also commented that: "I cannot focus on the class. If I am distracted, I leave the session when the teacher is going to ask a question". That is, the student avoided the instructor's questions by quitting the class.

Next negativity perceived by students was related not being able to find a suitable environment to study at home. This was also a commonly expressed issue in the

questionnaire responses. One student mentioned that she lived in a village, and it was noisy because of her parents and sisters. Furthermore, the same student added that it was problematic for her to have internet access as she lived in a village. Another interviewee stated that:

> Taking classes from home is a very different experience. Since I was going to school before, some of my responsibilities were taken over by the other family members. Now that I am learning from home, I have to fulfil these responsibilities. It is difficult to combine schoolwork and household responsibilities.

Another issue voiced by the learners was related to the class hours and volume of assignments. One of the students stated that assignments were challenging. Another one commented that: "The assignments are too heavy. Individual effort is required to be successful in online education. The class ends at 12.30, yet it is necessary to do homework throughout the rest of the day". Same opinion was repeated by another student, as well. The same learner also noted that class hours were not enough for every learner to ask their questions. Another learner mentioned that her instructor usually extended the class hours as it did not suffice for them. In other words, some learners felt that they were doing too much homework compared to the time they spent in live classes.

Lastly, one of the most frequently mentioned issues was the lack of communication in online learning. Students noted that they could not get to know their classmates and socialize with them. A student commented that: "I think I could not mingle with friends and warm myself to the school. We are approaching the end of the term, yet I just recently started opening up." Similarly, another learner explained that:

> Students start to get antisocial. The opportunities universities provide, such as sports and arts activities, or opportunities to socialize disappear. When a person goes to university, he/she meets people from different cultures and traditions, which develops the students. Online learning cannot provide these, which is a disadvantage of it.

It was also stated by several learners stated that lack of socialization rendered the educational process boring for them.

4.7 Summary of the Findings

This chapter has revealed the findings of the research which were obtained through both quantitative and qualitative instruments. Initially, each item of the questionnaire was analyzed individually via their mean and median scores. The highest scored items belonged to the dimension of instructor support while satisfaction related items were scored the lowest. Following the item analysis, mean scores of the 5 factors, which were acquired through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, were calculated. The factor with the highest mean score was instructor support, and it was followed by technical support, course activities and materials, peer relations and overall satisfaction, respectively. That is, learners viewed instructor support as the most satisfactory element in their distance learning, and it was followed by technical support, course activities and materials, and peer relations. Although instructor, technology, course materials and peer related aspects were found satisfactory by the learners, overall satisfaction was comparatively lower. Next point analyzed was the relationship between general satisfaction and the learning environment factors investigated in this study. Analyses indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between each one of the learning environment factors and learner

satisfaction. Next, findings regarding learner characteristics and the relationships between learner characteristics and general satisfaction have been presented. The relationships between satisfaction and learner related elements, such as gender, employment status, language level and achievement were found not to be significant. The last correlation analyses were conducted to investigate the relationship between students' encounters with online learning and satisfaction. Results showed that there was a significant positive relationship between having previous online learning experiences and satisfaction. The relationship between having access problems and satisfaction was also found to be significant and negative.

In the last section, data collected through interviews were analyzed under 4 sub-headings, as instructor support, peer relations, online learning platforms and general appraisal. In general, instructor support was acclaimed highly. Sharing additional materials, communicating with the students outside the class hours, positive attitude towards learners and provision of timely and providing detailed feedback were the appraised instructor characteristics by the learners. In terms of peer relations, nearly half of the interviewed learners stated to be satisfied with their communication with the classmates. Spending online time outside the class hours, helping one another and being willing to interact were the crucial aspects highlighted by the learners. All the interviewees indicated that they found the videoconferencing tool and the Moodle system of the university useful and easy to use. Few issues reported were about the occasional bugs in the software and problems resulting from internet connection failure. Lastly, learners' perceptions on the positive and negative sides of online learning were examined and reported. Positive aspects included not having to spend

time on transportation, and thus having a lot of time for studying and other things, studying comfortably at home and being able to reach a number of online materials. Negative aspects included loss of motivation and concentration, having too much homework, discomfort caused by the family members at home, health problems resulting from having to sit in front of the computer for long hours and lack of social connection to peers and instructors.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter discusses the findings of the study in comparison with the literature. Furthermore, implications of the results for practice and recommendations for future research are interpreted.

5.2 Discussions and Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate the experiences and satisfaction of English preparatory school students during the entire online language learning process. A questionnaire was developed by the researcher to set light to learner experiences in relation to previous experiences, their home environments and the prominent learning environment factors, as supported by the literature. The learning environment factors focused in this study were instructor support, course activities and materials, technical support and peer relations. Furthermore, learner satisfaction was assessed via a sub-scale integrated in the questionnaire. Questionnaire findings were supported with pertinent interview questions to delve further into student experiences. This thesis study aimed to explore (1) the perceptions and experiences of preparatory school students in the online learning process, (2) the associations between online learning environment and learner satisfaction (3) the associations between learner characteristics and satisfaction.

5.3 Learner Related Variables and Satisfaction

In the literature review, factors which influence the success of online learning and learner satisfaction were presented. In addition to the learning environment factors, there were studies exploring the relationship between learner-related elements, such as the demographics, previous experience, and student satisfaction (Allen et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2011; Thurmond et al., 2002; Thygesen et al., 2020). In this study, learner characteristics are handled in two groups as the ones that result from the learner's person and the ones that result from the learners' previous experiences, infrastructure and home environment. Characteristics, such as gender, working status, language level and achievement, were analyzed in the first group. The findings indicated that majority of the participants were female (60.2%). The correlation analysis showed that learners' gender did not influence their satisfaction. Following gender, working statuses of the learners were examined. A great majority of learners stated to be not working (92.9%). The correlation analysis did not show a significant relationship between working status and satisfaction. Next, language proficiency level of the learners at the beginning of the term was integrated into a correlation analysis, and the finding showed that there was not a significant relationship between learners' language level and satisfaction. Lastly, the relationship between learners' achievement and satisfaction was checked, and a significant relationship could not have been found. It can be concluded that satisfaction of the learners from the online learning experience was found not to be related personal learner characteristics. This finding is consistent with Moore & Kearsley (1996), Shea et al. (2006) and Thygesen et al. (2020), Yukselturk & Bulut (2007). Similarly, Kim et al. (2011) found that gender and working status were not significant factors influencing satisfaction with online learning. Yet, they also found

that previous online learning experience did not influence learner satisfaction, which contradicts the finding of this study, as will be explained in the following paragraphs. Moore and Kearsley (1996) noted that learner satisfaction was not correlated with achievement, which is parallel to our finding. Considering the great importance attributed to learner satisfaction in the literature, this finding is noteworthy as it suggests that satisfaction does not necessarily result in greater achievement performance. In contrast with the finding of this study, Fraser (2002) notes that female students usually perceive their learning environment more positively compared to male learners. However, the issue of whether there is a relationship between gender and learners' perception of their learning experience is likely to consist of other mediatory variables, such as the homeland culture, grade level, and the program design.

As to the reason why there was not a relationship between the learner-induced characteristics and satisfaction, Shea et al. (2006) suggests that online learning could be satisfying different expectations and needs of different learners. Similarly, considering the negative aspects mentioned by the learners in the interviews, it can be concluded that the same concerns were stated by different learners, which suggests that although learners' background were different, the problems they encountered and the concerns they had were the same. Therefore, rather than looking at the gender or working status of a learner, environmental elements, such as the instructor support, peer communication, interaction with the course activities and the technological facilities are recommended to be focused.

In addition to the variables which relate to the individual learners, experience and infrastructure related aspects were investigated. These aspects were previous online learning experience, access problems and having a suitable environment for attending live classes and doing homework. With the mass transition to online learning due to COVID-19, states encountered many issues in providing education to all learners at an equal quality because learners were affected differently from the global pandemic (Yıldırım et al., 2021). For instance, their mental states, home environments, financial situations, having access to necessary devices and their self-efficacy to use these were different from one another (Yıldırım et al., 2021). When such variables are considered, it is not surprising that learners' online learning experiences are also different. Another one of these variables is having prior online learning experience. In this study, 34.1% of the learners stated to have experienced online learning before, while for the remaining 65.9% of the learners, this was their first online learning experience. The correlation analysis found a significant difference between the satisfaction rates of learners who do and do not have previous online learning experience. Learners who were in another online course before were found to be more satisfied with the online language learning experience. This finding is not consistent with Thurmond et al. (2002) and Kim et al. (2011). Yet, it is parallel to many other studies conducted in the field (Arbaugh, 2004; Astani et al., 2010; Hixon et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2013). These studies also stated that experienced online learners found their online learning experience to be more satisfactory compared to the novice learners.

As to why experienced online learners get more satisfied, learners' increased ability to learn and interact with others online is found to promote learner satisfaction (Palmer & Holt, 2009). Allen et al. (2007) also argue that learners with low technological self-

efficacy are less likely to be satisfied with online learning. Similarly, Young and Norgard (2006) state that the experience with online learning helps students become more comfortable in the online setting. That is, when learners experience online learning, they learn how to use the course interfaces and how to communicate easily with the instructors and peers. Also, they learn what to expect and what they can attain from the online learning experience. Thus, they exhibit better competence in surviving in the online environment, and they can manage the process well, which leads to heightened levels of satisfaction with online learning. Hence, it is recommended that institutions provide opportunities to acquaint learners with the medium of instruction before the course begins in order to maintain the comfort that learners are shown to benefit from (Young & Norgard, 2006).

Lastly, the access problems learners had and its relation to learning satisfaction were investigated. Questionnaire results showed that 54.4% of the learners experienced access problems, such as weak internet connection, power cut, lack of computers and not having an appropriate home environment for online studies. Remaining 45.6% of the students reported not having experienced access problems. The finding that more than half of the learners experienced access problems should be taken seriously as such problems could deteriorate the quality of the online learning experience and estrange learners from the idea of distance learning. The correlation analysis showed that learners satisfaction diminished as they experienced more access problems. This finding is consistent with the findings in the literature (Bower & Kamata, 2000; Chong, 1998; Hara & Kling, 2003; Selim, 2007; Webster & Hackley, 1997). Research indicated that the reliability and quality of technology used in online learning were

related to learners' perception of the usefulness of technology and attitude towards distance learning (Webster & Hackley, 1997). Bower and Kamata (2000) found that access to online courses was one of the strongest predictors of learner satisfaction. Similarly, Hara and Kling (2003) reported that when learners were frustrated because of technology, they tended to become less satisfied. Similarly, students' lack of access to their own environment and computer may have led to the opinion that face-to-face education is more effective. To overcome the access problems, Salmon (2004) recommends the first stage of online learning to be maintaining easy access and motivation to learn online. However, maintaining access cannot be left at the mercy of the learners as the scope of the problem exceeds their power. Strengthening the internet connection all around the country, providing every learner with computers and creating a suitable environment for learners to access to the courses and study are issues that can only be handled when decision-makers decided to do something about it. To conclude, this study found that learners' gender working status or achievement level is not related to their satisfaction with the online learning experience, yet prior distance learning experience and access problems are found to be influential in shaping learner satisfaction. These findings suggest that rather than focusing on the individual learners, before developing and implementing fully online learning programs, learners' competence to survive in virtual environments and the probable access issues that can hamper the educational progress should be taken into account, these issues should be addressed.

