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Preparedness for online learning: An analysis of English teachers in Türkiye

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ABSTRACT

Ever since the early 1990s, online learning has become a method of instruction in the education systems of the world. *Online learning* offers both the educators and students extensive benefits such as flexibility, convenience, mobilization, and personalized learning. However, the significance of online learning had not been so apparent until the recent Covid-19 pandemic disrupted life in Türkiye and countries around the world. The switch to online education during the crisis was so swift and unprecedented that the question of how educators handled this experience was highly controversial. Thus, the answer to how prepared the users were for this type of encounter was worth the investigation. The study explored how prepared the English teachers in Türkiye were in using online learning to carry out their instruction from the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in comparison to the time of data collection of the research. The project used a mixed-methods approach with an online survey conducted with 55 teachers and online interviews performed with 5 participants. The findings show that most teachers felt confident in their level of preparedness for online learning at the start and whilst the pandemic. However, the findings also highlighted the essential need for improvement in certain aspects of *online learning* such as staff and student orientation, functional infrastructure, user-friendly interface, administrative support, counseling services, and user interaction. Lastly, one other significant finding of the research was that most teachers had been able to develop their skills in *online learning* independently without heavily relying on their institutions.

Keywords
online learning,
e-learning,
ERT,
distance education.

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Introduction

When online learning (hereinafter OLL) was a relatively new concept at the beginning of the century, there was some uncertainty about it. Educators wondered how teaching online would eventually become an indispensable tool that almost every institution will use in some way or the other to instruct their students (Ko & Rossen, 2010). Nonetheless, the ongoing development in technology has continued to enhance the comfort and convenience of people's lives, reflecting on how people communicate, socialize, trade, and inevitably get educated. Online learning gives both the educator and the student the benefits of using the Internet to send and receive educational content conveniently and practically. Some examples of these benefits for the learners and instructors are being able to learn from almost any location via the Web,

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pursuing education while having other responsibilities, and tailoring the instruction according to the needs of the learners. What is more is that with the introduction of Web 2.0, online learning has become even more effective and operational with the help of tools such as real-time chat, instant messaging, streaming media, discussion boards, and social media (Burns, 2011).

As mentioned earlier, online learning continues to add a valuable contribution to the world of education. However, it was not until the recent global pandemic of 2019 that online learning became a reviving tool for educational institutions worldwide. The novel coronavirus disease, also known as Covid-19, was labeled a fatally contagious disease by the World Health Organization in 2020. According to its report, the virus was first discovered in Wuhan, China, back in December of 2019 and later noticed in other parts of the world. The swift spread of the Covid-19 virus forced schools to close their doors to face-to-face education and put a halt to instruction till it could be delivered by other means possible (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020).

Nevertheless, online learning tools made it possible to pursue instruction and to learn again. However, as this scenario was utterly unforeseen for most participants, it created issues in adaption for the students and facilitation for the teachers. The leading cause of this was that although online learning had been developing for many years before the pandemic, it had not been implemented into the curricula of most institutions (Hodges et al., 2020). What is more, the necessary preparedness of the teachers in online learning had played a significant role in making this process a success, and it deserves crucial attention from educational establishments. Thus, this study intended to find the answer to the research question, "*How prepared were the English teachers in Türkiye in using online learning to carry out their instruction at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic*?" *(*with reference to the time of data collection)*

Although there had been some research done on the web instruction process in Türkiye during the Covid-19 crisis, most of them had been focusing on either the efficiency of the distance education system (Beltekin & Kuyulu, 2020), the teachers' perceptions of online learning (Karakaya et al., 2021), or pre-service teachers' views on their digital competence (Çebi & Reisoğlu, 2020). By taking into account all previous studies, this research project attempted to measure a different aspect of the e-learning experience by analyzing the teachers' essential skillsets needed for a robust online educational experience from the start and whilst the pandemic.

Background

Online Learning

Educators have used different terminologies to refer to the term *online learning*. For instance, some of these terms are *e-learning*, *Internet learning*, *distributed learning*, *networked learning*, *tele-learning*, *virtual learning*, *computer-assisted learning*, *web-based learning*, and *distance learning*. Hence, Anderson (2008) defines online learning further by simply stating that in online learning, the student learns from a distance from the classroom with the help of technology and support from the instructor. On the other hand, Ally (1997 as cited in Khan, 1997) does not see online learning to be a simple process and uses a more in-depth definition by remarking ''the use of the Internet to access learning materials; to interact with the content, instructor, and other learners; and to obtain support during the learning process, to acquire

knowledge, to construct personal meaning, and to grow from the learning experience'' (p. 7). Regardless of how we try to define online learning, one factor about the process does not change. OLL is the instruction that is conducted with two required tools: a technological device (e.g., computer, tablet, mobile phone) and the medium of the World Wide Web.

Since there is a vast amount of information about OLL and its affiliations, particular distinctions need to be made. Firstly, OLL is a type of *distance education* as the learning could be done physically away from the conventional classroom using the Internet. However, it would not be correct to refer to distance education as online learning, considering that distance education could be conducted with other means besides the Internet (e.g., post mail, DVD, telephone, TV) (Ko & Rossen, 2010). Along with this, another separation needs to be made by setting OLL apart from another concept called ''*e-learning*''. The European Union Commission, which is an acting body of politicians with one of their duties is to ensure quality education in Europe, defined e-learning as:

> ''The use of new multimedia technologies and the Internet to improve the quality of learning by facilitating access to resources and services as well as remote exchanges and collaboration'' (Commission of the European Communities, 2001, p.2).

As the E.U Commission highlights, although e-learning could involve using the Internet, it does not necessarily depend on it. E-learning could solely be applied using preinstalled multimedia on a computer (e.g., audio and video, presentation slides, e-books). The significant difference here between OLL and e-learning is that *OLL* relies on the medium of the Web as its agent. The final concept that OLL deserves to be contrasted with is *blended learning*. Stein and Graham (2020) illustrate that blended learning is a combination of conventional instruction and online learning. They further explain that anytime a typical face-to-face learning course is supplemented with online instruction or vice versa, this process becomes labeled as *blended learning*.

Advantages of Online Learning

As the digital age continues to progress, technology plays a more significant role in our lives, changing the way we learn and teach. Therefore, it is implicit that OLL can create significant educational opportunities both for the educator and the student. What is more, as Holmes and Gardner (2006) affirm, OLL creates a transformation in the way students learn by extending and enhancing the learning experience. Therefore, one benefit of OLL is its flexibility (Anderson, 2008). OLL does not possess limitations to time or location for most users. Either the educator or the learner can access material from almost any time zone or geographical position at any given time. Another advantage to OLL according to Fee (2009) is that online learning can become crucially practical if/when the teaching content needs to be personalized for the learner. With the power of online learning, different learning styles and methods could be implemented into educational programs by creating tailor-made courses. With the high demand for computer skills and savviness towards technology in the business world, it is crucially important that the current generations (e.g., Millennials, Gen. Z) possess the proper knowledge needed for their careers in the digital age. Based on this note, another advantage to OLL is that it can motivate participants to acquire such technical skills.

Challenges of Online Learning

It would be overcredulous to create a perfect image of OLL because, just as with other new developments in education (e.g., competency based-learning, experiential learning, distance education), the OLL method also comes with its challenges and skepticism. Although computers and the Internet have been more widely available in recent years, these tools still require additional training and knowledge to a certain extent. Ironically one of the most challenging drawbacks to OLL is technology. Aiming to participate in OLL, the stakeholders (e.g., educators, students, staff) are expected to own a technological device (e.g., tablet, laptop) and have stable access to the Internet (Berman, 2006). Furthermore, these stakeholders need to have acquired minimal computer skills to make educational tasks successful. Consequently, failure to be adequately equipped with these skills would result in frustration and discouragement for most participants (Zounek & Sudický, 2012).

