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Learner Readiness and Efficiency of Learning English in Online Higher Education Context: Voices of Turkish EFL Learners

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Today, online education has become indispensable for many learning environments, including those designated for teaching and learning languages, becoming widespread and revolutionizing how students access education and language learning resources. This shift to online platforms has opened up numerous opportunities for learners, breaking down barriers of distance and time constraints. However, it also brings challenges, especially in the Turkish context. From this perspective, this study aimed to determine the online readiness of Turkish learners of English and the factors affecting the (in)efficiency of their online language education in their universities. In this study, the online learning readiness of 409 EFL learners at the university level in different parts of Türkiye was identified using the questionnaire by Hung et al. (2010), adapted to the Turkish context by İlhan and Çetin (2013). The (in)efficiency of online learning was explored by interviewing 40 EFL learners about their experiences before and after taking online English courses. Results indicated that learners seemed relatively ready for online education. However, they reported several factors for the inefficiency of online learning, such as a lack of real class environment and technical problems, for efficiency, such as learning in the comfort of their homes and having more time for self-development. They also mentioned several challenges and provided some suggestions for improving online learning.

Introduction

Online learning has been around for about half a century, shifting our understanding of innovative teaching and learning methods by developing effective, exciting, and relevant methods and pedagogies (Harasim, 2000). Concepts such as distance education, online teaching, emergency online education, and remote teaching have been used interchangeably (Carrillo & Flores, 2020). Gacs et al. (2020) claim that there is a great difference between planned online education and crisis-prompted online education, which was faced at the beginning of 2020 due to the pandemic, as the latter requires modifications and adjustments

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considering the curricula which have been designed for face-to-face education (Carrillo & Flores, 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). Hodges et al. (2020) further add that distance learning caused by an abrupt pandemic outbreak might require on-spot decision-making. Therefore, carefully planning and arranging online education to increase its efficiency stands out. (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Hodges et al., 2020). This sudden shift in adapting to online education negatively affected the ill-prepared contexts with inequitable access to infrastructure instead of those well-resourced contexts that effectively utilized it. As in many contexts worldwide, Turkey also struggled to cope with this sudden shift due to factors caused by the low socio-economic background of the students, the high number of students per instructor, and limited access to infrastructure, especially in new and developing university contexts in terms of teaching and learning languages. For this reason, our study aims to measure whether EFL learners are ready for online learning in general, the efficiency of learning English online, and to point out any challenges the students face and their suggestions for improving the process.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing online learning

Online learning has various advantages such as cost reduction, time and space freedom, assistance with traditional instruction (Chao & Chen, 2009), having more flexible and interactive learning environments (Demir-Kaymak & Horzum, 2013; Tang & Lim, 2013), enabling teachers and students to work closely and collaboratively (Biasuttie, 2011; Hung et al., 2010). However, a series of problems were also reported with delivery, effectiveness, and acceptance (Park, 2009); lack of gestures and body language (Gacs et al., 2020); insufficient infrastructure (Flores & Gago, 2020); teachers' inexperience (Zhang et al., 2020); lack of connection between teachers and students (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020); shortage of mentoring and support (Judd et al., 2020); teachers' lack of confidence/competence in the use of digital instructions (Huber & Helm, 2020) and technological skills (Downing & Dymment, 2013).

The interaction between teachers and students in online learning takes place with the help of different tools, including narratives, blogs, chats, forums, web conferences or video conferences, and social networks, which may help the participants connect with each other. (Choi et al., 2016; Dickey, 2004; Dymment & Downing, 2018; Farr & Riordan, 2015; Gillies, 2008). Therefore, students might play an active role in online learning environments by collaborating with their peers to maximize their learning (Delfino & Persico, 2007; Olofsson, 2007). Nevertheless, although highly active instructors encourage learners to participate in online communities, they might dominate the discussion and not allocate enough time for student participation (Satar & Akcan, 2018). In short, online learning has both benefits and drawbacks depending on various factors, as outlined above.