5.4 Online Learning Environment and Satisfaction

5.4.1 Instructor Support

The aim of gathering data on instructor support was to evaluate whether students felt supported by their instructor in various aspects, such as accessibility, provision of timely and detailed feedback, creating a safe learning environment and communicating the expectations. The questionnaire results indicated that instructor support was the highest rated aspect of the online learning experience by the students. Learners were found to be very satisfied with the way their instructor communicated with them in and out of the class time, provided feedback, communicated the expectations and provided additional academic support. Findings of the student interviews endorsed the results of the questionnaire. A great majority of interviewees noted that their instructor did their best to support the learners academically and ease the difficulties brought by COVID-19. In the interviews, most frequently noted positive aspects of instructor support was accessibility outside the class hours, teacher's attitude, such as being understanding, tolerant, sincere and friendly, and the provision of additional learning resources.

Based on the questionnaire results, it was found that majority of the learners were satisfied with the feedback provided by their instructor. Yet, one learner noted in an interview that the feedback was given late, and her grades were lower than what students in other classes received. This was one of the few negative comments regarding instructor support in the interviews. Delayed feedback is stated to be one of the commonly encountered issues in online learning (Galusha, 1998; Yang &

Cornelius, 2004). The comment by the learner related to feedback is consistent with Hara and Kling's (2001) findings which hold that when learners do not receive timely and clear feedback, they feel confusion, anxiety and frustration. Another student stated that she benefitted greatly from long and detailed feedback her instructor provided, which shows that students appreciate it and benefit from it when teachers make an effort for feedback provision. This finding is parallel to other studies in showing that learners perceive their instructors more effective when useful and timely feedback is provided, and this leads to heightened levels of satisfaction (Şahin, 2007; Thurmond et al., 2002, Young & Norgard, 2006).

Further analysis showed that instructor support was positively correlated to learner satisfaction with online learning. In other words, learners who felt supported by their instructor were more satisfied with their online learning experience compared to other learners with poorer perceptions of instructor support. Similarly, many studies found a relationship between instructor-related factors and satisfaction with online learning (Bolliger & Martindale, 2004; Dziuban et al., 2004; Eom et al., 2006; Paechter et al., 2010; Rosell-Aguilar; 2007; Sun et al., 2008; Swan, 2001; Şahin, 2007; Thurmond, 2002; Young, 2006). There are a few probable reasons as to why learners are, to a large extent, are happy with the support they received from their instructors. First, during the online learning period, there were 4 days of synchronous classes in which learners had direct contact with their instructor. Students were able to ask their questions, get clarification and build further personal contact with the instructor within this time span. Therefore, relationship with the instructor was strengthened. Similarly, Song et al., (2004) found that students connected better with the instructor and

classmates thanks to the weekly synchronous meetings. Next, it was a novel thing for many instructors to teach fully online; therefore, instructors could empathize with the students regarding the probable difficulties they would come across. This situation could have encouraged instructors to exert more support. Lastly, each instructor was expected to establish an online office hour and offer help and guidance to the students, which might have increased the instructor support perceived by the students.

5.4.2 Technical Support

Technical support dimension was integrated into the study to investigate the availability of the information on how to use the online platforms, clarity of this information, ease of use of the online systems and being able to get help regarding technical issues when necessary. Survey results indicated that learners could easily use the online systems and receive help if necessary. As learners' proficiency with the online course medium is a crucial first step for the success of online learning (Hillman et al., 1994), it can be concluded that the preparatory school could enable learners to easily access to the course activities and materials, and thus promote a successful learning experience. Further correlation analysis proved that there was a significant positive relationship between the perceived technical support and online learning satisfaction. In other words, learners who perceived the online learning systems as easy to use and technical support as sufficient were more satisfied with their online learning experience. This finding is consistent with the results of Özkan and Köseler (2009), Pham et al. (2019), Song et al. (2004) Young and Norgard (2006). Özkan and Köseler (2009) found that there was a highly positive relationship between the design of the

learning interface and overall student satisfaction. Likewise, Pham et al. (2019) concluded that online learning system quality was the most significant element of online learning quality, which directly influenced learner satisfaction. In support of this point, another study showed that when learners encounter technical problems, their overall satisfaction declines (Hara & Kling, 2001). However, Sun et al. (2008) found that technology-related aspects of an online course do not have a significant impact on learner satisfaction, which contradicts our findings. Further explanation in Sun et al. (2008) posit that this finding does not suggest the insignificance of technology. Rather, this finding is argued to indicate that learners were satisfied with the technological dimension of the course; therefore, they did not express any concern, which prevented establishment of a connection between the two concepts (Sun et al., 2008).

The reason why learners regarded the technical aspects of online learning could have several reasons. First, learners were provided with information on how to use the online platforms at the very beginning of the term both in written and video format, which could have facilitated learners' transition to learning fully online. Next, as one of the learners commented in the interviews, technology is an integral part of the lives of young adults, and they can easily orientate their way when they come across an unfamiliar interface. The finding that learners found the course interface easy to use supports this assumption. Lastly, all the learners stated to have been using an online tool to communicate as a whole class. Such communication tools could have aided learners to get help from one another when they experienced a technical problem. As the same problems were experienced by many learners, they could have helped one another readily thanks to the online chat groups.

5.4.3 Course Activities and Materials

Course activities and materials dimension has been included in the research to investigate learners' perceptions regarding the usefulness of activities, resources and assignments employed during the course. Diversity of resources and sufficiency of assignments were also explored in this dimension. According to the mean scores, "course activities and materials" was third on the list, following instructor support and technical support (Table 4.2). Survey results demonstrated that students agreed to the usefulness, diversity and sufficiency of the course activities and materials. The item with highest the mean score related to course activities and materials was "various learning resources were used". The lowest mean scores belonged to the items "assignments were enough in quantity" and "assignments helped me improve my English". In other words, learners' perception of the assignments lowered their satisfaction with the course activities. These findings were supported with the learner comments in the interviews. More than half of the learners stated that a variety of useful course materials were provided during online learning. In terms of the assignments, the concern regarding the heavy homework load was voiced by the students. The reason why learners had lower ratings for assignment-related items are several. First, class hours were decreased, and more responsibility was given to students in line with the nature and requirements of online learning. This could have been an unusual experience for students. Especially non-autonomous learners have problems managing the workload when the program largely relies on their individual endeavors. Therefore, it is important to promote autonomous learning in settings where students are expected to manage a substantial part of their learning. Also, as majority

of homework needed to be done in front of a computer, this could have created weariness and cause learners to overrate the work they are doing. For instance, one learner stated that he was spending too much time in front of the computer, which he noted to have led to health problems. In short, homework load and learner autonomy stand as an issue that needs to be tackled carefully in fully online courses.

Correlation analysis indicated that there was a significantly positive relationship between the course activities and materials dimension and learner satisfaction. In other words, learners who found the content useful, diverse and sufficient tended to become more satisfied with their overall experience. Indeed, dimension of "course activities and materials" was found to have the most powerful relationship with satisfaction among all other learning environment factors examined in this study. This finding is parallel to several other studies in showing the importance of course activities and quality on learner satisfaction in online learning (Kuo et al., 2014; Martin-Rodriguez, 2015; Skordis-Worrall et al., 2015; Sun et al., 2008). Although it was not investigated in this study, research also found that learners' interaction with the course had a big impact on learners' perception of the course quality and their success (Bernard et al., 2009; Peltier et al., 2007). That is to say, course design deserves a great attention if online learning is to be successful. Peltier et al. (2007) argues that inter-learner interaction, learner-instructor interaction, delivery technology and course structure impact learners' perception of the course content. In other words, while students are evaluating the course content, they take many different factors into consideration, whether they are aware of it or not. The reason why course content has a primary role in explaining learner satisfaction can be found in the multidimensionality of the

concept of course content. That is, when learners are happy with the content, it means that they are happy with other dimensions, too, which, in return, contributes greatly to learner satisfaction.

5.4.4 Peer Relations

Peer relations were investigated in order to understand whether learners could build relationships with their classmates as they usually do in traditional learning. Items in this dimension were about whether students helped one another, answered each other's questions and had positive personal relationships. Among all the learning environment factors examined in this study, peer relations dimension was scored the lowest by the learners. Yet, the results indicated that the relationship among classmates were amicable. Items related to getting help when necessary and getting answers to questions were the ones with the highest mean scores in this factor. Three items with the lowest mean score in this dimension were related to students' having personal closeness, such as "I can trust my classmates" or "I have a lot in common with my classmates". This finding shows that learners have a certain level of interaction, especially for course-related issues, yet the sense of community and closeness among them are not as high. Parallel to these finding, Elshami et al. (2021) found that interaction was one the most reported challenges encountered in online learning by the students. Likewise, another study found that interaction among the learners were not as prevalent as it would be in face-to-face education; however, learners in the same study stated to be satisfied with the academic and social interactions that took place among classmates (Keaton & Gilberg, 2020). That is, although learners build

relationships to a certain extent, these relationships are not as strong as they would be in traditional education. Findings of the present study also indicate that learner-learner interaction is present, yet it is, to a large extent, limited to only course related communication.

The reason why some aspects of peer relations were viewed more positively than the others could have several reasons. As stated by a few learners, group projects were likely to have been useful in improving the communication among peers. Also, break-out activities, which enable students to work online in smaller groups, are likely to have strengthened the intra-group relationships. Some interviewees noted that their instructor facilitated their communication with other classmates thanks to the activities he/she conducted. The reason for the poor peer relations could be attributed to personal characteristics of learners as well as other online learning-related issues. For instance, it was stated in the interviews that certain students rejected turning their cameras on which prevented learners to get to know each other more closely. Also, when the instructor is unaware of the collaborative activities that can be carried out in online learning, learners will lack the opportunities to communicate and bond with one another.

Further analysis demonstrated that the relationship between peer relations and learner satisfaction was significantly positive. In other words, learners who had more favorable relationships with their classmates were more satisfied with the online learning experience. Similarly, Rovai (2003) found that strong connection among learners was a predictor of higher levels of satisfaction. In addition, in a meta-analysis,

Richardson et al. (2017) concluded that there was a positive correlation between social presence and satisfaction. Moore (1989) recommends organizing the educational programs in a way to offer the most suitable type of interaction based on the contextual differences, such as the subject area and developmental stage of the learners. Considering the nature of language learning, it is crucial for learners to interact with each other to improve their language skills. Therefore, the issue of peer relations should be carefully planned and integrated into the online programs especially in language learning contexts. In line with this need, Tüzün (2004) suggests using active learning strategies, such as real-world projects, collaborative learning tasks and online discussions in online language learning programs.

