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## **The Impact of Online Learning on The Motivation of University Level Preparatory EFL Students in Turkey**

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**Abstract.** Online education or e-learning has been a part of education ever since required technological advancements came into existence. Online education's efficiency and its impacts on both educators and learners have been questioned and investigated by many researchers and scholars since the COVID-19 global pandemic broke out. One of the many concerns is related to how online education affects learner motivation. Along with any educational setting or context, the role of online education and its effects on both learning and teaching processes has gained much interest and momentum in the context of EFL as well. In the early days of the pandemic, online education practically replaced traditional classroom settings and today, it continues to be an important part of learning English. For this reason, a good body of research and studies have focused on how online courses can affect the whole process of learning and teaching. This study aimed to investigate EFL learners' views on online education and to investigate how online learning affected the motivation of EFL learners. A qualitative descriptive design was used, and data were collected with a close-ended questionnaire, to understand how students identify with online learning and how it affected their motivation. 118 English preparatory program students at a foundation university participated in the study. The study findings reported mixed results. According to the findings, a considerable percentage of students claimed their motivation was negatively affected, although some students considered online lessons effective for target language learning.

**Keywords.** online education, online learning, e-learning, efl, motivation

### **Introduction**

Significant changes have been experienced across the world since COVID-19 pandemic was broke out in March 2020. Among various fields, services and practices, the dramatic changes have shown their impact on education as well. Educational institutions around the globe were unexpectedly required to move their classes online in order to enable students to continue with their education. Even though online learning has been a part of education in various institutions for a considerable amount of time, the implementation of online learning on a global scale with such short notice has brought its own additional issues. Both teachers and learners have had trouble adapting to the new medium.

The unprecedented change in the modes of teaching and learning has raised questions and concerns by researchers and practitioners in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education along with many other fields. These questions and concerns were mainly about

the efficacy of online learning, the challenges faced in its implementation, and how it may affect learners' motivation in the context of EFL. Amongst the main questions and concerns, a good number of researchers and scholars in the field have investigated the potential impact of the new medium of instruction on the motivation of EFL learners to a substantial extent. Motivation in foreign language learning and teaching, including EFL, has been a subject of interest for many researchers. (Boo et al. 2015; Bower, 2019). Aside from a strong interest in the subject, motivation is regarded as an essential and irrefutable component of every foreign language learning environment, and it has been extensively explored.

Considering the current circumstances in foreign language education all over the world, the potential effects of online learning on learners' motivation to learn have caught the attention of many researchers. Since online learning has been implemented on a global scale and as an emergency, it has added a new aspect to the concept of motivation. Thus, there is a growing interest in the topic, and it has led to a new path to conduct research on learner motivation in an online setting (Ozer & Badem, 2022). This study's goal is thus to research and examine EFL learners' experiences with online education. and its potential impact on their motivation and to research their views on the virtual classroom setting.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Online Education**

The definition of online education fundamentally is the use of the web and the internet in learning (Bates, 2005). Online education is described as the use of the internet to gain access to instructional materials as well as technologies in order to acquire knowledge and learning experience by Ally (2008). Harnett (2016) further adds that online education takes place where learners and teachers are geographically separated.

With the COVID-19 pandemic emerging, terms such as 'e - learning', 'distance education' 'online education' have been seen to be used interchangeably. During this period of global pandemic, a new term 'emergency remote teaching (ERT)' has started to be used as well. Hodges et al. (2020) describes ERT mainly as a temporary adjustment in instructional delivery due in the state of crisis. ERT is an obligation due to the emergency whereas distance education or online learning have been mostly concerned with alternative and flexible options for learners as further stated by Bozkurt and Sharma (2020).

Considering the fact that these terms are loosely and interchangeably used, 'online education' commonly refers to distant learning and teaching where there is a physical separation between teachers and learners as well as the school environment as an alternative or a mandatory during this time of crisis.

#### **Definition of Motivation**

According to Lumsden (1994), motivation means the willingness of a student to take part in the process of learning a language. As motivation relates to learner engagement, it must be ensured to witness a learner's engagement in the learning process (Dörnyei, 2020). Furthermore, the term motivation is commonly categorized in two fundamental types: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. When a learner's natural interest and curiosity activate and enhance their learning it is described as intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2014). Intrinsically motivated behaviors are the ones that learners conduct to acquire rewards that are internal such as satisfying one's curiosity or having pleasure from the act of learning itself (Dörnyei, 1994). Extrinsically motivated behaviors, on the contrary, are related to learners performing in order

to receive external rewards such as good grades and praise or to avoid punishment (Dörnyei, 1994s).

