

Chapter 11

The Experiences of Preparatory School Students With Online Language Classes and Tools

Semahat Aysu

Tekirdağ Namık Kemal University, Turkey

Pınar Çankaya

Tekirdağ Namık Kemal University, Turkey

Güray Karaduman

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9260-958X>

Tekirdağ Namık Kemal University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

As language learning is based on communication and interaction, this study will mainly focus on how synchronous and asynchronous online language learning processes affect language learners, what students think about online language classes and tools, and what they suggest in order to improve the language teaching. Therefore, in an attempt to reveal the way online language learning process has affected the learners, the researchers designed a qualitative study in which the following three domains are highlighted: 1) self-reported effects of synchronous online language learning on students' interactional ability, 2) the attitudes of the participants toward synchronous and asynchronous online language learning and tools, 3) the challenges the participants have faced. By doing so, the researchers aimed to reach a better understanding of learners' reactions to online language instruction in order to make suggestions for improving online language teaching practices through practical and suitable teaching tools and further enhance the lifelong learning process.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically and unexpectedly reshaped life in most aspects. Educational

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institutions are probably among the most affected by the pandemic. Many countries, including Turkey where this study was originated, took action to minimize the negative effects of the pandemic. The existing phenomenon has given a striking rise to online distance learning, which until the pandemic has often been criticized and underrated. In this sense, the main purpose of this paper is to scrutinize the online English language teaching and learning practices and online language learning tools employed in preparatory schools of foreign languages in a state university in Turkey in the fall term of the 2020-2021 academic year. Although students had experienced online learning in the last term of their high school when the pandemic broke out, there were many new challenges in the fall term. The main difficulties that the students have faced for two terms as a result of the coronavirus includes a lack of familiarity with the learning materials (the course book, online workbook, the online learning platform), and a lack of physical and immediate interaction with their instructors and classmates. Owing to these obstacles; not only the instructors but also the students have confronted unprecedented effects on their language learning journey.

As language learning is based on communication and interaction, this study will mainly focus on how synchronous and asynchronous online language learning process affect language learners, what students think about online language classes and tools, and what they suggest in order to improve the language teaching. Therefore, in an attempt to reveal the way online language learning process has affected the learners; the researchers designed a qualitative study in which the following three domains are highlighted: a) self-reported effects of synchronous online language learning on students' interactional ability, b) the attitudes of the participants toward synchronous and asynchronous online language learning and tools, c) the challenges the participants have faced. By doing so, the researchers aimed to reach a better understanding of learners' reactions to online language instruction in order to make suggestions for improving online language teaching practices through practical and suitable teaching tools and further enhance the lifelong learning process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Blending Synchronous and Asynchronous Online Learning

For the last few decades, especially since the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic, online education has been attracting more attention and it has been implemented by a wide variety of educational institutions worldwide. Online learning can be defined as a process which takes place in a virtual classroom environment, where the instructor tries to use different strategies to convey the right amount of input and the learners try to receive as much information as possible (Amiti, 2020). Many students can make use of the various resources through real time or asynchronous ways and other reasons why online learning has potential might be listed as follows: "flexible access to content and instruction at any time, from any place" (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia & Jones, 2009). Online education might be implemented synchronously and/or asynchronously through electronic means, which might be considered as a simple process for the instructors, but requires comprehensive planning and frequent evaluation. That means, online learning is challenging because instructors need to devise well-grounded strategies to keep learners engaged, motivated, confident and interested in learning. Therefore, in the following these two modes (synchronous and asynchronous ways) will be discussed with their benefits and drawbacks.

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