5.4.5 Satisfaction

As an affective outcome of the online learning experience, satisfaction was integrated into the questionnaire to evaluate learners' overall contentment with the process. Both item-by-item and factor-based analysis demonstrated that learners were not satisfied with their online learning experience. One-way repeated measures ANOVA results indicated that mean score of each factor was significantly different from one another, yet the correlations analyses found that there was a significantly positive relationship between each one of the learning environment factors and overall satisfaction. Although a significantly positive relationship was found between the learning environment factors and satisfaction, overall satisfaction was observed to be low. This finding contradicts the interaction equivalency theorem, which puts forth that maintaining one type of interaction, i.e., learner-learner, learner instructor and learner-

content, at high levels is sufficient to ensure learning and satisfaction (Anderson, 2003). Although instructor support, technical support, course activities and materials, and peer relations dimensions were regarded highly by the learners, overall satisfaction turned out not to be as high. The reason why overall satisfaction remained low could have several reasons. First of all, learners in the context of this school did not decide themselves to learn online. Rather, it was brought upon them obligatorily due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, they expected COVID-19 restrictions to end as soon as possible; however, the process strung out causing learners to feel further disappointed. Such tiring processes could have caused learners to reflect their feelings of disappointment onto the online learning experience. Likewise, Felix (2001) discusses that learners' motivation to learn at a distance is likely to influence their evaluation of the learning environment, and those who choose to work at a distance are able to deal well with isolation.

Young adults view school as a place of socialization and rely largely on the school to meet their need to socialize. As the findings show, peer relations were not acclaimed very highly compared to other three learning environment factors. This situation could have caused learners to experience disappointment and dissatisfaction. When the interviewee responses regarding the negative aspects of online learning are examined, it can be seen that learners reported not having been able to communicate with their instructors and classmates as much as they liked to. It was also stated that university was a place to meet people from different cultures and learn from them, yet in online learning it had not been so much possible. This finding is consistent with Skordis-Worrall et al. (2015) who found that main challenges in online learning were the lack

of interaction, sense of community and feeling isolated. Galusha (1998) also marked feelings of isolation and alienation as one of the hindrances of distance education. In the interviews, another drawback of online learning was stated to be the lack of eye contact, which caused an interviewee to lose focus easily in synchronous lessons. Similarly, a study by Webster and Hackley (1997) found that learners were looking at a document on the screen rather than the instructor directly, which decreased the effectiveness of communication cues, such as eye contact, used by the instructor. Furthermore, the same study found that distance education students were far more distracted compared to face-to-face learners, which was theorized to be due to the lack of adequate teacher presence and eye contact in online learning, which was also stated to be the case by several interviewees in this study. Other problems learners encountered in online learning included having to spend too much time in front of the computer, not having a suitable home setting for studying and having too much homework. All these issues learners voiced could have caused learners to rate their overall satisfaction lowly.

However, online learning was not only about negativities. There were several advantages learners stated to have benefitted from. One of the commonly noted advantages were spending no time for transportation and being able to study comfortably at home. Several other studies also found that convenience was noted to be the main benefit of online learning by the students (Skordis-Worrall et al., 2015; Song et al., 2004; Paechter et al., 2010; Young & Norgard, 2006). The present study found that another advantage of online learning was being able to reach a variety of course materials easily thanks to the internet. Similar advantages and disadvantages

were noted in Felix (2001). To conclude, although the benefits of fully online learning are not ignorable, lowness of the learner satisfaction shows that negativities outweigh the advantages for the learners.

5.5 Implications for Practice

In the light of the findings, there are some implications of this study for future online courses. However, these implications are not meant to be generalized for all settings because data was collected from only a group of learners in a single school. Initially, the study has found that there was a statistically significant relationship between each one of the learning environment factors and learner satisfaction. The strongest relationship was found to be between course activities and materials, and satisfaction. Although questionnaire results indicated learners agreed to the usefulness, diversity and sufficiency of the activities and materials, there is still room for improvement. A problematic area regarding course activities and materials was found to be the excessive amount of homework, as noted by the learners. Hence, while determining and assigning the homework, the amount of time learners will need to finish them should be taken into account, and learners should not be loaded with more responsibilities than they can handle. Furthermore, while doing a course activity, either in the class or as homework, the rationale for the task should be openly stated, so that learners have an understanding of how what they are doing will benefit them. When learners are convinced to the usefulness of course activities, the time they spend doing it will not be too much for them. Furthermore, encouraging learners to do certain parts of their assignments in groups can eliminate the feeling of isolation and enable students

to enjoy their homework. As learners reported loss of motivation and concentration, such a practice can be interesting for the learners and help overcome this issue.

Findings regarding interaction demonstrated that students were satisfied with their interaction with the instructors, yet they did not view peer relations to be as satisfactory. Many students reported that their interaction with classmates was confined to only course-related topics, and their personal relationships were weak. In other words, learners could not socialize and establish personal connections with their friends sufficiently. Martin and Bolliger (2018) recommends using ice-breaking activities and collaborative work practices to enable learner-learner interaction. Likewise, Wegerif (1998) and Moore (2014) emphasize the importance of establishing a classroom community with a warm-up period at the beginning of a course that is strengthened with icebreakers, structured exercises, orientation videos and comments from previous students. While teaching and learning online, it is inevitable to use the opportunities that the virtual world offers to build engaging and successful lessons. Using online tools can promote learner interaction and help learners socialize with each other while learning. Gruber and Bauer (2020) recommend using online tools, such as Padlet, LearningApps, Kahoot activities to promote the interaction among classmates. Similarly, Flipgrid, Loom and Remind applications are recommended to be used in online courses to strengthen interaction (Holbeck & Hartman, 2018). The abovementioned tools enable learners to share their written and spoken outputs with one another, share announcements instantly and practice their skills in a fun way without being confined to simple written text which is void of interaction and attraction. Furthermore, as a facility of online videoconferencing tools, break-out

rooms are recommended to be used (Gruber & Bauer, 2020). Break-out rooms enable learners to work in smaller groups of people with or without the presence of an instructor. Such communication is similar to the group work in traditional education. It was noted by some learners in the interviews that it helped them communicate easily with one another and establish connections. Also, break-out rooms facilitate the communication for group projects, which learners stated to have been beneficial for promoting learner-learner interaction.

In terms of technical support, learners found the online systems easy to use and technical support accessible. However, findings showed that learners who previously took online courses found their online learning to be more satisfactory. This result was attributed to the increased self-efficacy of learners to survive in an online learning environment. Hence, organizing an orientation program to enable learners to comfortably take part in online learning is recommended. This orientation program could prepare learners for the experiences they will have, so that learners can be prepared for what is ahead of them. However, whether this orientation would be equal to having previous online learning experience is a topic for another research study. Another technical difficulty learners experienced was about access problems. Learners reported to have gone through internet and power cuts, lack of computer and unavailability of a proper study environment. Unfortunately, solving these major problems are not within the capacity of instructors or schools. Access to unlimited and uninterrupted internet can be provided only if the local infrastructure is sufficient. However, internet access can be problematic for some students due to its costliness. For instance, a learner stated in the interview that she had to pay a lot of money to have

internet connection in her village. Not all students are able to afford such expenses. As Yıldırım et al. (2021) summarized, many countries all around the world, including Turkey, took steps to provide learners with the necessary technological devices and internet. However, the findings of this study show that more support needs to be provided in this respect. Therefore, if online learning is seen as the future of learning, easy and common access to internet and technological devices should be the first issue to be resolved.

In conclusion, whether we like it or not, online learning is the first option resorted in cases of natural disasters, political and social crises and pandemics. With the widespread use of online learning during COVID-19, it became a familiar aspect of many students' and teachers' lives. Therefore, understanding learner experiences in online learning is central to improving future distance learning practices and promoting achievement and satisfaction. Hence, this study humbly shed light on both learning environment and learner related aspects of the online experience. Future research is encouraged to have a clearer understanding online learning and its dynamics.

5.6 Recommendations for Future Research

This study focused on learner experiences during a fully online language course. However, instructors are also integral stakeholders of the whole experience. Therefore, future research is encouraged to incorporate instructor experiences, as well. In particular, problems instructors encounter while teaching online could provide very useful insights for improving future practices.

First of all, this study found a significant correlation between learners' perception of the learning environment and satisfaction. However, it is not possible to draw cause and effect conclusions from these findings. Therefore, experimental studies can be conducted in the future to test whether a cause-effect relationship exists between university students' perception of the online learning environment and learner satisfaction.

In this study, all the students at the school were learning online compulsorily. That is, they did not volunteer to take an online course. Further research is necessary to understand whether learners' voluntary decision to participate in online learning influences their perception of the learning environment. Furthermore, majority of the participants of this study belonged to the same age group and had the same working status. For understanding the perceptions of learners from different walks of life, the study can be replicated in a setting where learner profile is more diverse. In addition, the impact of learners' technological self-efficacy on online learning achievement and satisfaction can be investigated in future studies.

In terms of instructor support, this study focused on teacher's accessibility, provision of timely and clear feedback and skill to maintain a safe learning environment. Research shows that learners' opinion on their instructor's technological competence is also a predictor of learner satisfaction and achievement (Paechter et al., 2010; Webster & Hackley, 1997). Therefore, further study is recommended to investigate learners' perception of their instructor's online teaching skills. This information can

enable institutions to help equip instructors with the necessary skills, and it provides feedback to instructors regarding their online teaching performance.

This study focused on the usefulness, diversity and sufficiency of the course activities and materials. This dimension can be expanded in a way to integrate students' perspective of the material quality and the student evaluation regime. Visual quality of course materials, level-appropriateness of the resources and learners' assessment of the evaluation system are examples for such an expansion.

Lastly, findings of this study show that social interaction among classmates was limited, and some learners expressed their feelings of isolation and loss of motivation. Action research can be conducted to investigate whether the inclusion of practices which aim to promote the social interaction and bonding among classmates influence social presence and satisfaction with the programs focusing on the same subject matter. This information can help practitioners to verify what kind of activities strengthen the sense of social interaction in online courses.

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APPENDICES

A. APPROVAL OF METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER

ORTA DOĞU TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ
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29 OCAK 2021

Konu : Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi : İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Cennet Engin DEMİR

Danışmanlığını yaptığınız Zeynep Eda ALPSOY'un "Uzaktan Öğrenme Sürecinde Öğrencilerin Tecrübeleri: İngilizce Hazırlık Öğrencileri Örneği" başlıklı araştırmanız İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülmüş ve **381-ODTU-2020** protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

Saygılarımızla bilgilerinize sunarız.

