The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on EFL Classes through the Lenses of Secondary Learners

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Abstract

With Corona Virus Disease 2019 (Covid-19), a major change to the remote education arrangements has arisen. As it is clear, the pandemic has got side effects, especially in the scope of education and English as foreign language (EFL) teaching. Students at all levels were encouraged to continue learning despite the difficulties they had throughout the crisis. This study aims to investigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the field of EFL, particularly by revealing the viewpoints of secondary school students on pandemic remote education and its impact on their English language learning process. Thus, it was designed as qualitative research; interviews were held to probe in-depth into their perceptions on EFL teaching throughout pandemic remote education. Interviews were conducted with thirty secondary school students chosen voluntarily. The participants were chosen from different schools. The data obtained from the interviews were analysed through qualitative content analysis by NVivo 8 software program. The results revealed that participants declared that most of the teachers used course books and gave pencil-paper assignments. It was also highlighted that teachers emphasised reading and listening skills in their lessons rather than writing and speaking. Another significant finding of the study is that the participants preferred face-to-face foreign language teaching to remote teaching. Nevertheless, they admitted that online language teaching has several advantages comparing to traditional face-to-face education besides its challenges such as technical, economic, contextual, and individual problems. Lastly, several noteworthy suggestions were made regarding teachers, policymakers, families, and students themselves.

Keywords: COVID-19, EFL, Pandemic remote education, Online learning.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic was first reported in Wuhan, China, in Dec 2019 (Huang et al., 2020) and expanded quickly within a short and unlimited time across the world. All aspects of life, particularly education, were affected by the disease outbreak. The worldwide freeze resulted in a lockdown of educational establishments as the spread of the epidemic increased. Consequently, closing educational institutions, including schools, colleges, and universities, led to an anxious situation with increasingly limited opportunities for instructional management (Khalil et al., 2020).

It has also led to a shift in the instruction process to distance education with many barriers and challenges for both teachers and students regarding teaching efficiency and access to the internet. Besides, some instructors and learners have technophobia toward technological tools and are not competent enough in using these current technological platforms. During an emergency, obstacles to the digital context may postpone the implementation of technology-based

education (Chiasson et al., 2015; Nimrod, 2018; Rosen & Weil, 1995). For all circumstances, teachers must be more innovative and creative to maintain learners' awareness of effective education and instruction (White, 2007).

All over the world, the countries have implemented various principles and strategies for dealing with the shifts in the learning environment regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. National educational programs have switched to alternatives such as online approaches utilizing online software, radio, TV, and offline strategies, such as printed books, within a few months (Aliyyah et al., 2020). Therefore, many countries tried to find alternative ways for the traditional face-to-face instruction such as Turkey (Education Information Network, known as EBA (Eğitim Bilişim Ağı), Course Broadcast via Web and TV platforms in Turkish language (Hebebci et al., 2020); China (Chinese Network Education Television (CETV4) (Ma et al., 2004), via TV platform and Chinese language; India (National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER)), in both Hindi & English languages via Web platform (Jena, 2020a); Italy (Didattica a distanza) via Web platform, in Italian language (De Filippo et al., 2020); Russia (CIFRA), in the Russian language, via web and TV platforms; Malaysia (EduwebTV, TV Pendidikan) in both Malay & English language via Web, TV platforms (DeAlwis, 2020); Saudi Arabia (Ain channel) in both Arabic & English, via Web, TV platforms (Almaghaslah & Alsayari, 2020), and many other countries have been using online platforms (World Bank's EdTech, 2020). Students and teachers experienced several difficulties during the pandemic (Atreya & Acharya, 2020, p.2). Thus, there is a need to address the significant issues in the fields of education and also the EFL field. For the best knowledge of the researchers, there has been no research highlighting the secondary school students' perceptions about EFL teaching during pandemic distance education. Therefore, the current study has aimed to highlight the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic in EFL classes through the lenses of secondary learners, which will contribute to the field with its prominent results. By this aim, this paper will discuss the impact of Covid-19 on education, highlighting distance education in general and foreign language education in particular. The findings will be displayed and the discussion will be held respectively.

Covid-19 Pandemic and Remote Education Period

Currently, Covid-19 has affected various aspects from the basic to the important aspects of human life, but the most affected field after the health sector is education (Telli & Altun, 2020). Education is considered the crucial mechanism for developing knowledge and enhancing individuals' performance, while it has been seriously and adversely reformed by the pandemic. Also, the educational establishments were obliged to close their doors in early February (2020), started in China, and then spread out to the other affected countries (Celik et al., 2020; Muthuprasad, 2021). Over a hundred countries around the world closed their educational institutions to control the situation. The pandemic became an emergency matter (Williamson, Eynor & Potter, 2020) and then the remote education held during that time has been called Emergency Remote Education (ERE) (Bozkurt, et al., 2020). This emergency case has been experienced across the world and from kindergarten to university, all of the stakeholders have felt the traumatic effects of it on education (Green, Burlow & Carvalho, 2020, p.907).