### **Motivation in Online Education**

Concerns and questions regarding learner motivation whether it is in a face to face or online class are a matter of interest in the context of EFL. However, motivation in the online learning context is considered to be complex, which is affected by both the context and the individual traits (Hartnett, 2012). Motivation requires a more in-depth analysis when it is in the context of online education (Burston, 2003). Kyewski and Krämer (2018) further add that motivation is deemed to be worth investigating in regards of online education as learners tend to participate less and their lack of participation leads to certain concerns and questions. Therefore, learner motivation in online education gained a great deal of attention even before the global pandemic (Chen & Jang, 2010; Hartnett et al., 2011; Kyewski & Kramer, 2018; Özhan & Kocadere, 2020). Furthermore, since all the classes in any education institution, including places where EFL teaching and learning take place, shifted to online classes with great pace, concerns and research on the subject has raised more attention.

### **Factors affecting learners' motivation in online education**

As the term 'motivation' is a broad concept, it may only be explored based on certain factors affecting it. According to Meşe and Sevilen's (2021) study results, the following factors can be effective in an online EFL class:

- 1. Satisfaction of course content, materials, and instruction:** Learner motivation can be affected positively or negatively depending on their satisfaction with the content of an EFL course, the materials, and tools used in online lessons, and how teachers conduct their lessons.
- 2. Need for communication and interaction:** Motivation has one of its roots in the need for socialization in an online learning environment, especially in an EFL classroom. Lack of interaction between peers and the teacher might have a detrimental impact on learners' motivation. This interaction commonly includes social learning among peers and receiving feedback from teachers.
- 3. Self-regulation:** Learners' self-discipline and their own set goals can affect their motivation to engage in the language learning process. In an online education setting, learners may find it challenging to keep themselves motivated while sitting in front of a computer with little to no supervision.
- 4. Organizational problems:** Such problems mostly stem from the school organization and can have a hindering effect on learner motivation. The number of students and differing levels of attendees in online classrooms along with the rules and regulations set for online lesson conduct are the concerns of organizational problems.
- 5. Situational problems:** These problems are mainly related to the Internet connection and the conditions of the environment from which learners participate in online lessons.

### **Previous Studies on Learner Motivation in Online EFL Classes**

Research on the issue of learner motivation in online EFL classes can be classified into two broad categories. The first category studies are concerned with learner motivation in EFL classes where the Internet and online tools were used in a hybrid system before the worldwide use of online education due to the global pandemic. It is also referred to as distance education. As for the second category, it consists of the studies that have been carried out since the outbreak

as online education became an obligation around the globe. Studies carried out to explore aspects in terms of the motivation of learners in EFL online classrooms in both pre-pandemic and pandemic periods have yielded various findings and results. One of the recent studies conducted by Meşe and Evilen (2021). Their study included English preparatory school students, and the findings showed that the participants viewed online education mostly negatively due to factors such as lack of interaction between fellow students and their teachers, and inadequate teacher feedback. In their study, it was found that EFL learners' motivation decreased over time in online lessons. Similarly, Lin et al. (2017) concluded that learner motivation increases when there is a healthy amount of interaction between peers and their teachers, and then the quality of teacher feedback helps motivation increase. Additionally, in Meşe and Evilen's study, most participants had a challenge to motivate themselves as they felt they did not have the necessary self-discipline to attend and participate in the lessons. This outcome supports the study by Murday et al. (2008), which found that maintaining motivation and discipline at a desirable level is challenging in online sessions. Furthermore, in line with Meşe and Evilen's (2021) Kyewski & Krämer's (2018) study concluded that online class participation appears to be lower compared to traditional classroom setting. Rojabi's (2020) findings, on the other hand, revealed that online education in EFL supports the learning and teaching environment positively. Most participants of the study reported an optimal view towards online classes. Moreover, the participants mainly expressed that online learning was helpful to enable interaction between students and teachers. Similarly, Zabadi's (2016) study found that participating students had positive views toward online learning, and they expressed an interest in taking more online courses. In another study, it was concluded that if online education is used effectively, it will improve learners' class attendance, participation, engagement, and motivation by Abou El-Seoud et al. (2014). The study also showed that learners' self-motivation plays a key factor in online learning. For this purpose, learners should be supported by their digital enhanced learning in order to increase their motivation in the process of learning. For these reasons, learners must improve their skills in communication and knowledge of technology in order to benefit from online learning. In other words, motivation can increase in online education if the learners become independent and self-directed.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions were the focus of this study:

1. What are the views of EFL learners towards online English classes?
2. How does online English classes affect EFL learners' motivation?