Conceptualizing Learner Readiness for Online Learning

Readiness for online learning is a multifaceted concept that includes computer-use skill efficacy, self-control efficacy, and online communication self-efficacy (e.g., Hung, 2016; Hung et al., 2010; Keramati et al., 2011; McVay, 2000). Studies that investigate readiness for online learning have various foci. Warner et al. (1998) categorize readiness for online learning in three different aspects: students' choices for the form of delivery; their self-reliance, competence, and confidence in using e-communication and the Internet; and whether they can learn autonomously. In other words, students are generally required to take over the

responsibility of their learning in terms of time management, keeping up with the class, completing work on time, and active class participation with the help of teachers encouraging them to develop the skills necessary for self-directed learning (Hung et al., 2010) through well-structured learning materials that enable self-regulated learning (Paechter et al., 2010). However, along with student behavior and attitude as factors for online learning readiness (McVay, 2001), there are other student characteristics, such as access to facilities that significantly affect readiness (Çiğdem & Yıldırım, 2014) and whether they are trained to use online learning systems effectively (Keramati et al., 2011). Therefore, online learning readiness can be affected by students' skills to manage online learning (Smith et al., 2003) only after ensuring equal access to the required infrastructure.

In the Turkish context, online learning readiness has been researched from different perspectives, as successful implementation of online learning is based on student readiness and satisfaction. Çiğdem and Yıldırım (2014) provide valuable insights on whether online learning proved useful for 725 vocational college students, mentioning that they were generally ready for online learning but lacked competencies in computer and internet self-efficacy and communicating in online environments. Similarly, Deveci-Topal (2016) reported that students were moderately ready for and satisfied with online learning in general. Kayaoğlu and Dağ-Akbaş (2016) mention similar concerns. Though the students were ready for online learning, their computer and Internet self-efficacy levels could be improved. All in all, studies in the Turkish context highlight the importance of exploring students' readiness levels and enhancing their resources and motivation levels. However, not all students always have equal access to resources in the Turkish education context. In this respect, this study aims to bring about the voices of EFL students at universities related to their readiness for online learning, along with their experiences in learning English online.

Methodology

Research design and questions

This study was framed around a case study using a survey research design (Wagner, 2018) with a questionnaire and follow-up interviews in two phases: pre and post. The underlying assumption was that the questionnaire would provide demographic information and frequencies regarding the learners' background on their access to online learning and readiness to carry out learning in an online environment, and the interviews would provide a detailed understanding of the (in)efficiency of online learning through a set of questions that exploit their experiences. The following research questions were asked in the current study: 1) Are EFL learners ready for online learning? 2) In what ways do students find "online education" (in)efficient in language learning? a) What are the factors affecting the (in)efficiency of online education? b) Does the online learning readiness of EFL learners affect their online learning performance in terms of language skills? 3) What are the challenges and suggestions of EFL learners for online learning practices?

Participants and Context

In total, 409 Turkish EFL learners at universities representing 59 cities in Turkey completed the online survey. Among these 409 learners, 20 were interviewed in two phases (pre and post), and 40 interviews were conducted in total. All of these learners who filled out the questionnaire were studying at 22 different programs in different universities throughout the country. Table 1 presents the list of these programs and other participant demographics.



Table 1. Demographic information of the participants

		<i>n</i>	%
Programs	English Language and Literature	112	27.4
	Statistics	69	16.9
	Law	68	16.6
	English Language Teaching	64	15.6
	Psychology	34	8.3
	Turkish Language and Literature	11	2.7
	Architecture	10	2.2
	History	9	2.2
	Others*	32	8.1
	TOTAL	409	
Gender	Female	292	71.1
	Male	117	28.9
Grade	Preparatory Year	42	10.3
	Freshman	207	50.6
	Sophomore	103	25.2
	Junior	28	6.8
	Senior	28	6.8
	Senior (Fifth-year)	1	0.1