Generally speaking, the shifting models of face-to-face learning inside classroom environments to online and distance learning reveals various perceptions, benefits, and challenges as well, which has an impact on learning objectives. Remote or distance learning in a wide context is defined as a concept associated with online education, distance and e-learning, flexible learning, massive online courses, and external educations. One of the basic aspects of distance learning is that although the teacher and the learner do not share the same place like a classroom or the same time like a class hour, technologies facilitate contact and collaboration for the stakeholders of the learning process despite the separation between them (Singh & Thurman, 2019; UNESCO, 2020). It was believed that the current pandemic situation would continue for a long period, so authorities needed to deal with it carefully. Thus, it was important to improve the educational

mechanism by setting policy strategies for digital education, taking into account the impact of long-term closed down and preserving social distance.

Additionally, distance education has been counted as an efficient, focused, and significant way of acquiring knowledge, as well as keeping in contact with shifts in this pandemic (Lassoued et al., 2020). Therefore, the only alternative platform that saves the education sector could be distance learning/ remote learning via digital platforms (Dubey & Pandey, 2020). Furthermore, distance learning provides an academic opportunity for those participants who cannot engage in standard education in the classroom environment. Learners are physically separated from each other to communicate by electronic devices (Faith, 1988). It has some advantages, including assuring the sustainability of the education process (Akinbadewa & Sofowora, 2020; Seage & Türegün, 2020), and assumes lifelong learning (Alharthi, 2020; Lou, 2004). One of the current studies on the students' feedback about distance learning emphasized the essential academic achievement obtained by students during the pandemic (COVID-19). Moreover, even with no pandemic situation, this way of learning is practical and can be implemented (George, 2020). Another study was examined by Allo (2020) on the perception of digital learning in the pandemic status and implementations of online platforms, the learners required online learning as an appropriate and available anytime and efficient way of learning during COVID-19 (Allo, 2020).

Distance Language Learning

Technology is at the center of globalization and its effects are mostly felt in education (Graddol, 1997). English language teaching is also acknowledged to support globalization. Jordão (2009) stated that the English language has the power as the global language and teaching it with a multidimensional attitude should be promoted. And the people knowing English has the privilege in education constructing new ways of globalization. Therefore, technology use in English language teaching is a prerequisite regarding its global aspect. In the pandemic days that people feel the need for technology to receive education to bring the far closer, in EFL teaching, the effects of distance learning should be considered.

Effective language teachers should have expertise, knowledge, and skills in the related field (Faez, 2011). According to Richards (1998), those skills are necessary to be proficient language users and communicate. Therefore, four language skills had better be integrated language teaching to make the learners communicatively competent. Although it is not easy to include all those four skills in a communicative way in traditional language classrooms, distance learning is more inconvenient. So some new realities have emerged in EFL classes during the Covid-19 Pandemic. One of the significant factors in classes is communication which demands to be examined mainly in the education field. As well as interaction among teachers and learners has the opportunity to enhance the teaching and learning process and to develop a comfortable atmosphere. Since the pandemic period has caused other problems for students like having difficulty with an understanding of their lessons, lack of interaction and communication with their friends and their teachers as well, so they prefer face to face education in the classes more than distance and online education (Alawamleh et al., 2020; Esani, 2010).

Richards and Rogers (2001) claimed that learners could learn a foreign language only if they communicate with it. From this starting point, EFL learning in the Turkish context has been a problematic issue for ages. The exposure of the target language and opportunities to use it out of the classroom are very limited because Turkey has just Turkish as its official language and citizens do not need to use a foreign language for their daily communication. The communicative efforts for EFL have just stayed in the classroom, so learners cannot speak it although they have enough structural knowledge about the target language. Bal (2006) and Özsevik (2010) reported that the problems in EFL classes in Turkey are due to the crowded classrooms, lack of interaction, and intensity of teaching programs. Not only in Turkey but also in other countries, the EFL case is similar. Fansury et al. (2020) declared that limited class hours to practice the target language, limitation in authentic materials, and crowded classes are the main problems in EFL. Hence, even in face-to-face classes, EFL teaching has some trouble, remote education should be investigated more to overcome the problems and maintain language education.

According to some researchers in the Pandemic distance education period, EFL teaching has some problems. COVID-19 has influenced the EFL teaching classes, so teachers and students, like other stakeholders of the society, were affected by the pandemic and faced many challenges and problems (Tümen Akyıldız, 2020a). A study in Iran discovered that whereas Iranian EFL teachers are competent in using digital platforms, there are other obstacles including, lack of proper resources, lack of motivation and attention by students, and lack of financial support (Khatoony & Nezhadmehr, 2020). Furthermore, EFL instructors who do not have experience with online teaching, required to increase their skills as well as connection with different ways to enhance more learning language styles and approaches (Bailey & Lee, 2020). Ghounane (2020) surveyed EFL master students and teachers to examine the teaching/learning process during the pandemic at Saida University, Algeria. The results claimed that Facebook and Moodle platforms were popular tools for educational purposes regarding the students' motivation. Accordingly, the students were anxious in face-to-face in the classroom interaction as compared to online learning (Ghounane, 2020). So, it seems that even though technology is realized as an effective element in academic achievement, it has been maintained that face-to-face learning cannot be replaced by human interaction via technological tools (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). In addition, many EFL students' digital literacies are poor and have problems with using platforms and applications that are needed for online learning (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020).

