Through the Lens of EFL Teachers: Teaching Online on Lockdown
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Abstract
There has been a growing interest in online EFL teaching studies after the COVID-19 outbreak. However, the majority of the studies have centered around students’ perspectives. The studies examining the issue from EFL teachers’ perspectives, on the other hand, are relatively scarce. Therefore, this study qualitatively investigated EFL teachers’ perceptions and experience in this critical process to bridge the gap in the literature. For the study, the data were collected through written semi-structured interviews with 25 EFL teachers in Turkey. Five themes with several categories emerged based on the thematic analysis of the data with MAXQDA 2020 package program. The teachers commonly focused on the challenges of emergency online teaching and suggested potential solutions. The primary stemmed from the poor communication between teachers and students due to low engagement levels and technology-related issues. The teachers also struggled to find proper online EFL teaching materials since they had no or little experience in online education and did not know how find teaching resources. They suggested providing EFL teachers with workshop opportunities to learn how to tackle technology-related problems and improve their online material developing skills. This study may extend the relevant literature by providing a deeper insight into EFL teachers’ practices and recommendations for practitioners of online teaching.

Keywords: Covid-19 outbreak, EFL teachers, emergency online education, online EFL teaching

Introduction

The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 caught people off guard all around the world, and COVID-19 has been increasingly affecting human life on a global scale. Although the priority has always been health-related issues, countries worldwide have also been searching for ways to minimize the negative impact of lockdowns on the quality of education. During the pandemic when teachers and students had no chance to have face-to-face lessons, emergency online education was adopted without prior detailed planning (Karataş & Tuncer, 2020). Trying to take precautions for public health, schools in most countries closed and there was an abrupt shift to online education. Such a sudden shift to a complete online education platform required hi-tech devices and a stable internet connection, which was one of the many challenging issues for schools and universities (Ahmed, Salman, Abbas, Alkaisy, & Kathem, 2020; Toquero, 2020). For the transition from face-to-face education to complete online education to be smooth, there needs to be enough time to prepare for both teachers and students. However, because of the pandemic, the transition was abrupt, so most teachers and students had no time to shift their teaching and learning styles to suit the online teaching and learning environment (Mahyoob, 2020). In addition, not all schools and universities were ready for full-time online education, which caused further problems in the process.

The length of the lockdowns and mandatory online education, on the other hand, changed from country to country. In Turkey, schools closed down on March 16th, 2022, and from then on, online education took place on and off until September, which marked the beginning of the 2021-2022 education year (Can, 2020).

After switching to mandatory online education, research into online education gained popularity. The challenges in EFL education have been one of the most commonly investigated issues from various perspectives. Although there is a growing number of studies investigating EFL teachers’ experiences during COVID-19 (e.g. Bailey & Lee, 2020; Hakim, 2020; Sundarwati & Pahlevi, 2021; Zhang, Yan, & Wang, 2022), the majority of the studies have either centered around students and challenges from their point of view or included EFL teacher participants working at university level. The literature review suggests a gap in online EFL education from K-12 teachers’ perspectives in the Turkish EFL context. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the literature by shedding light on K-12 EFL teachers’ perceptions regarding their teaching experiences during mandatory online education in Turkey. Expanding on the findings of the research investigating EFL teachers’ lived experiences during the COVID-19 emergent online teaching in the literature, this phenomenological study aims to provide further insight into the essence of the phenomenon. In addition, the study presents the suggestions and recommendations of the EFL teachers about their challenges and experiences during emergency online education.

Literature Review

The inevitable changes in education since the pandemic outbreak have captured researchers’ attention. Allo (2020) examined the impact of online education during the pandemic from students’ perspective. The results showed that the participants are content with online education. They also stated that some of their classmates have no access to either the internet or technological devices; therefore, they prefer individual work rather than group work. Moreover, they believe instructors should be more precise while explaining what to do before each exercise/homework as it is more difficult to understand the instructions online. Another study from an EFL students’ perspective was conducted by Octoberlina and Muslimin (2020).
According to the findings of the study, the participants had difficulties since they were not familiar with e-learning, they had poor internet connection, and some physical pain due to spending too much time online.

One of the recent studies examining the issue from teachers’ perspective (Yan & Wang, 2022) deduced that teachers had to go through three stages while switching to online teaching without prior warning: preparing, adapting, and stabilizing. After a few weeks in the preparation mode, teachers were well aware of the importance of online lessons, and they adapted to the process by providing alternative methods for each difficulty they encountered. In the stabilization step, the participant teachers knew what to do better compared to a few months ago. However, teachers had to strive against various challenges throughout the process. Thus, the related literature mainly comprises studies focusing on the difficulties that teachers had to deal with.

