

**FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS'
PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ONLINE ROLES
IN EMERGENCY REMOTE TEACHING**

YABANCI DİL ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN ACIL
UZAKTAN ÖĞRETİMDE ÇEVİRİM İÇİ
ROLLERİNE DAİR GÖRÜŞLERİ

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ABSTRACT

Nearly all facets of life, including language instruction, have been impacted by the COVID-19 epidemic and the devastating earthquake in February 2023. Consequently, remote education, also known as e-learning or virtual learning, has taken over as the standard offering in numerous contexts. In this regard, remote teaching practices have been preferred in many higher education institutions. However, gaining a comprehensive understanding of the evolving educational practices during this period requires an awareness of how pupils respond to this change. In the course of the emergency remote teaching, language learners' conceptions of instruction and learning were examined using a metaphor analysis approach. For this purpose, a semi-structured form utilizing the Turkish university students' metaphorical concepts regarding their roles in online learning, along with an open-ended questionnaire where participants shared their background information, was employed. Data collected from 56 foreign language learners from different departments at a state university in Türkiye was analysed using elicited metaphor analysis. The results showed that foreign language learners used a variety of metaphors, which were categorized as passive recipient, independent learner, flexible person, ineffective consumer, lazy individual, and lost guide, suggesting both favourable and unfavourable dispositions toward emergency remote teaching. In light of the research results, several recommendations and implications were provided.

ÖZ

Dil eğitimi de dahil olmak üzere hayatın neredeyse tüm yönleri COVID-19 salgını ve yıkıcı Şubat 2023 depreminden etkilendi. Sonuç olarak, e-öğrenme veya sanal öğrenme olarak da bilinen uzaktan eğitim, birçok bağlamda standart teklif olarak yerini almıştır. Bu bağlamda, birçok yükseköğretim kurumunda uzaktan öğretim uygulamaları tercih edilmektedir. Ancak, bu dönemde gelişen eğitim uygulamaları hakkında daha kapsamlı bilgi edinmek, öğrencilerin bu değişime nasıl tepki verdiklerinin bilinmesiyle mümkündür. Acil uzaktan öğretim sürecinde, Türk üniversite öğrencilerinin öğretim ve öğrenme anlayışları metafor analizi yaklaşımı kullanılarak incelenmiştir. Bu amaçla, katılımcıların çevrimiçi öğrenmedeki rollerine ilişkin metaforik kavramlarını kullanan yarı yapılandırılmış bir form ve katılımcıların geçmiş bilgilerini paylaştıkları açık uçlu bir anket kullanılmıştır. Türkiye'deki bir devlet üniversitesinin farklı bölümlerinden 56 yabancı dil öğrencisinden toplanan veriler, ortaya çıkarılan metafor analizi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, yabancı dil öğrenenlerin pasif alıcı, bağımsız öğrenen, esnek kişi, etkisiz tüketici, tembel birey ve kayıp rehber olarak kategorize edilen ve acil uzaktan öğretime yönelik hem olumlu hem de olumsuz eğilimlere işaret eden çeşitli metaforlar kullandıklarını göstermiştir. Araştırma sonuçları ışığında, çeşitli öneriler ve çıkarımlar sunulmuştur.

INTRODUCTION

The unexpected global spread of COVID-19 caused the academic community to swiftly close in Türkiye as in many other countries around the world. As an alternative, a shift to emergency remote teaching was necessary in order to maintain the national educational system. Following this shift, most educational institutions have given priority to the further development and implementation of their digital platforms over the use of effective teaching methods. In addition, after the devastating earthquake in February 2023, online learning platforms have once again gained importance throughout the country. Teaching and learning have become more difficult as a result of these two societal crises for many people, including families, students, and teachers. Students should be given special attention among those because they require efficient help and instruction in self-direction to navigate the brand-new educational setting (Carter et al., 2020).