*Others: Dentistry, Economics, Electrical-Electronics Engineering, Industrial Design, Industrial Engineering, Journalism, Mechanical Engineering, Medicine, Metallurgical and Materials Engineering, Management Information Systems, Philosophy, Political Sciences, and Translation and Interpretation

These learners were chosen through convenience sampling. During this phase, the participants were informed about both the process and the aim of the study, and they were notified that they would be interviewed twice: at the beginning and the end of the semester. Thus, when they consented to participate in this study, the ones willing to contribute were selected, considering that they would not lead to any inconvenience for the data collection process. All learners were taking Basic English courses. They were typically studying different language skills except for learners in ELIT and ELT departments, where they had content courses related to language pedagogy, linguistics, and literature that would require them to display their language skills. Among the voluntary students, 20 of them were randomly selected for the interviews. Table 2 shows the demographics of the interviewees.

Table 2. Demographic information of the interviewees

Code	Age	Hometown	Living with	Program*	Grade
S1	19	Istanbul	Family	ELT	Prep
S2	19	İzmir	Family	DENT	Prep
S3	18	İstanbul	Family	ELT	Prep
S4	19	Kastamonu	Family	PAIR	Prep
S5	18	İstanbul	Family	PSIR	Prep
S6	19	Malatya	Family	MED	Prep
S7	18	Antalya	Family	METE	Prep
S8	18	Uşak	Family	MED	Prep
S9	20	İstanbul	Family	ELT	Sophomore
S10	20	İstanbul	Family	ELIT	Junior
S11	18	Ardahan	Family	ELT	Prep
S12	18	Adana	Friends	ELIT	Sophomore
S13	19	Ağrı	Family	ELIT	Prep
S14	19	İstanbul	Family	ELIT	Sophomore
S15	19	Diyarbakır	Family	ELIT	Prep
S16	18	Trabzon	Family	ELIT	Prep
S17	20	Artvin	Family	ELIT	Prep
S18	19	Kırşehir	Family	ELIT	Prep
S19	20	Ağrı	Family	ELIT	Prep
S20	19	Van	Family	ELIT	Prep

***Program abbreviations:** ELT: English language teaching, ELIT: English language and literature, DENT: dentistry, PAIR: public administration and international relations, PSIR: political science and international relations, MED: medicine, METE: metallurgical and materials engineering,

Data Collection

Online Learning Readiness Scale (OLRS)

The Turkish version (İlhan & Çetin, 2013) of the OLRS developed by Hung et al. (2010) was used to measure the EFL learners' readiness for online learning as it is a valid and reliable survey for the Turkish context, which made the researchers think that it would be an appropriate scale to use for data collection. This 5-point Likert scale OLRS consists of 18 items measuring five dimensions: computer/internet self-efficacy, self-directed learning, learner control, motivation for learning, and online communication for self-efficacy. Another item was added under the online communication for self-efficacy dimension to distinguish learner readiness for communication and to separate communication with course instructors and peers. The reliability analysis of dimensions in the survey for the current study is given in Table 3 below. Internal reliability coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha, α) range from .55 to .79, and the total α is .87, which might be interpreted as a high level of reliability.

Table 3. Reliability statistics (Cronbach's Alpha) for OLRS dimensions

Dimension	α	Number of items
Computer/internet self-efficacy (CIS)	.729	3
Self-directed learning (SDL)	.788	5
Learner control (LC)	.556	3
Motivation for learning (MFL)	.604	4
Online communication for self-efficacy (OCS)	.791	4
Total	.871	19

The OLRS was distributed online randomly to EFL learners studying in different parts of the country, and the data collection took about four weeks. What is more, the mean scores of this scale have been used to determine learner readiness for online education.