Bu imza kişisel verinin korunması için kapatılmıştır

Prof. Dr. Mine MISIRLISOY
İAEK Başkanı

B. EFA EXAMINATIONS OF THE ITEMS

1. Various resources were used in the online lessons.	Pass
2. Resources facilitated my learning.	Pass
3. There were activities which improved my language skills.	Pass
4. Group and pair work were utilized.	Low factor loading
5. Group work activities are useful in improving my language skills.	Low communality
6. Homework was sufficient in quantity.	Pass
7. Homework helped me improve my English.	Pass
8. Difficulty level of homework was suitable for my level.	Low Factor Loading
9. The number of weekly lessons was enough to support my language improvement.	Low communality
10. Information about the use of online platforms was provided.	Pass
11. This information was clear and understandable.	Pass
12. It was easy to use the online platforms.	Pass
13. When I experienced a problem while using the online platforms, I could get help.	Pass
14. I use the Moodle to reach additional materials while I am studying	Incompatible
15. I can easily submit my writing and speaking homework on the Moodle.	Low Communality
16. I use the Moodle to follow the learning activities conducted outside the class hours.	Incompatible
17. I check the Moodle regularly to follow the updates in the lessons.	Incompatible
18. The Moodle helps us overcome the difficulties of distance learning.	Low Factor Loading
19. I can reach my teacher when I have a problem.	Pass
20. The instructor answers my questions in a timely manner.	Pass
21. The instructor's answers are enough to solve my problems.	Pass
22. The instructor gives feedback to my homework in a timely manner.	Pass
23. The feedback my instructor gives on my homework is clear and informative.	Pass
24. The instructor encourages me to actively participate in the lessons.	Redundant
25. The instructor gives me advice on how to improve my language skills.	Pass
26. The instructor provides additional resources/materials that help me improve my English.	Incompatible
27. The instructor efficiently uses the technology.	Incompatible
28. The instructor provides a comfortable environment where I can express myself.	Pass
29. The instructor clearly explains what I need to do within the scope of the lesson.	Pass
30. I feel that I am a part of this class.	Cross-loading
31. My classmates help me when I need.	Pass
32. My classmates answer my questions.	Pass
33. I think I have many things in common with my classmates.	Pass
34. My classmates are willing to help one another.	Pass
35. I think I have good relations with my classmates.	Pass
36. We act together with my classmates when necessary.	Cross-loading
37. I think I can trust my classmates.	Pass
38. I am satisfied with my online learning experience at the English preparatory school.	Pass
39. I like learning with distance education.	Pass
40. I consider taking online classes in the future in addition to face-to-face classes.	Singularity
41. Learning a language online offers me many opportunities.	Pass
42. Thanks to online education, I discovered many apps and websites to learn English.	Incompatible

C. ÇEVRİM İÇİ EĞİTİMDE ÖĞRENCİ DENEYİMLERİ VE MEMNUNİYETİ ANKETİ (SESOL)

Değerli Öğrenci,

Bu araştırma Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi Eğitim Programları ve Öğretim Yüksek Lisans öğrencisi Zeynep Eda Alpsoy tarafından Prof. Dr. Cennet Engin-Demir danışmanlığındaki yüksek lisans tezi kapsamında yürütülmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, uzaktan öğrenim sürecinde öğrencilerin tecrübelerini araştırmaktır. Anketi yanıtlamak yaklaşık 7-8 dakika sürmektedir. Cevaplarınız tamamıyla gizli tutulacak ve bilimsel amaçlarla kullanılacaktır. Soruları içtenlikle yanıtlamanız çalışmanın doğru sonuçlara ulaşması için önemlidir. Katılım sırasında sorulardan ya da herhangi başka bir nedenden ötürü kendinizi rahatsız hissederseniz anketi yarıda bırakıp çıkmakta serbestsiniz. Çalışma hakkında daha fazla bilgi almak için Zeynep Eda Alpsoy ( ) ile iletişim kurabilirsiniz. Katılımınız için teşekkür ederiz.

Araştırmaya gönüllü katıldığımı ve araştırma kapsamında paylaştığım bilgilerin bilimsel amaçlarla kullanılmasını ve gizlilik koşullarına uyulması şartıyla yayınlanmasını kabul ettiğimi beyan ederim.

( ) Onaylıyorum ( ) Onaylamıyorum

1. BÖLÜM

1. Cinsiyetiniz: ( )Kadın ( )Erkek
2. Yaşınız: _____
3. Fakülteniz: _____
4. Evinizde konuşulan dil: _____
5. En son tamamladığınız eğitim seviyesini seçiniz:
   ( ) Lise ( ) Ön lisans
   ( ) Lisans ( ) Diğer
6. Çalışma durumunuzu belirtiniz:
   ( ) Çalışmıyorum ( ) Yarı zamanlı çalışıyorum ( ) Tam zamanlı çalışıyorum
7. İngilizce Hazırlık eğitiminize hangi dil düzeyinden başladınız?
   ( ) A ( ) A+ ( ) B ( ) B+
8. 1. Periyot sonundaki geçme notunuz nedir?
   ( ) 80 -100 ( ) 64.5 – 80 ( ) 64 ve altı
9. 2. Periyot sonundaki ders notunuz nedir?
   ( ) 80 -100 ( ) 64.5 – 80 ( ) 64 ve altı
10. Canlı derslere katılırken hangi cihazları kullanıyorsunuz? Birden fazla işaretleyebilirsiniz.
    ( )Dizüstü bilgisayar ( )Masaüstü bilgisayar ( )Akıllı telefon ( ) Tablet bilgisayar
11. Daha önce uzaktan eğitim aldınız mı?
    ( ) Evet ( ) Hayır
12. Cevabınız evet ise, bu eğitimi nerden aldığınızı ve içeriğini belirtiniz.
    _____
13. Uzaktan eğitime erişimde sorun yaşıyor musunuz/yaşadınız mı?
    ( ) Evet ( )Hayır
14. Cevabınız "Evet" ise en sık karşılaştığınız sorunları yazınız?
    _____
15. Uzaktan eğitim sürecinde canlı derslere katılmak için uygun ortamınız var mı?
    ( ) Evet ( ) Hayır

16. Cevabınız “Hayır” ise ortam açısından karşılaştığınız sorunları yazınız.

_____

17. Uzaktan eğitim sürecinde ödevlerinizi yapmak için uygun ortamınız var mı?
( ) Evet ( ) Hayır

18. Cevabınız “Hayır” ise ortam karşılaştığınız sorunları yazınız.

_____

19. Sınıf arkadaşlarınızla iletişim kurabileceğiniz bir platform kullanıyor musunuz? (WhatsApp grubu, e-mail grubu vb.)
( ) Evet ( ) Hayır

20. Cevabınız “Evet” ise bu grubu hangi amaçla kullanıyorsunuz? Birden fazla seçenek işaretleyebilirsiniz.
( )Ödevlerden haberdar olmak
( )Grup ödevlerini yapmak
( )Sınavlara hazırlanmak
( )Ders materyalleri paylaşmak
( ) Sohbet etmek ve sosyalleşmek
Diğer : _____

2. BÖLÜM

Aşağıdaki ifadeleri okuyunuz ve uzaktan öğrenme tecrübelerinizi en doğru ifade eden seçeneği işaretleyiniz.

İfadeler	Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum	Katılmıyorum	Kararsızım	Katılıyorum	Kesinlikle katılıyorum
1. Canlı derslerde çeşitli öğrenme kaynakları kullanıldı (sunum, ilave alıştırma, video, oyun, web sitesi ve benzeri).	1	2	3	4	5
2. Canlı derslerde kullanılan kaynaklar öğrenmemi kolaylaştırdı.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Canlı derslerde ve/ya ödevlerde dil becerilerimi geliştirmeme yardımcı etkinlikler yapıldı.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Verilen ödevler dil becerilerimi geliştirmem için nicelik (miktar) bakımından yeterliydi.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Verilen ödevler İngilizcemi geliştirmeme yardımcı oldu.	1	2	3	4	5

3. BÖLÜM

Aşağıda verilen ifadeler ile ilgili size en uygun seçeneği işaretleyiniz. Çevrim içi platformlar, yüz yüze dersleri takip ve yüz yüze ders dışındaki çalışmalarınız için kullandığınız platformlardır.

İfadeler	Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum	Katılmıyorum	Kararsızım	Katılıyorum	Kesinlikle katılıyorum
6. Çevrim içi platformları kullanabilmem için gerekli bilgilere ulaşabildim.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Çevrim içi platformları kullanabilmem için verilen bilgiler yeterli ve açıklayıcıydı.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Çevrim içi platformları kullanmak kolaydı.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Kullandığımız çevrim içi platformlarla ilgili bir sorun yaşadığımda gerekli yardıma ulaşabildim.	1	2	3	4	5

4. BÖLÜM

Aşağıda verilen ifadeleri şu an dersinizi giren öğretim görevlisini düşünerek cevaplayınız. Dersinize birden çok öğretim görevlisi giriyor ise soruları en çok ders saati olan hocanızı düşünerek cevaplayınız.

İfadeler	Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum	Katılmıyorum	Kararsızım	Katılıyorum	Kesinlikle katılıyorum
10. Bir sorum veya problemim olduğunda hocama ulaşabilirim.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Hocam çok zaman geçmeden sorularıma geri dönüş sağlar.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Hocamın cevapları, soru ve sorunlarımı çözmem için yeterli olur.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Hocam ödevlerime çok zaman geçmeden geri bildirim sağlar.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Hocamın ödevlerime yaptığı geri bildirimler açık ve bilgilendiricidir.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Hocam dil becerilerimi geliştirmem için tavsiyelerde bulunur.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Hocam canlı derslerde kendimi ifade edebileceğim rahat bir ortam sağlar.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Hocam ders kapsamında yapmam gerekenleri ve benden beklenenleri anlaşılır bir şekilde açıklar.					

5. BÖLÜM

Aşağıda verilen ifadeleri şu anda eğitim aldığınız sınıfı düşünerek cevaplayınız.

İfadeler	Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum	Katılmıyorum	Kararsızım	Katılıyorum	Kesinlikle katılıyorum
18. İhtiyacım olduğunda, sınıf arkadaşlarım bana yardımcı olurlar.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Sınıf arkadaşlarım sorularıma yanıt verirler.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Sınıf arkadaşlarımla birçok ortak yönüm olduğunu düşünüyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
21.Sınıf arkadaşlarım birbirlerine yardım etmeye isteklidirler.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Sınıf arkadaşlarımla iyi ilişkilerim olduğunu düşünüyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Sınıftaki öğrencilere güvenebileceğimi düşünüyorum.	1	2	3	4	5

6. BÖLÜM

Aşağıda verilen ifadeler ile ilgili size en uygun seçeneği işaretleyiniz.