Online learning environments increase the number of opportunities that students have to learn a language and gain knowledge on their own, enhance in-person learning opportunities, and create an environment that is so productive that students may naturally facilitate one another's autonomous learning (Sari & Wahyudin, 2019). It might offer an extensive amount of educational resources and activities that appeal to the students' learning styles and foster their independence (Nurjanah & Pratama, 2020). Online learning can also give students the opportunity of self-paced learning (Jung et al., 2019) and they might answer questions on quizzes, view a number of lecture films, and share their thoughts in discussion boards (Wong et al., 2019). On the other hand, as indicated by Ersoy (2023), online learning provides flexibility and accessibility, but it also has a "dichotomy" effect, increasing educational inequalities while also offering enormous opportunities, especially for underprivileged student populations. These students face a variety of obstacles that prevent them from having fair access to high-quality education in the context of remote learning. Moreover, in the case of crises, emergency remote teaching serves as a temporary substitute for traditional online learning experiences, which are scheduled and planned. In such situations, the main objective is to provide temporary access to learning and teaching that can be quickly put up and dependably accessed, rather than to recreate an excellent educational environment (Hodges et al., 2020).

When it comes to foreign language learning (FLL), online learning has evolved as a lifesaving for numerous students who would not have been able to continue with language learning because of availability restrictions (Garrison et al. 2000). However, there are a number of difficulties that could come with learning a foreign language online, such as low-rate participation, nervousness, disengagement, disconnection, low motivation, and teachers' lack of readiness and interaction (Hurd, 2005). Therefore, researching the roles and competences of online teachers is crucial since doing so could lead to a better knowledge of the setting and training programs for teachers (Baran, Correi & Thompson, 2011). It is also necessary to understand and describe the roles of foreign language learners in the age of online education in the Turkish context, given the unexpected shift in the nature of the educational setting and classroom environment. Within this purpose, an investigation about foreign language learners' understandings of their roles for learning a foreign language in remote teaching environments needs to be conducted.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Online learning has already been defined in a number of ways by numerous academics. Singh and Thurman (2019) indicated that the word "online learning" has been associated with at least 19 different terms and the majority of them involve the use of technological devices like computers and the internet as well as communication technologies to support the process of instruction and learning. There are no longer any students in the real classroom because it has been replaced with a virtual environment where all parties are virtually come together in a digital classroom and physically isolated (Unger & Meiran, 2020). Both the instructor and learners are in this virtual classroom together, where the teacher provides instruction, and the students have access to learning resources. Additionally, there are two categories into which this online learning can be divided depending on the time of delivery. Synchronous learning occurs when there is a set time limit or real-time opportunity for interaction between the teacher and pupils, such as during video conferences (Singh & Thurman, 2019). On the other hand, asynchronous mode refers to interactions that take place asynchronously, including those that occur on a discussion

board or through recorded videos of instructional materials (ibid).

After the COVID-19 epidemic, switching from traditional classrooms to online learning environments appears to be a viable potential strategy for maintaining the quality of education. Given that they both use the same instructional techniques to provide different instructional resources, Gómez et al. (2012) assumed that online learning and distance education are interchangeable terms. In their investigation of how students felt about a web-based distance learning course, the researchers also discovered that students can effectively communicate, engage, and offer feedback regarding the course material by utilizing technology resources like chat rooms, forums, email messages, and videos. According to a study by Memić-Fišić & Bijedić (2017), learners had a favourable opinion of the innovative application and organization of the electronically supplied instructional materials. In addition, Ahmadi & Reza (2018) stated that employing the right technology to help with learning a foreign language greatly encourages students to acquire language skills more successfully. Altunay (2019) also stated that the students were enthusiastic about studying language skills through online learning platforms since they valued how flexible it was in terms of saving time and location. However, the students in the study underlined that they encountered some difficulties in terms of technical issues and a lack of certain technological resources.

A methodology that supports and facilitates active, dynamic learning possibilities for student interaction is necessary for online learners to learn successfully. The dynamics of an online environment, including how relationships, interactions, perceptions, and the roles of instructors and learners operate, are essential knowledge for any student learning online. Since distance learners lack the same resources as students in regular classrooms, course instructors need to think about providing additional types of support to help students improve their abilities to be autonomous and independent (Neumeier, 2005). The role of a virtual student encompasses a variety of skills and competencies that need to be deliberately acquired and practiced, with the understanding that the skills and competencies used as onsite students in a conventional

environment may be substituted, reinforced, or simply reoriented when learning as an online learner.