The study by Hakim (2020), for example, investigated the challenges encountered by instructors at a university in Saudi Arabia through explorative sequential mixed-method research. The participants included 50 instructors teaching EFL in an online educational setting during the mandatory lockdown. The results indicated that the main challenges included the lack of hi-tech equipment and a stable internet connection. The students were also reported to have low levels of motivation and attention span. Despite the challenges, the participants were positive about using technology to teach their students. Two studies with similar results (Khatoony & Nezhadmehr, 2020; Algraini, 2023) also concluded that despite all the challenges, the participant EFL teachers were positive about integrating technology into their teaching. A recent study by Ma’rufa and Mustofa (2021) examined EFL teachers’ blended teaching experiences during the pandemic, and the results pointed to challenges, including a lack of student motivation, participation, and a stable internet connection. A study with similar results was conducted by Karaeng and Simanjuntak (2021). According to the findings, it was difficult for the teachers to maintain an interactive lesson mainly due to internet-related problems. The study by Putri (2021), on the other hand, investigated EFL teachers’ pedagogical challenges during mandatory online teaching and concluded that teaching productive skills, upper-level content, and providing feedback proved challenging in online lessons.

A study conducted in the Turkish EFL context (Şevik & Yücedağ, 2021) also concluded that the main challenges during online teaching through COVID-19 included problems regarding technological devices, internet access, and lack of previous experience with online education. Another study in Turkey (Gül, 2022) indicated that EFL teachers felt overwhelmed with all the extra tasks they were expected to accomplish without prior experience. Erdoğan and Yazıcı (2022), on the other hand, argued that Turkish EFL teachers had challenges in keeping students engaged and motivated during the lessons.

Method

This study followed a phenomenological research study designed to shed light on the common experiences of a group of EFL teachers as to what they experienced while teaching during the COVID-19 lockdown and how they experienced the whole process. A phenomenological study is helpful to highlight the specifics and determine a phenomenon as experienced or perceived by individuals in a common situation (Creswell, 2007). The researchers employed this research approach because the essence of the common experiences is expected to provide insights to policymakers, teachers, and practitioners who might experience a similar phenomenon in the future. Thereby, the study aimed to investigate a current and crucial
phenomenon more comprehensively. Written-interview was the most appropriate data collection tool since the COVID-19 outbreak was at its peak, and the country was on lockdown.

**Participants**

The participants included 25 EFL teachers working at the K-12 level in Turkish public and private schools during the data collection. The researchers preferred snowball sampling to choose the participants because chain referral made the data collection process cost-efficient on the lockdown, and it was easier to develop trust and affinity with these participants for more authentic and honest data. All participants participated in the study in the 2020-2021 academic year and had compulsory online lessons during the pandemic outbreak and data collection process. Of the 25 participants, only three were male. The majority (44%) had a teaching experience of 6-10 years.

**Research Instruments**

The data collection tool included a semi-structured open-ended interview. The researchers prepared six interview questions based on the related literature. They consulted them with two experienced colleagues, and made minor changes and additions based on the suggestions.

**Data Collection Process and Analysis**

The semi-structured open-ended interview questions were distributed to EFL teachers online through a Google Forms link. The data collection process took two weeks. The researchers thematically analyzed the data with MAXQDA 2020 package program. Thematic analysis is common in qualitative studies for understanding the nature of experiences and it comprises six crucial steps: familiarizing yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, producing a report/manuscript (Kiger & Varpio, 2020; Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). The researchers followed the given six steps, analyzed the data separately, and slightly modified the established codes, categories, and themes on a consensus.

**Trustworthiness and Ethics**

The researchers utilized expert reviews, intercoder reliability, and thick descriptions to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the research, after which they developed the research instrument. Before data collection, the researchers obtained the ethics committee approval from the Ethics Committee of a Turkish state-run university (Date: 16.10.2020). Furthermore, prior to the study, the researchers sent all participants informed consent forms declaring confidentiality of the data and identities. Additionally, the researchers separately analyzed the collected data. They calculated the overall intercoder reliability after comparing the two separate analyses. Accordingly, the intercoder reliability was found to be 93%. The researchers discussed different codes and categories and reached a consensus. Furthermore, thick description as a research methodology enhanced the trustworthiness of the current qualitative study since the researchers tried to explore the unique features of teaching English online on lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic as a phenomenon and to explore and present the subjective experiences of the participants. Therefore, the researchers gave all of the findings directly without commenting.
Results

In this study, trying to provide insights into EFL teachers’ perceptions and approaches regarding their experiences with online education during the COVID-19 pandemic, five themes were designated as a result of the data analysis. The themes include the changes, difficulties EFL teachers faced, comparisons of both types of education in the sudden transition from face-to-face to emergency online education, and suggestions about making it effective in the relevant process. A figure for each theme displays the codes and categories with their frequencies.