While some of the educators claimed that online second language teaching has some challenges because the use of internet-based facilities can be confusing for teachers (Peterson, 2014), the EFL field is one of the most proper ones to utilize some interactive digital content as learning resources (Fansury et al., 2020) if the teachers and students are digital natives. As Chirimbu and Tafazoli (2013) believed, for many language learners around the world, new digital environments create a useful way for learning language and also the main medium in which they will use their second language in everyday life.

As web-based technological developments facilitate communication (Thomas, 2009), they should be utilized in language teaching classes. There are several studies demonstrating the positive effect of distance education on foreign language learning (Hurd, 2008; Murphy, 2008; White, 2007). Several studies have also revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic has a positive influence that will make a significant contribution to the adoption of online teaching (Lederman, 2020). Even before the pandemic situation, there were efforts for the development and acceptance of online education (Hixon et al., 2012; Orleans, 2014). Supporters of this perspective assume that online education is as successful as classical classroom education (Read, 2020). Fatonia et al. (2020) showed that students feel comfortable with online instruction since they are free to listen to their lessons whenever and wherever they want.

With its pros and cons, remote language education in the pandemic period should be investigated closely to enhance the implementation. Besides the opinions of teachers, students also have so many valuable ideas about their language learning which need to come out. Thus understanding students' opinions about remote language learning will have a great effect on better practices.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions
The changes experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of education are clear. Several attempts have been made about its effect on education and even on language education. However, there is limited research about the thoughts of the learners on EFL during pandemic distance education. This paper attempted to investigate the opinions of Turkish secondary school students about online pandemic EFL education. This study aimed to address the following research questions:
1. What are the students' views on remote EFL education during the Covid-19 Pandemic?
2. What are the students' comparative views on face-to-face and remote EFL education?
3. What are the students' suggestions for better remote EFL teaching and learning?

Research Design

Qualitative research explores the 'how and why' of human behaviors, feelings, and attitudes (Tong, et al., 2012). It helps to understand and interpret the social reality of humans by means of interviews, diaries, and open-ended questionnaires (Zohrabi, 2013). Hence, for the present study qualitative method offered an effective way to understand the opinions and perceptions of secondary learners regarding pandemic distance language education. Interviews were conducted to probe into the perceptions of participants.

Trustworthiness of the Study

In the present study, there are some practices to ensure trustworthiness one of which is a random sampling of participants. Randomly chosen participants are more likely to represent the larger groups (Bouma & Atkinson, 1995). The second one is direct quotations, supported by Shenton (2004), indicating that the real episodes make the reader believe in the research. Therefore, direct episodes were given in the findings and result section to enable the readers to understand the research in detail. The last factor in ensuring trustworthiness is the background of the researchers, which is also an important one for Shenton (2004). One of the researchers is an academic having 10 years of EFL teaching experience and the others are EFL teachers and master students of the previous one.

Participants

30 participants were recruited from four different state schools in Elazığ, a city located in the Eastern Anatolia region of Turkey. The reason for choosing these schools was their different socio-economic levels to represent a larger group. 30 students, 17 of whom are females and 13 are males from different class levels, accepted to participate in the research voluntarily. There are seven students from 5th grade, six students from 6th grade, 11 students from 7th grade and six students from 8th grade. The age of participants ranged from 10 to 14.

Data Collection

Interviews are utilized to probe into beliefs, views, motivations, and experiences of people on a specific topic (Gill et al., 2008), so it was decided to use interviews to collect the data. Among the different types of interviews, a semi-structured interview was chosen to reveal the opinions of secondary learners on EFL teaching through pandemic distance education. It is because semi-structured interviews are more flexible compared to structured ones (Gillham, 2000). Interview forms were prepared by the researchers investigating the field. The questions were consulted by two academics from the Faculty of Education and revised on their suggestions. The interviews were conducted in person and recorded by a voice recorder. To provide a comfortable environment, the interviews were conducted in Turkish. The recordings were translated, transcribed, and analysed consecutively by three of the researchers.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was carried out through NVivo 8 Software Program. Using a computer in analzing the qualitative data may ensure the users work more methodologically and attentively. As suggested, using a software program for qualitative analysis contributes to a powerful analysis (Bazeley & Jackson, 2007). Hence, the NVivo 8 software was used for the content analysis to make the analysis stronger and to develop models. For the analysis, an MS Word document was created for each interview question and the participants' answers to each question were copied into the documents. Later, the documents were imported to NVivo 8 software and the data were analzed. According to the similarity and frequency of the statements, codes and categories were formed. Lastly, models were developed according to codes and categories formed through NVivo. To preserve the participants' privacy, codes were used to report their statements instead of full names such as S1M and S2F. These codes stood for 1st student who is a male and 2nd student who is a female.

Findings and Results

Research questions were investigated by several interview questions. Findings related to each research question with its interview questions were provided in this section.

1st Research Question: What are the students' views on remote EFL education during the Covid-19 Pandemic?