If students want to succeed as online learners, they must engage with their studies enthusiastically and actively (Palloff & Pratt, 2001). In addition, an e-learner needs to be able to manage the learning process by creating precise plans, setting clear goals, and obtaining the necessary resources. Students need to engage in discussions in the classroom, be ready to voice their opinions, come up with solutions, and follow basic instructions. Additionally, students have to work together to develop more advanced levels of comprehension (Chang & Fisher, 2003). In virtual learning settings, students have adopted significant roles as collaborators, organizers, communicators, leaders, researchers, and practitioners (Bernard & Lundgren-Cayrol, 2010). Through online educational platforms, students are expected to cooperate with teachers and peers, communicate with teachers and peers to express themselves and convey opinions, and find appropriate knowledge, solutions, and other required sources before sharing them with peers. In a similar vein, Yılmaz (2018) investigated the metaphorical perceptions of university students towards online education and showed that students repeated metaphors such as a golden blessing and a great opportunity to define online education.

To continue with, numerous methods of measurement have been used in relevant research on online learners' engagement, which have shown that learners' roles and patterns of participation in the online learning process can change. Two learner engagement patterns are listed by Ferguson et al. (2015), which include completer or nearly there, and mid-way dropout, and sampler. The study involves two categories of participants and these are eager learners who turned in nearly all of their assignments regarding their schedule, and learners who completed their assignments after the deadline. Despite discontinuing before the course ended, the learners who partly joined the lessons consistently completed evaluations during the course. Students who dropped out halfway through the course completed three to four measurements. Additionally, a lot of students within the sampler pattern had a quick look at the course by viewing just a few videos and participating in the exercises for a short while (Ferguson et al., 2015).

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), a relatively new educational leader, encourages the use of technology to enhance and support the teaching and learning process. The ISTE Standards were created to enhance professional development and online learning opportunities while equipping educators and learners with the skills necessary to successfully employ technology in the classroom. Three stages of the ISTE Standards for learners have been finalized. The initial phase, which was released in 1998, was targeted at assisting students in learning technology. The second phase, which focused on training students to use technology for learning, was established in 2007. In order to inspire digital students to produce genuine and digital learning, the third phase was revised and designed in 2016 with a focus on transformative educational experiences with technology. This was accomplished by modifying seven ISTE Standards for Students. According to the revised standards as stated by Smith (2017), learners need to be digital citizens, empowered learners, knowledge creators, computational thinkers, innovative designers, creative communicators, and global collaborators. On the other hand, it is known that learners join learning settings with prior knowledge, firmly established beliefs, and past experiences. Metaphor inquiry is one of many approaches to investigate these concepts and perceptions. In addition to ensuring access to tacit knowledge and providing a comprehensive picture of understanding and knowledge, metaphor analysis also blends quantitative and qualitative research perspectives (Moser, 2000). Thus, it is important to understand how students responded to remote teaching practices by the help of metaphors following the COVID-19 crisis and the devastating earthquake in February 2023.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

This study included 56 foreign language learners from different departments at the same state university in Türkiye. Convenience or opportunity sampling is the most widely used sample strategy in L2 studies, according to Dörnyei (2007), where the researcher's convenience is the only factor taken into account.

Since they fit certain practical requirements, including being close to the location, available at a specific time, easily accessible, or ready to volunteer, the participants in this investigation have been chosen in accordance with the objectives of the study (Dörnyei, 2007). The researcher prepared and shared the form with the learners from different foreign language departments including German, English and French at the Faculty of Education. Table 1 shows the participants' distribution according to their gender, department, and class level.