Kumar (2015) points out another drawback of OLL, the lack of interaction among the participants. She argues that face-to-face interaction is inadequate in OLL and that most real communication happens through emails and instant messages. Therefore, the issues related to isolation and lack of interaction could negatively affect students' productivity and motivation. Zounek and Sudický (2012) further argue that this particular problem could be more visible with students who are not characterized as independent learners and need instructor support for their progress in the course. The final setback to OLL is the argument of learning itself. As Anderson (2008) states, some educators believe that OLL does not fully allow deep learning to take place with more complex subjects. According to Anderson, deep learning cannot exist without having real-time classroom experience, building technical and pedagogical homogeneity, monitoring possibilities that invade privacy regulations, and theorizing existing cultural activities (e.g., education as a cultural discourse).

Learning Languages via Online Learning

Technology has taken part in language learning for decades. Ever since the obsolete cassette player, devices such as CD players, DVD players, projectors, Mp3 Players, laptops, and tablets have assisted the learner and the instructor in the language classroom. In fact, the use of a computer in language learning dates back to the start of the 1960s with the Computer Assisted Language Learning System (CALL). Whether recording an excerpt for the listening exercise of an exam or displaying the book's contents on the whiteboard, these tools have created countless ways to creativity for language enthusiasts.

With the advancement of the Internet in the late 1980s and the accessibility of a web browser in the early 1990s, technology created new opportunities for OLL in education (Bezhovski & Poorani, 2016). The first aspect of OLL in language acquisition worth discussing is the use of Learning Management Systems (LMS) and the Virtual Learning Environments (hereinafter VLE). Both LMS and VLE are online platforms that create a language-learning opportunity with the use of the Web. Although LMS and VLE are used interchangeably in the literature, Pinner (2014) distinguishes these two systems by pointing out that the difference between the two is that LMS is more of a training-based platform where the interactive real-time instruction is not so significant. Pinner further distinguishes by saying that in VLE, the

focus is more on the interactive real-time learning process. In other words, LMS is preferred mainly by institutions whose goals are to track the progress of their trainees, whereas VLE is fancied by organizations that want to educate students with synchronous instruction. Furthermore, due to the insignificant difference between the two platforms, this composition will use the term LMS to refer to these online learning platforms throughout this study. Finally, Moodle, Blackboard, ALMS, Sakai, and Google Classroom are examples of some LMS systems used today for online language teaching.

About 3.78 billion people use social media in the world today, and this number is expected to rise to 4.41 billion by the year 2025 (Tankovska, 2021). As the numbers highlight, social media has become one of the most preferred ways to socialize and communicate. Furthermore, social media has also been integrated into the language learning process, and it has gained its place as one of the most beneficial online teaching tools (Ahmed, 2020). Language learners can access videos or films with subtitles of the target language or subscribe to language teaching channels via social media. In addition, teachers may use blogs or pages to provide materials and create online interactions for their students. Using social media in language learning also provides benefits such as student immersion, participant collaboration, blended learning opportunities, and student self-direction (Ahmed, 2020). Popular social media types with language learning are YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Flipgrid, and specialized blogs.

Another conventional classroom tool that has been carried to the realm of online is games. Wright et al. (2006) describe a classroom game as ‘‘an activity which is entertaining and engaging, often challenging, and an activity in which the learners play and usually interact with others’’ (p.1). Halfield (1999 as cited in Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016) emphasize that some authors on games in the classroom defend the idea that games should not just be used as supplementary tools but instead be placed in the center of the language learning process. What is more, playing games in the classroom can ease language learning difficulty by making it fun, allowing the student to use the language in context, and review previously learned material (Halfield, 1999 as cited in Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016). Some examples of popular English learning games that can be played online are Kahoot (user-generated quiz), Hangman (letter guessing/spelling), Taboo (word guessing), and Scrabble (word formation).

Competency of the Online Teacher

According to Barbour (2012), although what teachers learn in their pre-teacher training programs on conventional education may align with how they should approach OLL, there is still a substantial difference between OLL and face-to-face instruction. By the same token, Burns (2011) stresses that distance education, especially in web-based applications, is a significant paradigm shift. Furthermore, Robinson and Latchem (1997) warn that instructors without a good understanding of technology or pedagogy will be confronted by a steep learning curve. According to the authors, teacher competency in OLL is essential. If the instructors are not skillfully prepared for the OLL experience, it can lead to ominous consequences in learning. Hence, proper teacher training in OLL is thereby fundamentally beneficial for institutions.

The idea of being trained as a conventional instructor before becoming an online teacher is most likely accurate but what is certain is that the duties and the responsibilities of the OLL

educator outweigh that of any traditional teacher (Gulbahar & Kalelioglu, 2015). Goodyear et al. (2001) summarize these roles of the online educator for us, as seen in Figure 1 below.

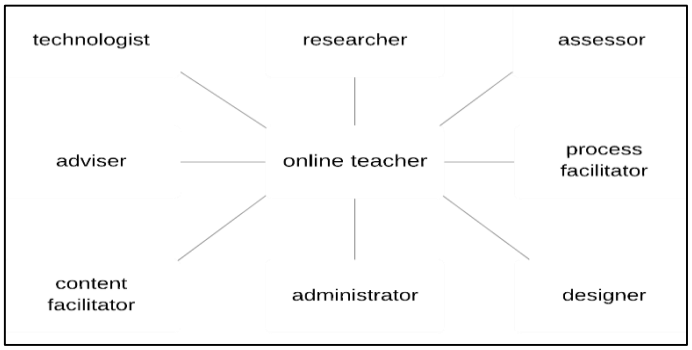

Figure 1. Roles of the online teacher (Goodyear et al., 2001, p.69)

The first role of the online teacher is to act as a technologist. This indicates that the instructor is expected to choose the right technologies to be used in online learning, which will help enhance the learning environment for the learners (Goodyear et al., 2001). The next role is the advisory role. The instructor maintains contact with the learners individually to help them get the most out of the online learning experience (Goodyear et al., 2001). The following role of the teacher is the content facilitator, where they are responsible for the learners' understanding of the online course content (Goodyear et al., 2001). The fourth role is administration. With this duty, the teacher assists students with issues related to registration, online security, and record keeping (Goodyear et al., 2001). Next is the role of being an online content designer. The online teacher is expected to construct tasks specifically designed for online learning (Goodyear et al., 2001). The sixth role of the online instructor is to be the process facilitator. This particular position is more complex compared to the previous roles mentioned. The OLL teacher is accountable for creating online learning tasks that involve welcoming learners, developing ground rules, creating an online community, maintaining communication, demonstrating social behavior, and creating a self-identity for students (Goodyear et al., 2001). The next role of the instructor is involved with assessment. This particular job is more straightforward as the teacher conducts online assessments, provides timely feedback/marks, and validates learners' assignments (Goodyear et al., 2001). Finally, the last role of the online teacher is the researcher. Since knowledge, content, and technology are in constant development, the online instructor's unique duty is to search and find new information regarding these elements for online instructional content (Goodyear et al., 2001).

Based on the information provided above, it is apparent that the role of the online teacher goes well beyond just teaching. The instructor has to be well knowledgeable in other areas such as technology, research, online content, administration, design, and processing. For these reasons, Burns (2011) encourages all OLL programs worldwide to offer high-quality ongoing professional development for their staff. As attested by Burns, the online teacher training programs should mainly focus on the following aspects of teacher development: understanding how to utilize technology (e.g., using emails, chat, bulletin boards, LMS systems, web 2.0 applications), maintaining student interest and motivation, promoting interaction (e.g., student

→ teacher, student → student, student→ content), providing timely and relevant feedback, creating high-quality evaluations that make use of the advantages of the specific distance learning technology, allocating instruction and assistance for students (based on needs, abilities, and professional status), constructing fair assessments that take advantage of the specific distance education technology and understanding grading and administrative procedures (especially in the context of LMS). All in all, teacher capability and creativity in technology add significant value to distance learning programs. The skills of adapting conventional pedagogical approaches while exploiting the benefits of the Internet can raise the quality standards of any type of distance education program.

