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Ceyhun Yükselir¹, Fatma Yuvayapan²

¹Osmaniye Korkut Ata University,
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4781-3183

²Kahramanmaraş İstiklal University,
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-7924-0933

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An Evaluation of Students Studying English Language and Literature about Transitioning to Online Classes during COVID-19 Pandemic

Ceyhun Yükselir^{1*}, Fatma Yuvayapan²

¹Osmaniye Korkut Ata University

²Kahramanmaraş İstiklal University

Abstract

There are ever-increasing studies about online classes and their applications in terms of benefits and deficits in transitioning to online education especially after the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in the world. This study investigates the English language learners' evaluations about transitioning to online classes in higher education in a sample of students at English language and literature (ELL) department. In addition to this, following a mixed-method design, it attempts to find out the students' preferences whether this change about online delivery in higher education is well welcomed or not. ELL students' preferences and evaluations were assessed through a five-point Likert survey and a focus group interview. After employing convenience sampling, 96 ELL students responded to the survey and 10 students who answered the survey participated in the focused interview voluntarily. The results showed that both groups of learners had positive evaluations about transitioning to online classes in terms of the content, delivery and structure during pandemic. The participants also thought that their professors utilized online classes effectively leading to a seamless transition to online learning for them. The implications of these findings for online classes in Turkish higher education context are discussed.

Key words: English language and literature (ELL) students, Online classes, Mixed-methods, COVID-19

Introduction

Since the outset of the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, all aspects of human life, including economy, health, tourism and education, have been influenced (Hebecci et al., 2020) and some changes have been made in accordance with the recent restrictions and alterations. Some strict rules such as social-distancing, home-office working, home-schooling have been implemented in order to decrease the number of people affected from this pandemic. In many countries, schools and higher education institutions have experienced a disruption to their traditional way of education system due to COVID-19 outbreak, in February 2020. In Turkey, the emerging threat of this pandemic has also brought about the closure of schools and universities in a short span of days in March 2020. In the fall term of 2020 academic year, educational institutions are continuing to run their courses via online-learning tools. Within these rapid changes and implementations, at least 1.5 billion learners which make up 91 percent of the student population were influenced (UNESCO, 2020) and education is the second most affected sector in a very short time (Telli & Altun, 2020). This lockdown process has led to a shift to online learning in all levels of education system in Turkey as implemented in all countries.

With the widespread use of technology and the Internet, online learning has become an inevitable part of the education system worldwide, especially in higher education institutions. Due to its flexibility in time, space and pace, online learning is considered as an alternative to traditional face-to-face learning. However, changing the perceptions of students and teachers towards online delivery is one hurdle that institutions need to handle. Previous studies represent this practice. One major issue in early research of online learning is concerned with perceptions of students in higher education (Armstrong, 2011; Artino, 2010; Astani et al., 2010). Some studies specifically compared the perceptions of experienced and novice online students (Hixon et al., 2016) while others examine the difference between faculty and students' perception of online classes (Bagasra & Mackinem,

* Corresponding Author: *Ceyhun Yükselir, ceyhunyukseir@gmail.com*

2019). Some attempts have been made to evaluate the quality of digital tools to be used in online courses (Rogers, 2011).

Until COVID-19 pandemic, online delivery has been used as a supplementary mode to face-to-face teaching. However, the rapid and mandatory suspension to face-to-face delivery in education systems has initiated a serious debate about the quality of learning and student and teacher satisfaction of online learning. Pal, Vanijja and Patra (2020) explain that in the wake of current COVID-19 pandemic, conduction to a “fully online” teaching has been made mandatory to reduce the negative effects of school closures worldwide. To maximize the potentials of this “fully online” methodology, it is essential to examine students’ experience of multimedia applications utilized in this delivery of teaching. Additionally, the quality of lesson, delivery and experience can be easily and quickly assessed in face-to-face delivery of teaching during class hours. What is almost impossible in an online class is to get immediate feedback from students. Hence, students’ and teachers’ perceptions should be integrated to online learning methodology during the design of the online curriculum. Understanding their perceptions of online learning mode may enable educational experts to make modifications to suit their needs (Nambiar, 2020).