Interviews

In addition to the OLRS, the participants were interviewed in two phases to get an in-depth understanding of their views regarding the factors that led to the (in)efficiency of online education in terms of relation to different language skills, how it affected their end-of-course performances, and their challenges and suggestions. The participants were chosen using random sampling. The interviews were conducted in Turkish, the participants' mother tongue, to better understand their online learning experiences. The participants were interviewed in two phases. The pre-phase interviews were done at the beginning of the semester to get a general idea of their beliefs and concerns about learning English online. The post-phase interviews took place at the end of an entire semester, after about 15 weeks. This post-phase aimed to learn about the participants' experiences in learning English online, if the process was (in)effective, which language skills they believed were more (in)effective, the problems they had, and their suggestions. In total, there were 40 interviews in two phases with 20 participants. The interviews ranged from 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the participants' experiences. They were guided through a set of semi-structured interview questions prepared by the researchers considering the purpose of the study and the findings of the quantitative data collected through questionnaires during the interviewing process. The interview questions were piloted with two students from the researchers' institutions to check for the content.



Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the OLSRS were analyzed using IBM SPSS to check for descriptive statistics and frequencies. The qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using content analysis (Patton, 2015). The data acquired from the transcriptions of the interviews were first classified and categorized to make it easier for the researchers to put transcriptions into themes that belong to different categories. (Krippendorp, 2004). These categories are “the main groupings of constructs or key features of the text, showing links between units of analysis” (Cohen et al., 2007; p. 478). The coding process was carried out according to the guide by Saldana (2009). All phases of this study were carried out following the ethical principles and code of conduct of the American Psychological Association (APA). Participant consent was taken for the survey and interviews. They were informed that their participation in this study was completely voluntary and that they would withdraw at any point without having to present excuses.

Results

Participant demographics

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics of participant demographics related to their house income level, whether they have a computer, tablet, or smartphone, and how they access the online learning platforms and the Internet.

Table 4. Participant demographics related to their access to online learning

Variable	Choice	n	%
Level of monthly house income	0-400 \$	110	26.9
	400-800 \$	163	39.9
	800-1350 \$	91	22.2
	+1350 \$	45	11.0
Having a personal computer	Yes	332	81.2
	No	77	18.8
Having a tablet	Yes	90	22.0
	No	319	78.0
Having a smartphone	Yes	407	99.5
	No	2	0.5
Access to online learning platforms through	Computer (desktop or laptop)	319	78.0
	Smartphone	78	19.1
	Tablet	11	2.7
	Other: computer and smartphone	1	0.2
Internet access through	Wi-Fi (Home)	357	87.3
	Personal mobile data	32	7.8
	Wi-Fi (Neighbour)	14	3.4
	Family members' mobile data	3	0.7
	Wi-Fi (Work)	1	0.2
	Common portable Internet	1	0.2
	Personal mobile data + Wi-Fi (Neighbour)	1	0.2

These demographics presented in Table 4 give information about the participants' backgrounds regarding their readiness for online learning opportunities. It is seen that more than half of the participants (66.8%) have a relatively low socio-economic considering the ‘minimum wage’ given throughout the country. Still, most participants (81.2%) own a personal computer while accessing online learning platforms. A striking point is that not everyone who owns a computer uses it for online learning. While the majority (78%) use computers to access online learning platforms and some others (19.1%) use smartphones,

some choose to use smartphones over computers to access online learning, despite having computers (3.2%). Another point is that most learners have access to the Internet at home (87.3%), while others need to use their mobile data from smartphones or, in rare cases, other means to access the Internet.

Frequencies of the ORLS dimensions

The first research question asks whether the learners are ready for online learning. The participants' overall readiness for online learning was measured by calculating the mean scores for items in the ORLS. The findings are presented under five dimensions following the dimensions of the ORLS.