**Theme One: Changes and challenges in the sudden transition to emergency online education**

The participants expressed their experiences, especially on sudden changes in education. ‘The changes and challenges in the sudden transition to emergency online education’ EFL teachers faced were identified as the first theme as a result of the data analysis since they expressed the changes in education by emphasizing the challenges.

![Figure 1: Theme for changes and challenges in the sudden transition to emergency online education](image)

In Figure One, the pandemic-related changes and challenges EFL teachers experienced in their teaching are shown. The researchers identified only one category including several codes. Almost all participants (24 out of 25) emphasized interaction while expressing the changes faced in an emergency online education. They commonly stated that the social interaction between teacher-student and student-student decreased. That limited social interaction caused young learners to be more addicted to the internet and computers were asserted as “Social interaction decreased during this process, so children are more addicted to the internet and computers” (P 38). Additionally, the importance of face-to-face interaction and classroom interaction in effective education was underlined by the teacher-participants, and the absence of these kinds of interaction in the pandemic-caused online education resulted in motivation problems in students and teachers. Specifically, transferring students’ adverse home environments to the classroom environments in synchronized online education was shown as one of the reasons for lower motivation: “I was suddenly full of energy when I saw my students even if my mood was lower. I can neither see their faces nor hear their voices anymore. The chirping sounds were replaced by sounds synchronized with the parents fighting in the background” (P 10). The lack of face-to-face interaction left the teacher in a difficult situation in solving student problems, as stated by one of the participants: “Since we do not interact face-to-face with students, we find it difficult to learn
what they really experience and the real reasons for their distress” (P 25). Absenteeism was another challenge emphasized by social interaction. One participant mentioned that social interaction diminished as emergency online education increased the attendance challenges. However, unlike other participants, one of the teachers pointed out the positive side of online interaction and class participation as follows: “It is true that there were students that we could not reach in the interaction, but students who did not attend the lessons in our conventional classroom started to attend the lessons in online classrooms” (P 21). The participants highlighted the difficulty or limitation in communicating with students and parents in parallel with interaction. Participant 25 stated that “It is incredibly difficult to reach parents and students only by phone. Communication often fails. Not to mention that they haven’t even returned our calls.”.

The roles of students, teachers, and parents were another issue emphasized by the majority of the participants (N=18). The teachers pointed out that their students commonly played down online lessons and acted uninterested in lessons as follows “The student role is often frivolous. For example, during the lesson, watching another video in the back, taking care of his brother, etc.” (P 5). While some of the teachers said the parents did not take responsibility or play a certain role, others stated that the parents had a lot of workload in the pandemic-caused online education. Besides, some participants pointed out that there were no changes in the roles and responsibilities of teachers in online education as others signified that the duties and responsibilities of teachers increased, and their private and business lives became more tiring by merging. Furthermore, those teaching in rural areas stated that parents were insufficient to be involved in the process; therefore, their students could not become successful enough: “Since it is a village school, there is hardly any parental support. For this reason, the students cannot do these activities at home, or they make mistakes” (P14).

Assessment is yet another challenging issue in online education. The participants mentioned that assessments during emergency online education did not completely evaluate the teaching and learning process. The teachers explained that they tried to assess their students with homework, online quizzes, projects, etc. However, one of the teachers mentioned that technological barriers in terms of devices like tablets or laptops and mobile phones and internet accessibility hindered some of the students’ access to assessment activities “Those who do not have the internet, tablet, etc. are rightly excluded from the assessment” (P 25). The participants commonly thought that online exams and assessments did not reach their goal because they believed that the reliability was lower in online assessments.

As shown in Figure One, students’ and teachers’ motivation is one of the most scored issues (N=16). The participants pointed out that being at home all the time due to the mandatory quarantines and lockdowns reduced their motivation. In addition, sitting constantly in front of a screen decreased teachers’ and students’ motivation after a while. Only one of the teachers pointed out the positive motivation of the students as follows: “Since the textbooks we use online attract the attention of children, participation and motivation are increasing” (P 18).

Another code, which was determined as a result of the analyses, was related to the materials and sources used in the process. The participants had different approaches to online sources and materials. Some of them mentioned that they tried to use many different kinds of audio-visual sources and applications, interactive books, and worksheets during the process to both motivate their students by attracting attention and, thus to ensure student participation in lessons and to assess their students, or to gain time to rest. While one of the participants stated that there were not enough sources and materials in online education, the other one said that he
wanted to use printed resources but had problems in delivering them to students in distance education as the following: “I cannot share the printouts I use during the online education process as my children have financial problems and they do not have the chance of a photocopy machine” (P14).

