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A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO AFFORDANCES AND CHALLENGES OF ONLINE LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

(Research Article)

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Abstract

This study explores the perceived affordances and challenges of online teaching and learning among English instructors and students. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews from 8 online English instructors and 8 online English learners at a state university in Turkey. Using Nvivo software, content analysis was employed for data analysis. Results indicate a strong consensus among the instructors and students on the affordances and challenges of online language education. Participants view online education positively for its flexibility, accessibility, comfort, technology integration, cost-saving benefits, and opportunities for autonomy and individual development. However, concerns have also been raised about the sudden transition to online education, leaving both instructors and students feeling unprepared. Consequently, participants perceive online education as demanding and challenging. Identified challenges include difficulties in teaching language skills and using language teaching methods, lack of interaction and communication, inadequate technical infrastructure, limitations of the online platform, poor attendance and participation, insufficient teacher training, ethical concerns, large class sizes, limited online material infrastructure, low motivation and autonomy among students, and increased workload for instructors. These technical, pedagogical, and attitudinal issues collectively influence the overall perception and effectiveness of online teaching and learning. The findings underscore the need for comprehensive training, improved technical and material infrastructure, and a reevaluation of online course design to ensure a high-quality teaching and learning experience.

Keywords: Affordances and challenges, online language instructors, online language learners, distance education, online teaching, online learning

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1. Introduction

In today's digitized environment, the impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) cannot be ignored. The development of online technologies has made it easier and more convenient to communicate with people and access information anytime and anywhere. From an educational perspective, the benefits of technology are innumerable. It expands people's knowledge, enables the storage and mobility of information, saves time and money, eliminates borders, facilitates communication with people from different parts of the world, and allows for studying in virtual communities (Lehman & Conceição, 2010).

Parallel to the emergence of educational technologies, the design, development, and presentation practices for both on-campus and off-campus courses have undergone significant changes (McNaught, 2007). The availability of various online platforms for interaction and communication has transformed the nature of distance education, giving rise to the concept of teaching online. Consequently, some universities have initiated the provision of campus-based online courses to enhance pedagogy, offer flexibility in education, and reduce education-related costs (Taplin et al., 2013; Yamagata-Lynch, 2014).

According to Bates (2015), it is important to meet the changing demands of the digital era when designing an online classroom. Simply adding technology to education or teaching online with the same design will not suffice. Online education should be designed to fully leverage the educational potential of technology. Otherwise, the effectiveness of the lesson may even decrease, as it will not go beyond mimicking the traditional classroom. For these reasons, simply integrating new technologies into the classroom may not be enough to address the advanced skills required in the digital era. Necessary changes should be made to the basic design model to maximize the potential of the new technology.

There has been no consensus in the literature on whether face-to-face (F2F), online, or blended teaching is superior to the others. Abrami et al. (2012) propose that online learning offers enticing benefits, such as increased access to education, reduced costs, and most importantly, improved teaching and learning quality. Turoff et al. (2004) argue that online learning is not disadvantaged, as many people believe, since it is enriched by social and physical technologies and tools that enable interaction among learners.

Hampel and Stickler (2005) argue that online learning environments provide excellent opportunities for language learning. In particular, authentic materials can facilitate a variety of communication tasks, such as web searching and email exchanges. However, merely designing online materials to reduce the teacher's workload can lead to an unsuccessful learning environment. To foster communicative competence, an authentic and meaningful approach with appropriate pedagogical support is essential.

The transition to online education has brought many opportunities and challenges for the stakeholders (Adedoyin & Soykan; 2020; Alshamrani, 2019; Chahkandi, 2021; Sun, 2011), which surely have an effect on the quality of teaching and learning outcomes. In this regard, it is crucial to identify the perceived advantages and challenges among online language teachers and students. This understanding is essential for a more comprehensive grasp of their needs and for addressing concerns more effectively, ultimately contributing to

the development of successful online education programs and faculty training initiatives. Within this background, the present research aims to investigate the perceptions of both online EFL (English as a Foreign Language) instructors and students regarding the affordances and challenges of online language education, addressing the following research questions:

- 1) How do EFL instructors and students perceive affordances of teaching and learning English online?
- 2) How do EFL instructors and students perceive challenges of teaching and learning English online?

2. Literature Review

A considerable amount of literature has been devoted to examine the affordances and challenges of online teaching and learning so far. A significant portion of research has been published on practical considerations involving actual online practices and real-world case studies. Among them, Coldwell et al. (2006) conducted a survey to investigate how university students viewed online learning. The study found that the major benefits of online learning were its flexibility, allowing students to study at their own pace, and the variety of resources available. On the other hand, drawbacks included slow internet connection, system outages, communication problems, delayed feedback, and limited IT skills among students. The study concluded that students regard online learning positively when it offers flexibility, quality resources, prompt feedback, positive interactions, and reliable access to computers and the internet.

In their qualitative study, Conrad and Pedro (2009) examined the perspectives of faculty members and students on online learning. Teachers believe that teaching online contributes to their professional development and enables them to use technology more innovatively. Overall, they perceive accessibility to course materials and evaluative strategies as the most beneficial aspects of online learning. Nonetheless, they also find online teaching to be more demanding and time-consuming. Students appreciate the flexibility, convenience, and cost-effectiveness of online learning, including the opportunity for self-directed learning and access to vast resources. However, students also face challenges such as limited interaction with professors and assignments that they find boring and test-like.