Consequently, online learning seems to be a future mode of teaching methodology, so teachers need more understanding of how students evaluate online classes and multimedia applications as a learning mode to maximize the effectiveness. In Turkey, all universities have moved to online delivery since March 2020 in the light of the rising concern due to COVID-19 pandemic. However, this digital mandatory transition has posed some challenges that universities have to cope with. Besides, getting used to this mode of delivery may be also problematic for faculty members and students. Telli and Altun (2020) explain that one of the main problems about online learning in Turkey is to prepare online versions of content and presentations. Ertuğ (2020) claims that educational materials uploaded to the online systems during the pandemic were all printed books in higher education in Turkey. Thus, materials focusing on collaborative learning need to be urgently developed for higher education. At this point, students’ evaluations of the quality and presentations of the content may offer us crucial information in assessing online courses and materials during the pandemic. In Turkish context, studies have been conducted to examine student’s perceptions about online classes in different fields: health management (Serçemeli & Kurnaz, 2020), theology (Genç & Gümrükçüoğlu, 2020), Turkish Language teaching (Karakuş et al., 2020) and sports science (Aktaş et al., 2020). To our knowledge, the perceptions of students studying at the department of English Language and Literature have not been investigated before. Hence, this study is motivated by the need of ELL students’ evaluations of transitions to online classes regarding the use of Microsoft Teams online classes and delivery, content and structure of the online classes. As Pal and Vanijja (2020) highlight, the usability of the learning tools is prominent to ensure the online learning to be effective and useful for the students. The participants were the 1st and 2nd class students studying in English language and literature department. Our ultimate aim was to compare their evaluations of online classes to figure out whether there are any differences between 1st and 2nd class students’ evaluations of online delivery. For this purpose of the present study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the evaluations of the 1st class and 2nd class English language and literature students’ about transitioning to online classes regarding the use of online classes, delivery, content and structure?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference between the 1st class and 2nd class English language and literature students’ evaluations regarding the use of online classes, delivery, content and structure?
3. What are the feelings of the 1st class and 2nd class English language and literature students’ about transitioning to online classes?

Literature Review

At a time where every life is rested on technology and internet, online learning is recognized as an efficient means of instruction of delivery. It has been defined by many scholars in the literature. For Ally (2004), the term implies that “the learner is at a distance from the tutor or instructor that the learner uses some form of technology to access the learning materials that the learner uses technology to interact with the tutor or instructor and with other learner that some form of support is provided to learners (p. 16). Means, Bakia and Murphy (2014) define online learning as “a learner’s interaction with content and/or people via the Internet for the purpose of learning” (p. 6). Similarly, Kirk (2007) adopts a broader definition of the term: “one form of learning and teaching which uses computer-mediated communication via the internet to achieve the learning objectives within an educational organization” (p. 240).

Ally (2004) explains the benefits of online learning to educational institutions. Firstly, it creates a learning environment for learners where there are no time zones, location and distance. In addition, they can reach up-to-date materials and negotiate with experts through the internet. They can also take any online classes while working or in their free times. Bowman (2010) labels three types of online learning: independent study is the form of non-formal classes where course materials are available online and students complete them on their own. In synchronous learning both students and lecturers attend online classes at the same time and lecturers teach in real time. As the most popular form of learning, asynchronous learning provides learners flexible time to complete specific assignments and discussions.

Means et al. (2014) suggest four dimensions of online learning: *context, design features, implementation and outcomes*. *Context* is related to *the field use of use, provider type* (types of school) and *breadth* (type of the program) that online learning application is implemented. As the second dimension, *instructional design* includes features of *modality* (type of online learning), *pacing, synchrony, instructor and student role, the role of online assessment and feedback mechanism*. The third dimension is the *implementation* that is associated with *learning location, co-located facilitator and student-teacher ratio* (interaction). Finally, it is prominent to take into account the *outcomes* of the process which has four specific features: *cognitive, engagement, productivity measures and learning-to-learn outcomes*.