Interview Question 1: *Which skills does your English language teacher attach importance to the most in online classes?*

The findings of the first interview question resulted in only codes given in Figure 1. 4 codes were formed according to students' answers.
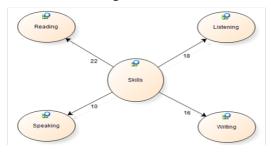

Figure 1: The Skills Emphasized in Online English Classes

The first code, 'reading,' was declared by most of the students (f=22) as the skill that teachers attached great importance to during classes. S7M exemplified, "I think we attach too much importance to reading skill." As the second code, the 'listening' skill (f=18) was determined. S2F stated that "I think our teacher attaches importance to listening in our classes so that we can understand what someone is speaking." Another code is 'writing' reported by 16 students. S22M indicated, "I think my teacher pays more attention to writing activities." The last code, 'speaking', was underlined by less than half of the participants. S5M said that "We care more about speaking and we do activities to develop our speaking skills."

Interview Question 2: How does your English language teacher carry out online classes?

The findings concerning the second interview question were presented in Figure 2. For the question, only codes could be identified as the participants' answers could not be collected under categories. When EFL students were asked how their teachers implement online classes, 10 codes were labelled.
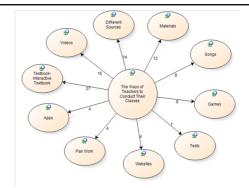

Figure 2: The Ways of English Language Teachers to Conduct their Online Classes

As shown in Figure 2, the first code, which was reported by almost all of the students (f=27), was the textbook or interactive versions of the textbook. S21M said that "We use the interactive version of our textbook involving pictures, sounds, and extra exercises. We study from it but we don't do all the exercises in the textbook, though. We skip some parts that our teacher finds not suitable for us." S10M indicated, "In online classes, we utilise our textbook the most. Our teacher shares it and everybody can see it on the screen." S25F responded, "My teacher uses the textbook's interactive version which includes different visuals and audios. It is more fun and interesting than the paperback textbook." Other responses to the question included videos reported by half of the participants (f=15). S3F declared, "I like our lessons because they are so much fun compared to other lessons as our teacher teaches with videos and funny activities related to the videos." S14F stated that "We often watch videos during our lessons to learn or revise the vocabulary."

14 participants answered the question indicating that their teachers utilize other sources of different publishing companies apart from the textbook in online classes. S1M expressed, "We do exercises not only from our textbook but also from different sources." S20M commented as "The exercises in the textbook are not enough for us to comprehend the topic. Thus besides the textbook, my teacher conducts the lesson by using e-books of other publishers that are open access to everybody in EBA." The other code (f=13) is about the supplementary materials. S13M said that "My teacher also uses materials made by herself. For example, she once used materials

made of felt in the 'occupations' unit. When she turned on her camera, we encountered images of all occupations made of felt. And she made us do a lot of different activities and exercises showing them. That was so fun." S4F explained, "She sometimes uses materials she prepared beforehand and teaches us the vocabulary or the grammar topic by showing these materials from the camera. We do exercises with them."

The same number (f=8) of students commented that their teachers integrate songs and games into online classes. In this respect, S23F stated that "While she is waiting for us to do the exercises, she plays music until we finish the exercises. Other teachers don't provide such a relaxing atmosphere. I feel more comfortable and confident when I listen to music." S11M declared, "We listen to songs in the lessons, sing together and do activities about the songs. Besides, she plays music at the beginning of the lessons till everybody joins the class." In terms of games, S9F responded, "We cut some pictures with scissors and play games with them," while S7M indicated ", We always play games like jeopardy at the end of each unit." Another code, solving tests, was reported by 7 students, most of whom were 8th-grade students. S26F expressed, "We often solve tests questions about each unit as we have a high school entrance exam at the end of the term." Other responses to this question included using websites (f=4) and applications (f=4) and doing pair work activities (f=4), respectively. S15M stated that "We do the exercises on a website in our online classes." S12F indicated, "We use a dictionary app that our teacher suggested. We downloaded it to our phones and during lessons, we do some vocabulary activities." S2F said that "Although we don't do group activities, we often do pair work activities in online classes."

Interview Question 3: How does your English language teacher assign you?

For the third interview question, only 2 codes could be identified again, as shown in Figure 3. The majority of the students' responses (f=20) showed that their teachers give paper-pencil homework, which is traditional. S5M declared, "Sometimes she assigns some exercises or activities in the textbook." S18F stated that "My teacher usually

gives homework from the textbook. Sometimes she also sends a worksheet in PDF format via WhatsApp and she wants us to write down and answer all the exercises in the worksheet to our notebook." S24F responded, "Worksheets or tests related to the subject we learned are sent as homework via WhatsApp or EBA. We are expected to finish doing them in a given time."
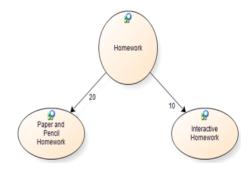

Figure 3: The Ways of English Language Teachers to Assign in Online Classes

The rest of the participants' (f=10) comments revealed that English teachers also give interactive homework. S2F indicated, "My teacher gives us video assignments, which I've done such kind of homework for the first time in my life. We shoot videos in English about the topics we learned and send them to our teacher via WhatsApp or Telegram. Video assignments are both easy and so much fun." S3F commented as "She also gives unusual assignments, such as recording our voice or videos, as well as visualizing words and taking photos of them."