Previous research has also explored the ideas towards blended learning. For example, Yamagata-Lynch (2014) conducted a qualitative self-study on university students' ideas towards 15-week blended online asynchronous and synchronous learning. Through student reflection papers, the study found that students perceived the blended online course as offering a higher level of participation and a flexible learning environment. The incorporation of both asynchronous and synchronous communications provided students with a variety of communication styles. Synchronous communication enabled participation in spontaneous discussions, while asynchronous communication allowed students the opportunity to carefully consider and prepare responses to assigned discussion topics.

In recent years, there has been an increase in research into online teaching and learning applications as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Among them, König et al. (2020) conducted a study that explored early career teachers' social contact with students, teaching challenges, teacher competencies, and teacher education related to online teaching and learning during the pandemic. They found that the majority of teachers managed to maintain social contact with students and parents, but did not use digital tools during online education. Additionally, most of the teachers were able to introduce new content, provide task differentiation, and give regular feedback, although they found online teaching and assessment challenging.

Research on online language teaching and learning has also proliferated over the past decades. For example, Nurgroho and Atmojo (2020) researched EFL learners' perceptions towards learning English online. The study found that the learners have a positive attitude towards learning English from a distance, as it offers more comfortable and enjoyable learning process that increase learners' motivation, autonomy, productivity and learning. The study also found that the usage of different digital technologies such as Youtube, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Google classroom are very useful in terms of teaching the content, giving assignments, delivering materials, giving feedback, and evaluating the students.

Most recently, pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards online teaching and its challenges in an Iranian university have been studied (Taghizadeh & Basirat, 2022). The results showed that the pre-service teachers are interested in online teaching and believe that it can help learners develop their English. Nevertheless, they identified challenges in technical, pedagogical, interactional, supportive, and attitudinal aspects. Technical challenges were primarily attributed to unstable and slow Internet connections in Iran, while pedagogical challenges included a lack of technical expertise and inefficient teaching skills. Interactional challenges were related to online feedback and managing interactions, while attitudinal challenges involved developing online courses, taking on new online roles, and keeping up with new technologies.

Most related to our study, Avcıoğlu and Altay (2022) have explored attitudes of university preparatory class teachers towards distance English language teaching in Turkey, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. The findings demonstrated that distance English language teaching offers certain advantages, such as flexibility, increased accessibility, affordability, and convenience, integration of online learning tools and technologies, and recordability of the lessons for future use. However, the study identified significant drawbacks, such as a lack of interaction and feedback, poor participation, technical problems, difficulty in teaching English skills, students' lack of motivation and self-discipline, and a shortage of teacher training. The study emphasized that achieving the effectiveness of distance English language teaching requires the implementation of instructional, technical, technological, and digital precautions, along with providing training and guidance to educators.

Overall, the literature review presents a comprehensive understanding of students' and teachers' experiences and perspectives on online learning, with a focus on its benefits, challenges, and potential. To fully understand these factors and their impact on English

language teaching and learning in a Turkish university, it is important to conduct a qualitative study that explores the affordances and challenges from the perspectives of both teachers and students. By identifying the specific opportunities and challenges of online English language teaching and learning, this study can inform the development of more effective and engaging online pedagogical practices.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study aims to explore the perceptions of online EFL instructors and students towards the affordances and challenges of online language teaching and learning. To collect and present more personalized and in-depth data, the study takes on a qualitative approach and case study method. When conducting a case study, how case-related factors such as environment, people, events, and time periods affect or are affected by the case is examined in detail (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). In this study, participants' environment, present states, past actions, emotions, thoughts, and how these components were related to each other were investigated thoroughly (Ary et al., 2006).

3.2. Research Setting

This study was conducted at a state university in Turkey. The Distance Education Centre (UZEM) oversees the coordination of online education courses and is responsible for ensuring all relevant activities align with administrative, technical, and pedagogical requirements. Online courses are facilitated through the Learning Management System (LMS), allowing students to participate either synchronously or asynchronously. Additionally, computer labs are available for those who do not possess a personal computer, providing internet access and computers for their use.

Common Compulsory Foreign Language Courses have been delivered online since 2015. Before teaching online, EFL instructors attended a compulsory online faculty development program provided by UZEM that aimed to provide necessary knowledge and skills for teaching online. It included basic concepts of e-learning and online learning theories, use of LMSs and virtual classrooms, online instructional design concepts and methods, copyrights, intellectual rights, academic ethics and plagiarism, basic concepts of measurement, assessment and e-assessment, principles of graphic design, creating effective visuals, graphics and multimedia materials, use of social media tools, and quality assurance in e-learning. The program involved one-hour live and interactive virtual classes, and additional face-to-face practical classes.