Table 5. Cumulative mean scores of the ORLS dimensions

Dimension	<i>n</i>	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Computer/internet self-efficacy (CIS)	409	1	5	3.77	1.052
Self-directed learning (SDL)	409	1	5	3.69	1.029
Learner control (LC)	409	1	5	3.11	1.083
Motivation for learning (MFL)	409	1	5	4.20	.907
Online communication for self-efficacy (OCS)	409	1	5	3.91	1.042

Each dimension's mean scores were calculated by determining the sum of answers to each item and dividing it by the number of each item. As seen in Table 5, the cumulative mean scores of the ORLS dimensions range from 3.11 to 4.20, indicating an above-medium learner readiness in general. Among these dimensions, the learners have rated their motivation for learning in an online context higher than the others (M=4.20). In contrast, learner control seems to have the lowest mean score (M=3.11), indicating that learners report less control over learning in an online context than in other dimensions.

(In)efficiency of online education

As part of the second research question, students were asked about the efficiency of the online lessons during the first and second interviews. Table 6 shows the reasons and the number of students stating them.

Table 6. The reasons why learners find online learning efficient

Reasons given	Frequency
Learning in the comfort of our houses	15
More time for self-development	6
Autonomous learning	5
Easier note-taking	1

A majority of the participants highlighted the efficiency of online learning as it provided them with the opportunity to get their education in the comfort of their own houses, where they feel safe and did not need to pay any money for their basic needs such as transportation and food: *'Living with the family gives us the advantage of having meals ready and not spending any money on accommodation, meals and transportation'* (S3). Moreover, some participants stated they had more time to develop themselves during online education: *'As we do not waste time on transportation, we have much time left for self-development after the classes. For instance, we can watch videos, movies and read books, all of which will contribute greatly to our self-development'* (S12). Along with self-development, some learners mentioned the significance of 'autonomous learning' in online education: *'We have to take over the responsibility of our learning in online education so we can search for the information of which we are deprived, and we must do our best to learn it on our own'* (S1).



It can be concluded that online learning somehow encourages students to be autonomous learners. There was consistency among the participants regarding the efficiency of online learning during the first and second interviews. However, some found it not efficient at all. Table 7 presents the results of the inefficiency of online learning.

Table 7. Reasons why learners find online learning inefficient

Reasons given	Frequency
Lack of a natural classroom environment (lack of feelings, gestures, mimics, face-to-face interaction)	12
Loss of concentration	10
Technical problems (Unstable Internet connection)	10
Not having enough chances to ask teachers questions	5
Loss of motivation	4
Lack of self-discipline	2
Cheating (on the exam)	2

The most frequently mentioned reasons were the lack of a natural classroom environment, technical problems, and loss of concentration. Twelve students complained that it did not give the same classroom environment as a natural classroom setting. One mentioned: *‘There are no humane relationships, no body language, and gestures, no real relationship with friends. Thus, there is no sincerity in communication’* (S2). This being the case, learners did not feel they were a part of the classroom, which decreased their participation levels.

Moreover, some students pointed out severe Internet connection problems due to the country's infrastructure system: *‘I live in a village in the eastern part of the country, and the Internet is really problematic here. I have to use my own mobile data and have to pay high bills’* (S13). Not having the chance to ask the teacher questions was another reason for the inefficiency of online learning, leading to a loss of motivation. There was consistency among the participants regarding what was said about the inefficiency of online education both during the first and the second interviews. However, in the second round of interviews, some learners mentioned ‘cheating’ and ‘technical problems’ as reasons for the inefficiency of online learning.

Factors affecting the (in)efficiency of online education

Classroom practices

Students were also asked about the classroom practices implemented in the online classes and their efficiency. Many stated that the classes were boring and unbeneficial when there was no interaction and only lecturing by the teacher ($n=12$). Participants also complained that they gained nothing when there were no instructions and guidance and were left alone for their studies ($n=6$). One explained the situation as follows:

‘We do not learn a lot when we are given some time for self-study. This can be understood in breakout room sessions as we do not know whether we do it right or wrong, even if we make efforts to practice our speaking skills. Thus, we need some guidance from the teacher’ (S6).

It can be understood that learners do not want to be left alone in their online learning journey and that guidance from the teacher is a critical component that contributes to the efficiency of online learning.