2nd Research Question: What are the students' comparative views on face-to-face and remote EFL education?

Interview Question 4: Which one do you prefer; online English classes or face-to-face English classes? Why?

Asking the participants about their preferences regarding online English classes and face-to-face classes, 29 students reported that they prefer face-to-face classes. In contrast, only 1 student said she prefers online classes. And when they are asked their reasons for their preferences, 5 codes were attained according to the former group's answers, which can be seen in Figure 4.
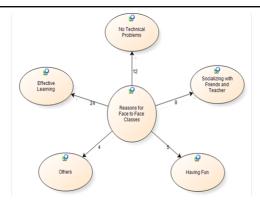
Figure 4: Students' Reasons for Choosing Face to Face English Classes

Most of the students (f=24) declared that they prefer face-to-face classes because they learn English efficiently at school. S2F remarked, "I believe that school environment provides high-quality learning. So I prefer learning in the classroom." S10M commented as "I think it's better to study at school. I don't think the classes in EBA or Zoom are effective. I don't fully understand the topics when I listen to the teacher in front of the camera." S27F stated that "I can understand what is taught more easily in face-to-face classes. They are more efficient. Hand and face gestures and eye contact help me understand better." The other code about the reasons is having no technical problems in face-to-face classes (f=12). S23F expressed her ideas as, "I'd rather face-to-face classes since the internet connection can be cut off during lessons. I cannot join the classes when our internet is over." S29M indicated, "I don't prefer online classes because when I say something, my voice cannot be heard. There can be audio problems and sometimes EBA kicks me out because of the slow internet connection."

The third code was labelled as socializing with friends and teachers (f=8). S11M pointed out, "I could play games and do different activities with my friends at school. Thus, I prefer being at school." S26F noted, "I'd rather face-to-face education since I could see my teacher and friends. I could be together with them." The following code having fun was emphasized by 5 students. S28M declared, "I think face-to-face classes are more fun." The last code was identified as others which were commented on by 4 participants. Under this code, S13M stated that

"Although activities can be done in online classes as well, they cannot be as diverse as in the classroom. Face-to-face education is more lively and offers different types of activities. That's why I prefer it to online classes." In terms of class hours, S14F remarked, "30 minutes in online classes is not enough for me." S24F responded concerning the inequality in online classes "In face-to-face education, everyone can go to school and attend the classes. Face-to-face education provides opportunities for those who do not have an internet connection and it provides equality." S2g emphasized that "In online classes, we have to study harder. I realized that I spent a lot of time studying my lessons since I started online classes. I didn't study that much beforehand. Thus, I prefer face-to-face classes."

Interview Question 5: What are the challenges that you've experienced so far in online English classes?

Findings regarding this question resulted in categories and codes presented in Figure 5. According to the student's answers, 5 main categories were identified.
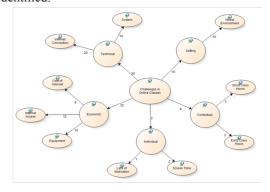

Figure 5: The Challenges Students Experienced in Online English Classes

Within the first category, economic challenges (f=32), 3 codes were determined. Most of the students (f=14) declared that due to the equipment they had to use to join classes, they encountered some problems. Most of them didn't have a laptop or tablet but only one mobile phone at their homes. S4F remarked, "I have a device problem because my father is at work generally and only my mother has a mobile phone. As I have one sister and a brother, our classes sometimes coincided. Only one of us

could attend the classes. That's why there are times when I cannot join English lessons." S12F noted, "I attend classes via my mother's mobile phone. It is old and its screen is very small. Its battery runs out very quickly."

The second code in this category was internet access and 12 students indicated that they couldn't join classes since they didn't have internet access at their homes and used their mobile phone's internet. S26F stated that "We don't have an internet connection at home. When the mobile phone's internet runs out, I sometimes miss the lessons until we buy a new internet package." S9F declared, "I go to my aunt to attend classes because we don't have an internet connection at our house." The last code indicated by 6 students is the cost of the internet packages. S21M said that "I use at least 10 GB per month, which sometimes is not enough. It runs out immediately and my parents cannot buy a new internet package which is so expensive for us because we have financial difficulties." S24F expressed, "I have to constantly buy an internet package. I buy an internet package 2-3 times a month, which is financially challenging."

The participants in the second category reported some technical problems (f=30) as challenges that they've experienced in online English classes. 2 codes were attained in the category and most of the students (f=20) declared that they had problems due to the 'internet connection' such as audio problems. S8g indicated, "Sometimes we cannot hear the teacher's voice or we have intermittent sounds like the internet connection slowdown during the lesson." S28b pointed out, "Unstable internet connection is sometimes a problem for me. I cannot fully comprehend the lesson because of the distorted audio of my teacher or myself." The other participants also noted that they had EBA or Zoom 'systems' (f=10). S1b expressed, "Sometimes EBA caused problems. It kicked me out of the lesson and it took a lot of time to connect to the lesson again. Sometimes it was really hard to join the lesson." S13M explained, "EBA or Zoom systems were sometimes inconvenient. Sometimes they were very slow. It lasted a few minutes to join the lesson, or it kicked us out in the middle of the lesson."