Table 1. The Participants' Demographical Data

	Frequency	
Gender	Male	10
	Female	46
	Total	56
Department	German	30
	English	13
	French	23
	Total	56
Class Level	1. Class	5
	2. Class	25
	3. Class	6
	4. Class	10
	Total	56

The form was designed to gather foreign language students' understanding of their roles in terms of online learning through their wording. An encoding letter (P) was utilized to express the participants' ideas, and ordinal numbers were used as counterparts (Participant 1=P1).

Data Collection Tool and Data Analysis

The constructed electronic metaphor form was applied in this study as a means to collect data. The participants received URL address of the form via Google Drive. There were two separate parts in the form. The participants were requested to write their gender, department, and class level in the first section of the supplied form. They were questioned about their roles regarding online learning in the

second section. They were asked to create a metaphorical sentence that fit the example sentence structure provided in the question in the second section. As a result, the participants were instructed to construct their own phrases by adding missing words to the following example: “In online learning, the student is similar to...; because...”. By using metaphors, information that cannot be gained objectively from participants is indirectly gathered (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). The primary data source for the study was the data gathered here.

Since the information gathered from open-ended question was qualitative, the main technique for data analysis was Qualitative Content Analysis (Schreier, 2012). Finding categories, topics, phrases, or conceptions within texts was the goal in order to draw conclusions about the opinions that the participants had expressed. First, the data were coded to identify metaphors. Next, similar codes were arranged to build categories. Finally, validation and reliability were provided and frequency distributions and categories associated with the metaphors were composed. Two distinct experts were requested to review the researchers’ analyses in order to ensure their reliability and validity. After evaluating the codes and categories that emerged from the analysis, experts reached a conclusion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data gathered to understand how students perceived their roles in relation to online learning through metaphors were examined and the results were outlined below in accordance with the research question. The results of the study were categorized into six themes, which include passive receiver, independent learner, flexible person, ineffective consumer, lazy individual, and lost guide.

Categories and Themes regarding Students’ Roles about Online Learning

The metaphors that students used to describe distance education were carefully analysed. The participants provided 56 metaphors, which were gathered and examined. Six categories, which include codes in relation to metaphors representing students’ roles regarding distance education, emerged from the data analysis. The categories, codes, as well as frequency rates for each code are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Categories and Codes regarding Students’ Roles about Online Learning

Categories	Codes ¹	Frequency
Passive Receiver	A machine	2
	A robot	2
	A chair always sitting	1
	A sheep needing directions	1
	A lifeless person	3
	9 Total	
Independent Learner	A decision maker	4
	An autonomous person	3
	A free passenger	1
	8 Total	
Flexible Person	An octopus	3
	An elastic rope	3
	A person adapting to rapid change	4
	A very large pool	1
	11 Total	
Ineffective Consumer	A glass that doesn’t fill up	3
	A tricky fox	1
	A car that can’t move forward	1
	A circle always returning to the beginning	3
	A fruitless pine tree	2
		10 Total
Lazy Individual	A grasshopper	4
	A person always on holiday	3
	A ghost	3
	A lazy person	2
	A panda lying down all the time	1
	13 Total	
Lost Guide	A needle in the hay	2
	An arrow with no direction	2
	A navigator trying find a direction	1
		5 Total

The metaphors stated by foreign language learners from different departments included many roles of the students regarding online learning. The most cited role indicated

¹ The codes mostly represent the students’ statements.

by the participants is about the category which is about being a lazy individual (f=13). In this category, the learners perceived themselves as a grasshopper, a person always on holiday, a ghost, a lazy person, and a panda lying down all the time. The following quotes illustrate this category very clearly:

P1: "In online learning, the student is similar to a grasshopper; because he/she always lies down."

P10: "In online learning, the student is similar to a ghost; because neither the teacher nor the student can see each other."

P14: "In online learning, the student is similar to a person who is always on a holiday; because he/she is always available whenever you call."

The second most repeated roles stated by the foreign language learners formed the category of being a flexible person (f=11). In this section, the codes including an octopus, an elastic rope, a person adapting to rapid change, and a very large pool had the most repetitions. As a result, the following quotes represent an example of how the students believe they have contributed to their personal preparation for the online process in the form of a metaphor explanation:

P6: "In online learning, the student is similar to an 8-armed octopus; because he/she can do more than one job at the same time."