İfadeler	Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum	Katılmıyorum	Kararsızım	Katılıyorum	Kesinlikle katılıyorum
24. İngilizce hazırlık sürecindeki uzaktan öğrenme tecrübemden memnunum.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Uzaktan eğitim ile bir şeyler öğrenmek hoşuma gidiyor.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Uzaktan dil öğrenmek bana birçok fırsat sunuyor.	1	2	3	4	5

7. BÖLÜM

1. Uzaktan İngilizce öğrenme tecrübenizde beğendiğiniz/hoşunuza giden yönler nelerdir? Yazınız.

---

2. Uzaktan öğrenme tecrübenizde değiştirmek istediğiniz yönler var mı? Varsa neleri değiştirmek isterdiniz? Yazınız.

D. STUDENT EXPERIENCES AND SATISFACTION IN ONLINE LEARNING SCALE (SESOL)

Dear Student,

This research is conducted within the scope of a master's thesis by Zeynep Eda Alpsoy with the supervision of Prof. Dr. Cennet Engin-Demir at the Curriculum and Instruction Program at Middle East Technical University. This research aims to investigate the experiences of students during the distance education period. Participating in the study will take around 7-8 minutes of your time. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential and will only be used for scientific purposes. Your sincere answers will ensure that the results of the study are accurate. If you feel uncomfortable with the questions or for any other reason during participation, you are free to leave the survey unfinished. If you want to obtain more information about the study, you can contact Zeynep Eda Alpsoy ( ). Thank you for your participation.

I declare that I voluntarily participated in the research and that I accept the use of the information I shared within the scope of the research for scientific purposes and its publication on condition that confidentiality conditions are respected.

( ) I approve ( ) I do not approve

PART 1

1. Sex: ( )Female ( )Male
2. Age: _____
3. Department: _____
4. Mother language: _____
5. Choose your latest qualification
   ( ) High school ( ) Associate degree
   ( )Bachelor ( ) Other
6. Working status:
   ( )not working ( )working part-time ( )working full-time
7. What was your language level when you started the preparatory school (1st period)?
   ( ) A ( ) A+ ( )B ( )B+
8. What was your total grade at the end of the 1st period?
   ( ) 80 -100 ( ) 64.5 – 80 ( ) 64 and below
9. What was your total grade at the end of the 2nd period?
   ( ) 80 -100 ( ) 64.5 – 80 ( ) 64 and below
10. Which device do you use to participate in the online lessons? You can mark more than one.
    ( )Laptop computer ( )Desktop computer ( )Smart phone ( ) Tablet computer
11. Have you taken distance education courses before?
    ( ) Yes ( )No
12. If your answer is yes, state where you attended distance education courses.
    _____
13. Have you experienced any problems during the online lessons?
    ( ) Yes ( )No
14. If your answer is yes, write the most important problems you had.
    _____
15. Do you have a suitable study environment to participate in the online lessons?
    ( )Yes ( )No

16. If your answer is no, what kind of difficulties have you experienced during the online lessons?

_____

17. Do you have a suitable study environment to do your homework?

( )Yes ( )No

18. If your answer is no, what kind of difficulties have you experienced while doing your homework?

_____

19. Do you use a platform where you can contact your classmates? (WhatsApp, e-mail groups…)

( )Yes ( )No

20. If your answer is "Yes" for the 18th question, for what purposes do you use that platform? You can mark more than one option.

( )learn the homework
( )do the group homework
( )prepare for the exams
( )share course materials
Others:_____

PART 2

Read the statements and choose the option that best describes your experiences in the distance learning process at the preparatory school.

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
10. Various sources were used in the online lessons (slides, additional exercises, videos, games, web sites and so on).	1	2	3	4	5
11. Sources used in the online lessons facilitated my learning.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Activities that helped me improve my language skills were done in the online lessons.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Assignments were sufficient in quantity.	1	2	3	4	5
14. The homework I was assigned helped me improve my English.	1	2	3	4	5

PART 3

Read the statements and choose the option that best describes your experiences with the online platforms.

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
15. I could reach the necessary information to reach the online platforms.	1	2	3	4	5
16. The information about the use of online platforms was clear and sufficient.	1	2	3	4	5
17. It was easy to use the online platforms.	1	2	3	4	5
18. When I experienced a problem while using the online platforms, I could get help.	1	2	3	4	5

PART 4

Read the statements and choose the option that best describes your experiences with your teacher. If you have more than one teacher, reply according to the teacher who has more classes with you.

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
19. I can reach the instructor when I have a problem.	1	2	3	4	5
20. The instructor answers my questions in a timely manner.	1	2	3	4	5
21. The instructor's answers are enough to solve my problems.	1	2	3	4	5
22. The instructor gives feedback to my homework in a timely manner.	1	2	3	4	5
23. The feedback my instructor gives on my homework is clear and informative.	1	2	3	4	5
24. The instructor gives me advice on how to improve my language skills.	1	2	3	4	5
25. The instructor provides a comfortable environment during the live lessons where I can express myself.	1	2	3	4	5
26. The instructor clearly explains what I need to do within the scope of the lesson.	1	2	3	4	5

PART 5

Answer the following statements considering the class you are currently studying in.

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
27. My classmates help me when I need.	1	2	3	4	5
28. My classmates answer my questions.	1	2	3	4	5
29. I think I have many things in common with my classmates.	1	2	3	4	5
30. My classmates are willing to help one another.	1	2	3	4	5
31. I think I have good relations with my classmates.	1	2	3	4	5
32. I think I can trust my classmates.	1	2	3	4	5

PART 6

Choose the option that best describes your experiences.

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
33. I am satisfied with my online learning experience at the English preparatory school.	1	2	3	4	5
34. I like learning with distance education.	1	2	3	4	5
35. Learning a language from a distance offers me many opportunities.	1	2	3	4	5

PART 7

1. What are the things you like about your online language learning experience at AYBU?

_____

2. If you had the chance, what would you change about the online learning system?

_____

E. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN ÇEVRİM İÇİ EĞİTİM DENEYİMLERİ: İNGİLİZCE HAZIRLIK OKULU ÖRNEĞİ

Giriş

Dünyayı etkileyen COVID-19 pandemisini kontrol altına almak üzere birçok ülkede yüz yüze eğitim askıya alındı ve Türkiye'de 25 milyon öğrenci, uzaktan eğitime geçti. Bu öğrencilerden 7,2 milyonu üniversite öğrencisiydi (UNESCO, 2020). COVID-19 pandemisinin ortaya çıkışıyla çevrim içi eğitimin kullanımında benzeri görülmemiş bir artış yaşandı. Diğer bir deyişle, yüz yüze eğitim almanın mümkün olmadığı durumlarda öğretimin sağlanmasını mümkün kıldığı için, çevrim içi eğitimin hayatımızdaki önemi büyüktür ve giderek artmaktadır. Çevrim içi eğitim programlarının kalitesini arttırmak ve sürdürmek için, öğrencilerin çevrim içi öğrenme ortamları ve memnuniyetlerini etkileyen diğer faktörlerle ilgili deneyimlerini anlamak gerekir. Bu çalışmanın amaçlarından biri çevrim içi öğrenme ortamı faktörleri ve öğrenci memnuniyeti konularını inceleyerek, etkili çevrim içi programların tasarlanması ve uygulanması için gereken geri bildirimleri toplamaktır. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda, öğrencilerin çevrim içi eğitim sürecinde karşılaştıkları sorunlara ışık tutmayı ve genel memnuniyeti etkileyen etmenleri açığa çıkarmayı hedeflemektedir.

Araştırma Soruları

1. Üniversite öğrencilerinin çevrim içi eğitimlerine ilişkin algıları ve deneyimleri nelerdir?

2. Üniversite öğrencilerinin öğrenme ortamlarına ilişkin algıları ile öğrenci memnuniyeti arasında anlamlı bir ilişki var mıdır?

3. Öğrenci özellikleri ile çevrim içi eğitim sürecinden memnuniyet arasında anlamlı bir ilişki var mıdır?

Alanyazın Taraması

Çalışmalar, öğrenci memnuniyetinin, motivasyon, eğitimi tamamlama ve akademik performans gibi birçok etmeni olumlu etkilediğini göstermiştir (Herbert, 2006; Ramsden & Entwistle, 1981; Martin-Rodriguez et al. 2015). Aynı zamanda, öğrenci memnuniyeti, bir uzaktan eğitim programındaki sorunlu alanların belirlenmesine yardımcı olabilir (Law, 2010; Pearson & Trinidad, 2005). Bu sebeple, uzaktan eğitimin son jenerasyonu olarak ortaya çıkmış olan çevrim içi eğitimde (Aoki, 2012), öğrenci memnuniyeti, eğitim kalitesinin önemli bir göstergesi olarak kabul edilmektedir (Bradford & Wyatt, 2010; Law, 2010; Martin-Rodriguez et al., 2015; Thygesen et al. 2020). Öğrenci memnuniyeti hem öğrenme ortamı faktörlerinden hem de öğrencinin kendi ile ilgili özelliklerden etkilenmektedir. Öğrencinin kendi ile ilgili özellikler, cinsiyet, bilgisayar öz-yeterliliği ve daha önce uzaktan eğitimi deneyimlemiş olma durumu gibi başlıkları içermektedir. Öğrenme ortamı ile ilgili faktörler, öğretmen desteteği, akran ilişkileri, ders içeriği ve etkileşim gibi birçok konuyu kapsamaktadır. Fraser (2012), öğrenme ortamını, öğrenmeyi sağlayan, sosyal, fiziksel, psikolojik ve eğitimsel etmenler olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Çalışmalar, öğrenme ortamının, duyuşsal

ve bilişsel eğitim çıktıları ile ilişkili olduğunu göstermektedir (Fraser, 2007, 2015). Akademik performans, bilişsel çıktılara; öğrenci memnuniyeti ise duyuşsal çıktılara örnek olarak verilebilir.