The third category is setting and 10 comments were reported about it. Only 1 code was formed in the category as the home environment (f=10), in which students talked about the problems related to their houses and family members. S5M expressed, "Our house is heated with a wood stove and we stay in the living room together, especially during the winter. Thus, I have to attend classes while my family is watching TV for instance. Sometimes we have guests and there is also a lot of noise when they come. I have to turn off my audio. At such times, I cannot fully concentrate on the lesson." S29M stated that "Another problem is my little brother who is crying during lessons. I have to turn off my microphone when he cries or yells. Sometimes he comes to the room where I join the classes and he knocks on the door and wants me to open the door. So I get distracted." S16M said, "When there are guests at home, it can be crowded and noisy and I cannot focus on what my teacher is talking about. For instance, my aunt and her family visited us a few days ago, and there was a lot of noise. I had to warn them to be silent."

For some of the students (f=6), contextual issues determined by the policymakers caused some challenges. In the category, 2 codes were identified as early class hours (f=3) and short class hours (f=3). S23F responded, "Sometimes our English classes were in the early hours and I had to attend classes drowsily. It was a little hard to concentrate on. The lessons are better when they are scheduled at noon or in the afternoon." S21M pointed out, "The lesson hours are a bit short as it lasts 30 minutes, which I think is not enough. It can be 40 minutes like in face-to-face lessons."

The last category concerning the fourth question is individual problems (f=3) and 2 codes were attained under this category. 2 students talked about the challenges caused by long screen time. S22M declared, "I often have a headache because I stare at a screen for a long time. If the English lesson is scheduled towards the last hours, my eyes also start to hurt and sometimes I can't pay attention although I liked English classes so much." The other code is the lack of motivation (f=1). In this respect, S8g pointed out, "As I cannot see my friends and teacher, I am not fully motivated for the lesson."

Interview Question 6: What are the advantages of online English classes?

Findings concerning the fifth interview question revealed 3 main categories, which can be seen in Figure 6. In response to the question, a range of responses was elicited, although participants underlined that they prefer face-to-face English classes despite some advantages. Three participants insisted that online English classes have no advantages and did not answer the question. According to the other participants' responses, the first category was identified as contextual (f=24) and under this category 3 codes were determined. For most of the students (f=16) in this category, one of the advantages of online classes is having more free time. S12F said that "I have more spare time at home and I can solve more tests." S19F noted, "I think online education gives us free time. For example, I watch the videos my teacher sent. I use supplementary books and revise the topics that I learned in online classes." The second code was formed as facilitating learning (f=6). S17F explained, "Since few students join the lesson, I can understand the subject better.

Moreover, it is more comfortable to take notes in online classes." S19F, who was the only one preferring online classes contrary to other participants, pointed out, "I realized that I speak English more comfortably in online classes. I become more self-confident and thus I slightly improved my English level." S26F declared, "One of the pros of online classes is that I can search for unfamiliar words immediately during classes." For very few students (f=2), interacting with the teacher easily is an advantage. S9F commented, "If I don't understand the topic in online classes or how to do the homework, I'm able to ask my questions through WhatsApp immediately."
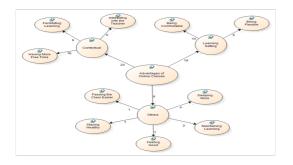

Figure 6: Advantages of Online English Classes

The participants in the second category indicated some advantages related to the learning setting (f=19) and 2 codes were identified. The most highlighted code in the category was comfortable (f=14). S3F stated that "During classes, I can turn off my camera and go to the toilet or get something to drink or eat." S8F expressed, "We have no dress code problems in online classes. We turn the camera off most of the time and that's why I sometimes attend the classes with my sweatpants or pyjamas and without doing my hair. We just listen to our teacher. We don't feel tired because we're just sitting.

Moreover, as my school is far from my home, I had to walk a lot in the past. There is no such problem now." The other code was being flexible (f=5) in terms of time and place. S4F indicated, "The biggest advantage is that I can join the lessons anywhere. For example, when we go to visit my grandparents, I can attend the classes at their house." S23B explained, "Online class hours are flexible comparing to face-to-face education. And as soon as the class is over, I can do other things such as going to the supermarket with my mother, helping her, spending time with my brother."

The last category was formed as others (f=9) and 5 codes were attained. 4 students reported that they could sleep more in online education. S11M pointed out, "We don't go to school. So I don't have to get up too early. When we went to school, I woke up at 6 every day. Now our lessons start at ten in the morning and sometimes at half past eight. I can sleep more." S20M responded, "Lessons start late, which is an advantage. Because I had to get up at six in the morning to go to school as my village is very far away from the school. I had to go to school by school bus." As the second code, maintaining learning (f=2) during the pandemic was declared as an advantage. S2F remarked, "We are lucky to continue our education despite Covid-19. We might not have been able to do any online classes. So we can call this an advantage." The other codes were determined as feeling good (f=1), staying healthy (f=1), and passing the class easier (f=1). S24F said that "During this pandemic period, the classes make me feel good as we cannot go anywhere. It is perfect to be with my friends and to hear my teachers' voice." S30F indicated, "The virus can be transmitted in face-to-

face education. We do not have such a problem in online classes so that we can protect our health." S10M stated that "We move on to the next grade without hard work as we didn't take any exams in English as well as other subjects."