3.3. Participants

The participants comprise eight EFL instructors who teach the common compulsory “Basic English Course” at the School of Foreign Languages in a state university, and eight students from various departments enrolled in this course. Demographic information of the participants is provided below:

Table 1. Online EFL instructors' profile

Participants	Gender	Age	Highest qualification	Teaching experience	Online teaching experience
<i>I1</i>	Male	42	B.A	19	2 semesters
<i>I2</i>	Male	42	M.A	20	1 semester
<i>I3</i>	Male	43	M.A	19	2 semesters
<i>I4</i>	Female	46	M.A	22	1 semester
<i>I5</i>	Female	58	B.A	28	1 semester
<i>I6</i>	Female	39	M.A	16	1 semester
<i>I7</i>	Male	36	M.A	2	2 semesters
<i>I8</i>	Female	48	M.A	23	1 week

I= Instructor

Table 2. Online EFL students' profile

Participants	Gender	Age	Grade	Study department	Online learning experience
<i>S1</i>	Male	21	1 st	Business Administration	1 semester
<i>S2</i>	Female	21	2 nd	International Trade and Finance	1 semester
<i>S3</i>	Male	18	1 st	International Trade and Finance	1 semester
<i>S4</i>	Male	20	2 nd	Healthcare Management	2 years
<i>S5</i>	Male	20	2 nd	Physical Education	1 semester
<i>S6</i>	Female	22	2 nd	Public Administration	2 semesters
<i>S7</i>	Male	21	1 st	Energy Engineering	1 semester
<i>S8</i>	Male	22	2 nd	Energy Engineering	2 semesters

S= Student

3.4. Sampling Procedure

The primary objective of qualitative research sampling is to engage participants who can offer rich and diverse insights into the research process (Dörnyei, 2007). Therefore, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants. EFL instructors were chosen based on their scores obtained from the online instructor certificate program (e-Tutor) in which they participated. These scores were categorized as high, medium, and low. Instructors were then randomly selected from each category on a voluntary basis. For students, the criterion was their attendance rates in online English language courses, categorized as high, medium, and low. Students were selected randomly from each category on a voluntary basis. According to Patton (2014), there is no strict rule for determining the sample size of a qualitative study, and the recommendation is to stop when no new information emerges. In this study, eight instructors and eight students were interviewed until data saturation was achieved.

3.5. *Data Collection Method*

In this study, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews, chosen for their suitability in providing detailed and in-depth insights. The interview questions were developed by the researchers following an extensive literature review. The initial draft of the interview form underwent scrutiny by three experts—university academics with experience in qualitative studies, online teaching, and English language teaching. Based on their feedback on content and design, a second draft was prepared. Subsequently, a pilot study was conducted with a volunteer instructor teaching English online and a volunteer student taking an online English course. Following this process, necessary adjustments were made, and the interview forms were finalized.

3.6. *Data Collection Procedure*

Prior to data collection, necessary permissions were secured from the School of Foreign Languages and relevant faculties. Participants were assured, before the interviews, that the collected data would be used solely for scientific purposes, and their names and answers would be kept confidential. All participants signed a consent form, signifying their voluntary participation in the study and granting permission for the recording of their interviews. To ensure a comfortable environment for expression, interviews were conducted individually, with no one else present in the room. The interviews were carried out in Turkish, allowing participants to express their ideas more freely and comfortably in their mother tongue. The duration of interviews ranged from 25 to 45 minutes.

3.7. *Data Analysis*

To analyze the data, the content analysis technique was applied following the steps outlined in Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model: (1) data reduction, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawing/verification. Utilizing the PC-based software program NVivo v.10 facilitated the organization, classification, structure, analysis, and storage of qualitative data in a more efficient manner (QSR International, 2012). Initially, the data were transcribed and prepared for analysis. Subsequently, the transcripts were uploaded into the NVivo program and reviewed multiple times to capture the participants' general ideas. A detailed analysis followed, involving the organization of data into codes. Throughout the iterative coding process, some codes were merged, and others were reorganized as sub-codes. To ensure inter-rater reliability, an external code check was conducted by another researcher, examining 10% of the data and recoding it. Identified similarities and discrepancies led to revisions of the original codes. Upon finalizing the revised list of codes, a second-level coding (Dörnyei, 2007) was implemented by recoding the original transcripts according to the new codes. Following this step, codes were grouped into categories, and themes were defined. In the final stage, conclusions were drawn by making inferences and interpretations, specifying relationships between categories, and revealing patterns.

3.8. *Trustworthiness*

To ensure the trustworthiness of the current research, data triangulation was employed. Data triangulation, aiming to enhance the credibility of the ongoing investigation (Golafshani, 2003), involved the inclusion of different participant groups—both instructors and students.

The interview questions, developed based on existing literature, underwent scrutiny by three experts in the field of ELT. Furthermore, to ensure inter-rater reliability, the coding process was jointly conducted by two researchers who collaborated to establish agreement on the coding methodology. Each of these stages collectively contributed to fostering the credibility of the current research.

4. Results

4.1. Instructors' views towards the affordances of online language education

The advantages of online language education that have been addressed by the instructors are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Instructors' views towards affordances of online language education

No	Categories	frequency
1	Time and place flexibility	6
2	Permanent record of lectures	5
3	Being comfortable	5
4	Technology enhanced lectures	4
5	Accessibility	3
6	Professional development	3
7	Reduced social pressure	3
8	Less distraction	3
9	Being economical	2
10	Accessing more information	2
11	Learner autonomy	2
12	Individual development	1

Detailed information pertaining to these categories is presented below, accompanied by relevant descriptions and quotes.

1. Time and place flexibility

The majority of the instructors indicated that teaching online provides time and place flexibility for teaching and learning. Both instructors and students can participate in online classes from different places.

I1: It offers location flexibility if you have internet access, camera and microphone. You can teach at home.

I3: Internet is mobile technology and it offers people freedom of movement.

2. Permanent record of lectures

A lot of instructors emphasized the importance of having a permanent record of lectures, as it allows students to listen to or review them at their convenience.

I2: Students can revisit topics they missed or did not understand, and even review the material repeatedly. This provides valuable opportunities for learning, making online education a highly useful option.

I8: We can teach synchronously and asynchronously, so if a student misses a class, s/he can watch it several times, which is a very good opportunity.