Başarılı bir öğrenme ortamı oluşturulmasına ışık tutan teoriler bulunmaktadır. Bunlardan ilki, Bandura'nın Sosyal-Bilişsel Kuramıdır (1986). Bandura, öğrenmenin birey, çevre ve davranış sosyal bir bağlamda etkileşime girdiğinde gerçekleştiğini savunur. Bu kurama göre, bireyler arası etkileşim ve sosyalleşme öğrenmenin temelini oluşturmaktadır. Moos (1974), sosyal ortamların, kişiler arası ilişkiler, kişisel gelişim imkanlarının varlığı ve sistemin devamlılığı ve değişimi ile ilgili konulara bağlı olarak birbirinden ayrı kategorilere konabileceğini öne sürmüştür. Diğer bir deyişle, öğrenciler arasındaki ilişkiler, öğrencilerin kendini geliştirmesine yönelik imkanlar, beklentilerdeki netlik, düzenlilik, öğrencilere verilen kontrolün kapsamı ve değişime duyarlı olma gibi durumlar eğitim ortamlarını birbirinden birbirinde ayıran faktörlerdir (Moos, 1974). Tinto (1975, 1987), Sosyal Etkileşim Teorisinde, öğrencilerin, eğitim ortamına akademik ve sosyal olarak entegre olmasının, öğrencilerin eğitim kurumuna bağlılığını güçlendirdiğini ve okul terklerini engellediğini öne sürmektedir. Bu teori ve sınıflandırmalardan da anlaşılacağı gibi, eğitim sanal ortamda gerçekleşse de sosyal etkileşim ve iletişimin eğitim için önemi yadsınamaz. Moore (1989), uzaktan eğitimde 3 tür etkileşim olduğunu öne sürmüştür. Bunlar, öğrenciler arası etkileşim, öğrenci-öğretmen etkileşimi ve öğrenci-içerik etkileşimidir. Anderson'un (2003) Etkileşim Eşdeğerliği Teoremi'ne göre, bu 3 etkileşim türünden birinin yüksek seviyede mevcut olması, öğrenmenin gerçekleşmesi ve öğrenci memnuniyetinin sağlanması için yeterlidir. Fakat hangi etkileşim türünün teşvik edileceği konusunda öğrenim

modunun (uzaktan veya yüz yüze) ve ders konusunun dikkate alınması gerektiği savunulmaktadır (Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010). Garrison ve diğ. (1999), öğrenmenin bir "araştırma topluluğunda" gerçekleşebileceğini ve böyle bir toplulukta 3 öğenin mevcut olması gerektiğini öne sürmektedir. Bunlar, bilişsel buradalık, toplumsal buradalık ve öğretimsel buradalıktır. Bilişsel buradalık, topluluk üyelerinin devamlı iletişim yoluyla ne ölçüde bilgi oluşturabildiklerini ifade eder. Sosyal buradalık, öğrencilerin kişiliklerini topluma yansıtma ve bir kişi olarak var olma yeteneği olarak tanımlanır. Son olarak ise, öğretimsel buradalık, bir araştırma topluluğunun tüm bileşenlerini dengeli ve işlevsel bir şekilde bir araya getirir. Öğretimsel buradalık, "kişisel olarak anlamlı ve eğitsel olarak değerli öğrenme çıktılarını gerçekleştirmek amacıyla bilişsel ve sosyal süreçlerin tasarımı, kolaylaştırılması ve yönlendirilmesi" olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Kısacası, öğrenmenin sosyal, bilişsel ve öğretim ile ilgili yönlerinin uzaktan eğitimde anahtar öğeler olduğu öne sürülmüştür. Etkileşimsel Uzaklık Teorisi, öğrenci-öğretmen arasındaki ilişkiye ışık tutmaktadır (Moore, 1997). Etkileşimsel uzaklık öğrenci ile öğretmen arasında bulunan iletişimsel ve psikolojik uzaklık olarak tanımlanır ve bu uzaklık 3 faktörden etkilenir. Bunlar, program yapısı, diyalog ve öğrenci özerkliğidir. Ders hedefleri, öğretim stratejileri ve değerlendirme yöntemleri program yapısını oluşturur. Diyalog, öğrenciler ve öğretmen arasındaki eğitimsel etkileşimi ifade eder ve olumlu bir anlama sahip olduğu belirtilmektedir. Son olarak, öğrencilerin özerk olmasının etkileşimsel uzaklığın algılanışını etkilediği belirtilmiştir. Moore (1997), öğrencilerin eğitim sürecini bağımsız olarak yönetebildikleri zaman, özerk olmayan öğrenciler kadar diyalojik bir sürece ihtiyaç duymadıklarını ve açıkça tanımlanmış bir yapı olmadan işlev görebileceklerini ifade etmiştir. Yukarıda bahsedilen teori ve sınıflandırmalardan da anlaşılacağı üzere,

öğretim ortamını etkileyen birçok temel faktör vardır. Öğrenimin çevrim içi olarak gerçekleşmesi, dersin konusu ve eğitim felsefesi, hangi faktörlere önem verildiği konusunda önemli ipuçları sağlayabilir.

Teknolojinin yoğun olarak kullanıldığı veya eğitimin tamamen çevrim içi gerçekleştiği ortamlarda, öğrenci veya öğretmenlerin öğrenme ortamına dair algılarını araştırmak üzere birçok çalışma gerçekleştirilmiştir. Şimdiye kadar geliştirilen ölçeklerden bazıları ve odaklandıkları başlıklar aşağıdaki gibidir:

- Uzaktan ve Açık Öğrenme Ortamı Ölçeği (DOLES): Etkileşim, kurumsal destek, teknolojik destek, öğretmen desteği, görev yönelimi, uzlaşma, esneklik ve ergonomi (Jegede ve diğ., 1995).
- Yapılandırmacı Çevrim içi Öğrenme Ortamı Anketi (COLLES): Mesleki alaka, yansıtıcı düşünme, etkileşim, bilişsel talep, duyuşsal destek ve anlamın yorumlanması (Taylor & Maor, 2000).
- Web Tabanlı Öğrenme Ortamı Envanteri (WEBLEI): Özgürleştirici faaliyetler, ortak katılımlı faaliyetler, nitelikler, bilgi yapısı ve tasarım faaliyetleri (Chang & Fisher, 2001).
- Teknoloji-Donanımlı ve Kazanım-Odaklı Öğrenme Ortamı Envanteri (TROFLEI): Öğrenciler arası uyum, öğretmen desteği, katılım, araştırma, görev bilinci, iş birliği, sınıf içi demokrasi ve eşitlik, farklılaşma, bilgisayar kullanımı ve ergen kültürü (Aldridge et al., 2004).

- Çevrim içi Öğrenme Ortamı Anketi (OLES): Öğretmen desteği, öğrenci özerkliği, öğrenci etkileşimi ve iş birliği, kişisel ilgi, otantik öğrenme, bilgisayar kullanımı ve asenkronluk durumu. (Trinidad ve diğ., 2005).
- Uzaktan Eğitim Öğrenme Ortamı Anketi (DELES): Öğretmen desteği, öğrenci etkileşimi ve iş birliği, öğrenci özerkliği, kişisel ilgi ve otantik öğrenme (Walker & Fraser, 2005).
- Çevrim içi Öğrenme Ortamı (OLLES): Bilgisayar yeterliliği, öğrenci iş birliği, öğretmen desteği, materyal ortamı, bilgi tasarımı ve çekiciliği, aktif öğrenme ve yansıtıcı düşünme (Clayton, 2007).

Yöntem

Desen

Öğrencilerin çevrim içi eğitim deneyimlerini incelemek üzere gerçekleştirilen bu çalışmada karma araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın odağını oluşturan nicel verilerin analizini ve yorumlanmasını desteklemek için nitel görüşme verileri kullanılmıştır. Cresswell (2003), karma araştırma yöntemlerini 6'ya ayırmıştır. Nitel veriler, nicel verilerden sonra toplandığı ve nicel verileri destekleme amacıyla kullanıldığı için bu çalışma, "sıralı açıklayıcı desen" kategorisine girmektedir.

Örneklem

Araştırma kapsamında, pilot çalışma, ana çalışma ve görüşmeler olmak üzere 3 farklı veri toplama işlemi gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmanın örneklemini, Türkiye'deki bir

devlet üniversitesinin yabancı diller yüksekokulunda İngilizce öğrenen öğrenciler oluşturmuştur. Bulguların temelini oluşturan ana çalışmaya 226 öğrenci katılmıştır. Bu öğrenciler, COVID-19 pandemisi tedbirleri sonucunda okulların kapanmasıyla zorunlu olarak çevrim içi eğitime geçen öğrencilerdir. Uzaktan eğitim sürecinde öğrencilerden veri toplamak zorlaştığı ve çalışmanın gerçekleştirilebilmesi için yeterli veriye ulaşılabilmesi hedefiyle kolay ulaşılabilir durum örneklemesi yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın örnekleme oranı %16,38 olarak ölçülmüştür. Çalışmaya katılan öğrencilerin 136'sını kadın (%60,2), 90'ını (%39,8) ise erkek öğrenciler oluşturmaktadır. Öğrencilerden 209'u (%92,5) lise mezunu, 10'u (%4,4) lisans mezunu, 4'ü (%1,8) ön lisans mezunu olduğunu belirtmiş ve 3 (%1,3) öğrenci ise "diğer" seçeneğini işaretlemiştir. Öğrencilerin 87'si (%38,5) başlangıç düzeyinde, 100'ü (%44,2) temel düzeyde, 20'si (%8,8) orta öncesi düzeyde ve 19'u (%8,4) orta düzeyde İngilizce hazırlık eğitimlerine başlamıştır. Nitel verilerin toplanması için 13 öğrenciyle görüşme yapılmıştır. Bu öğrencilerin 7'sini kadın, 6'sını erkek öğrenciler oluşturmaktadır.

Veri Toplama Araçları

Alanyazın taramasında, daha önce gerçekleştirilen uzaktan eğitim öğrenme ortamı araştırmalarında kullanılan anketler incelendi ve bu anketlerin, bu çalışma bağlamında direk kullanılmaya uygun olmadığı görüldü. Bu sebeple, nicel verilerin toplanmasında, araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen bir anket kullanıldı (SESOL). Pilot çalışma için veri toplamaya başlamadan önce, hazırlanan anketin görünüş ve içerik geçerliğini incelemeleri için 5 öğretim görevlisi ve 1 eğitim bilimleri öğretim üyesinden uzman

görüşü alınmıştır. Anket ilk oluşturulduğunda 42 Likert tipi madde içeriyordu. 202 öğrenciden veri toplanan pilot çalışmadan sonra gerçekleştirilen açımlayıcı faktör analizinin sonucunda bazı maddeler çıkarılmış ve Likert tipi madde sayısı 26'ya düşmüştür. Ana çalışma verileri ile gerçekleştirilen doğrulayıcı faktör analizi, açımlayıcı faktör analizinde elde edilen faktör yapısını onaylamıştır. Öğrencilerin soruları anladığından emin olmak için anket Türkçe uygulanmıştır. 7 bölümden oluşan anketin 1. bölümündeki sorular, demografik bilgiler ve uzaktan eğitim deneyimleriyle alakalıdır (Ek C). Bu bölümü takip eden 5 bölüm, 26 adet 5'li Likert tipi maddeden oluşmaktadır. Bu bölümler, öğretim görevlisi desteği, çevrim içi sistemlerin kullanımı ve teknik destek, akran ilişkileri ile ders etkinlikleri ve materyalleri konularına odaklanmıştır. 5. bölüm öğrencilerin genel memnuniyetini ölçmek üzere eklenmiştir. Son bölümde ise öğrencilerin olumlu ve olumsuz uzaktan eğitim tecrübelerinden kısaca bahsetmesi istenen 2 açık uçlu soru bulunmaktadır. Nicel verilerin analizini takiben, bulguların yorumlanmasını desteklemek amacıyla 6 açık uçlu görüşme sorusu hazırlanmıştır. Görüşme soruları, öğrencilerin mevcut deneyimlerine ışık tutmanın yanı sıra öğrencilerin, bu deneyimlerin nasıl iyileştirilebileceğine yönelik düşüncelerini de almak üzere oluşturulmuştur.