Socio-economic status of the students

Another theme sought was whether learners' socio-economic status affected the efficiency of online learning. The results pointed out that all the participants reached a consensus, and they said there was a direct relation. One elaborated on the issue as follows:

'This fact is valid both for teachers and students because if the teacher is using a quality microphone and camera, the quality of the lesson will be high as well. Similarly, if the students have quality equipment, they will benefit more from the lesson' (S9).

S14 also mentioned that the efficiency he got from the lessons was high because:

'I have a computer with two screens and a separate microphone. This affects the quality of courses positively. However, I believe our country does not pay attention to technology, and most of my friends do not have such access' (S14).

This quote also shows the significance of the student's socio-economic status, which is directly connected to the quality of online learning processes.

(In)efficiency of Learning Different Language Skills Online

Another research question asked in the study was whether the efficiency of online learning differed according to different language skills and components. The results were given below each of these: reading, writing, listening, speaking, grammar, and vocabulary. Regarding the reading skill, the only positive effect mentioned was 'the availability of the books on online platforms' ($n=8$). As for the negative sides of online learning on reading, 'the difficulty of reading on the screen' was mentioned by six students. Additionally, some mentioned that the lack of 'read-aloud activities' in online learning environments made reading online inefficient. For the efficiency of the writing skill, half of the participants ($n=10$) said it had neither a positive nor negative contribution to their writing skill improvement. However, the other half said it had brought some advantages. Table 8 shows the benefits of online learning in developing learners' writing skills.

Table 8. Benefits of online learning for writing skills

Benefits	Frequency
Easy to type on the keyboard	5
Computer-literacy	3
More time to think before writing	2
Auto-correction of spelling	2
Consumption of less paper (environmentally friendly)	1

Besides these benefits, learners also reported some negative consequences of writing online. Half of them ($n=10$) said they could not get 'immediate feedback' after submitting their papers. Moreover, some of these participants complained about the quality of the feedback, which did not meet their needs ($n=5$). Another weakness S5, S13, S15, and S17 mentioned was 'the relaxed atmosphere of the home,' which prevented them from taking the assignments more seriously compared to an actual classroom setting.

The only positive effect of the listening skill was that they could easily concentrate on the listening track because there was no one around to distract them, as almost half of the participants ($n=9$) mentioned. S5, S9, S10, S14, and S17 emphasized the importance of 'using

either earphones or headphones' to facilitate listening comprehension during online learning. Over half of the participants reported no negativity when doing online listening practices. However, 'technical problems' was found to be the major weakness of online learning for listening (n=6).

As for the speaking skill in online learning, participants had differing attitudes: some of the participants (n=11) found it quite beneficial as it was easier to speak in online sessions because they did not feel shy as they did in front of other people in real communication whereas the rest of the participants (n=9) found it not effective at all to improve their speaking skills. S16 complained about the situation: '*Shy students like me cannot easily take a turn to talk, and I can get unnoticed by the teacher. It felt like I am talking to people I do not know*'(S16).

In terms of learning grammar online, some participants (n=4) claimed that it was effective because it was much easier to take notes in online learning during grammar teaching. Similarly, few (n=4) stated that it was effective as it included more visuals and samples for grammar explanations. More than half of the participants said it had neither positive nor negative sides compared to face-to-face education. On the other hand, less than half of them (n=8) complained that they did not have as many chances to ask the teacher questions about the topic they covered in face-to-face education.

When asked about the efficiency of learning vocabulary through online education, some learners (n = 6) claimed that applications made it easier to learn vocabulary in an online learning environment. The rest said that there was no difference compared to face-to-face education. Students were also asked whether online learning negatively affected vocabulary learning, but only one student mentioned that vocabulary could be more abstract in an online environment.

The effects of online education on exam results

In the post-interviews, after the semester was completed, how online learning affected learner performance in the exams was questioned. Fourteen participants said online learning positively affected their exam performance, especially regarding reading, writing, and grammar. The rest of the participants said it did not positively affect their exam performance and results. They said they could perform better in face-to-face education because they claimed that most students cheated on the exams as it was possible to get help from others. Therefore, the students' actual performances were not reflected in the exam results, as reported by the participants.