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

Quantitative data was gathered from 118 EFL students using online surveys. The participants in this study were 118 EFL students in A2 level at the preparatory school of foundation university in Istanbul, Turkey. All the participants answered the questionnaires. Of the 118 EFL student participants, 45 of them were females, 72 of them were males, and one of the students preferred not to say his or her gender. 97 of the students were between 18 and 20 years old, 14 of them were between 21 and 23 years old, 6 of them were between 24 and 26 years old, and one of them was 30 and above. All the participating students had English classes in their previous education. The students were placed in A2 classes based on their performance in the placement test applied by the university. Of the twelve A2 level classes, four of them were randomly selected and the questionnaires were given to those classes.

### Instrument

According to Sandelowski (2000), a descriptive study is commonly used to describe an event or an experience of reality as completely as possible. Qualitative descriptive design was used, and the data were gathered by means of a background questionnaire and twelve questions related to the research questions. The background questionnaire elicited the participants' demographics such as age and gender. To uncover the impact of online learning on the motivation of EFL learners, the BQ consisted of twelve questions. Theoretical and empirical discoveries in the literature served as the foundation for these inquiries and focused on such aspects as the importance of e-learning, learner motivation, usefulness of using e-learning, as well as the willingness and interest of learners in using e-learning. Participants indicated their opinions by choosing 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neutral', 'disagree', and 'strongly disagree', showing how strongly they agree or disagree with the survey questions.

### Data Analysis

For the purposes of this research, the questionnaire approach was used to collect data. The study used a quantitative method to collect data from all participants, the questionnaire answers were gathered through multiple choice answers, which consisted of closed-ended questions. This approach produced numerical data which made it possible to mathematically examine and summarize. This quantitative research required the statistical process, which was done using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program. The total of learners participating was 118 students in Istanbul Aydin University preparatory school at A2 level. Only 1 student did not prefer to mention his or her gender, but 45 female and 72 male learners participated in the research. The data of the study were gathered using a Google Form and the link was shared with the participants via WhatsApp class groups. The key justification for using an online survey platform was that it was thought to be useful for gathering information during the Covid-19 outbreak.

### Results

**Table 1**

*I like using e-learning for English modules.*

	N	%
Strongly Agree	9	7.63%
Agree	33	27.97%
Neutral	36	30.51%
Disagree	21	17.80%
Strongly Disagree	19	16.10%

*Note.* The first question asked if participants like to use e-learning for English modules. 42 or 35.6% agreed, 40 or 33.9% disagreed, and 36 or 30.51% remained neutral.

**Table 2**

*I think the teacher's application of e-learning in teaching English modules helps me improve my skills in English.*

	N	%
Strongly Agree	13	11.02%
Agree	37	31.36%
Neutral	36	30.51%

Disagree	24	20.34%
Strongly Disagree	8	6.78%

*Note.* The second question asked if participants consider teacher's application of e-learning in teaching help them improve their skills in English. 50 or 42.38% agreed, 32 or 27.12% disagreed, and 8 or 6.78% remained neutral.

**Table 3**

*I think the teacher's application of e-learning in teaching English modules is not useful.*

	N	%
Strongly Agree	5	4.24%
Agree	28	23.73%
Neutral	34	28.81%
Disagree	39	33.05%
Strongly Disagree	12	10.17%

*Note.* The third question asked participants if the teacher's application of e-learning in teaching was ineffective. 51 or 43.22% disagreed, 34 or 28.21% remained neutral, and 33 or 27.97% agreed.

**Table 4**

*I think my grades will improve by using e-learning for English modules.*

	N	%
Strongly Agree	12	10.17%
Agree	27	22.88%
Neutral	32	27.12%
Disagree	30	25.42%
Strongly Disagree	17	14.41%

*Note.* The fourth question asked if participants believe that their grades will improve by using e-learning for English modules. 47 or 39.83% disagreed, 39 or 33.05% agreed, and 32 or 27.12% remained neutral.

**Table 5**

*I find English modules easier when the teacher uses e-learning in teaching.*

	N	%
Strongly Agree	12	10.17%
Agree	29	24.58%
Neutral	43	36.44%
Disagree	21	17.80%
Strongly Disagree	13	11.02%

*Note.* The fifth question asked if participants find English modules easier when the teacher uses e-learning in teaching. 43 or 36.44% remained neutral, 41 or 34.75% agreed, and 34 or 28.8% disagreed.

**Table 6**

*I hope teachers of English continue to use e-learning in their teaching.*

	N	%
Strongly Agree	11	9.32%
Agree	27	22.88%
Neutral	31	26.27%
Disagree	20	16.95%
Strongly Disagree	29	24.58%

*Note.* The sixth question asked if participants hope that teachers continue to use e-learning in their teaching. 49 or 41.53% disagreed, 38 or 32.2% agreed, and 31 or 26.27% remained neutral.