Preparedness of the Online Teacher

As mentioned earlier in this composition, using any kind of new technology can bring along its challenges. Therefore, it is essential that working professionals do some research on how to overcome these challenges and acquire some type of training. With this in mind, some countries around have already placed teacher development programs in OLL. Some examples of these countries are Singapore, Taiwan, and China (Kong et al., 2017). What is more, according to Kong et al. (2017), the most common methods being used for teacher development in OLL today are lectures, workshops, hands-on training, involvement in communities of practice, mentorship programs, and design-based pedagogical education. In relation to these types of teacher training programs, the literature from various authors suggests that OLL instructors gain skills in the following areas: *the use of technology* (Goodyear et al., 2001), *content facilitation* (Burns, 2011), *blended pedagogy* (Burns, 2011), *maintaining online presence* (Burns, 2011), *learner management* (Dennis et al., 2004), *instructional design* (Gulbahar & Kalelioglu, 2015) and *e-assessment* (Gulbahar & Kalelioglu, 2015).

The first aspect of online teacher training programs is *the use of technology*. The progress in technology demands that educators stay up to date with their technological skills. As a result, with the implementation of OLL, teachers need to possess basic computing skills (e.g., word processing, email, file organization, installing/uninstalling software) and knowledge of information communication technologies (ICT) (Ghavifekr & Rosdy, 2015). As Goodyear et al. (2001) mentions, the online teacher also carries the title of being a "technologist." Therefore, he/she must be able to deal with any technological issues and at the same time make good use of the technologies available for instruction in OLL. Furthermore, Carrolaggi (2006) and Sodhar et al. (2020) identify these commonly used technological OLL tools in Figure 2 below.

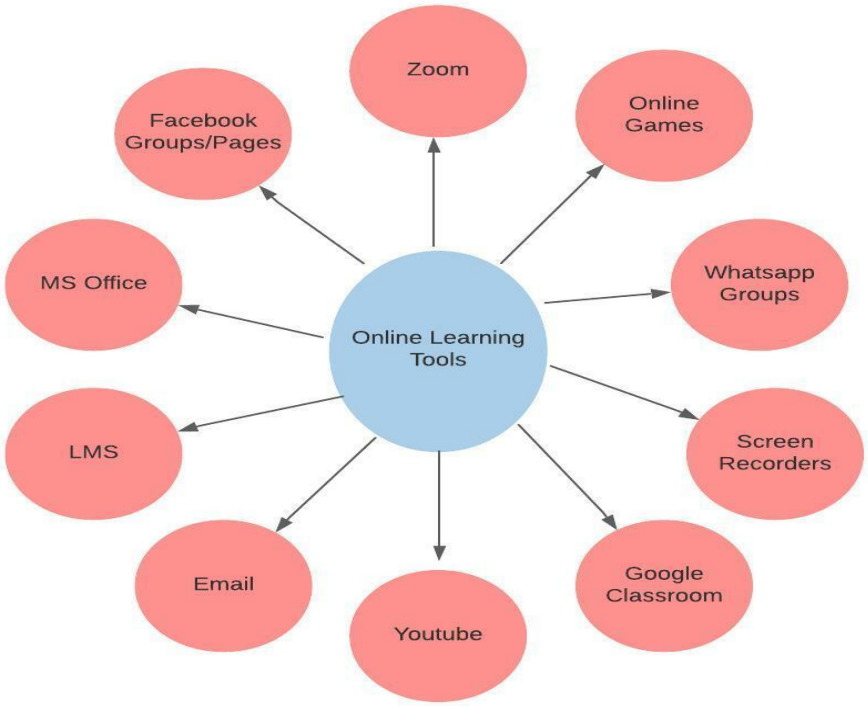

Figure 2. Technologies used in OLL (adapted from Carrolaggi, 2006; Sodhar et al., 2020)

The second notion of online teacher training programs is *content facilitation*. According to Burns (2011), a common misinterpretation by online instructors is the belief that learners can learn independently with the provided learning content. In contrast, Burns argues that the OLL instructors are responsible for assuring that the participants gain a deep knowledge of the learning materials and that this process is efficiently structured. As a result, it is vital that OLL instructors possess skills in online facilitation. As Zorfass et al. (1998) indicate, some of the facilitation duties of the online teacher are to provide orientation to the participants, promote strong interaction, identify the needs of the students, and create channels for feedback on the learning. Furthermore, Pappas (2014) points out another aspect of facilitation related to content. He states that instructors should break down the information they provide to the students by dividing their courses into smaller sessions. This way, the learners can absorb the information given to them and make sense of it. Pappas concludes by emphasizing that the content taught online should also have connections to actual life scenarios so that the learners can build a real connection.

The third critical skill for OLL teachers stated by Burns (2011) is adapting instructional skills from face-to-face education to the online learning environment. In other words, to use *blended pedagogy*. As Vanourek (2006 as cited in Burns, 2011) notes, ‘‘distance learning programs often struggle to find well-qualified instructors who understand how the intersection of technology, pedagogy, and content can provide meaningful learning experiences for the learners’’ (p.178). Nevertheless, Harris et al. (2007) suggest that teachers acquire sufficient technology-based pedagogical content along with various pedagogical approaches. Thus, online instructors need to combine two types of technology or approaches to convey information to the learners effectively.

The fourth aspect of online teacher training programs is *online presence.* Since OLL is a form of distance education, the participants may not be physically in the same environment as the teacher or their classmates. Consequently, this may create a disconnection among all the stakeholders (Burns, 2011). Therefore, according to Burns, the online instructor has to be skilled in maintaining the online presence of all learners by supporting engagement and curiosity, analyzing participant interaction, monitoring learner progress, and creating ways for deep communication.

Another type of expertise Burns (2011) believes that the OLL teacher should demonstrate is *learner management.* Since learners in the OLL platform may not be accustomed to the learner autonomy or self-discipline, the instructors need to act as counselors. Therefore, the instructor directs students to reach their goals by helping them find resources, setting up synchronous interactions, motivating them to participate in group assignments, and making sure they are up to date with their work. Burns (2011) proposes that this can be achieved by using online communication tools (e.g., instant messaging, email, discussion boards) on an ongoing basis. Lastly, Dennis et al. (2004) add that the online educator is also entitled to other managerial duties such as course record-keeping and overseeing enrollments.

The following skillset for the online teacher, according to Gulbahar and Kalelioglu (2015), is the concept of *instructional design*. Reizer (2007, as cited in Azimi & Fazelian, 2013) gives the latest definition to instructional design regarding the concept of technology as ‘‘the analysis of learning, performance problems, design, development, implementation, evaluation, and management of both instructional and non-instructional processes and resources’’. Therefore, it is a vital skill for the online instructors to develop a learning environment with the following foundations: fundamental knowledge of the learning process, taking into account the learners' needs, forming a connection between theory and practice, accommodating different learning styles, having a flexible design (customizable) and maintaining flexible delivery of instruction.

The final concept of online teacher training programs worth mentioning is *e-assessment*. Burns (2011) identifies assessment in distance education to be the weakest element. He advocates the view that problems such as distance, lack of funding, and under-trained staff who do not have sufficient knowledge in online assessment result in testing that forgoes validity and accurate performance-based measurement. Furthermore, he adds that assessments in distance education should be formative and continual rather than summative. Therefore, the online instructor is advised to make full use of the technology available online by utilizing certain conventional face-to-face assessment practices on the online platform. Some examples of the online alternatives for assessment could be online quizzes, e-portfolios, drag and drop activities, online interviews, dialogue simulations, online polls, online games, and discussion boards (Jones, 2020).

Methodology

The operation of this study took a mixed-methods approach. The quantitative data collection was performed with a five-point Likert scale online survey with statements related to the essential skillsets of online teachers. The researcher conducted *semi-structured*, individual interviews with five participants for the qualitative data collection. However, to better

understand the topics asked in the questions, the researcher used probes to acquire more in-depth explanations of the answers.

Participants

The participants for the study, in general, had two pre-set requirements. The first requirement was that they had to be English teachers working in Türkiye, and secondly, they had to have taught online learning at any point from the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic to the time of research. The participants were first recruited from the researcher's network of colleagues for the online questionnaire. The researcher sent out the surveys first to his network of teachers and then had those people send the online questionnaire to other potential candidates. In addition, social media such as LinkedIn and Instagram were also used to reach out to the candidates outside of the researcher's internal network.