Teaching strategies/methods/activities was another code identified as a result of the data analysis. Although some participants stated that they acquired new teaching methods and technology-related strategies in the process, they also expressed that they were not completely satisfied. One of them: “Although discovering new technological methods contributes positively to us, it is unclear how beneficial it is to continue education using only technology” (P 2). It was underlined that group activities, chain repeat, and role play were not always possible in online education, even if diversity in activities increased. However, they often associated it with the issues with the internet and time: “Actually, group work is not possible. The variety of online activities has increased, but time and internet problems decrease the efficiency rate in the lessons” (P11).

However, administration and inclusion of technology were less focused issues. While one participant stated that administration members of schools became passive during the process, three participants mentioned that technology had to be fully included in all the stages of education.

To summarize the results in Figure One, the participants mainly emphasized the challenges and changes they faced in the sudden transition to online education due to the pandemic. Participant 12 summarized emergency online education during the pandemic with the following words:

“In my opinion, the general problem with online education is that teachers, students, and parents are not used to the digital teaching platform and have not been exposed to this much before. Especially since the pandemic process was shown as the reason for online education and this system was introduced to the student as a compulsory education process, not as an alternative education process, all these principles of necessity created a psychological dislike for the student. I believe that the difficulties we experienced in the adaptation phase lie behind all the problems we experienced, as we were brought up with the traditional education standards in this country and have maintained them for years. The problems will decrease if it becomes an alternative form of education that everyone can adapt to, from teacher to student.”

**Theme Two: Advantages of traditional education versus online education**

One of the open-ended interview questions was related to the positive and negative sides of traditional and emergency online education. As a result of the data analysis, positive aspects of traditional education versus online education were designated as the second theme.

*Figure 2. The theme for advantages of traditional education versus online education*
As Figure Two indicates, the second theme includes two categories and several codes for the advantages of traditional and online education. In the first category, few of the participants emphasized the advantageous aspects of face-to-face education. The participants underlined the importance of interaction and participation as in the first theme. They stated that if low-level students do not understand the subject in face-to-face education, it is easier to directly contact and help them to comprehend without distracting other students. Besides, they also stated that the games played as activities in face-to-face education increase the interaction, the students are more active, and thus the lessons are taught in a more fun environment. One of the participants explained this matter, comparing the games in face-to-face education with those in online education; “The games were fully enjoyable when they were face-to-face and in groups” (P 22).

The second category of the present theme focuses on the advantages of online education. Nineteen out of 25 participants pointed out a wide range of types of materials and resources used in online education, and it shows that it is the most crucial advantage of the respective type of education. Additionally, they stated that by using various visual-audio and interactive resources and materials, they could motivate their students and make English lessons more effective for their students; thus, these kinds of materials and sources provided to involve their students in the online English learning process ensure student participation in lessons. One of the participants said: “As the textbooks and materials we use online attract the attention of children, participation increases” (P 3). Furthermore, some teachers stated that the resources and materials used online were highly suitable for English teaching lessons and that some materials were even language skill-based. The materials these teachers used in their online English courses provided convenience to teachers and students, especially in terms of listening, pronunciation, and speaking activities, and English lessons, thus, became more enjoyable. One of the participants expressed it as “The students can see the visual of the word to be learned, listen and pronounce it. I think online English education is a unique opportunity for English teachers who try to teach on a chalkboard or blackboard. With online games, the students can make sentences, listen, and speak” (P 18). Two participants approaching the resources and materials used in online education from a different perspective found online education more advantageous in terms of environment and nature because they delivered digital worksheets instead of printed ones. One explained: “I think that the worksheets we send digitally prevent the waste of paper to some extent” (P 25).

Eight participants found online education more advantageous than face-to-face education in increasing students’ motivation and being more enjoyable and attractive for the students in terms of various activities. One of the participants declared that it is more challenging to involve shy students in face-to-face education than online education as the following: “…and because we did not see each other face to face, the extent of embarrassment among the students decreased, especially when speaking English” (P 2). Furthermore, as stated by one of the participants, the shorter lesson times than face-to-face education ensured that students were not distracted and thus increased their motivation: “Due to the shorter time in online education, students are more motivated than face-to-face education. As they are alone, there are no distractions. Since student-student communication was higher in the classroom, distraction was more common” (P 13). Additionally, only one out of 25 teachers found the involvement of parents in the education process as the advantage of online education. Underlining the importance of online education in maintaining communication with students during the pandemic period and in motivating them and ensuring that they did not miss the lessons, one of the teachers also added, “At least, we have the opportunity to meet with the students during these difficult times, they do not get away from
the lessons and teachers. A little is better than none because we are trying to do our lessons together, we are trying to increase the motivation of our students even from a distance” (P 23).

Briefly, it can be concluded that the participants considered online education more advantageous than face-to-face education in the present study.

**Theme Three: Disadvantages of traditional education versus online education**

The third theme includes the disadvantageous sides of both traditional and online education. As shown in Figure Three, the participants mainly emphasized the disadvantages of online education.