**Table 7**

*Using e-learning for English modules is more interesting than the traditional method.*

	N	%
Strongly Agree	10	8.47%
Agree	19	16.10%
Neutral	22	18.64%
Disagree	33	27.97%
Strongly Disagree	34	28.81%

*Note.* The seventh question asked if participants find using e-learning for English modules more interesting than the traditional method. 67 or 56.71% disagreed, while only 29 or 24.57% agreed, and 22 or 18.64 remained neutral.

**Table 8**

*E-learning makes me more interested in learning English.*

	N	%
Strongly Agree	9	7.63%
Agree	12	10.17%
Neutral	28	23.73%
Disagree	41	34.75%
Strongly Disagree	28	23.73%

*Note.* The eighth question asked if e-learning makes participants more interested in learning English. 59 or 58.48% disagreed, 28 or 23.73% remained neutral, while only 20 or 17.8 agreed.

**Table 9**

*By using e-learning for English modules, the opportunity of interaction with the teacher is enhanced.*

	N	%
Strongly Agree	10	8.47%
Agree	29	24.58%
Neutral	28	23.73%
Disagree	23	19.49%
Strongly Disagree	28	23.73%

*Note.* The ninth question asked if e-learning for English modules enhances the opportunity of interaction with the teacher. 51 or 43.22% disagreed, 39 or 33.05% agreed, and 28 or 23.73% remained neutral.

**Table 10**

*By using e-learning for English modules, the opportunity of interaction with my classmates is enhanced.*

	N	%
Strongly Agree	9	7.63%
Agree	23	19.49%
Neutral	34	28.81%
Disagree	27	22.88%
Strongly Disagree	25	21.19%

*Note.* The tenth question asked participants if e-learning for English modules enhances the opportunity of interaction with their classmates. 52 or 44.07% disagreed, 34 or 28.81% remained neutral, while only 32 or 27.12% agreed.

**Table 11**

*Using e-learning for English modules encourages me to continue learning on the Internet by myself.*

	N	%
Strongly Agree	13	11.02%
Agree	33	27.97%
Neutral	30	25.42%
Disagree	29	24.58%
Strongly Disagree	13	11.02%

*Note.* The eleventh question asked participants if using e-learning for English modules encourages them to continue learning on the Internet by themselves. 46 or 38.92% agreed, 42 or 35.6% disagreed, and 30 or 25.42% remained neutral.

**Table 12**

*I am unwilling to learn English modules through e-learning.*

	N	%
Strongly Agree	27	22.88%
Agree	14	11.86%
Neutral	43	36.44%
Disagree	17	14.41%
Strongly Disagree	17	14.41%

*Note.* The twelfth question asked participants if they are unwilling to learn English modules through using e-learning. 43 or 36.44% remained neutral, 41 or 34.74% agreed, and 34 or 28.82% disagreed.

### **Discussion**

The present study was carried out to investigate EFL learners' view towards online English classes and how these classes affect their motivation. The study yielded mixed results concerning the two research questions.

The students' views on online English classes were found to be divided. One third of the participants viewed online lessons positively in general whereas another third had negative views. Almost half of the students reported that they found online lessons useful and thanks to

the contribution of the teacher's application of online courses, they believed it helped them improve their skills in English. However, a significant number of students expressed that online learning would not improve their grades. Further, most students did not view online lessons as more interesting than the traditional method and they preferred not to have online lessons in English in the future.

The reported views of the students also had mainly negative effects on their motivation in online lessons. The learners' motivation revealed to be decreased during online English learning. A large number of learners believe that online education does not make them more interested in learning English. Regarding the opportunity of interaction with the teacher and other students, they mostly see online learning as a barrier to their interaction. These findings were in line with the following studies: Murday et al (2008), Kyewski and Krämer (2018), Meşe and Evilen (2021), Ozer and Badem (2022). In contrast, a fairly large number of learners view online learning as a facilitator to their autonomous learning in the future.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that even though almost half of the students found online English lessons useful, a significant number of the students did not view the lessons positively overall. Therefore, it was believed by the majority of the participating students that the online learning environment of English did not have a positive impact on their motivation as the interaction between peers and their teachers was not adequate.

The present study had its limitations. The questionnaire was conducted among only a certain level of students (A2) and in an English preparatory school context. Future research should investigate both EFL learners' and teachers' views and the impact of online English lessons on motivation with a wider range of levels and different contexts of EFL on a larger scale. Additionally, further research may be needed to investigate ways and approaches to increase the effectiveness of online English lessons, to explore how common obstacles can be overcome, and to inquire into the possible means and methods to enhance learner motivation.

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