A total of 55 English teachers filled out the online questionnaire. For descriptive statistics purposes, some demographic information such as age, gender, location, type of institution, level of education, and work experience were acquired from the contributors. Thus, based on the demographic information accumulated from the survey, the researcher was able to determine the following characteristics of the participants: Firstly, most of the partakers were from the age group of 31-40 (58.2 %), as shown in Figure 3, with the females dominating the task with 69.1 %, as demonstrated in Figure 4.

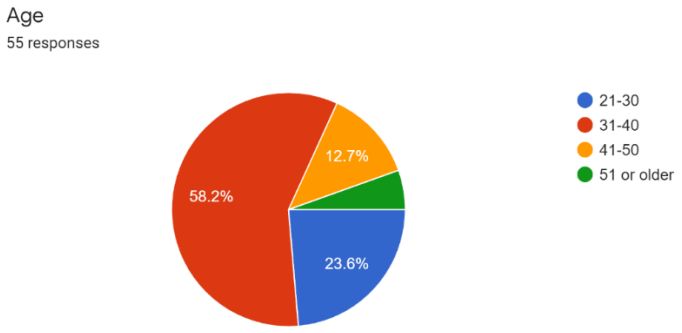

Figure 3. Age groups for survey participants

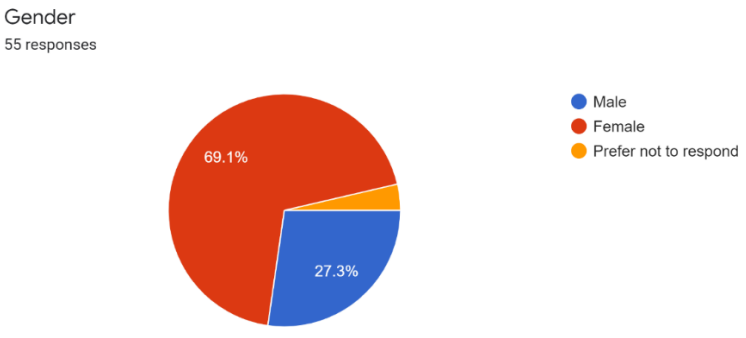

Figure 4. Gender results for survey participants

Secondly, in addition to the age and gender information, other demographic details that were observed to be relevant were the teachers' work experience and the type of institution. According to Figure 5, a large proportion of the participants had 6-10 years of work experience (49.1%), with 54.5 % working in private institutions, as illustrated in Figure 6.

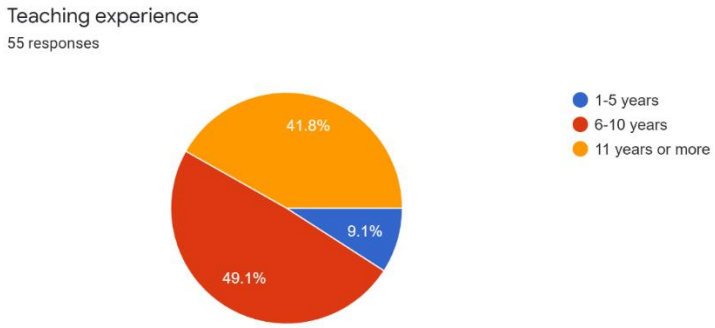

Figure 5. Teaching experience for survey participants

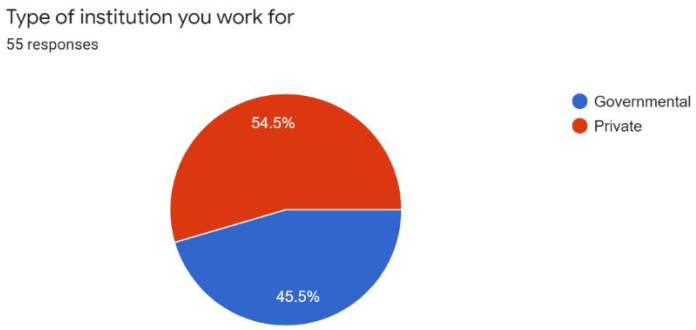

Figure 6. Type of institutions survey participants work for

The recruitment for the online interviews took place via email. The researcher contacted potential participants with the contact information they had left on the last section of the online survey. In order to get different perspectives on the interview questions, the researcher tried to choose individuals based on three types of demographic data. These were age, type of institution, and grades taught. Table 1 below shows the results of the demographic data of the five participants from the interviews, along with their genders.

Table 1. *Demographic information on interview participants*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Institution Type	Grades Taught
P-1	Female	41-50	Governmental	University
P-2	Male	51 or older	Private	University
P-3	Female	31-40	Governmental	High School
P-4	Female	21-30	Governmental	University
P-5	Male	31-40	Private	University

All the interviews started with a couple of ice breaker questions regarding why the participants became teachers and their feelings towards their jobs. The interviews later progressed into questions related to the participants' perceptions on specific aspects of OLL, such as general feelings on OLL, teachers' preparedness for OLL, motivation and interaction in OLL, and the future with OLL.

Quantitative data analysis

The data collected from the Google Forms online survey was converted into an Excel document. Then the data was reorganized in Excel according to variable names and values that the researcher had set in the online survey. Once the reorganization was done, the excel document was imported into the SPSS software. In SPSS, final labels and measuring types were assigned to the data. Finally, descriptive statistics were performed on the data to look at possible trends in the given answers. Some of the statistical procedures conducted were frequencies, crosstabulation, scale reliability, correlations, and comparison of mean values.

Qualitative data analysis

The one-on-one interviews conducted with five English teachers were digitally recorded with the *Zoom* application. The audio files were then fully transcribed and prepared as text documents for thematic analysis. As mentioned by Braun and Clarke, the procedure could be applied by two approaches: an inductive approach (bottom-up) and a theoretical approach (top-bottom, also known as the deductive method). Since the researcher was interested in investigating related themes to the research question, the theoretical approach was adopted.

Next, by importing the transcriptions into the QDA Miner software, the analysis was performed in six phases, as suggested by Braun and Clarke. The first phase was *getting familiar with the data* (e.g., reading the dialogues a few times to get an overall understanding of the ideas or opinions). The next step was *creating initial codes* about the data (e.g., identifying early patterns). The third phase was to *search for themes* (e.g., grouping certain codes together tied to a similar idea). The following step was to *review the set themes* (e.g., going over the themes to ensure that correlation truly exists). The fifth phase was *defining and naming the themes*. In this step, the researcher had to decide on the themes he wanted to use for a detailed analysis. As advocated by Braun and Clarke, the final phase of the thematic analysis was *producing a report* (e.g., writing an analytical narrative on the themes and collected data).

Results and Discussion

Teachers' Preparedness at the Start of the Pandemic

As mentioned earlier, the online survey consisted of two parts that questioned the teachers' competence in online learning skills. The first part (part 2 of the survey) was separated into seven sections that focused on different aspects of competence in online instruction. This part assessed the teachers' skillsets at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic rather than their status at the time of the data collection. There were seven sections with three statements for each section with a total of 21 items. For the total calculation of the results of this section, the

answers showing positivity were paired (e.g., Agree, Strongly Agree), then the selections that showed negativity were paired (e.g., Disagree, Strongly Disagree), and thirdly the answers showing uncertainty (e.g., neutral) were separately counted. Finally, the total answers given for items 1-21 of the survey were calculated, and the percentages were determined accordingly. Figure 7 below shows the results of the overall view of the teachers regarding their preparedness in OLL at the start of the pandemic.