3. Being comfortable

Most of the instructors expressed that online education offers a comfortable environment for both instructors and students.

I4: I am comfortable... I am at my own home and it is good. For example, I can give two minutes break and take one glass of water. I think it is also good for students.

I2: In traditional classes, teaching English is tiring but in online classes, you can teach while sitting. It is not a problem if you eat or drink something. It is the same situation with students; they can wear anything and eat, drink, or lie down while listening.

4. Technology enhanced lectures

Some of the instructors pointed out that technology can be more readily incorporated into online teaching compared to traditional classroom settings.

I1: We cannot use certain technologies in traditional classes. I mean, having students watch a video or listen to something is limited in traditional classes. But through technology, we can do it quite easily. For example, we can show them a video by putting a link on the system instantly, but it is impossible in a traditional class.

5. Accessibility

Another addressed advantage of online education is its accessibility for a wider range of students, including those who are geographically remote, have physical disabilities, or have other commitments that make attending traditional classes difficult.

I8: I have a positive attitude towards online education. I believe it can be very beneficial for individuals facing obstacles and can also reach a larger audience.

I6: I think online education is advantageous for people with disabilities or illnesses who are unable to attend school in person.

6. Professional development

Some instructors mentioned that online education can contribute to professional development of the instructors by offering a different teaching experience and opportunities to learn about LMSs and technology integration into their lessons.

I4: Teaching on this platform has been beneficial for me in terms of gaining new experiences and establishing a foundation for future work.

7. Reduced social pressure

Some of the instructors stated that, in a traditional classroom, some students might feel social pressure to comply with the behavior of their classmates. In online classes, there is a reduced social pressure which can be beneficial for some students who may feel more comfortable expressing their opinions or asking questions.

I2: I think the participation is higher compared to F2F classes. There are lots of distractions in F2F classes. For example, there are many students around and someone might say something wrong or mispronounce something and then feel embarrassed or think that others will make fun of them. But there are no such concerns on this platform. Students can give answer without feeling uneasy.

8. Less Distraction

A few instructors indicated that in a traditional classroom setting, there can be many interruptions that disrupt the learning process, such as other students talking, outside noise, or interruptions from other classes. With online education, students can control their environment and minimize these types of interruptions.

I4: In traditional classes, distractions such as classmates or mobile phones can cause students to miss important points or feel bored, leading to a lack of engagement. However, in online education, students have the flexibility to listen to the lesson at their own pace and convenience. They can revisit topics they missed or did not understand, and even review the material repeatedly. This provides valuable opportunities for learning, making online education a highly useful option.

9. Being economical

Two of the instructors mentioned that the opportunity to teach or listen to lectures anywhere is more economical than meeting in a classroom, as it reduces transportation costs.

I2: I believe that online education reduces costs, which is an important consideration. It is more economical for both students and the state. Students no longer need to pay for transportation expenses, as they can participate in lessons from the comfort of their homes or any location of their choice.

10. Accessing more information

Furthermore, it was emphasized that students have easy access to technology, enabling them to efficiently reach and compare a vast amount of information.

I3: As students are in front of the computer during classes, there is an opportunity of accessing more information easily.

11. Learner Autonomy

Some instructors mentioned that online education fosters individualized learning and learner autonomy, which aligns with the expected profile for 21st-century learners.

I2: In distance education, students are required to take responsibility for their own learning. As an instructor, I don't have to guide them every step of the way. It is expected that students follow the course independently, fostering autonomy, which is a fundamental aspect of lifelong learning. The goal is to cultivate students who can make informed choices, take ownership of their learning responsibilities, and actively strive towards self-directed learning. In this regard, I believe that distance education significantly contributes to achieving this aim.

12. Individual development

One instructor stated that online education is good for individual development of students.

I8: I think that distance education gives students a different culture. In other words, they can take courses on any subject to improve themselves.

4.2. Instructors' views towards the challenges of online language education

When the instructors were asked about the drawbacks of online language education, numerous challenges were pointed out within the existing online education system. These challenges are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Instructors' views towards the challenges of online language education

No	Categories	frequency
1	Teaching language skills	8
2	Using language teaching methods	8
3	Lack of interaction and communication	7
4	Poorness of technical infrastructure	7
5	Lack of attendance and participation	7
6	Lack of readiness	6
7	Poorness of teacher training	6
8	Ethical concerns	5
9	Difficulty of giving and getting feedback	5
10	High class sizes	4
11	Lack of material infrastructure	4
12	Difficulty of monitoring student progress	3
13	Student profile	3
14	Extra Workload	2
15	Neglected pedagogical aspect	2

Detailed description about these categories is presented below, accompanied by relevant quotations:

1. Teaching language skills

All of the instructors expressed that online platform poses challenges for teaching English language skills. They stated that, with the current LMS, the instructors cannot see or hear students' voices; only the students can see and hear the instructors. As there is only written interaction, the instructors cannot teach or assess speaking skills.

I5: As instructors, we rely solely on written responses, which means we are unable to assess or provide feedback on students' speaking and pronunciation skills.

The instructors think that teaching and assessing writing skills is also not practical.

I8: When we give students assignments, such as describing their rooms, it becomes quite challenging to evaluate and provide feedback after they write and submit their work online. However, when they write it on paper and hand it to us, the process of evaluation becomes much easier and more practical.

I6: In online education, we can neither make students speak nor write. Thus, it is not suitable for teaching productive skills.