![Figure 3. The disadvantages of traditional education versus online education](image)

The first category shows the only disadvantage of face-to-face education expressed by the participants. What they underlined as a disadvantage of face-to-face education was related to technological and technical problems. They expressed that the smart boards in the classrooms were generally out of order, and they do not always permit to use their USB devices.

The second category is about the disadvantages of online education. In this category, the participants mentioned interaction, motivation, and technology-related issues (respectively N=25, N=24, N=25). The participants often emphasized that there was less communication and interaction in online classes, which was due to the limited time available in online classes. One explained it as “There is not much opportunity for one-on-one interaction” (P 7). They believed that they were more likely to be distracted by other students while focusing on a single student for a while during an online class. Specifically, it was referred that this kind of education is not suitable for their young students in terms of effective communication and interaction: “We cannot provide communication that we need at the primary school level in online education” (P 15). The fact that the interaction was limited to sound and a few materials, and the teachers could not see all the students during the lesson as they would in a natural classroom environment, could not control students’ learning environment, and the pressure of the presence of their parents in students’ home classrooms was asserted as reasons for demotivated counterparts in online education. One of the participants indicated the following as the reason for lowering her teaching motivation to teach: “It can be a little discouraging to know that some of the students who don't turn on their camera and microphone are acting really arbitrarily”(P1). While figuring out the disadvantages of online education, the participants also pointed out that maintaining student motivation in online education was challenging due to prolonged screen time, which was also tiring for both teachers and students. The fact that teachers, who were also parents, made
concessions from the time they spent with their families while conducting their lessons was shown as a demotivating factor.

Online education depends on technology, specifically technological equipment and the internet, which has been a big challenge for shareholders during the pandemic. A related challenge was based on poor or lack of internet networks, technological devices, and digital skills. One participant stated that her students had inadequate digital skills and poor networks: “Having to explain technology to students is the main difficulty. I send the link. For this, I have to explain how to use WhatsApp Web, zoom chat box because they don't know. The internet is cut off, I repeat the same sentence to each student in different places over and over” (P 5). Another participant working in a rural school underlined the same challenge “Students do not have enough support at home (due to being a village school). Most students lack tablets, smartphones, and the Internet. In addition, they sometimes have problems with the use of technology even if they have all the devices” (P19). All participants emphasized that students facing these problems were deprived of the online education provided. Moreover, these kinds of problems reduced the efficiency of the lessons while increasing teachers’ workload.

The majority of the participants (N=20) emphasized the challenges based on online teaching strategies. The teachers commonly expressed that they had difficulties in controlling online teaching classrooms, they used limited foreign language teaching strategies and, therefore, limited teaching activities, specifically while teaching English to primary students. Furthermore, it was found that the limited online teaching strategies that teachers used during the pandemic worsened their students' speaking and writing skills rather than improving them. Stating that teaching English pronunciation online was disadvantageous, one of two teachers asserted: “Pronunciation is not very effective from the web camera, even if we use body language.” (P9).

The negative aspects of online education about activities and sources and materials were less emphasized by the teacher-participants (respectively N=7, N=8). They thought that online education limited classroom activities, specifically group work, chain repeat, and role play. It was underlined that efficiency and performance decreased due to technological problems although the diversity in online activities increased. One of the participants mentioned having difficulty conducting these kinds of activities; “There are many kinds of activities and materials, but we sometimes cannot use them because of some technological problems such as hardware and quality of devices and internet” (P 15). Moreover, increasing the number of students joining online activities made activities less effective. In addition, the participants underlined technical problems in using online sources and materials. While four participants found online course sources and materials limited and difficult to reach, one thought that teaching English to young learners with 2D visuals distracted them from other printed course materials.

**Theme Four: Teachers’ Strategies to Overcome the Online Classes Challenges**

The fourth theme was designated as the strategies EFL teachers used to overcome the challenges they experienced in online education during the pandemic as a result of the content analysis of the data. The theme includes several codes under four main categories as shown in Figure Four.
As seen in Figure Four, the participants preferred to use certain ways to cope with the difficulties of emergency online teaching. The first category was related to methodological strategies. The participants declared that they tried to enrich and concretize their online English classes with various kinds of materials including audio-visual and interactive materials, online sites, web tools, live worksheets, videos, power point presentations (N=9). Meanwhile, they tried to find alternative strategies not only for their students and lessons, but also for increasing their teaching motivation. One participant explained her strategy to keep her motivation higher: “I strengthened the virtual classroom environment by using apps like ‘Quizizz or Class dojo’ to increase my motivation” (P18). The participants also uttered that they used additional games and activities to make their online English classes fun. Thus, they thought that they kept their lessons from being dull and monotonous. Two participants changed their planned lesson hours and increased the number of their lessons by assigning their students to smaller groups because of the limited number of technological devices the students had. One pointed out this situation: “I sometimes conducted my online English lessons in evenings because there were many students who attended the lessons on their fathers’ smartphones in the evenings. There was no conflict with their siblings when doing so. Even I conducted additional lessons and taught voluntarily at the weekends so that those whose lesson hours coincide with that of their siblings do not fall behind their classmates” (P2).