Suddenly, online learning has become compulsory worldwide due to the expansion of COVID-19 pandemic. Many universities announced that online courses would be available in the spring of 2020. Students would participate courses, complete assignments and take their exams online. However, during this mandatory shift, the universities worldwide were concerned about whether their students would be able to learn online. The literature on online higher education during the present pandemic has mostly focused on the perceptions of undergraduate students' perceptions to online delivery of teaching in different contexts worldwide. In a case study, Agung et al. (2020) examined the perceptions of 66 students of English Language Education Study Program at a college in Indonesia to online classes through a survey and labelled three major obstacles in online learning: availability and sustainability of internet connection, accessibility of the teaching media, and the compatibility of tools to access the media. In another similar study conducted in this context, Allo (2020) found that the learners of English study program at a college developed positive attitudes to online classes in the midst of the pandemic. In Chinese context, Demuyakor (2020) found that the implementation of online learning programs was supported by the students in spite of the high cost of participation to them. On the contrary, Unger and Meiran (2020) witnessed negative attitudes of undergraduate students towards this mode.

Through an online survey, Doyumğaç et al. (2020) observed that the factors improving online education were mainly associated with technological and internet infrastructure during the pandemic in Turkey. Based on the data collected from undergraduate students in South Korea and India, Baber (2020) analysed the relationship between students' perceived learning outcomes and satisfaction and observed some factors affecting these two concepts positively: *interaction in the classroom, student motivation, course structure, instructor knowledge, and facilitation*. In another study, Krishnapatria (2020) claimed that promoting flexibility and personalization where learners can choose their learning path and pace result in positive e-learning perceptions.

Murphy et al. (2020) examined undergraduate college students' perceptions, general preferences, and emotional responses to a virtual learning classroom in a college in the northeast United States. Based on the results, students thought that LMS system in online classes was used effectively to adopt the content and communicate changes in the content by their professors but not to declare the changes in the syllabi and schedule. Pal et al. (2020) compared the quality of three popular applications (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Cisco Webex) by using an objective based approach and found that Microsoft Teams (*MT, hereafter*) provides the least experience, whereas those from the others vary depending upon the objective models used.

As can be concluded from the studies in the previous literature, the delivery of education has changed all over the world during the pandemic. The compulsory closure of schools and universities has led to excessive use of online learning. No one was prepared for this sudden and dramatic change in the delivery of educational instruction. The unplanned and rapid shift to this mode negatively influenced the participants of the learning and teaching process. Many teachers and students believed that it was not possible to get sufficient knowledge from online learning. In this sense, measuring their evaluations of this delivery should be the first step of adaptation of technology since positive attitudes and evaluations facilitate learning effectively.

Methodology

Research Context

The study was carried out in a state university in southern Turkey. The data were collected from the department of English Language and Literature, in which the medium of instruction is English. The students enrolled in this department are obliged to be proficient in the English language by passing a proficiency test at the beginning of the academic year. If they do not, they have to take preparatory-year education for one year and to pass the final exam to be able to participate in first-year classes. The classes in ELL department ranges from academic writing, research methods, outline of literature, reading literary texts to literary terms and digital literacy.

Participants

The sample group in the current study comprised 96 ELL students from a state university located in the south part of Turkey. As the department commenced to accept students two years ago, the participants were English language and literature students in their first and second year of study due to the lack of other classes in the research context. In order to collect the data, convenience sampling was used to enhance the study's effectiveness since one of the researchers worked in this state university. As McIntyre (2004) states "convenience sampling is the technique of selecting sampling units on the basis of availability rather than representativeness" (p. 105). It is worthy to state that all the students who participated in the study had voluntarily agreed to participate and to give their opinions about transitioning to online classes and online education during COVID-19 pandemic period. The consent forms were taken through Google form document at the beginning of the survey. The demographic variable distributions of the participants in terms of gender, age and class are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic results related to the participants

Variable	Descriptor	N	%
Gender	Female	72	74,99
	Male	24	24,99
Age	18 - 21	88	91,66
	22- 25	5	5,20
	26 - 30	3	3,12
Class standing	1 st year	54	56,24
	2 nd year	42	43,74