Moreover, they mentioned that teaching reading and listening skills in an online classroom is quite challenging because of the copyright issues.

I6: We cannot use reading and listening activities of the course book, it is a real inconvenience for us. Authentic materials need to be used in language education, but when you prepare it, I mean when you speak and record your own voice, it is not authentic. Therefore, it is not appropriate for language teaching.

2. Using language teaching methods

All of the instructors underlined that they cannot use most of the ELT methods and techniques in online classes compared to F2F classes. For example, they cannot use communicative methods as there is limited interaction, so they can only use "Grammar Translation Method" (GTM) while teaching.

I1: Language teaching methods and techniques that we use in traditional classes are not valid for distance education. We normally use eclectic method according to flow of the lesson. However, in online classes, we cannot observe the flow of the lesson. Therefore, we teach everything by using GTM.

The instructors also acknowledged the limitations of the techniques they can employ in online classes. While they utilize diverse techniques and activities such as group work, pair work, and discussions in F2F classes, they cannot effectively use them in online classes.

I8: In F2F classes, using dialogues, pair work, and group work is an efficient way of teaching a language. However, such methods are not feasible in distance education.

I3: In online classes we do not have opportunity of using different activities. We only use question-answer technique.

I1: If we are provided with fully equipped computer systems where we can hear students and vice versa, where students can interact with each other, peer learning may be possible. There's something called pair work or group work in language education. We can't do this in online classes.

3. Lack of interaction and communication

The majority of instructors stressed the lack of teacher and peer interactions in online education. They highlighted that the current LMS lacks features that facilitate audiovisual and two-way interaction. Therefore, the predominant mode of interaction is mostly one-way, with the instructor doing the majority of the speaking.

I1: I strongly believe that F2F interaction is essential in language teaching. Despite our efforts to foster interaction, it is impossible to fully achieve it from a distance. Moreover, interactions among students are also vital, so I think there should not be distance but F2F education.

I4: In language teaching, interactivity plays a vital role. It involves techniques such as standing beside students, encouraging them to speak English, and engaging in dialogues together. However, these interactive approaches are not feasible in distance education.

Most of the instructors indicated that, due to the lack of interaction and communication, it is difficult to gauge whether the students are engaged in the lecture or not.

I6: I think online language teaching is not appropriate. Because language teaching requires interaction and F2F communication, but we cannot achieve this in online education. I also want to see the reactions of the students while teaching, but I can't...

I1: We are unable to interact or communicate effectively with students, which hampers our ability to receive feedback and gauge our progress during lessons.

4. Poorness of technical infrastructure

The instructors emphasized that the technical infrastructure of the university has a negative impact on the online teaching experience. They highlighted that the existing LMS does not facilitate audiovisual interaction. Therefore, it has been demanded that improvements should be made to the infrastructure of the online platform, particularly enabling video-conferencing capabilities.

I4: You can't gauge whether students are actively following the class ... because students do not have a chance to talk back. Each student has to push a button to talk. Maybe we should change the platform we are using. Or make it more interactive. Like video conferencing. They will see me teaching but they will be free to talk when they want. It's not possible with the current system.

They also mentioned that the university's internet infrastructure is inadequate, leading to frequent connection problems.

I3: I encountered difficulties a couple of times due to the internet. The internet speed should be improved. I am not familiar with the technical aspects, but sometimes, when we are all online, we experience issues with sound or video.

I8: Once, my voice was not transmitted to the other party (the students) while I was speaking. Therefore, even though I had taught the course, it had to be canceled. This was a waste of time, and I had to re-record the lesson.

Furthermore, they expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of well-equipped computers and their need for such equipment.

I4: This computer in our office is very old and does not work. That's why I have to carry my own computer every day. However, I cannot carry a large computer because I have a herniated disc problem. My colleagues also have such problems. Perhaps every third faculty member in an office could be provided with a well-equipped computer. This is really important.

5. Lack of attendance and participation

The instructors underscored that attendance and participation rates in online education is very low. They said that in F2F courses, it is much easier to check attendance and participation. However, in online courses, it is difficult to understand whether the students follow the lecture or not.

I3: Most of the time, the attendance was low, and there were instances when I ended up teaching zero students. Can you imagine how challenging it is to deliver a lesson to an empty class?

I6: I have doubts as to whether the students logging into the system are really there. I have 40-50 students normally, but only 3-4 students participate in the lessons.

I4: I think it is a loss... I mean, in my first lesson, I had 35-40 students. Then the number started to decrease. For example, only 3 students attended the class yesterday.

6. Lack of readiness

The instructors stated that both the instructors and students are not ready for online education. They indicated that they lack knowledge and skills for teaching English online.

I4: Before teaching online, I had a very positive attitude towards integrating technology into lessons. However, after starting to teach online, I realized that our in-service training is not sufficient and students need to be educated too. I think, as the School of Foreign Languages, our transition to online education has been very fast.

I6: Instructors who teach online need to use technology effectively, but I do not think I am competent enough for using technology effectively.

I3: I do not prepare materials because I do not have enough knowledge related to it. If I prepared materials, I am sure they would be terrible...We should integrate technology in our courses. Can we do it through? No. We lack knowledge and skills.

The instructors asserted that students also lack familiarity with the online platform and do not have online education culture yet. Therefore, they do not know their responsibilities.

I3: Students must know they are going to take online education and prepare themselves for it. (...) Students do not have online education culture and developing online education culture take years, not one or two years.