Veri Toplama Süreci

Veri toplama süreci başlamadan önce, ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (Ek A), çalışmanın gerçekleştiği üniversitenin etik kurulu ve çalışmanın gerçekleştiği yabancı diller yüksekokulunun müdürlüğünden gerekli izinler alınmıştır. Veriler, COVID-19 pandemisi koşullarından dolayı Google Forms aracılığıyla internet ortamında

toplanmıştır. Pilot çalışmaya, yaklaşık 500 öğrenci öğrenme sistemi üzerinden mesaj yolu ile davet edilmiştir. Gerekli sayı sağlanamadığından dolayı, öğretim görevlileri ile iletişime geçilip öğrencilerine çalışma daveti konusunda hatırlatma yapmaları rica edilmiştir ve gerekli katılım sağlandığında (202) pilot çalışma kapatılmıştır. Ana çalışmada, bütün yüksekokul öğrencilerine duyuru e-postası gönderilmiş, öğretim görevlileri hatırlatmalarda bulunmuş ve sonuçta 226 öğrenci çalışmaya katılmıştır. Anketi tamamlamak yaklaşık 8 dakika, görüşmeler ise 8 ile 15 dakika arasında zaman almıştır. Çalışmaya katılım gönüllülük esasına bağlı olup anketin başlangıcında katılımcılardan gerekli izin alınmıştır (Ek C). Ankete katılan 35 öğrenci e-posta yoluyla görüşmeye davet edilmiş ve 13 olumlu geri bildirim sağlanmıştır. Görüşmeler video konferans programı aracılığıyla görüntülü veya sesli olarak gerçekleştirilmiş ve katılımcıların izniyle görüşmelerde ses kaydı yapılmıştır.

Veri Analizi

Nicel verilerin analizinde, SPSS 25 VE AMOS 24 olmak üzere iki farklı istatistik programı kullanılmıştır. Öncelikle, SPSS kullanılarak pilot çalışma verileri üzerinde açımlayıcı faktör analizi yapıldı. Bu analizde hem temel bileşenler analizi hem asal eksen faktör analizi yöntemi denenmiş, iki analiz de aynı faktör yapısını ortaya çıkarmıştır. Ana çalışma verilerinin analizinde betimsel ve çıkarımsal yöntemler kullanılmıştır. Betimsel analizlerde, madde ve faktörlerin frekans, yüzde, ortalama, ortanca ve standart sapma değerleri kullanılmıştır. Çıkarımsal analizlerde faktörlerin ortalama puanları referans alınmıştır. Çıkarımsal analizler için tek yönlü tekrarlanan varyans analizi ve Pearson korelasyon testi kullanıldı. AMOS 24, ana çalışma verileri

üzerinde doğrulayıcı faktör analizini gerçekleştirmek için kullanıldı. Bu aşama, açımlayıcı faktör analizinden sonra ve ana çalışma nicel veri analizinden önce yürütülmüştür.

Görüşmelerin analizi için betimsel içerik analizi yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Kaydedilen öğrenci görüşmeleri tekrar dinlenmiş, ortaya çıkan temalar, deneyimler ve anekdotsal bilgiler not edilmiştir. Görüşmelerde sorulan her soru farklı bir temaya odaklandığından, bu sorular nicel verilerin analizinin tematik çerçevesini ortaya koymaktadır.

Araştırmanın Sınırlılıkları

Çalışmanın sınırlılıklarından biri, verilerin tek bir okuldan ve aynı eğitimi alan öğrencilerden toplanmış olması nedeniyle bulguların genellenebilir olmamasıdır. Sonuçların genellenebilirliğini engelleyen bir diğer neden ise kolay ulaşılabilir durum örneklemesi yönteminin kullanılmasıdır Araştırmanın ikinci sınırlılığı, çevrim içi eğitimin bu araştırmaya katılanlar için gönüllü bir seçim olmaktan çok bir gereklilik olmasıdır. Bu durumun öğrencilerin çevrim içi eğitime yaklaşımlarını ve dolayısıyla çalışmanın sonuçlarını etkilemesi muhtemeldir.

Bulgular

Bu çalışmanın bulgularına bir devlet üniversitesinin İngilizce hazırlık okulunda eğitim alan öğrencilerden anket ve görüşme yolu ile toplanan veriler aracılığıyla ulaşılmıştır.

İlk olarak anketin bütün maddeleri, ortalama ve ortanca değerleri aracılığıyla analiz edildi (Tablo 4.1). En yüksek ortalama değerleri alan maddelerin eğitmen desteği boyutuna, en düşük ortalama değeri alan maddelerin ise genel memnuniyet boyutuna ait olduğu görüldü. Madde analizinin ardından açımlayıcı ve doğrulayıcı faktör analizleri ile elde edilen 5 faktörün ortalama değerleri hesaplanmıştır. Ortalama değerinin en yüksek olduğu faktör öğretim görevlisi desteği olurken, bunu sırasıyla teknik destek, ders etkinlikleri ve materyalleri, akran ilişkileri ve genel memnuniyet izlemiştir. Öğretim görevlisi desteği, teknik destek, ders aktiviteleri ve materyalleri ve akran ilişkileri boyutları öğrenciler tarafından tatmin edici bulunsa da genel memnuniyetin nispeten daha düşük olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. 5 faktörün ortalama değerlerinin birbirinden anlamlı derecede farklı olup olmadığını incelemek üzere tek yönlü tekrarlanan varyans analizi yapılmış ve ortalama değerlerin birbirinden anlamlı olarak fark gösterdiği ortaya çıkmıştır.

Bu çalışmanın amaçlarından birisi de öğrenme ortamı ile öğrenci memnuniyeti arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemekti. Bu çalışmada odaklanılan öğrenme ortamı faktörleri olan öğretim görevlisi desteği, teknik destek, ders etkinlikleri ve materyalleri ve akran ilişkileri ile genel memnuniyet arasındaki ilişki Pearson korelasyon analizi kullanılarak incelenmişti. Analizler, öğrenme ortamı faktörlerinin her biri ile öğrenci memnuniyeti arasında anlamlı bir pozitif ilişki olduğunu göstermiştir. Memnuniyeti en çok etkileyen öğrenme ortamı faktörünün ders aktiviteleri ve materyalleri boyutu olduğu bulunmuştur. Öğrenme ortamının yanı sıra öğrenci özelliklerinin genel memnuniyet ile ilişkisi de analiz edilmiştir. Bu analizde odaklanılan öğrenci özellikleri cinsiyet, çalışma durumu, okul başındaki dil seviyesi ve öğrencinin akademik

başarısıdır. Pearson korelasyon analizinde öğrenci özellikleri ve memnuniyet arasındaki ilişki ayrı ayrı incelenmiş ve öğrenci özellikleri ile genel memnuniyet arasında anlamlı bir ilişki görülmemiştir.

Bir sonraki aşamada, öğrencilerin daha önce çevrim içi öğrenim deneyimine sahip olup olmaması ve çevrim içi öğrenime erişimde sorun yaşayıp yaşamaması konusu incelenmiştir. Öğrencilerin %34,1', daha önce çevrim içi öğrenim deneyimi edindiğini, geri kalan %65,9 u ise böyle bir deneyimi olmadığını belirtmiştir. Korelasyon analizi, daha önce çevrim içi eğitimi deneyimlemiş olmak ile genel memnuniyet arasında anlamlı bir pozitif ilişki olduğunu göstermiştir. Çevrim içi eğitime erişim konusunda, öğrencilerin %54,4' ünün sorun yaşarken %45,6'sının böyle bir sorunla karşılaşmadığı bulunmuştur. Korelasyon analizi sonucunda, çevrim içi eğitime erişimde sorun yaşama durumu ile genel memnuniyet arasında anlamlı negatif bir ilişki olduğu görülmüştür.

Son bölümde ise görüşmeler yoluyla toplanan veriler öğretim görevlisi desteği, akran ilişkileri, çevrim içi eğitim platformları ve genel değerlendirme olmak üzere 4 alt başlıkta analiz edilmiştir. Öğrencilerin büyük çoğunluğunun öğretim görevlisi desteği konusunda hemfikir oldukları görüldü. Ek materyallerin paylaşılması, öğrencilerle ders saatleri dışında iletişim kurma, öğrencilere karşı olumlu tutum ve zamanında ve ayrıntılı geri bildirim sağlanması, öğrencilerin bahsettiği olumlu öğretim görevlisi özellikleri arasındaydı. Akran ilişkileri konusunda, görüşülen öğrencilerin yaklaşık yarısı sınıf arkadaşlarıyla olan iletişimlerinden memnun olduğunu belirtti. Ders saatleri dışında çevrim içi vakit geçirmek, birbirine yardım etmek ve etkileşimde

bulunmaya istekli olmak, öğrenciler tarafından vurgulanan önemli konulardı. Görüşülen kişilerin tamamı üniversitenin kullandığı video konferans programının ve Moodle sisteminin faydalı ve kullanımının kolay olduğunu belirtti. Kullanılan video konferans programında ara sıra meydana gelen hatalar ve internet bağlantısı hatasından kaynaklanan kesintiler öğrencilerin belirttiği sorunlar arasındaydı. Son olarak, öğrencilerin çevrim içi eğitimin olumlu ve olumsuz yönlerine ilişkin algıları incelenmiş ve raporlanmıştır. Olumlu yönler arasında, ulaşıma zaman harcanmadığı için ders ve diğer şeyler için daha çok zaman ayırabilmek, evde rahatça ders çalışabilmek ve birçok çevrim içi materyale ulaşabilmek sayılabilir. Olumsuz yönler arasında motivasyon ve konsantrasyon kaybı, çok fazla ödev olması, sürekli evde yaşamanın getirdiği zorluklar, uzun saatler bilgisayar başında oturmaktan kaynaklanan sağlık sorunları ile akranlar ve öğretim görevlileriyle sosyal iletişimin olmaması sayılabilir.

Tartışma

Bu çalışma, çevrim içi eğitimde öğrenci deneyimleri ve memnuniyetine odaklanmıştır. Öğrenci deneyimlerinin öğrenme ortamı ile ilgili olan bölümü 4 başlık altında incelenmiştir. Bu başlıklar öğretim görevlisi desteği, teknik destek, ders etkinlikleri ve materyalleri ile akran ilişkileridir. Alanyazın taraması, öğrenci deneyimlerini etkileyen diğer bir etkenin de öğrenci özellikleri olduğunu göstermiştir (Allen ve diğ., 2007; Kim ve diğ., 2011; Thurmond ve diğ., 2002; Thygesen ve diğ., 2020). Bu çalışmada öğrenci özellikleri, öğrencinin kendisinden kaynaklananlar ve önceki

deneyimlerinden, altyapısından ve ev ortamından kaynaklananlar olmak üzere iki grupta incelenmiştir.