Choosing random student names from the class list and asking questions to involve them in the lesson and activity were among the strategies used by the teachers. The participants also tried to strengthen their online English lessons with their technical strategies. Two participants stated that they bought better-equipped technological devices like flip laptops in addition to supporting their internet infrastructure, while three of them mentioned that they used different kinds of online education platforms and WhatsApp to contact and interact with their students. They underlined that they used WhatsApp constantly so that their students could ask their questions individually, especially when they were disconnected. Participant 10 stated that this strategy was tiring and very time-consuming as follows: “When students’ connection cut off, I wanted them to take note of the points they could not understand and ask them privately, but this was very tiring. I spent most of my time after lessons answering the students’ questions with such messages.”

As a behavioral strategy, the participants commonly utilized motivating feedback during their online English lessons. They preferred positive feedback with words and sending emoji from the
screen to increase students’ motivation and attract their attention. Participant 5 asserted, “I try to attract children's attention by giving emoji awards on the screen.”. In addition, it was stated that students were sent announcements about lessons.

Parents became a part of online education for communication, especially on internet connection cut off and informing them about lessons. Two of the participants also stated that they felt desperate because of the process and that the strategies they used were insufficient as the following: “I don't think there is much I can do” (P3). In brief, the participants mainly focused on improving methodological strategies to make their lessons more effective and appealing.

**Theme Five: Suggestions for the challenges**

The last theme is related to the suggestions submitted by the EFL teacher-participants to make online English lessons more effective. As can be seen in Figure Five, the theme includes several codes under four categories.

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**Table 5. Suggestions from EFL teachers**

As seen in Figure Five, the first category includes the methodological suggestions of the EFL teacher participants. The teachers commonly emphasized the use of different kinds of activities and games in English lessons (N=8). The teacher suggested using various activities to attract students' attention and involve them in the learning process. While one of the participants suggested using various activities to develop students’ EFL reading and writing skills, the other proposed using activities for listening and speaking skills: “We can give students extra skills classes like speaking activities, games, listening songs, videos” (P16). Participant 20, an EFL teacher of young learners, suggested generating games to keep young learners active: “Suitable games for online education can be developed because 1st and 2nd grade and even kindergarten students get distracted quickly. It is necessary to involve all children physically in learning through games.” Instead of using games and activities, one teacher suggested memorizing English vocabulary and solving quiz questions. One of the six teachers who suggested using and developing different materials recommended using quality and authentic English resources where students could practice speaking, another said: “E-resources suitable for all age groups should be created for online language education” (P4). On the other hand, two of the participants presented
suggestions related to course hours. One of them suggested more weekly course hours while the other suggested shorter lessons.

Online education is bounded by technological and technical basis. Therefore, the teacher-participants gave several technological suggestions to develop and strengthen online English education. Eleven out of 25 teachers suggested benefiting from Web 2.0 tools, websites, and applications in EFL lessons in terms of helping students develop their speaking and listening skills instead of traditional activities or practices. One stated that “First of all, children should be encouraged to speak more with applications that can detect children's voices. Otherwise, we can only go beyond solving tests, matching, or filling in the blanks” (P11). Moreover, it was also among the suggestions that paid resources should be included school libraries or membership should be added to the system of the Ministry of Education as the following: “Purchasing the membership of paid sites by schools where students can read books suitable for their English level, or adding a similar system to EBA (Vooks, Raz-kids)” (P8).

While one teacher emphasized that working with a group of teachers teaching the same branch in a school plays an important role in organizing and strengthening online English education, another teacher underlined the need to encourage EFL students with well-known and traditional motivating phrases that are important in teaching and learning with the following words:

“I think it is very important to tell students that it is okay to make mistakes. Since they are not among their friends in class, they may be much more comfortable with speaking and pronouncing. I think that encouraging them in this regard is an important way to improve language education.” (P23).

In the fourth category, the teachers (six out of 25) emphasized the importance of the professional development of EFL teachers in online education, while two teachers thought that it is necessary to involve students and parents in online education seminars or workshops as well as teachers. The tendency of teachers was generally towards training on the use of Web 2.0 tools as the following: “Applied online training can be given to teachers, especially on how and where to use Web 2.0 tools” (P6). One teacher thought that theoretical teacher training and training on the use of technology should be included in the pedagogical context as well as training on programs supporting distance education such as Kahoot. One participant also stated that training should be provided for the development of online EFL course materials: “Online material development courses are required” (P17).