7. Poorness of teacher training

The instructors stressed that the training they received for online teaching was inadequate in terms of developing their proficiency in utilizing LMS, integrating technology, and creating online educational materials.

I1: As we have only recently started online education, we are facing numerous challenges in terms of materials and technical equipment. Furthermore, as teachers, our competencies are not yet sufficient. If we receive more professional guidance and ongoing support, the success of online education could improve significantly.

I4: As I think that the training was not sufficient, I also feel myself incompetent.

They also expressed dissatisfaction with the online training method, believing it to be ineffective. They mentioned a preference for continuous and hands-on trainings, which they consider to be more practical and efficient.

I6: We took the training given by UZEM, but it was also from a distance. As I can learn better by doing, I would prefer this training was given F2F.

I1: I wish the training wasn't online. It would be helpful to have in-service training on how to find technological tools and use them properly. Since technology is ever-changing, I also wish there was something that continuously keeps us informed.

One instructor suggested the training to be given in the form of multiple workshops with smaller groups.

I7: UZEM should improve its current training program and offer workshops specifically designed for smaller, micro groups. I believe it would be beneficial if they organized 3-4 workshops per year to address the needs and challenges of instructors in utilizing online teaching effectively.

8. Ethical concerns

Numerous instructors voiced their struggles with generating online materials, utilizing web-based tools and websites, all stemming from ethical concerns. This issue has a negative impact on the effectiveness of their teaching.

I1: Due to various reasons, we are unable to upload materials to the system. Copyright is the most significant factor as we cannot copy content from the internet and paste it into the system. Consequently, we rely on exercises provided in our course book.

I6: In distance language education, I am unable to use authentic materials as I have been informed that it is illegal to utilize someone else's listening or reading materials from the internet.

9. Difficulty of giving and getting feedback

Most of the instructors emphasized the difficulty of obtaining feedback from students during online teaching. As a result, it becomes challenging to understand whether students are actively engaged with the lesson or not.

I1: We cannot interact or communicate with students; we cannot get feedback, so we cannot observe our progress during the lessons (...) We suppose students are following the lesson, but when we ask something, we cannot get an answer except one or two students.

Some of the instructors highlighted the importance of nonverbal cues to assess comprehension. However, as they cannot see the students' faces, it is very challenging.

I4: I want to get feedback from students, I want to see the output; I mean, I want to hear their voices, see their gestures, and body movements. It may be hard in an online platform but I know there are platforms that we can do this.

I6: I think online language teaching is not appropriate. Because language teaching requires interaction and F2F communication, but we cannot achieve this in online education. I also want to see the reactions of the students while teaching, but I can't...

The instructors also argued that providing feedback to students in online classes is not practical.

I8: When we assign students, like describing their room, after they write and send their writings, evaluating them and giving feedback is very hard. But when they write it on a paper and give it to us, evaluating them is much easier and practical.

10. High class sizes

The instructors complained that having a large number of students in some classes is not efficient for language teaching. They stated that effectively interacting with a large number of students in an online environment is challenging.

I1: As our classes are too crowded, it's not possible to interact from a distance.

I7: Class size is too high; I have 167 students. Ideal number for language teaching is between 6 and 12 in the world.

Moreover, they noted the difficulty of learning about such a large number of students' needs and characteristics taking their attention, and motivating them.

I7: How can I motivate 167 students who have different characteristics? It is out of question.

High class size also affects assigning and checking homework negatively.

I5: Considering the large class size, with 60-70 students, you may contemplate assigning homework to engage them. However, the challenge lies in effectively controlling and managing such a large number of students.

11. Lack of material infrastructure

The instructors delivered that material infrastructure for the university is also not adequate for an efficient teaching.

I3: I can't use brain storming in online classes. Can't use constructivist or problem-based methods ... I need a serious material support to do that. Cartoons, videos, etc. Students can watch videos, and are then led to discussions.

I6: I use materials which our material design team prepared, but those materials are not sufficient enough.

I1: We have material design team; they upload materials to the system. But they are not good enough for teaching the topic.

The instructors underscored the need for improvement in the material infrastructure. They argued that the content and materials should be prepared by professional material designers rather than instructors.

I1: We must have a well-planned, professional content and material infrastructure. We currently have a content team of 5-6 instructors, they prepare materials for certain weeks and upload them to the system. But this is not sufficient. There should be a more professional team and online materials should be of high quality.

12. Difficulty of monitoring student progress

A number of instructors declared that the LMS that they use is not sufficient enough for following student progress after the lesson.

I7: The main objective after the lesson is to monitor student progress. In an ideal LMS, you can see the progress of each student; which exercises they did, how many right or wrong answers they give to the questions, their strengths or weakness etc. Currently, the system we use is not suitable for following student progress after lesson. You cannot know what student does after lesson. In distance education, normally, you can give assignments and take them back, but it is not possible in this system.

13. Student profile

Several instructors stated that the difficulties of online education also arise from the student profile. They indicated that some students are not motivated enough to learn English, and some have low English proficiency levels. For this reason, instructors think that it is more difficult to motivate them and involve them in online lessons.

I3: I believe that distance education can only be beneficial for highly motivated students with a specific purpose, such as students preparing for language proficiency exams. I think it is very inefficient for students who do not have a certain level of English.

It was also articulated that online learning requires autonomous learners, but their students lack autonomy.

I2: There may be problems arising from the student profile. Our students are accustomed to being led. In other words, our students only fulfill their responsibilities under the guidance of the teacher.