3rd Research Question: What are the students' suggestions for better remote EFL teaching and learning?

Interview Question 7: Do you have any suggestions for online English classes?

When respondents were asked to make suggestions for better online English classes, most students suggested significant ideas apart from three students who did not want to suggest anything. 5 different codes were formed, as shown in Figure 7.
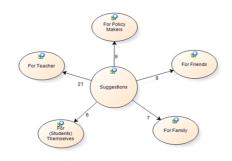

Figure 7: Students' Suggestions for Better Online English Classes

The participants in the first code (f=21) had suggestions 'for their teachers' concerning assignments, activities that are done in the classes, lesson implementation, and lesson scheduling. S2F pointed out, "My teacher still gives video assignments occasionally, but their number can be increased. She can give video assignments every week. She also gave voice recording assignments several times, and they also can be given at least once a week." S5M indicated, "Project works can be given. We can draw pictures about the meaning of the words and they can be presented in the lesson. Dictionary exercises can be done. We can do more reading and listening practice. Besides, when we are given the right to speak, if that person does not speak, our teacher can wait for a while. She waits, but that period can be extended a little bit because that person may have gone to the toilet at that moment, or he may not be able to speak because of the guests at

home as in my case. We can wait a little longer for that person to answer the question." S10M stated that "We should solve more tests in online lessons and we should have less writing homework." S18F declared, "It's going well right now but she can do word quizzes. Class hours can be determined earlier, for example. As teachers schedule their class hours late, sometimes I cannot notice and I can miss the lesson."

The second code was identified for policymakers (f=9) who are expected to provide equipment or internet connection for more low-income students and make some changes in some significant issues. S29M said that "People who are not financially good should also be considered. Many students don't have a laptop, tablet, or even a smartphone and cannot join classes. The Ministry can support much more students who cannot attend their online classes and can give more tablets so that these students can follow their lessons and download different language applications." S24F expressed, "If the Ministry can make changes, the hours of lessons can be increased from 30 minutes to 45 minutes." S16M explained, "Strange people, who were not one of our friends, attended our online class once, and they swore in our lesson. The authorities should take precautions to prevent such issues."

Moreover, some participants (f=8) had suggestions for their friends. S22M indicated, "Sometimes my classmates speak at the same time in our lessons and it can be so noisy. They have to be more respectful and careful. We already have audio problems in online classes and some of them make it more difficult to understand the lesson by interrupting the teacher or the one who is talking and by speaking so loudly."

7 of the participants suggested some issues for their families. Some expected their family members to help their studies and others wanted them to ensure a better learning atmosphere. S5M remarked, "My mother and my sister also have responsibilities. My mother can help me revise the vocabulary. My sister is in 7th grade and she has already learned what I am learning now. She can help me with topics I don't understand." S26F explained, "Families should provide opportunities for students. They should renew the internet packages. I join classes in the

same room with my siblings and parents. As we do not have a room that only belongs to us, they should be quiet and turn off the TV during lessons.

Moreover, my parents may install a wood stove in other rooms for us." And lastly, 6 students had a self-critical attitude and made suggestions for themselves. S29M stated that "I can study harder and participate more in the activities during lessons. I often forget what I have learned because I don't revise the topic or vocabulary regularly. Sometimes I do not do the homework, I upset my teacher."

Discussion and Conclusions

This study set out to reveal the EFL case through the pandemic remote education period through the lenses of secondary school students. It is a well-known fact that English language learning is crucial even in emergency periods to be and sustain a global citizen. So, the learners' opinions about the EFL teaching process are important because they are at the center of their learning. The study found that, generally, EFL teaching in Turkey has been continuing without much interruption during the pandemic period. In this section, the research questions will be examined and several important consequences will be drawn attention.

The first major finding was that the reading skill teaching, followed by the listening skill, came to the fore during the pandemic EFL education. Both of these skills are receptive ones that do not require active communication. This case has not been specified for pandemic education; instead, as Davies reported (1976), teachers have been concentrating on improving students' receptive skills in traditional schools, although the curriculums were designed to develop communicative skills. The present case could have resulted from a lack of interaction between students and teachers in online classes. However, English is global communication, so the main focus should be on communication in face-to-face or online classes. It is suggested that EFL learners should be provided interactive environments to improve their communicative ability (Öz, Demirezen & Pourfeiz, 2015), which does not depend on the type of education.

According to the study results, EFL teachers have used various ways to conduct their online

classes. However, most of them still have adhered to their course books or other publishing companies' textbooks instead of using some interactive materials and diversifying the range of activities they used during online classes, which can be interpreted negatively. Although using coursebooks is the most practical way for language teaching (Chou, 2010), Hutchinson and Torres (1994) claimed that structured course books might limit the skills of teachers. According to Swan (1992), instead of deciding what can be done for better learning, using readymade course books, teachers base themselves on the writers of those books who do all for them. Depending on course books, teachers could feel safer and more comfortable through the pandemic education since they do not have much time to conduct extra activities in limited online hours.