The last category presents a suggestion related to the class size. One participant suggested less crowded classes, especially in language teaching lessons: “The number of students in English lessons should be decreased” (P1).

As a general comment on suggestions from EFL teachers, the participants commonly presented to use of different kinds of activities and games in online EFL classes as methodological suggestions. Moreover, they suggested that EFL teachers should use Web 2.0 tools in their online lessons for enriching and making them more effective. In addition, the teachers underlined the need to focus on Web 2.0 tools in professional development training or workshops.

**Discussion**

The study tried to discover EFL teachers’ experiences during the online education process that emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in the Turkish setting. The participants were asked six questions about education during the pandemic process. The first question was related
to the pandemic-related changes and challenges EFL teachers experienced in their teaching. The sudden transition from traditional classrooms to online education was considered a new phenomenon by many teachers and learners in Türkiye. However, emergency online education during the pandemic transformed the world of teaching and learning both positively and negatively. Consequently, they encountered various challenges due to the sudden online education. Interaction and communication challenges were among them. Almost all participants underlined that direct communication and interaction considerably decreased. The findings regarding interaction challenges due to the abrupt shift from physical classes to online teaching are in line with the results of the previous studies (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Daragmeh, Mead, & Copeland, 2021; Mohmmed et al., 2020; van der Spoel et al., 2020). Although technology may be a paramount means of online interaction, it may also either reduce the amount or the quality of spoken communication among teachers and students (Shyamlee & Phil, 2012; Simin & Heidari, 2013). Emergency online education also necessitated cooperation between teachers, learners, and parents to diminish or decrease some challenges during online education. However, the participants commonly noted the changes in the roles of their students. Many of the participants also maintained that their students typically decreased the efficiency of online instruction by displaying a lack of interest in the lessons. Likewise, Yunus et al. (2019) mentioned that other online content such as games and chatting online while learning may distract students and prevent engagement. Moreover, the participants mostly highlighted the changes in teaching and learning motivation during online courses. Mandatory quarantines, lockdowns, and online courses demotivated both the participants and their students. In a similar study conducted by Nugroho et al. (2021), Indonesian teachers stated that the engagements of their students in online courses or online learning activities were lower due to the lack of motivation. The teacher-participants in the study focused on the diversity or absence of materials related to their lessons and the subject they teach, the teachers in the study by Nugroho et al. (2021), on the other hand, mentioned the difficulty in choosing materials and resources by their students’ needs in online education. Thus, it was time-consuming to prepare effective and suitable materials.

In the second interview question, the participants compared the positive sides of traditional and online education. The results indicated that online education was considered more advantageous. The teachers’ focus was primarily on the materials, sources, and activities used in online education. In addition, they regarded online education as more advantageous in terms of teaching methods and strategies because it provided rich content in English lessons and made classroom management easier. The participants commonly supported the idea that online English education would develop students’ language skills and maintain the quality of language teaching during the transition process during the pandemic. These findings are in agreement with Fitria (2020), Kawinkoonlasate (2020), Rahayu and Wirza (2020), Rifiyanti (2020), Shahzad et al. (2020) stating that online education including learning management systems and online teaching platforms turned the crisis into a helpful opportunity for both the teachers and the students by presenting rich and free online materials as well as by attracting students’ attention and making them feel confident, thereby increasing their motivation. As in above mentioned studies, additionally, the participants positively regarded online education during emergency remote teaching. In this respect, it can be concluded that one of the most possible reasons why teachers thought online education more advantageous compared to the traditional one was that English language teachers had already integrated digital and technological resources in their lessons (Turchi et al., 2020). Moreover, they had been familiar with Computer Assisted Language
Learning (CALL) turned out to be beneficial during emergency online education (Bailey & Lee, 2020; Huang et al., 2021).

The third question was on the disadvantages of traditional and online education. From the results, it can be deduced that English teacher participants had several challenges in online classes, thus, they considered these challenges as disadvantages. The major ones for them included a lack of technological devices, an unstable and poor internet connection, and low student participation, thus, limited motivation and interaction. The participants stated that they felt uncomfortable due to the lack of control over students and their learning environment, which made them more demoralized during the online English teaching process. They generally regarded online classes as unnatural. In line with the findings of this study, many studies found similar disadvantages to conducting online EFL teaching during the COVID-19 (Almekhlafy, 2020; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Bailey & Lee, 2020; Hadianti & Arisandi, 2020; Huang et al., 2021; Nartiningrum& Nugroho, 2020; Novikov, 2020; Rahman, 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020; Shaaban, 2020; Shahzad et al., 2020; Sürüç-Şen & Genç; 2022; Turchi et al., 2020). These previous studies showed that the abrupt online teaching of English contained significant shortcomings and left all stakeholders in education including language teachers, students, and parents in a difficult situation (Hadianti & Arisandi, 2020). As well as the insufficient technical and technological infrastructure including an unstable internet connection, ineffective online teaching platforms and inadequate or poor technical devices such as smartphones, tablets, and computers (Almekhlafy, 2020; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Huang et al., 2021; Nartiningrum & Nugroho, 2020; Novikov, 2020; Rahman, 2020; Shahzad et al., 2020; Turchi et al., 2020), teachers’ lack of control over students’ in online learning environments and online teaching platforms, students’ inadequate technological literacy, online classroom management problems, the need for re-teaching, less varied teaching and engaging strategies/activities, a lack of direct interaction, thereby lower motivation to participate during the courses (Bailey & Lee, 2020; Huang et al., 2021; Mokoena, 2022; Nartiningrum & Nugroho, 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020; Shaaban, 2020; Sürüç-Şen & Genç; 2022) were amongst the most underlined disadvantages of online English teaching during the pandemic.