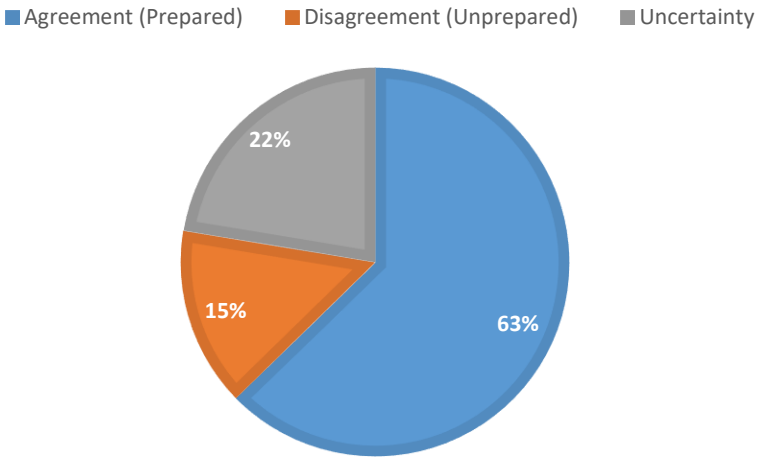

Figure 7. Teachers' preparedness at the start of the pandemic

According to Figure 7 above, a majority of the teachers (63 %) displayed confidence in their preparedness for OLL, while 15 % showed concern. Furthermore, 22 % of the teachers felt uncertain about the sufficiency of their skills. Let us now look at the results for each skillset and interpret the results in the following sections.

Use of Technology

Section A (items 1-3) of the online survey focused on the use of technology in OLL. It acquired teachers' views on how skilled they were in OLL with technology-based tools, such as word processing applications, web-conferencing software, and online instruction platforms (LMS). As shown in Table 2 below, although the general attitude towards this set of questions seemed to be positive (N=55, M=3.89, SD=.839), question 3 related to the use of online instruction platforms displayed some concern.

Table 2. *Section A-Use of technology*

		Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Average
N	Valid	55	55	55	--
	Missing	0	0	0	--
Mean		4.02	3.96	3.69	3.89
Std. Deviation		.828	1.071	1.052	.839

Question 3 assessed the teachers' perspectives related to using instructional websites with the statement, "*I had sufficient skills in using the Online Learning System of my institution (e.g.,*

LMS, EBA, Moodle, Google Classroom) to give online instruction while switching to online education at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic". Despite the fact that 37 out of the 55 participants showed agreement to this statement, 18.2 % of the teachers disagreed, while 14.5 % of them were neutral about it. The rationale behind the lack of confidence shown by some of the teachers may have been that the instructional websites were reasonably new technology, especially if the instructors had never used this particular tool for instruction or that this type of infrastructure had not existed at their institution before/during the pandemic.

Online Facilitation

The next aspect of OLL that was questioned in Section B (items 4-6) was regarding online facilitation. This aspect included giving online orientation about the learning system, encouraging students to interact, and preparing online learning content. 65% of the teachers displayed a positive stance on this aspect of OLL for the total of the three statements (N=55, M=3.68, SD=.965). However, as Table 3 displays, question 4 regarding orientation about the learning platform illustrates that about a quarter of the teachers (25.5%) felt neutral while 18.1 % disagreed.

Table 3. *Online Facilitation (Item 4)*

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Strongly Disagree	2	3.6
	Disagree	8	14.5
	Neutral	14	25.5
	Agree	20	36.4
	Strongly Agree	11	20.0
	Total	55	100.0

Question 4 of the survey examined the instructors' views on introducing the teaching platform to their students with the sentence, "*I had sufficient skills in giving orientation to students about the institution's online learning system while switching to online education during the Covid-19 pandemic".* As mentioned earlier, with the use of technology, the learning platforms had been perceived as advanced infrastructures that some teachers had not experienced before. Thus, the lack of experience in this type of technology may have left the teachers confused, resulting in the incapability of familiarizing their students with the new instructional tool.

Blended Pedagogy

Section C of the questionnaire (items 7-9) concentrated on using a blended pedagogical approach with online instruction. This aspect of OLL measured the teachers' views on how sufficiently they could convert face-to-face lesson plans to online learning. Based on Table 4 below, the majority of the teachers believed they were adequately skilled in all items, with 61.8 % for Item 7, 63.6% for item 8, and 69.1 % for item 9.

Table 4. *Blended Pedagogy Results (Section C)*

Scale of Agreement	Item 7	Item 8	Item 9
Agree (4)	38.2 %	32.7 %	49.1 %
Strongly Agree (5)	23.6 %	30.9 %	20.0 %
Total	61.8 %	63.6 %	69.1 %

Despite the fact that all three items regarding the use of blended pedagogy for OLL had seemed to show satisfying results, a demographic factor illustrated a compelling finding with this aspect of OLL. Item 7 examined the teachers' views on their skills to adapt either face-to-face lessons or teaching approaches to OLL in the statement, "*I had sufficient skills in adapting a face-to-face teaching approach to online learning while switching to online education during the Covid-19 pandemic".* The astounding finding of the statement was that a vast majority of 32 of the 35 participants that displayed optimism about the use of blended pedagogy had had six years of work experience or more. The grounds for this outcome might have been that teachers with more teaching experience could better transform their face-to-face teaching materials to the online platform. Finally, teachers that lacked the experience most likely found OLL highly challenging as they had not had the skills to accommodate the new teaching environment.

Maintaining Online Presence

The next group of statements in Section D (items 10-12) addressed the skillset of maintaining students' online presence. In other words, were the teachers skilled enough to keep their students motivated, comforted, and engaged with OLL? The findings show satisfactory results in this aspect, with 66% of the teachers agreeing to statements 10-12 (N=55, M=3.78, SD=.882). Nevertheless, when we observe item 11, which demonstrated the highest mean score of 3.85 compared to 3.75 for items 10 and 12, the researcher felt the need to investigate what factors could have influenced these results.

Item 11 had questioned the teachers specifically in making students feel comfortable with the online learning environment with the inquiry, *"I had sufficient skills in making students feel comfortable with the online learning environment while switching to online education during the Covid-19 pandemic".* With a thorough analysis of the demographical information provided by the participants, it was agreed that the age factor of the students with the "grades taught" demographic information may have affected the results, as illustrated in Figure 8 below.

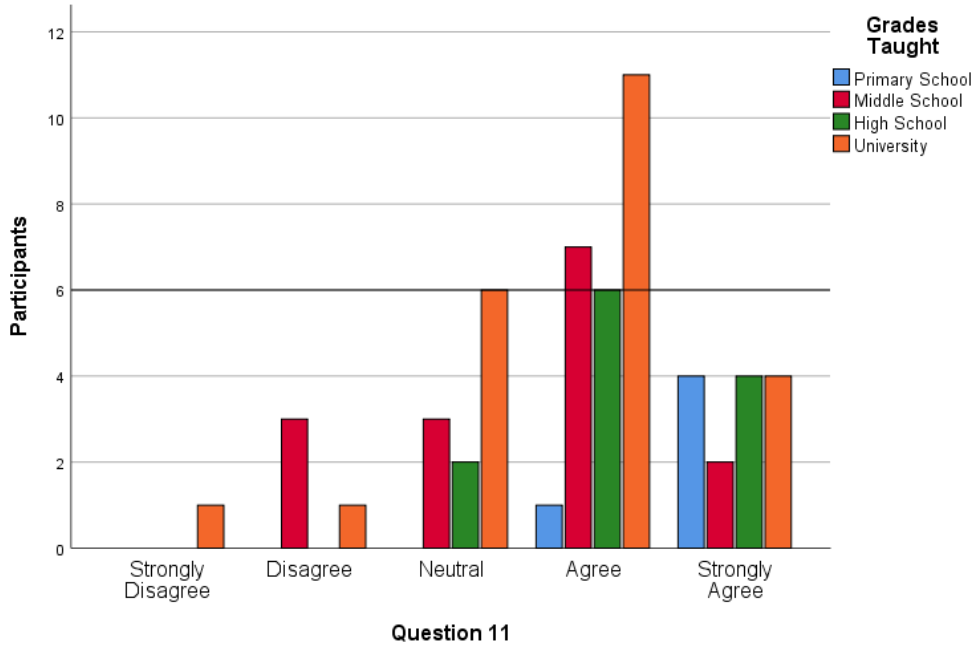

Figure 8. Online presence by grades taught (Item 11)

As Figure 8 above demonstrates, out of the 39 participants that showed agreement with item 11, 15 of them taught university-level students who were assumed to be 18 years of age or older. Therefore, teachers dealing with the adults may have had less of a challenge explaining the new features of new technology than the teachers who had younger pupils. It may be appropriate to say the older students were most likely more familiar with using the Internet and its communication tools than the younger generation. All of these factors may have influenced the experience of the teachers regarding this aspect.