P8: "In online learning, the student is an elastic rope; because the more one pulls it, the longer it can stretch."

P20: "In online learning, the student is similar to a very large pool; because no matter how much it is filled, it is not still full."

P31: "In online learning, the student is similar to a person adapting to a rapid change; because he/she has to be very intelligent."

The next sets of roles with high-frequency rate cover the category named as an ineffective consumer (f=10). Under this category, the students from different departments identified themselves with the roles including a glass that doesn't fill up, a tricky fox, a car that can't move forward, a circle always returning to the beginning, and

a fruitless pine tree. During the process of emergency remote teaching, many of the students who participated in this study perceived themselves as receiving information without showing sufficient improvement in terms of learning. The following quotes clearly show their perceptions as ineffective consumers:

P45: "In online learning, the student is similar to a glass that doesn't fill up; because he/she can't improve their knowledge level."

P52: "In online learning, the student is similar to a fruitless pine tree; because he/she can don't produce anything from what they learn."

P29: "In online learning, the student is similar to a circle always returning to the beginning; because he/she seems that they don't understand what is taught."

In the fourth place, the participants expressed themselves as passive receivers (f=9). In this category, the codes include the roles of a machine, a robot, a chair always sitting, a sheep needing directions, and a lifeless person. The foreign language learners expressed these roles as they need to be more active and guided during the process of online learning. Some of the students expressed these roles with the following quotes:

P24: "In online learning, the student is similar to a machine; because he/she just receives the instructions without interaction."

P34: "In online learning, the student is similar to a chair always sitting; because he/she can sit silently in front of the screen for a long period of time."

P47: "In online learning, the student is similar to a lifeless person; because the teacher isn't sure if the student listens to the lesson."

Finally, the foreign language students indicated their roles regarding online learning as independent learners (f=8) and lost guide (f=5). Under the category of independent learner, the codes can be listed as a decision maker, an autonomous person, and a free passenger. For the last category about lost guide, the codes can be named as a needle in the hay, an arrow with no direction, and a navigator trying to find a direction. The following quotes exemplify these roles very

clearly:

P15: “In online learning, the student is similar to a decision maker; because he/she can decide whether to enter the virtual lesson or not.”

P22: “In online learning, the student is similar to a navigator trying find a direction; because he/she needs time to make right decisions.”

In this study, metaphors were used to discover how foreign language learners perceived online learning. It is believed that metaphor analysis can be employed as efficient qualitative research, which is particularly beneficial when researching novel and complicated concepts, events, and facts in-depth (Güneş & Fırat, 2016). The study revealed a total of 56 distinctive metaphors that were divided into six categories. Those metaphors towards online learning were categorized as “passive receiver”, “independent learner”, “flexible person”, “ineffective consumer”, “lazy individual”, and “lost guide”. According to a study with students investigated by Çivril et al. (2018), metaphors were classified into 5 categories such as “flexibility”, “accessibility”, “educational”, “interaction” and “effective”. In another study conducted by Fidan (2017) with students, metaphors were collected and named in 6 categories as “technological”, “education”, “useful”, “negative”, “independence” and “other”.

With the categories of “passive receiver”, “ineffective consumer”, “lazy individual”, and “lost guide”, the results indicate that there exists a belief that in-person instruction is more effective than online learning and that investing time and energy in online education is unproductive. In general, these four categories are dominated by unfavourable perceptions which are expressed by using parallel metaphors. The lack of preparation of participants for the emergency remote teaching approach applied at every grade level as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic may be the cause of their indigent thoughts concerning online learning. In the same way, Ateş and Altun (2008) suggested that insufficient knowledge and absence of experience with online learning are actually the fundamental causes of unfavourable attitudes and perceptions regarding the term. It is crucial to remember that conventional education may not always equip students

for the degree of independence and interdependence needed for an online learning environment (Palloff & Pratt, 2001). The negative categories identified in this study are in line with the study conducted by Bozkurt (2020). In the aforementioned study, themes of unnaturalness, socialization, loneliness, lack of interaction, emotional distance, effectiveness, inequality, instability, and effective accessibility emerged among the negative metaphors group. Upon examining related studies in the literature, Civril et al. (2018) found that students had metaphorical perceptions of online learning in their studies. Consequently, students expressed negative opinions in the expectation category, stating that “online learning is like a radio because it does not always play the track you want.” By using this unfavourable metaphor, the students said that, similar to radio, distant learning could never produce the desired results.