Data Collection and Instruments

This study adopts explanatory sequential design which starts with the collection and analysis of the quantitative data and goes on with collecting qualitative data in the second phase (Creswell & Clark, 2011). A survey and focused group interview were utilized with the aim of gaining an overall picture about students' evaluations aside from the statistical data. A survey developed by Murphy et al. (2020) was administered to measure the views of ELL students about the course delivery, content, structure and preferences regarding to virtual classes. Before applying the scale, permission through an email was received from the corresponding author who developed this tool. To collect data online, Google form (*see Appendix 1*) was prepared and sent to the students via internet. In relation to the instrument, the fact that Murphy et al. (2020) developed and employed this scale and published in an international journal contributes to the issues of validity and reliability. The scale is a sixteen-item measure with responses based on a five-point Likert scale (5) 'strongly agree' to (1) 'strongly disagree', with (3) 'neutral' as the middle option due to the nature of research questions we formed. This instrument comprised three main parts with the consent form and demographic questions at the beginning. Part A includes six-items in relation to the students' evaluations about online classes, Part B is made up of ten-items as for course delivery, content and structure and Part C deals with the feelings about the change to online classes. There were 16 items in Part A and B sections in total and there were 13 feelings about this change to virtual classes in which students can choose more than one feeling. In each of the first two sections, there were items measuring ELL learners' evaluations, course delivery, course and delivery with a five-point Likert scale, except for the last section, feelings. It is noteworthy to state here that there are certain differences in the formation of the sentence structures between 1st and 2nd class ELL learners' questionnaire, the reason for this

lies in the fact that the freshman has the first and new experience to encounter online classes and sophomores had the experience from the previous semester thereby having the chance to evaluate the online classes. Here is the example from Part A:

1st class: I prefer my lecturers utilize Microsoft Teams in a manner that help my transition to virtual coursework.

2nd class: My lecturers utilized Microsoft Teams in a manner that helped my transition to virtual coursework.

Apart from the scale, which measures students' evaluations about transitioning to online classes questionnaire (Murphy et al., 2020), focused interview was also used to obtain triangulation and to compare and contrast the data. Prior to using the instrument, comments, opinions and feedback about the items were taken from an expert doing research in foreign language teaching to touch upon the validity and reliability issues. According to Merriam (2009) this type of interview enables the researchers to provide a deeper understanding and insights of the qualitative data. In this study, the participant students' evaluations towards transitioning to online classes were examined through a focused interview that was conducted with 10 voluntary students who had answered the survey. The interview was conducted by the researchers through Zoom program in compliance with the social distancing regulations during COVID-19. Suffice to add that both researchers engaged in the interview which was held in English. Our ultimate aim to conduct focused interview was to "to enhance the overall quality of the data" (Guest et al., 2012, p. 22), so we asked them to answer four questions regarding the evaluations of online classes, course, content and feelings about the change to virtual classroom environment, as suggested.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data collected from the participants were analysed using SPSS Statistics 22 version. The questionnaire about quantitative data described above was distributed to English language and literature students before the start of the autumn semester of 2020. As stated, participation in the study was voluntary. It took about 25-30 minutes to complete the survey. To present the data from the questionnaire, frequencies and percentages were given for every category. However, in order to gain comprehensive results, the researchers applied summative scales for analysing the data, which means the reduction to three Likert scaling (Strongly Agree, Neutral and Strongly Disagree). Similarly, the first and second year of students' variable was run through independent-samples t-tests to determine if it correlated to a measure change.

In addition, thematic analysis was used to make inferences from the data and find out themes and sub-themes in order to gain deeper insights into the research topic. Since they also recorded the interview that lasted 40 minutes, they had the opportunity to see every detail in the interview, thereby enabling them to make sense of each point. Boyatzis (1998) labels four steps of thematic analysis: (a) sensing themes, (b) doing it reliably, (c) developing codes, (d) interpreting the codes in the context of a theory or a conceptual framework. Following these steps, the two researchers watched the recorded focused interview individually in order to analyse and decide the themes. Then, they discussed the themes gathered from this process and reached an agreement about the main themes emerged from the analysis of the focused interview. Finally, the codes were interpreted in relation to the findings gathered from the questionnaires. To protect anonymity of the participants, we took the decision to use some abbreviations like "S1, S2, etc" while referring to their evaluations in the focused group interview.

Results and Discussion

Evaluations of Transitioning to Online Classes

In an attempt to answer the first research question, 1st and 2nd class English language and literature students' evaluations regarding the use of Microsoft Teams online classes system, delivery, content, and structure were investigated. All the items related to these two concerns were placed under the first two sections of the questionnaire. Table 2 displays the descriptive results for the learners' preferences and evaluations regarding the use of Microsoft Teams online classes system. The system used by the participants in their online classes was Microsoft Teams (MT).