14. Extra Workload

Some of the instructors delivered that online teaching increases their workload as it requires extra preparation.

I6: Online education seems to diminish the instructor's workload, but it means extra concern, stress and workload for me; because I feel I always need to be well-prepared.

I3: Online education is considered making things easier, but I think it does not, except saving time.

15. Neglected pedagogical aspect

Lastly, some instructors argued that pedagogical aspect is ignored in the current online teaching practice. They think the university administration considers the Basic English course as less important compared to other courses, therefore, such 'less important' courses can be given online.

I3: In Turkey, online education is regarded as fewer institution, educators, technologists, and less employment and paperwork... This is what neo-liberal policies impose. Therefore, I think the educational aspect is completely overlooked.

I6: In my opinion, distance education is often used for courses that are perceived as unnecessary. It seems that we have already acknowledged student failure through the use of this method.

4.3. Students' views towards the affordances of online language education

The advantages of online language education that have been indicated by students are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Students' views towards the affordances of online language education

No	Categories	frequency
1	Time and place flexibility	6
2	Permanent record of lectures	6
3	Being comfortable	6
4	Technology enhanced lectures	5
5	Accessing more information	2
6	Reduced social pressure	1
7	Less distraction	1
8	Individual development	1

Below, you will find in-depth information about these categories, along with pertinent quotations:

1. Time and place flexibility

The majority of students expressed that online education provides time and place flexibility.

S1: I don't lose time in online education by going to school; I can attend classes at home and learn something.

S7: Its positive side is you don't have to get prepared for the school. You wake up, turn on the computer and then directly log onto the system and listen to the lesson.

2. Permanent record of lectures

Most of the students emphasized the importance of permanent record of lectures as it allows students to listen to or review them whenever they want.

S8: The best aspect of online education is ... the opportunity of listening to the course whenever we want. In a F2F class, you have to listen to lesson at that day and take notes. But in distance education, even if you don't listen to the lesson, you can watch it later. From this aspect, it is quite useful.

3. Being comfortable

A lot of students voiced that they can attend classes from their homes or dorms which is more comfortable for them. They do not have to get dressed, can listen to course by lying down, or adjust the voice according to their wishes.

S2: There is order in the traditional classroom, but not in distance education. As you are at home, you feel more comfortable. The lesson can be listened to by sitting or lying down.

S4: Its positive side is that students can behave as they wish. They can put on a headphone or use loudspeaker. I stay at dormitory; I can listen to lesson from my bed.

4. Technology enhanced lectures

Many students pointed out that, the instructors are more likely to integrate technology in their lectures in online education.

S2: Its advantage is ... for example, today our teacher opened a website and teach lesson by showing it. In traditional classes, he does not do this; he always uses the course book.

5. Accessing more information

Some students indicated that in online classes, students can reach technology and utilize it for learning aims in a much easier way than traditional classes.

S1: When the teacher is lecturing, you can open google translate and translate something, (...) more tools are available, so it is convenient.

6. Reduced social pressure

One student mentioned that in a traditional classroom setting, there can be social pressure to conform to the behavior of peers. In contrast, online education can offer a more comfortable and relaxed learning environment, enabling students to express their opinions or ask questions without feeling the same peer pressure.

S8: In F2F classes, shyness can be a factor. For instance, our class is composed of students from both Vocational High School and Anatolian High School, which results in differing levels of English proficiency between the two groups. For example, I have a strong command of English; I am only taking this course to improve my GPA (Grade Point Average). Conversely, some of my friends attend the class due to their limited English proficiency. In F2F classes, when the teacher asks a question, they may feel hesitant to give the wrong answer. Likewise, when the teacher poses a question, I am hesitant to respond, as I want to avoid offending my friends or appearing boastful. I think online education eliminates this problem, as we feel more comfortable expressing ourselves.

7. Less Distraction

One student uttered that online education diminishes distractions for students, as there are no other students around who may disturb the flow of the lesson.

S3: In a traditional class, the most disturbing thing is that when a student speaks, it ruins the flow of the lesson. In distance education, there is no one around who will disturb you. It is okay if anyone doesn't want to listen to the lesson, but the one who really wants to listen will be able to without being distracted.

8. Individual development

Lastly, one student indicated that online education is a good option for individual development of students.

S6: I think the university should allow its students to access all online classes for individual development. For example, online German or French language courses can be made available to all students. It wouldn't be a mandatory course; only those who really wish to learn would participate. I believe it would be a beneficial initiative.

4.4. Students' views towards the challenges of online education

When the students were queried about the disadvantages of online language education, most of them indicated that there are a lot of challenges in the current online education system, which are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6. Students' views towards the challenges of online language education

No	Categories	frequency
1	Lack of interaction and communication	6
2	Lack of attendance and participation	6
3	Poorness of technical infrastructure	5
4	Lack of readiness	5
5	Student profile	4
6	Difficulty of getting feedback	3
7	More distraction	2
8	Neglected pedagogical aspect	1

Below are detailed explanations of these categories and relevant quotes:

1. Lack of interaction and communication

Majority of the students asserted that online platform creates interaction problems. They underscored the importance of visual and oral communication in education. Conversely, they noted that the lack of visibility and auditory cues from their peers restricts interaction to text-based chat, thereby diminishing the efficiency of the lessons.