On the other hand, two categories including “independent learner” and “flexible person” show that students also have positive perceptions regarding their roles in terms of online learning. Upon reviewing related research in the literature, Bozkurt (2020) analysed a metaphorical study that explored elementary school learners’ perspectives on online learning throughout the coronavirus outbreak. After analysing the positive metaphors that students have for emergency remote teaching, several themes became apparent in the mentioned study including “facilitator, lifelong learning, teaching presence, structured learning, sense of community, autonomy, independence of time and space, intrinsic motivation and accessibility”. Similarly, according to Howland & Moore’s (2002) findings, students who expressed satisfaction and positive feelings with their online learning experiences reflect the characteristics of self-organized learners. In the same way, according to Singh et al. (2005), online learning can offer students numerous opportunities in addition to a pleasant and interesting experience. In particular, it may help them develop into self-directed, autonomous learners who can eventually become lifelong learners.

In fact, it’s important to highlight that the metaphors found in this study regarding the roles represented by foreign language learners according to online learning mirrored the ones found in relevant literature, which indicate that

a variety of metaphors are employed to comprehend the roles undertaken by the students (Bozkurt, 2020; Civril et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2005; Howland & Moore, 2002). Despite the fact that traditional face-to-face instruction gave way to emergency remote teaching, it can be deduced from this study that the students still have both positive and negative perceptions about online learning when it comes to adjusting to this new medium. As a result, the students mainly bring some of their traditional roles to the virtual classes, but they also acknowledge that the online environment has given them access to other technological roles.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study primarily focuses on how foreign language learners perceive their roles in emergency remote teaching. The metaphors demonstrated how foreign language students have different viewpoints about their roles associated with online learning, and it is critical and essential to work together to strengthen their online learning abilities in order to develop a productive online learning environment. The categories can be grouped as two dimensions including positive and negative perceptions about the students' roles in terms of online learning. For the positive group of perception, the categories are about being an "independent learner" and a "flexible person". On the other hand, on the negative side, the categories include being a "passive receiver", an "ineffective consumer", a "lazy individual", and a "lost guide". Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that participants' opinions of online learning are generally negative and not at the intended level. The students are in need of having a positive impression of online education in order for it to be successful. It is essential to provide high-quality education to the learners specifically for them to have this perception. The results also indicate that most participants as foreign language learners need to be guided to handle the requirements of online learning environment. Many pupils were sceptical of the entirely different approach to teaching and learning that the COVID-19 epidemic demanded. Nevertheless, the online learning environments gave the students the chance to learn about innovative resources, designs, and practices that they may use for their learning in the post-epidemic era.

This study has significant implications since online learning has the potential to become a dynamic aspect of educational programs in the years to come. Moreover, the results of this investigation can promote future research involving teachers and students in online foreign language learning (FLL) (Daniel, 2020). In fact, it can build a theoretical understanding of FLLs' perception of online learning. This study can pave the way for future research and the theoretical framework of online learning. Understanding the participations' ideas can also enable lecturers to better support their students by offering a variety of online interactive exercises and educational resources during discussions and assignments. In order to develop and sustain learners' responsibilities during an online learning process, it is also important to take into account how to enhance learners' motivation.

There is a limitation to the current study as the restricted number of samples and the selected online educational program reduce the generalizability of the results. More diverse roles for learners could have been created by a wider number of students from different educational institutions and courses. This study also indicates a number of aspects which require further investigation. Future studies may concentrate on students using materials from various online learning environments, allowing the researcher to investigate the reasons behind how these environments impact learners' roles.

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