Challenges in online education

As part of the last research question, participants were asked about the challenges they faced during online learning in the first and second interviews. All the participants, except one, complained about internet connection problems, unstable Internet, not having a personal computer, or using a smartphone, making it difficult to follow the lesson. Table 9 presents the challenges faced by the students during online learning.

Table 9. Challenges of online learning

Challenges	Frequency
Technical problems	19
Loss of concentration	9
No natural classroom environment (lack of feelings, gestures, mimics, face-to-face interaction)	8
Lack of motivation	4
Lack of self-discipline	3
Unfair grading	1

The challenges mentioned in the interviews were almost the same as the ones stated as the reasons given for the inefficiency of online learning. One exception was the addition of unfair grading: *'course content and exams do not match. Grading is unfair, I study for a week, but others who cheat or get help from others receive higher grades than me'* (S12).

Suggestions for online education

Participants also offered suggestions to design online learning environments better to make the quality much higher and serve the students' needs. Most of them reported that they must be encouraged to participate in this learning process and be activated during and out of the courses to make their learning process much more fruitful instead of seeing them as passive receivers of the knowledge transmitted through the Internet. Table 10 summarizes the suggestions made by the participants.

Table 10. Suggestions for improving the efficiency of online learning

Suggestions	Frequency
Encouragement of the students to participate	14
More guidance from the teachers	11
Technical support for the students	7
The use and integration of different platforms	2

Discussion

This study provided a detailed insight into EFL learners' readiness for online learning, how effective one semester of receiving online education was, any challenges these learners faced during the implementation of an emergency online education system, as well as their suggestions for improving these online practices.

Although online (language) teaching has been claimed to be as effective as face-to-face learning (Moneypenny & Aldrich, 2016), results from this study do not pinpoint such effectiveness in general. On the contrary, it was seen that the learners had a medium level of readiness in all dimensions of the OLR scale, learner control being the lowest one. Similar results were obtained in some other studies in the Turkish context (Çiğdem & Yıldırım, 2014; Kayaoğlu & Dağ-Akbaş, 2016), which might suggest that learners are generally ready for online learning as far as their background is concerned. It can be inferred from this specific finding that while learners in the Turkish context may generally be ready for online learning in terms of their background and readiness level, and that their online learning readiness and motivation could be seen as essential predictors (Çebi, 2023), the effectiveness of online language teaching compared to face-to-face learning remains uncertain.

Though online learning might seem disadvantageous to many, learners thought it could be considered efficient as well because online learning gave learners the freedom to learn in the comfort of their own houses and allocate more time for self-improvement. Chow and Shi (2014) confirm that online education's flexibility motivates them to learn. What is more, they



realized the importance of autonomous learning as they had to take over the responsibility of their learning (Gacs et al., 2020). Hung et al. (2010) claim that students should take over the responsibility of their learning in online learning education in terms of time management, keeping up with the class, completing work on time, and active participation in class because online learning readiness can be affected by students' skills to manage their online learning (Smith et al., 2003). The Turkish context also offers significant discussions on the efficiency of online learning environments. Solak and Çakır (2014), in their study that compares the effectiveness of face-to-face and online learning environments, conclude that learning English via e-learning is as successful as face-to-face learning. This could partly be caused by the level of student readiness in online learning situations, as readiness for online learning is seen important regarding the structure that affects the learning results of students (Demir-Kaymak & Horzum, 2013) and their interactions (Çebi, 2023).

One striking result from this study is that students do not think the online learning environment is genuine due to the lack of gestures, mimics, feelings, and face-to-face interaction. What is more, technical problems caused by internet connection decrease the deficiency of the quality of online education. Volery and Lord (2000) emphasize the importance of technological facilities for quality online education. Thus, it is significant that technical support is highly needed both for the students and teachers as technical problems negatively affect the learners' motivation (Çoban et al., 2015).