Table 2. The Use of MT online classes System in Online Classes

Item	Class	Strongly Agree		Neutral		Strongly Disagree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
		Lecturers' utilization of MT	1st	40	61,1	9	16,7
	2nd	31	73,8	7	16,7	4	9,5
Course syllabi availability on MT	1st	40	74,1	12	22,2	2	3,7
	2nd	33	78,5	5	11,9	4	9,5
Course schedule availability on MT	1st	40	74,1	9	16,7	5	9,3
	2nd	30	71,4	7	16,7	5	9,3
Course grades and assignments availability on MT	1st	36	66,6	11	20,4	7	13
	2nd	33	78,6	7	16,7	2	4,8
Communication in timely manner	1st	41	75,9	11	20,4	2	3,7
	2nd	37	88,1	3	7,1	2	4,8
Use of MT to provide course content	1st	39	72,2	13	24,1	2	3,8
	2nd	31	73,8	7	16,7	4	9,5

Table 2 presents 1st class learners' preferences and 2nd class learners' evaluations descriptively regarding the use of MT. A quick glance to the percentages of "Agree", may enable us to suggest that the participants on the whole demonstrated high level of agreement regarding their transition to online classes in terms of MT use. The table shows that the majority of the participants in 1st (75,9 %) and 2nd class (88,1 %) commented that changes in course content and assignments are communicated to them in a timely manner. It is probably that they had a strong desire to be informed when and what to do in online courses.

The findings presented above were in line with Murphy et al. (2020) who found that undergraduate students participated in the study mostly thought that their professors utilized MT effectively leading to a seamless transition to online learning for them. In accordance with our findings, Krishnapatria (2020) observed that more than half of the participants were satisfied with their online learning experiences during the pandemic. Additionally, Armstrong (2011) found that college students were mostly concerned with the use and implementation of online tools as supported with the findings of the present study. Table 3 displays 1st class learners' preferences and 2nd class learners' evaluations descriptively regarding delivery, content, and structure in their online classes.

Table 3. Delivery, Content and Structure in Online Classes

Item	Class	Strongly Agree		Neutral		Strongly Disagree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
		Communication about changes in course content	1st	39	72,2	12	22,2
	2nd	35	83,4	6	14,3	1	2,4
Communication about changes in deadlines	1st	38	70,4	12	22,2	4	7,4
	2nd	37	88,1	4	9,5	1	2,4
Communication via email / WhatsApp Group	1st	50	92,6	3	5,6	1	1,9
	2nd	39	92,8	2	4,8	1	2,4

Communication about changes in graded elements	1st	41	75,9	9	16,7	3	5,6
	2nd	36	85,7	5	11,9	1	2,4
Communication about course proceedings	1st	43	79,6	8	14,8	3	5,6
	2nd	34	81	6	14,3	2	4,8
Flexibility in deadlines	1st	45	83,3	5	9,3	4	7,4
	2nd	33	78,6	5	11,9	4	9,5
Change in the graded assignments	1st	37	68,5	13	24,1	2	3,7
	2nd	31	73,8	8	19	3	7,2
Active student participation virtually	1st	31	57,4	13	24,1	10	18,5
	2nd	35	83,3	5	11,9	2	4,8
Effective use of virtual classroom	1st	40	74	11	20,4	3	5,6
	2nd	33	78,6	8	19	1	2,4
Recorded lectures to review	1st	46	85,2	5	9,3	3	5,6
	2nd	33	78,6	6	14,3	3	7,1