Learner Management

Section E of the questionnaire (items 13-15) assessed the teachers' competence in managing their classes in OLL. The topic of management included different aspects such as helping students with their individual needs, forming group learning activities, and bookkeeping of grades. According to Table 5 below, the teachers' position towards this dimension of OLL was assuring except for item 14.

Table 5. *Learner management results (Section E)*

		Question 13	Question 14	Question 15
N	Valid	55	55	55
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		3.69	3.38	3.87
Std. Deviation		1.086	1.225	.944

As 65.4 % of the participants agreed on item 13 related to helping with the students individual learning needs and 76.3 % of the teachers agreed on item 15 related to the bookkeeping of student records, the level of positivity towards item 14 was 54.5 %. Question 14 enquired the teachers' opinions of the readiness they possessed on organizing group learning tasks online by

asking the question, *"I had sufficient skills in organizing students to participate in group learning with online learning while switching to online education during the Covid-19 pandemic".* The speculation towards this outcome was the challenging task of applying group-based assignments online. As this type of work requires certain technological features for executing pair or group activities online, it could be a complicated and detailed task to manage.

Instructional Design

The following aspect of OLL that the teachers were asked about was instructional design. Section F of the survey (items 16-18) covered skills such as constructing an online course (including an online curriculum) and developing learning tools specifically designed for online education. Although the average mean is slightly above the threshold of positivity with 3.53 (N=55, SD=.909), the results for items 16 (M=3.40) and 17 (M=3.51) do not seem to be very convincing, as shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6. *Instructional design results (Section F)*

		Item 16 (Instructional Design)	Item 17 (Instructional Design)	Item 18 (Instructional Design)
N	Valid	55	55	55
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		3.40	3.51	3.67
Std. Deviation		1.047	1.034	1.055

The particular set of questions in this section had been intended more for teachers in administrative positions (e.g., coordinators, course leaders) as the main topic was the construction of an online course. For instance, item 16 was stated as follows *"I had sufficient skills in creating an online learning curriculum while switching to online education during the Covid-19 pandemic".* Although 28 out of 55 participants showed agreement with the statement mentioned above, constructing an online course requires far more advanced skills as both formal and informal learning solutions need to be constructed for the program (Gulbahar & Kalelioglu, 2015).

Online Assessment

The last section of the questionnaire, Section H (items 19-21), observed the teachers' skills in applying online-based assessments to their students. This section included using online technologies, adapting face-to-face techniques, and performing formative testing. The overall judgment made by the teachers regarding this aspect also showed positive results (N=55, M=3.61, SD=.879). However, out of all three items asked in this section, question 21 regarding formative assessments failed to demonstrate a favorable outcome (M=3.40, SD=1.099). The statement that assessed the teachers' beliefs towards making summative assessments online was as follows *"I had sufficient skills in performing formative assessments online while switching to online education during the Covid-19 pandemic".* As the results are displayed in Figure 9

below, it is observable that a vast majority of 47 % of the teachers had shown doubtfulness in this particular skill.

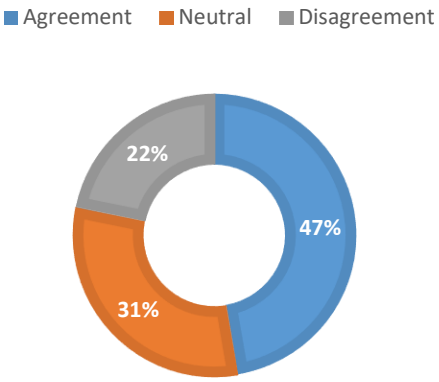

Figure 9. -Online assessment (item 21)

The motive behind the weakness in the outcome of item 21 could have been that formative assessments had not been implemented into the teachers' curriculum or that the methods for conducting this type of assessment were never discussed by the institutions when moving online (Burns, 2011).

Current Competence in OLL (at time of data collection)

The next part of the online survey assessed the teachers' competence in OLL at the time of the research rather than at the start of the pandemic. The rationale behind this inquiry was to see if the perceptions of the teachers had changed since the start of the pandemic. Furthermore, the seven items asked (questions 22-28) summarized the seven skillsets mentioned in the previous part of the questionnaire. When we analyze each item one by one in Table 7 below, we can see that the teachers displayed the highest confidence in their online class management skills with item 26 (M=4.20, SD=.755) while showing the lowest self-assurance in their lesson adaption competence with item 24 (M=3.78, SD=1.117).

Table 7. *Teachers' competence results in OLL (at time of data collection, items 22-28)*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Item 22 (Technology)	55	4.00	.923
Item 23 (Interaction)	55	3.85	.848
Item 24 (Adaptation)	55	3.78	1.117
Item 25 (Motivation)	55	3.87	.924
Item 26 (Management)	55	4.20	.755
Item 27 (Constructing OLL)	55	3.91	.948
Item 28 (Assessment)	55	3.84	1.102
Valid N (listwise)	55		

The justification behind these results may have been that the teachers were highly experienced, which may have helped with their online class managing skills. However, the lesson adaptation from face-to-face to OLL seems to be a challenge for them.

Finally, when we observe the results of teachers' current competence as a whole, Figure 10 below shows us, that 70 % of the instructors had thought their current competence skills in OLL were adequate.

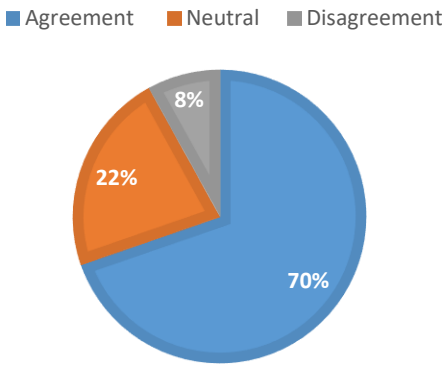

Figure 10. - Teachers' competence at the time of data collection

Another analysis worth noting is when we compare the teachers' competence at the time of research to the start of the pandemic. After applying a T-test to the two sets of questions, we can see a positive shift of 0.22 in the mean average, as displayed in Table 8 below.

Table 8. *T-test results between current competence (at the time of data collection) and the start of the pandemic*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Questions 1-21 Teacher's Competence on OLL (Start of Pandemic)	55	3.7004	.72778	.09813
Questions 22-28 Teacher's Current Competence in OLL (at data collection)	55	3.9221	.77265	.10418

This progress in the teachers' level of competence from the start of the pandemic could have been directly tied to the fact that 52.7 % of the participants reported that they had acquired training from their institutions while 32.7 % developed their skills independently since the start of the pandemic. This particular detail regarding this matter was acquired at the beginning of the survey in the demographic section as a question with 4 choices as demonstrated in Figure 11 below.

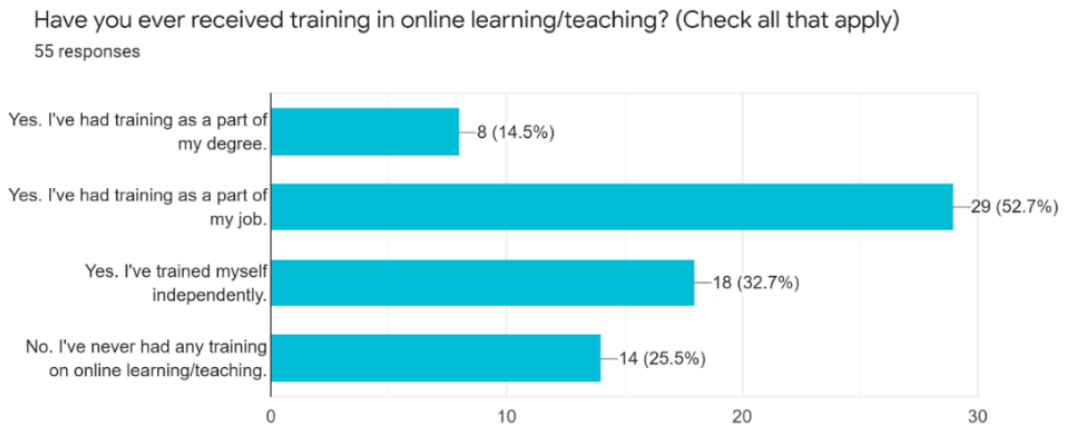

Figure 11. - Source of teachers' competence in OLL

Although details about the specific training that the teachers had gotten were not asked in the study, the research supposes that educators that independently trained themselves could have either acquired knowledge from social media (e.g., YouTube, Instagram, Facebook) or from community support groups. In addition, the study assumes that teachers that received support from their institutions had been given workshops or orientation programs on OLL during the pandemic.