When students were asked about the most efficient classroom practices, they thought encouraging the students to participate and the interaction of teachers and learners would increase the efficiency of online classes. Thus, it can be concluded that learners do not want to witness online education, just like webinars, where the knowledge is transmitted from the trainer to the audience. Therefore, students must be encouraged to participate in the lessons. They must be a part of it to feel that their personalities and thoughts are influential, naturally motivating them to learn and participate in the lessons more. Satar and Akcan (2018) state that highly active instructors encourage learners to participate in online sessions, but they also warn that it is likely for the teachers to dominate the discussion and may not allocate enough time for student participation. Furthermore, the learners suggested they should be given some guidance from the instructors to increase the efficiency of online education (Keramati et al., 2011).

Regarding improving different language skills through online learning, the most controversy was reported in speaking and writing. Half of the participants found the former to be more efficient as they felt freer to speak to the computer as they did not have to talk in front of the public. The positive influence of online education on improving speaking skills was emphasized in other studies as well (e.g., Rodrigues & Vethamani, 2015). However, in this study, some participants claimed that it was artificial to speak to the computer as it could not be considered natural communication. Half of the participants complained about the writing skill improvement as they could not get immediate feedback on their products. However, Ebadi and Rahimi (2019) pointed out improving the participants' writing skills in online sessions but provided them with one-to-one sessions as part of their study.

As for the challenges they faced, students complained more about the technical problems they had to deal with. Thus, it is significant that learners have their personal computers with a good quality Internet connection (Flores & Gago, 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). In this study, it was also found that there was a direct relationship between the socio-economic status of the learners and the quality of online education that they get. Bonilla-Medina and

Cruz-Arcila (2013) also report on the inequality in terms of economy, technology, and sociocultural status, badly affecting the efficiency of language education in the Colombian context. Thus, learners need to be provided with equal opportunities and facilities in online education to prevent inequalities in education because of the lack of economic strength for some learners.

Conclusion

It can be concluded from this study that students were relatively ready for online learning. To be more specific, learner control was the least scored dimension out of the whole questionnaire ($M= 3.11$). The interview results also justified this as they all stated that they needed more guidance from the teachers who must encourage them to be active learners with the former's instructions for the in and out of class learning. This is also understandable because these learners may not be entirely familiar with online learning.

On the one hand, productive skills such as writing and speaking are reported to be the most affected parts of online language education as the learners do not have easy access to talk to their teachers, who might otherwise immediately help them in face-to-face learning environments. Thus, learners need more teacher guidance in an online learning environment. On the other hand, receptive skills such as reading and listening are the least affected language skills in an online learning context.

Finally, technical problems due to the lack of quality internet connection and adequately functioning computers and the learners' low socio-economic status are two of the most significant variables affecting online education's efficiency. For this reason, equality in terms of the facilities must be provided for the learners for effective online learning.

Overall, our study points out the importance of learner readiness in online learning, especially in English language learning environments in the Turkish Higher Education context. In recent years, the pandemic in 2020 and the recent earthquake disasters in Türkiye made it clear that online education cannot be avoided and is necessary for the continuity of education systems even in unexpected catastrophic situations. In this respect, the concept of learner readiness for online learning needs to be researched in other contexts that could potentially help researchers, teachers, teacher educators and other stakeholders in education to plan effective instruction with desired outcomes.

Limitations of this study

This study was conducted during the fall semester of an academic year. Thus, it could have been done throughout the academic year, combining both fall and spring semesters to turn it into a more longitudinal study. However, due to some concerns, it was completed within a semester because it was improbable to find the willing participants who were interviewed at the beginning of the fall semester available at the end of the academic year.

For further studies, it is suggested that this research should be conducted in different contexts who apply online education in their institutions in various faculties and universities to better compare the results of this study to those. What is more, this can be done within a whole academic year to make it a longitudinal study.

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