The highest percentages were computed for the item associated with communication via email / WhatsApp Group (1st class, 92,6 % and 2nd class, 92,8 %). It seems that they were satisfied with the constant communication during the term, which is in line with the feelings of the undergraduate students about online educational communication in the studies of Allo (2020) and Agung et al. (2020). In these studies, WhatsApp was perceived as the most effective online learning platform by the participant college students. Consistent with Armstrong (2011), the evaluations concerned with the *communication about changes in course content, deadlines, graded elements, graded assignments* and *course proceedings* were echoed by both 1st and 2nd class students. A possible explanation for this might be that the participants sought for concise directions on everything about their online classes from content and assignments to deadlines. They also had an agreement about *effective use of virtual classroom* and *recorded lectures*. In the process of online learning, 2nd class students indicated that their lecturers facilitated *active student participation during online classes* (83,3 %) while 1st class student did not seem to be as confident as 2nd class students about active participation (57,4 %). This was the biggest difference in the percentages of the items in the questionnaire. It is likely that previous experiences of online learning due to the pandemic might positively affect the 2nd class students' evaluations of active participation to online classes. The independent sample t-test was run to examine whether there was a statistical difference between the groups of students regarding the use of MT. No significant differences in the score of 1st class learners' preferences and 2nd class learners' evaluations regarding these two concerns. On the contrary, they displayed a level of agreement, supported with the results of descriptive statistics and independent sample t-test. Regarding delivery, content, and structure in their online classes, a statistical difference for two items were calculated. The first one is related to being active during virtual classes ($p=,046$). While 2nd class learners pointed out active participation in virtual classes positively, 1st class students tended to be closer to neutral for this matter. On the other hand, the difference in the scores about the recording of the lectures ($p=,020$) displays that 1st class learners wanted recorded lectures to view at their leisure, however, 2nd class learners were not enthusiastic as much. Considering that 2nd class learners had already had the experience of one-term online classes, it could be hard or rare to review previous classes for different reasons.

The last concern of the study was the feelings of 1st class and 2nd class English language and literature students about the transition to online classes. It was observed that they had multiple feelings. While 1st class learners mostly felt excited (59,3%), anxious (42,6%), happy (40,7%), and nervous (38,9%), 2nd class learners mostly felt nervous (40,5%), comfortable (35,7%), happy (35,7%), and uncertain (33,3%). The results indicate that 1st class learners could have these feelings (excitement, anxiousness, happiness, and nervousness) because they were met with online courses for the first time as well as this was their first year in the university. However, 2nd class students had one-term experience beforehand, while this could be the reason for their comfort and happiness, the reason why they feel nervous or uncertain should be explored. This finding is contrary to that of Murphy et al. (2020), who found that the participant undergraduate students studying in a college in the USA felt mostly uncertain and anxious about this compulsory transition to online mode.

Focused Interview Results

This section provides the results emerged from the thematic analysis of the focused interview concerning the evaluations of the participants related to the online system and delivery, content and the structure of the online classes. To do this, we asked four questions during the focused interview:

1. How do you feel about in online classes?
2. What do you think about integrating course syllabi and schedule into the Microsoft team?
 - a) Do you follow the changes in the course content and assignment deadline easily when the syllabus is available on the system?
 - b) What are the advantages and disadvantages of using flexible deadlines?
3. Do you think you can participate in the online classes actively?
4. What are the lecturers' drawbacks in online classes?

Analysis of the focused interview produced three major themes regarding students' feelings about online classes: *motivation, ownership and anxiety*. As Hixon et al. (2016) suggest, students' preparedness to be an online learner affect their online learning experiences positively. The level of comfort in using the internet and technology increase not only their ability to be an online learner but also their satisfaction in the online mode of learning. However, there are also previous studies about students' experiences and distress in web-based distance education (Hara, 2000; Hara & Kling, 2001; Hilliard et al., 2020), which is in linear with one part of students' remarks stating that they had sometimes technical issues and internet problems in the course of online classes. The participants made the following remarks related to above mentioned themes as:

"We gain time because we have no accommodation and transportation problems. We can easily rewatch a class and solve our problems when we lack knowledge" (S1)

"Online learning is better than traditional learning. Thanks to it, we learned how to manage our time, to prepare our own schedule. We started to get motivated and learn our responsibilities" (S2)

"We are becoming more responsible, but I don't feel I am learning better" (S3)

When we asked about the content and delivery issues in online learning, we emerged the following themes: *the use of one program, little feedback from lecturers and friends, taking individual responsibilities*. In relation to the themes, some of the participants' excerpts are as follows:

"Only one program should be used otherwise it is hard to follow the course syllabi" (S4)

"In traditional learning, we can ask our teachers and friends about the things to do" (S5)

"The flexible deadlines make me to take my own responsibility about the assignment. When I have flexible deadlines, I trust the time and feel relaxed" (S2)

In terms of active participation in online classes, they seemed to have different opinions: *eagerness to online participation, being neutral, a preference of traditional classes*. These themes may be related to their learning styles. Simpson and Du (2004) state that when students learn via listening, observation and participation, the isolation during online classes may lead to satisfaction and success. It is possible that availability of the course schedule and syllabi on the MT system may help them to construct their own path of learning and feel more eager to engage in online classes. Vonderwell and Zachariah (2005) label the factors affecting students' online participation: "criteria for evaluating and assessing online discussions, the written nature of online discussions course design and instructor interventions and learner background knowledge" (p. 213).