Online Interviews

Searching for Themes

The online interviews performed with the 5 participants showed both diverse and mutual feelings on OLL. Although the emotion of intimidation had existed in all participants when moving to online education at the start of the pandemic, their perceptions of adapting OLL to be a permanent method of instruction seem controversial. A total of 13 sub-themes were discovered with thematic analysis performed on the transcriptions of the interviews. Figure 12 below shows these 13 sub-themes.

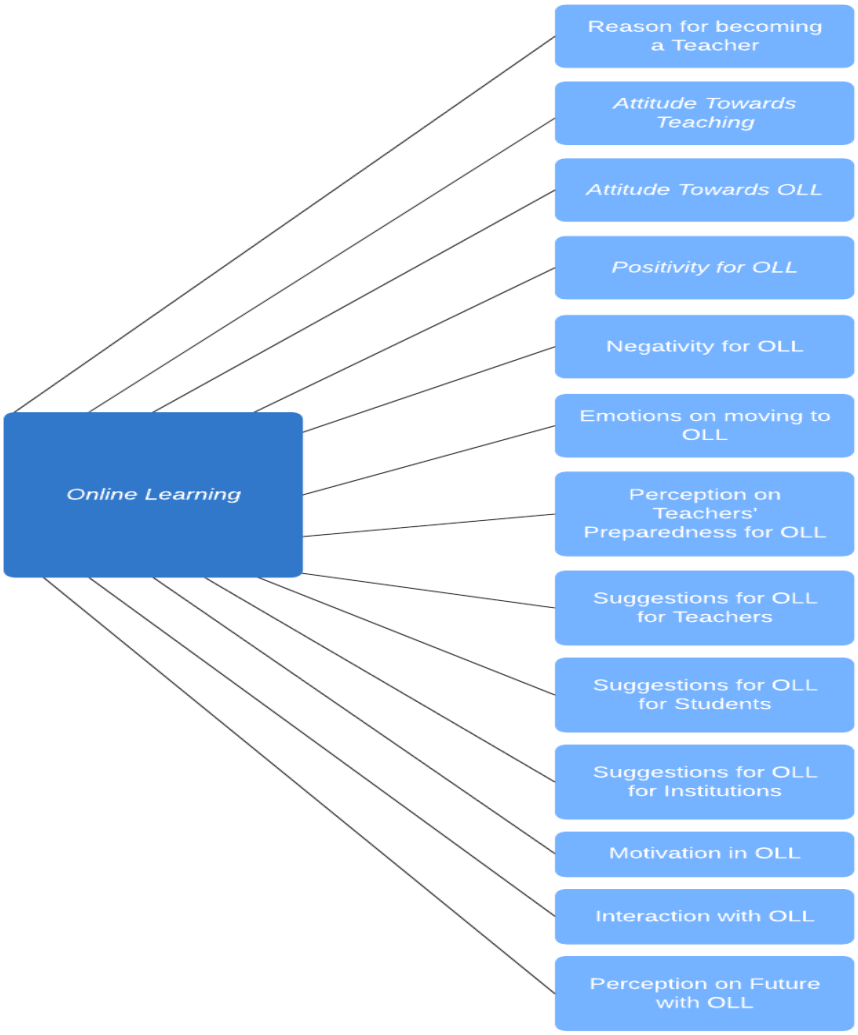

Figure 12.- Sub-Themes

After a thorough review of the 13 sub-themes, the researcher grouped the themes that formed coherency and eliminated those that did not carry any significance to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Hence, the remaining sub-themes were transformed into four central themes, as presented in Figure 13 below.

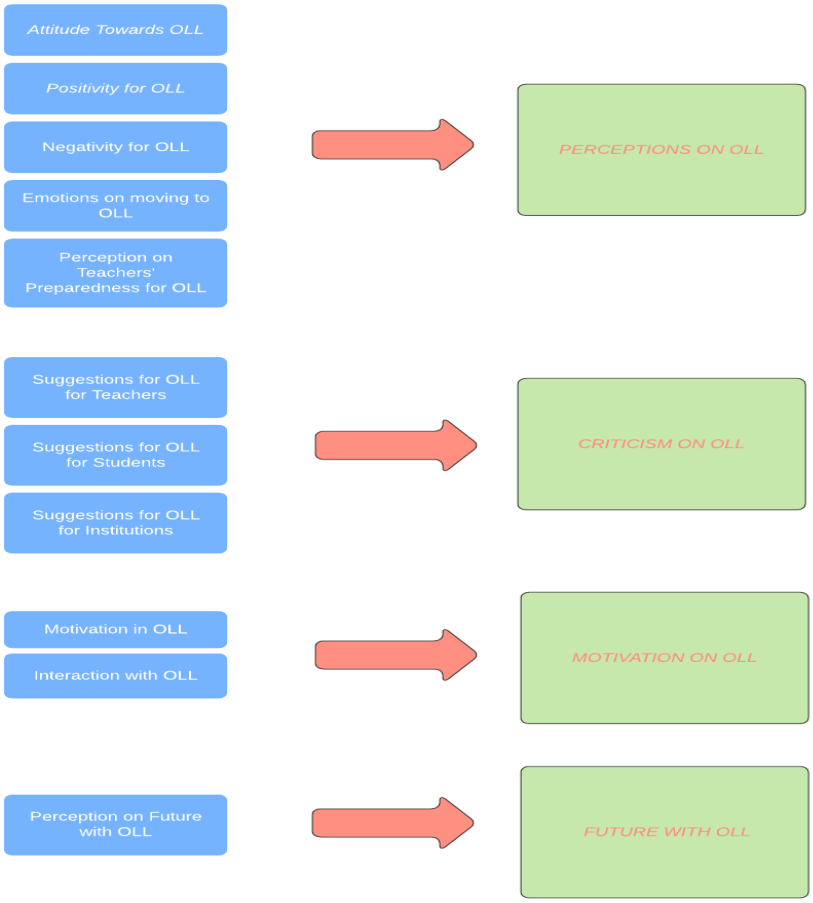

Figure 13.- Main Themes

The first main theme consisted of sub-themes that identified mainly attitudes, emotions, and perceptions toward OLL. Thus, it was labeled as "Perceptions on OLL." The second central theme was related to suggestions made by the teachers on improving OLL; therefore, it was categorized as "Criticism on OLL." The third main theme merged the concepts of motivation and interaction into one category called "Motivation on OLL." Finally, the last central theme covered the beliefs of OLL regarding future developments. It was labeled as "Future with OLL.

Theme 1-Perceptions on OLL

The participants revealed their thoughts on OLL from different aspects. The points discussed were about general attitudes towards OLL, emotions when first switched to OLL during the pandemic, and the implications of the process. All participants had unfavorable feelings when they were told to move to online education with the Covid-19 pandemic hitting Türkiye. For example, in the demonstrative extract below, P4 revealed her attitude towards OLL when she discovered that she had to carry on her instruction online. She expressed intimidation towards a new means of instruction due to OLL being something she had never experienced before. Her anxiety had derived from the uncertainty of not being able to foresee the challenges of a new platform for instruction. In addition, she was also worried about her older colleagues because they had insufficient skills in using technology.