Moreover, most EFL teachers prefer pencil-paper assignments. As a few of the students declared to be assigned interactive technology-based homework, most of them admitted to having traditional pencil-paper homework. This finding has demonstrated the first one who has shown the receptive skills were given more importance. It is because pencil-paper homework is also an indicator of teachers' ignorance of students' communicative competence, which can be supported by interactive tasks. These findings may also be explained by the finding of Rahman (2020) in that online class design was revealed to be 'less prepared' and less thorough (p. 190) according to the students' answers.

The results of the second research question revealed that nearly all of the participants had preferred face-to-face education. This finding of the study is in line with several others (Altunay, 2019; Ghounane, 2020; Tümen Akyıldız, 2020b); on the other hand, the same outcome is contrary to the others (Öztürk Karataş & Tuncer, 2020; Surani & Hamidah, 2020) in which students are glad to have online learning. A possible explanation for this might be related to the age factor. In the present study, participants are secondary level students who need interaction more than the adult learners. In higher education, students are expected to be more self-regulated (Tümen Akyıldız, 2020b) and then they can adapt more easily to the remote education. Participants of the current study gave some reasons about their preferences of

face-to-face education such as effective learning, the necessity of interaction, socialising with friends and having more fun as some researchers in the language education field claimed that interaction is crucial in EFL settings (Swain, 2005; Ellis, 20087), which is also an important part of communicative language teaching. Providing active student participation is not so easy in online language learning environments. It is a fact that secondary learners should also be physically active at their age to have more fun and learn better. As Rivers (1987) supported that two-way interaction such as cooperation of learners for effective communication should be utilised to facilitate communicative activities. In terms of effective learning, a similar finding is also found out in Altunay's (2019) study, in which students reported that they learn English efficiently and communicate without a problem when they are face-to-face. The other advantage that students reported is the flexibility of time and place and the comfort of the home environment. This finding corroborates the finding of Harvey, Greer, Basham, and Hu, (2014), who also examined secondary school students in the online learning environment which they liked because of the flexibility that was provided and staying home for school comfortably.

However, during the pandemic remote education period, online language learning settings have too many problems to prevent communication between students and teachers. These problems were also among the participants' reasons to prefer face-to-face learning. All participants asserted that online learning has several disadvantages; economic, technical, setting, contextual, and individual problems. As emphasized by Rajab et al. (2020), the pandemic has brought financial difficulties to students similar to the students and their families in the current study. Most of the participants indicated that as they do not have a proper device and internet access at their homes, they cannot participate in the classes. This is in parallel with the study of Altunay (2019), in which many students do not attend remote classes because they do not have a computer.

Furthermore, students do not have internet access at home and they try to join the classes by using their mobile phones' internet packages, as in the study of Rahman (2020). Other challenges were related to the technical issues concerning poor internet connection and EBA or Zoom systems, which is in line with the finding of Rojabi (2020), whose participants stated that they understand better in face-to-face classes because they sometimes do not have a stable internet connection. They have to re-attend classes more than once. Besides, Rahman (2020) also found out that technical problems like internet connection are challenges in online education for the participants in his study. Moreover, according to Rojabi (2020), the learning environment is significant for students' learning and motivation. In the present study, participants reported that they have problems in terms of a home environment, which affected their learning and concentration negatively.

On the other hand, participants acknowledged that online language education has some advantages as well. However, they insistently underlined that they prefer face-to-face English classes despite the advantages they reported. For instance, the most highlighted advantages are having so much time to study, facilitating English language learning, home comfortability, flexibility of time and place, and some individual reasons such as preferring staying healthy and getting higher grades from exams. Remote education is asserted to facilitate language learning. This result may be explained by the fact that introverted students feel comfortable comparing to the crowded classroom environments and the opportunities that remote education offers.

On the third research question, this study found that students have noteworthy suggestions for EFL pandemic education. Their suggestions address teachers, policymakers, friends, families, and themselves. Students have demanded their teachers diversify the language learning activities and the assignments. According to Lin Singh and Li (2005), language teachers are responsible for promoting an interactive environment organizing different activities proper for interaction. Secondly, the participants have demanded policymakers provide economic support to access remote education easily. Thirdly, some of the participants have complained about their friends disrupting the online classes and suggested they be respectful of each others' learning rights. The other suggestion has been for families responsible for friendly learning environments. They

suggest their families help them to create a better learning environment and support their learning. Last and the most interesting suggestion has been for the participants themselves. As self-critical ones, some of the participants declared that they are aware of studying more.

In general, therefore, it seems that remote education will be a part of the lives of both educators and students in the new normal period. Instead of comparing remote education to the traditional face-to-face one, educators and students should adapt to the new conditions. As discussed in the previous parts, foreign language learning maintains its importance. Thus, students should go on learning EFL using the opportunities they have. This research contributes to the existing knowledge of foreign language teaching by providing students' insights about pandemic distance language learning and the teaching process. Although the current study is based on a small sample of participants, the findings extended the knowledge in the field because the participants were chosen from different grades of four different state schools.

This research has thrown up many implications in need of further investigations. More research is required to examine the new methods or ways facilitating remote language learning increasing interaction and communication among students. Another possible area of future research would be to investigate the perceptions of high school students to improve the EFL teaching at that level. Moreover, observations and experimental research may provide greater accuracy on this matter.

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