The teacher-participants used various strategies to cope with the challenges they experienced during the process. They mainly focused on improving their methodological strategies to make their lessons more effective and attractive. They used various kinds of activities, sources, and materials to enrich their lessons and to increase both their own and students’ motivation. On the one hand, there were the teachers who were always looking for different strategies, on the other hand, there were the teachers who preferred to do nothing anymore. The results also proved that the teachers were usually aware that online education during the pandemic was a must rather than an option and they tried to do their best to sustain teaching activity without cancellation as stated by Andriivna et al. (2020). Moreover, the teachers experienced new online teaching resources and materials, and new digital tools and platforms; thus, they enhanced their TPACK knowledge to increase their students’ engagement and their own motivation in the process. The results are compatible with the study by Dhwan (2020) stating that teachers are free to provide flexible teaching platforms and to create or design new sources and materials. Additionally, parental support and involvement in online English education to maintain communication and teaching and learning routines was one of the results in line with Shamir-Inbal and Blau (2021). The teachers’ efforts to cope with the challenges of emergency online teaching and the developments in their online teaching skills as well as online language teaching
strategies and methods showed how the teachers turned the challenges into opportunities (Shamir-Inbal & Blau, 2021; Cardullo et al., 2021; Marshall et al, 2020).

The last interview question was related to the teachers’ suggestions for more effective online courses. The findings suggest that teachers should include a wider range of activities to keep online students engaged. Nugroho, Ilmiani, and Rekha (2021) also argue the importance of providing students with up-to-date student-centered activities to keep their motivation levels high. According to Bailey and Lee (2020), a wise choice of various teaching activities might contribute to overcoming the challenges encountered in online teaching. For the best results, appropriate Web 2.0 tools, websites, and applications should be involved (Luy, 2021; Safira, Hadi & Zaitun, 2021; Hendrawaty, Angkarini & Retnomurti, 2021). Teachers who are not used to benefitting from technology in their classes on a large scale might naturally have problems during online teaching. The researchers in the literature, in parallel to the suggestions provided by the participants in the study, recommend teachers take part in professional development workshops and seminars to be able to select and apply the most convenient technological tools for their teaching purposes (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Bailey & Lee, 2020; Dashtestani, 2014; Li, 2021; Lukas & Yunus, 2021). For the pre-service English teachers, on the other hand, a course related to online teaching could be added to the teacher training program (Fuentes-Hernández & Flórez, 2020; Van der Spoel, Noroozi, Schuurink & Van Ginkel, 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020).

Conclusion

This study aimed to provide a deep insight into the EFL teachers’ experience during the online education process that emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. The data collected through semi-structured written-interview questions revealed the participants’ challenges, advantages, and shortcomings of traditional and online education, strategies to cope with the challenges, and suggestions for the solution of them. Most of the participants mentioned poor communication among students and teachers as the primary challenge in online education, which may be a direct result of the lower engagement levels in online classes. The participants also had difficulty in choosing the appropriate teaching materials as they had almost no experience with such resources before. The ones who were more familiar with technological devices and web tools, on the other hand, proved to be advantageous in choosing the appropriate materials that increased their students’ motivation levels. Interestingly, when the participants were asked to compare face-to-face and online education, the most commonly mentioned problems were the technology-related ones. It could be concluded that schools lack sufficient technology in traditional education, however, individuals, too, seem to lack the proper technological devices and facilities to pursue a healthy connection to the educational platforms. The participants also confessed to lacking knowledge regarding effective teaching strategies for online EFL education. To maintain a satisfying teaching, they incorporated additional teaching materials/games/activities and benefited from motivational feedback. Based on the participants’ arguments, it could be deduced that using a broad range of activities/Web 2.0 tools/websites/applications, encouraging students during the whole process, and attending personal development workshops for online teaching could soothe the teaching/learning process. The findings are limited to the Turkish context and are subject to limitations of qualitative design. Future studies could conduct mixed-method studies with a wider range of participants.
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