Demonstrative Extract

P-4: *Well, actually, we were all freaked out! [laughter] because that's how we literally felt. I mean because it was something totally new. And especially with teachers who were nearly close to retirement age. They didn't know anything about technology. And it was really difficult and for me. It was kind of scary at first because you don't know what's going to happen and what's waiting for you. So that's how I felt at first.*

P-2 voiced similar feelings concerning OLL when I asked her about her initial feelings. She exposed negative feelings similar to P-4, but her distress seemed to be more related to her technological skills. We can observe from the two participants (P-2 and P-4) that the lack of support from the institution, insufficient knowledge on technology, and the uncertainty of the future created undesirable emotions (e.g., anxiety, intimidation, isolation).

Theme 2-Criticism on OLL

The interviewees discussed how OLL could have been more user-friendly for the users and how certain factors could have improved their experiences. P-1 advocated her view on the importance of training and ongoing support for the users of OLL when I asked her about the factors that could have improved the OLL experience. P-1 emphasized the necessity of a training program not only for the educators but also for the students. She also felt that there should have been psychological support for the users for a couple of reasons. First, OLL had been a new experience for most, and second, the pandemic conditions had contributed to this experience with worries and distress among the participants. Furthermore, P-5 emphasized his frustration about how the LMS platform of his institution had limitations and how he did not have the flexibility of carrying forward his instruction with a type of technology that he was comfortable with. P-5 demonstrated his dissatisfaction with the platform that his institution used when moving online. Lastly, he believed that if he had had the flexibility of using third-party software with better features, his OLL experience could have been less upsetting.

Theme 3-Motivation on OLL

In the data, expressions towards motivation and interaction regarding OLL were significantly noticeable. Throughout the conversations, motivation and interaction seemed to have a strong connection with each other. What is more, the results indicated that the students and the teachers had a challenging experience in maintaining satisfactory levels of motivation. According to the teachers, technological issues, and lack of familiarity with OLL had considerable influence on the users' motivation and interaction. When I asked about his motivation, P-5 mentioned that his platform was problematic, thus diminishing the motivation of the users.

As noticed in the dialogue, the microphone feature of the platform was unsatisfactory because there was a considerable amount of delay in usage and a constant loss of connection. As mentioned by P-5, these flaws in the online infrastructure of the institution had a substantial adverse effect on interaction.

When I asked P-2 about his thoughts regarding motivation, he commented by saying that OLL could not replicate the learning environment of face-to-face education. Therefore, this

created problems in motivation and interaction both with the students and the teacher. As Brown (2008) mentions in his constructivist perspective, motivation cannot be generalized, and the motives behind it can vary according to the individual. Nevertheless, we can assume from the conversation I had with P-2 that some specific elements had played a role in affecting the users' motivation. These elements seemed to be the insufficient features of the learning platform, such as a camera or other types of audio-visual technology.

Theme 4-Future with OLL

The participants were asked questions concerning the future of OLL. The first question was on their views of where they saw OLL in the next ten years, and the other question was more of a subjective point of view on their career positions with OLL in the future. Firstly, there was a mutual belief in seeing OLL as a part of education for the present and future. However, when we observe the teachers' perspectives from a subjective view of OLL, only two of the participants showed interest in taking on OLL as a permanent profession in the future. P-3 demonstrated her optimism for OLL and her desire to be a permanent online teacher. P-4 also illustrated her devotion to OLL when I asked her if she would take on a permanent position with online learning. Determined by the conversations with the participants, they perceived OLL to be a permanent component of education one way or the other. Although we can apprehend that the teachers' experiences had not been so straightforward and that OLL had created different challenges for each teacher, there still seems to be optimism for the future. Nonetheless, the two participants (P-3 & P-4) have put forward their high enthusiasm in accepting OLL to be a permanent part of their instruction method for the future.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to assess how ready the teachers were for online learning by trying to find supporting data to answer the research question *"How prepared were the English instructors in Türkiye to use online learning to carry out their instruction at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic?"*. The analysis was carried out from the teachers' perspective to assess how competent they perceived themselves to be when they moved online to continue instruction. As the literature on online learning suggested, the research project questioned the teachers on particular skillsets they should have been knowledgeable about. These skillsets were *the use of technology* (Goodyear et al., 2001), *content facilitation* (Burns, 2011), *blended pedagogy* (Burns, 2011), *maintaining online presence* (Burns ,2011), *learner management* (Dennis et al., 2004), *instructional design* (Gulbahar & Kalelioglu, 2015) and *online assessment* (Gulbahar & Kalelioglu, 2015).

Based on the analysis of the survey from the previous section, the study could conclude that most participants had sufficient skills in conducting OLL when the pandemic hit Türkiye. In other words, the teachers were able to one way or the other execute their lessons online while facing some challenges. However, it is also significant to consider the educators who had displayed dissatisfaction or felt uncertain about their particular skills in OLL. Furthermore, the qualitative data from the interviews highlighted crucial topics for us to contemplate. Factors such as staff and student orientation, functional infrastructure, user-friendly interface,

administrative support, counseling services, and staff and student motivation seem to be crucially important for the development of OLL. Based on the interviews, the study also made a connection to relevant research that had been conducted in Türkiye concerning the perceptions of the teachers toward OLL. As Karakaya et al. (2021) had indicated in their research that issues such as poor interaction, technological infrastructure, and lack of teacher competency had played a role in these perceptions, the qualitative data gained in this project found supporting arguments for their claims.

Another outcome of the study that did not come as a surprise was how competent the teachers considered themselves to be in OLL for their current status (in other words referring to the time of the data collection). Clearly, the teachers also rated themselves to be adequately skilled in the various skillsets of OLL after a year had passed since the start of the pandemic. However, one striking finding that was achieved from the analysis was the answer to where the competence in these skillsets derived from. As Burns (2011) highlighted the importance of ongoing support and training for OLL by institutions, the study revealed that the teachers had not only depended on the training provided by their schools but that they had been able to train themselves independently. As this research project had not enquired about the core of this self-training, the study supposes that the teachers' self-development in OLL could have been gained by using various sources such as community support with colleagues (Burns, 2011), social media, or books on OLL.

Lastly, although the outcome of the study favors that the educators believed they were sufficiently skilled for OLL, the concept of ERT has to be emphasized repeatedly. The reason for this is that the study focused mainly on the concept of OLL which has long been professionally developed as a means of delivery in educational instruction. However, with the pandemic's unprecedented effect, this delivery method was forced on most institutions across the globe as they had minimal choices of continuing their teachings otherwise (Hodges et al., 2020). This is when the two concepts: OLL and ERT, overlapped with each other. Therefore, although the teachers may have perceived themselves to be ready for OLL, the experience they had lived through was more in the direction of an emergency act of taking on a system to teach their students by any means possible. Thus, from the perspective of the researcher, it is safer to say that the teachers managed themselves successfully for ERT but that the glory for a true implementation of OLL needs a deeper understanding of its methodology, features, and technologies.

Limitations

The study faced two important obstacles worth mentioning. The first limitation was the fact that the survey data was collected from 55 participants and the interviews were conducted with only 5 teachers. Hence, these limited numbers restrained the researcher from making any nationwide generalizations of the results. Another limitation was that since both the pandemic and the learning process for teachers had been ongoing phenomena, identifying the exact time each participant had developed themselves in the mentioned skillsets for online learning was unattainable.

Conclusion

The English teachers in Türkiye displayed a satisfactory level of confidence in the preparedness of online learning for both the start of the pandemic and the time of data collection after a year had passed. What is more, there had been an improvement in their competence in online learning from the start of the pandemic to the time of research. In contrast to the literature on online learning, teacher training programs are not the only source for the teachers' development in online learning. Instead, they had been able to enhance their skills via self-development as well. Nevertheless, no matter how much the educators may seem to perceive themselves to be ready for online learning, the online interviews reveal certain issues such as the absence of user orientation, malfunctioning infrastructure, complicated user interface, lack of counseling services, and insufficient user motivation that deserve crucial attention.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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