Öğrencinin kendisinden kaynaklanan özellikler, cinsiyet, çalışma durumu, okul başlangıcındaki dil seviyesi ve akademik başarı olarak ele alınmıştır. Analizler, bu özelliklerden hiçbirinin genel memnuniyetle anlamlı bir ilişkisi olmadığını göstermiştir. Bu bulgu birçok çalışmayla paralellik göstermektedir (Moore & Kearsley, 1996; Shea ve diğ., 2006; Thygesen ve diğ., 2020; Yükseltürk & Bulut, 2007). Alanyazında öğrenci memnuniyetine verilen büyük önem göz önüne alındığında, genel memnuniyet ile akademik başarı arasında anlamlı bir ilişkinin olmaması dikkat çekici bir bulgudur. Öğrenci kaynaklı özellikler ile memnuniyet arasında bir ilişki olmamasının nedeni konusunda ise Shea ve diğ. (2006), çevrim içi eğitimin farklı öğrencilerin farklı beklenti ve ihtiyaçlarını karşılamış olabileceğini iddia etmektedir. Bu çalışmada, öğrencilerin genel memnuniyetlerinin düşük olduğu düşünüldüğünde aynı mantıksal sonuca öğrencilerin olumsuz deneyimlerine bakılarak da ulaşılabilir. Benzer şekilde, görüşmelerde öğrencilerin dile getirdikleri olumsuz yönler dikkate alındığında, farklı öğrenciler tarafından aynı kaygıların dile getirildiği görülmüştür öğrencilerin özellikleri farklı olsa da karşılaştıkları sorunların ve kaygılarının aynı olduğu sonucuna varılabilir.

Öğrenci özelliklerinin diğer yönünde, öğrencilerin daha önce çevrim içi eğitim alma durumu ve çevrim içi eğitime erişimde sorun yaşama durumu incelenmiştir. Öğrencilerin yaklaşık 1/3'ü daha önce çevrim içi eğitimi deneyimlediğini belirtmiştir. Korelasyon analizi, öğrencilerin daha önce çevrim içi eğitimi deneyimlemiş olma

durumunun genel memnuniyeti olumlu etkilediğini göstermiştir. Bu bulgu, alandaki birçok çalışmayla örtüşmektedir (Arbaugh, 2004; Astani ve diğ., 2010; Hixon ve diğ., 2016; Wang ve diğ., 2013). Bununla beraber, bu bulguyla örtüşmeyen çalışmalar görmek de mümkündür (Thurmond ve diğ., 2002; Kim ve diğ., 2011). Çevrim içi eğitimi daha önce deneyimlemiş öğrencilerin daha çok memnun olmalarının sebebinin, öğrencilerin sanal ortamda öğrenme ve başkalarıyla çevrim içi etkileşime geçme yeteneklerinin artması olduğu belirtilmiştir (Palmer & Holt, 2009; Young & Norgard, 2006). Öğrenci ile ilgili konular bakımından incelenen son başlık öğrencilerin çevrim içi eğitime erişimde sorun yaşama durumudur. Öğrencileri yarısından fazlası, zayıf internet bağlantısı, elektrik kesintisi, bilgisayar olmaması ve evde ders için uygun ortam olmaması gibi sorunlarla karşılaşmıştır. Korelasyon analizleri incelendiğinde, erişimde sorun yaşanması ile genel memnuniyet arasında anlamlı bir ilişki görülmüş ve sorun yaşayan öğrencilerin memnuniyetinin azaldığı bulunmuştur. Bu bulgu alandaki diğer çalışmaların sonuçlarıyla uyumludur (Bower & Kamata, 2000; Chong, 1998; Hara & Kling, 2003; Selim, 2007; Webster & Hackley, 1997). Araştırmalar, çevrim içi eğitimde kullanılan teknolojinin güvenilirliğinin ve kalitesinin, öğrencilerin teknolojinin kullanışlılığına ilişkin algıları ve uzaktan eğitime yönelik tutumları ile ilişkili olduğunu göstermiştir (Webster ve Hackley, 1997). Benzer, öğrencilerin kendilerine ait bir ortam ve bilgisayara ulaşamamaları, yüz yüze eğitimin daha etkili olduğu kanısına yol açmış olabilir.

Öğrenme ortamı yönünden, öğrencilerin çevrim içi eğitim deneyimlerinin en tatmin edici etkeni öğretim görevlisi desteği olmuştur. Bu bulgu hem anket verileri hem de görüşme verileriyle onaylanmıştır. Bunu sırasıyla teknik destek, ders etkinlikleri ve

materyalleri ve akran ilişkileri takip etmiştir. Öğrenme ortamı faktörlerinin ortalama değerlerinin olumlu bir resim çizmesine rağmen, bu değerlerin birbirinden anlamlı ölçüde farklı olduğu bulunmuştur. Bu, öğrencilerin çevrim için eğitimde karşılaştığı etmenlere dair algılarının, etmene bağlı olarak, önemli ölçüde fark gösterdiğini ifade etmektedir. Ankette incelenen alt ölçekler arasında en düşük ortalama değere sahip olan boyu genel memnuniyettir. Diğer bir ifadeyle, öğrencilerin öğrenme ortamı faktörleriyle ilgili görüşleri olumlu olsa da öğrenciler çevrim içi eğitim deneyimlerinden genel anlamda aynı ölçüde memnun değildirler. Fakat bu bulgu yanlış yorumlanmamalıdır çünkü korelasyon analizi, öğrenme ortamı faktörleriyle genel memnuniyet arasında anlamlı bir pozitif ilişki bulmuştur. Diğer bir deyişle, öğretim görevlisi desteği, teknik destek, ders etkinlik ve materyalleri ile akran ilişkileri konusunda olumlu görüş belirten öğrencilerin çevrim içi eğitimden memnuniyetinin daha yüksek olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Bunlar arasında, memnuniyet ile bağlılaşımı en yüksek olan faktör, ders etkinlikleri ve materyalleri boyutu olmuştur. Bu bulgu, çevrim içi eğitimde ders etkinliklerinin ve bunların kalitesinin öğrenci memnuniyeti üzerindeki önemini gösteren diğer birçok çalışmayla paralellik göstermektedir (Kuo ve diğ., 2014; Martin-Rodriguez, 2015; Skordis-Worrall ve diğ., 2015; Sun ve diğ., 2008). Peltier ve diğ. (2007), akran ve öğrenci-öğretmen etkileşiminin, iletişim teknolojisinin ve ders yapısının öğrencilerin ders içeriği algısını etkilediğini öne sürmektedir. Yani öğrencilerin içerikten memnun olması, diğer birçok boyuttan da memnun oldukları anlamına gelir ve bu da öğrenci memnuniyetini önemli ölçüde etkiler.

Öneriler

Veriler tek bir kurumdan toplandığı için bulguların genellenmesi mümkün olmasa da araştırma sonuçları doğrultusunda, gelecekte yapılması planlanan çevrim içi eğitim uygulamalarına katkı sağlayacağı düşünülen bazı öneriler sunulmuştur:

1- Ödevlerin fazlalığı, ders etkinlikleri ve materyalleri boyutunun sorunlu yönü olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu nedenle, ödev miktarını makul olacak şekilde belirlemek, ödevlerin öğrencilere kazandıracaklarını açıkça belirtmek ve grup ödevlerini teşvik etmek öğrencilerin ödevle ilgili algılarını olumlu kılabilir.

2- Öğrenciler tarafından belirtilen diğer bir sorun, çevrim içi eğitim döneminde izole bir yaşam sürülmesi, akranlar ve öğretim görevlileriyle bir bağ kurulamamasıydı. Eğitim döneminin başında, öğrencilerin birbiriyle tanışmasını kolaylaştıracak etkinlikler yapmak, öğrencilerin iş birliği yapabileceği aktiviteler sunmak ve internet üzerinde iletişim ve iş birliğini kolaylaştıran web 2.0 araçlarını kullanmak bu sorunun azaltılmasına fayda sağlayabilir.

3- Çalışma sonuçları, daha önce çevrim içi eğitimi deneyimlemiş olan öğrencilerin memnuniyetinin daha yüksek olduğunu göstermiştir. Çalışmalar, bunun sebebinin daha önceki deneyimlerin, öğrencilerin uzaktan eğitimde öğrenmek ve iletişim kurmak için gerekli becerilerinin artmasından kaynaklandığını belirtmektedir (Palmer & Holt, 2009; Young & Norgard, 2006). Bu doğrultuda, öğrencilerin çevrim içi eğitime

uyumlarını kolaylaştırmak için gerekli becerileri vurgulamak amacıyla oryantasyon programları düzenlenmesi fayda gösterebilir.

İleride yapılacak araştırma çalışmaları için de bazı öneriler sunulmuştur:

1- Gelecekteki araştırmaların öğretim görevlisi veya öğretmen deneyimlerini de içermesi teşvik edilmektedir. Çevrim içi öğretim sırasında öğretim elemanlarının karşılaştığı sorunlar, gelecekteki uygulamaları geliştirmek için yararlı bilgiler sağlayabilir.

2- Bu çalışmada öğrencilerin öğrenme ortamına ilişkin algıları ile memnuniyet arasında anlamlı bir ilişki bulmuştur fakat bu bulgulardan sebep-sonuç çıkarımları yapmak mümkün değildir. Bu nedenle gelecekte, üniversite öğrencilerinin çevrim içi öğrenme ortamına ilişkin algıları ile öğrenen memnuniyeti arasında bir neden-sonuç ilişkisi olup olmadığını test etmeye yönelik deneysel çalışmalar yapılabilir.

3- Öğrencilerin çevrim içi eğitim almasının kendi bilinçli ve gönüllü kararı olmasının, öğrenme ortamına ilişkin algılarını etkileyip etkilemediğini anlamak için araştırma yapılması gereklidir.

4- Bu araştırmaya katılan öğrencilerin çoğunluğu aynı yaş grubundaydı ve önemli çoğunluğu çalışmıyordu. Farklı profillere sahip öğrencilerin deneyimlerini incelemek amacıyla, bu çalışma, öğrenci profilinin daha çeşitli olduğu bir ortamda tekrarlanabilir.

4- Öğrencilerin, öğretim görevlilerinin çevrim içi öğretim becerilerine ilişkin algılarını araştırmak için daha fazla çalışma yapılması önerilir.

5- Ders etkinlikleri ve materyalleri boyutu öğrencilerin materyal kalitesine bakış açısını ve öğrenci değerlendirme sistemini entegre edecek şekilde genişletilebilir. Materyallerin görsel kalitesi, kaynakların seviyeye uygunluğu ve öğrencilerin değerlendirme sistemini değerlendirmesi böyle bir genişlemeye örnektir.

6- Akranlar arasında sosyal etkileşimi geliştirmeyi amaçlayan uygulamaların sosyal buradalığı ve memnuniyeti etkileyip etkilemediğini araştırmak için eylem araştırması yapılabilir.

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