"I am more active in online classes" (S3)

"I prefer traditional classes because I can participate more actively" (S6)

About the drawbacks of the lectures in online classes, they thought that some of their lectures adapted the changes in online mode of teaching, but some started to follow a more teacher-centred approach. Recall that more than half of the students in both groups evaluated that lecturers utilized MT in a manner that helped their transitions to virtual coursework.

When compared to traditional mode of learning, online learning may require addressing motivation by undergraduate students. In the present study, the vast majority of the participants clearly had strong positive attitudes toward quickly adjusting to online learning mode from the use of online system to the delivery of the classes. One interesting result of this study is increased self-autonomous learning style felt by undergraduate students engaged in the study.

Conclusion

This study explored to provide more insights about transitioning to online classes in higher education setting in line with the English language and literature students' evaluations. The findings of the study about the use of Microsoft Teams online classes reveal that the majority of the participants had a high level of positive agreement. 1st (75,9 %) and 2nd class (88,1 %) students stated that changes in course contents and assignments were conducive to the use in a timely manner. It is probably that they had a strong desire to be informed when and what to do in online courses. In relation to delivery, content and structure, it can be stated that communication about changes in course content, deadlines, graded elements, graded assignments and course proceedings were met with an agreement by both 1st and 2nd class students. In the process of online learning, 2nd class students indicated that their lecturers facilitated active student participation during online classes (83,3, %) while 1st class student did not seem to be as confident as 2nd class students about active participation (57,4 %). Regarding the focused interview results, the striking theme regarding students' feelings about online classes was building ownership for their own learning. We believe that using both quantitative and qualitative data in this study broaden the understandings of the transition to online classes during pandemic.

This current study has two major limitations. First, the sample group of the study participants was limited to 96 participants (1st and 2nd class) and the context of the study was set in ELL department at a state university. The other limitation is related to the duration of data collection period in which the study was carried out. The study did not cover the whole academic year, as stated before, the data were collected at the beginning of the spring term of 2020-2021 academic year. Given the smaller sampler size, it is recommended that further studies be conducted with a larger sample of students in higher education to determine perceptions and academic needs of undergraduate students as well as instructors. A second area of research is needed to further explore the evaluation of online classes by using a formative approach which may include the evaluation of the courses regarding design, content, materials and assessment techniques.

Considering the findings of the study, there are several implications for practice and suggestions for future directions. Firstly, there is a need for acknowledging and addressing student emotions and needs in online learning mode achieving self-efficacy in online learning. Secondly, integrating autonomy related activities in course contents could improve learning and increase learning autonomy to a higher level (Balçıkanlı, 2010; Gabryś-Barker, 2017). Based on the participants' remarks and statistical analysis, the functions and applications of an online platform to access information do not make learning process slower. Thus, there is also a need to make better use of this online technology with the aim of making a strong contribution to student learning at higher education. Future studies could explore transitioning to online class in higher education with more senior students (e.g. 3rd and 4th classes or post-graduates) and with a large sample group from different English departments and universities. Moreover, more comprehensive research is also needed to see the overall picture regarding the online classes during COVID-19 pandemic in the Turkish context.

Ethical Committee Approval

Ethical approval was successfully obtained from the Committee of Scientific Research Projects Unit at the higher education institution where the study was conducted. (Osmaniye Korkut Ata University, reference number E.31120; 27/10/2020).

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Appendix 1

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfPnuSJM_JhOzQMkoyhGLrmsowIgKAJCBeytG-0WdpXTET7WQ/viewform?usp=sf_link

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScS1zXbsHMMMIKgzRbACh_OYqNBBQZCHa5Cw1BSspqQUe4uxA/viewform?usp=sf_link