S3: I think there should be always eye-contact between the instructor and the learner because eye-contact affects people. You can understand how people feel from their facial expressions. It is the same for the instructor. If the instructor is an effective speaker, online education is a disadvantage for him/her, because there is no one-to-one interaction. (...) Visual interaction is very important. There is a difference between listening to somebody one-to-one or from two-dimensional environment.

S2: You cannot easily ask questions as you would in F2F education. When you encounter something you don't understand, you ask by writing. Yet, it is not as effective as in F2F interactions.

Some students indicated that even their instructor does not open the camera; they can only hear the teacher's voice, which decreases their success.

S5: I think it [distance education] is incorrect; because we cannot participate in the lessons actively. We can participate through computers and we cannot see the teacher,

make interaction, and the teacher cannot show us something. My GPA has decreased because of this.

2. Lack of attendance and participation

Most of the students stated that they do not attend or participate in the online classes. As the instructor does not see them, they only log into the system to seem to be attending; but later they leave.

S3: Students think that “teacher doesn’t see me, so I can do whatever I want”, and they log onto the system, but they do not listen.

S7: What we do in distance education is log in to the system and leave. If we need to fill in something, we do it, and before the exam, we memorize them a little bit.

3. Poorness of technical infrastructure

Numerous students addressed challenges which arise from technical infrastructure, including poorness of internet connection and technical equipment.

S5: For instance, our connection to the online system could not be established due to audio system problems. They fixed it later, but we started the lesson one hour later.

S6: There were numerous audio problems and delays. (...) Particularly when connecting from home, I consistently experienced voice interruptions, causing a delay in what I was hearing.

Some of the students asserted that technical and internet infrastructure needs to be improved.

S4: I think that the university’s Wi-Fi system should be improved; it frequently freezes when we are online. I have been experiencing this issue for 1.5 years. (...) Those headphones in UZEM are too old and need to be changed. Most of them are broken. All students suffer from it.

S6: Internet connection should be bettered.

4. Lack of readiness

A lot of the students stated that both the instructors and students are not adequately prepared for online education. They indicated that the instructors lack sufficient knowledge and skills for teaching English online.

S7: I think it would be better if the lessons were conducted F2F. Because distance education occurs in a digital environment and most of our teachers don’t know using computer at all. So, there are lots of disconnections, and we cannot understand anything.

S8: Definitely s/he should know how to use computer. Our first lesson was unsuccessful because when our teacher was writing on the board 2, we were seeing board 1. Therefore, we had to do the lesson again.

The students highlighted the need for training online instructors in the effective utilization of LMS and technology within online classes.

S7: I think computer training must be given for instructors who will teach online.

S8: I think it would be better if the instructors were given training before teaching online.

It was also noted that students are not accustomed to learning on an online platform, which leads to difficulties in understanding the lesson.

S6: We try to do something online that we cannot do F2F. This is extra tiring, extra unaccustomed situation... We experience difficulties of this.

Some students argue that online courses should be optional, allowing students to choose whether they want to participate in online lessons or not.

S6: I think students should be asked if they want to take online education or not, because each student has a different learning type.

5. Student profile

The student profile also poses challenges for online learning. For example, some students have mentioned that their English skills are not at a satisfactory level. Given that they already encounter difficulties learning English in F2F classes, they are uncertain about their ability to effectively learn the language through online education.

S7: My English lessons so far have not been efficient for me. (...) My English level is low, maybe this inefficiency stems from me.

S5: I think it is not efficient ... because I do not know English at all. How can I learn something remotely that I struggle to learn in a classroom setting? If the teacher doesn't interact with me F2F, I find it difficult to learn.

Another challenge is the students' low motivation to learn English.

S5: My department is Physical Education, what is the point for me to learn English? I have to take this course because it is compulsory.

6. Difficulty of getting feedback

Some students pointed out that, as their instructors cannot receive audiovisual feedback from them, it becomes challenging for the instructors to assess whether the students comprehend the topic or not.

S2: The teacher continues lecturing as s/he cannot know if we understand the topic or not because s/he cannot see our faces. As there is no eye contact, I think something is missing.

S3: I think there should be always eye-contact between the instructor and the learner... You can understand how people feel from their facial expressions. Online education is a disadvantage for the instructor, because there is no one-to-one interaction.

7. More distraction

A few students mentioned that they often become easily distracted during distance education, as they find various activities to engage in at home or on the Internet.

S8: In traditional classes, you have to listen to the course as there is an authority. You cannot deal with your telephone, or your environment. However, in distance education, I turn on the computer but the things around me can affect me. Simply, I open another tab from the internet and look other websites.

8. Neglected pedagogical aspect

One student has a perspective that distance education is associated with unimportant courses, indicating a concern about the pedagogical quality or focus of such courses.

S3: For me, distance education should not be done; I think it is nonsense. ... Because I think distance education is used for unimportant courses.

5. Discussion

5.1. Affordances of Online Language Education

Among the advantages cited by both instructors and students, the flexibility of time and place stands out. This flexibility empowers students and instructors to engage in virtual classes from any location and at their convenience, allowing them to set their own pace and schedule. Such flexibility enables students to access lessons and course materials when they are most alert and focused, all while accommodating other responsibilities such as work, family, and personal commitments. In alignment with this discovery, various studies examining the perspectives of university students (Coldwell et al., 2006; Yamagata-Lynch, 2014) and instructors (Avcıoğlu & Altay, 2022; McKenzie et al., 2000) have consistently found that online education provides a flexible teaching and learning environment. Braun (2008) similarly concludes that the flexibility offered is a pivotal factor influencing students' preferences for online courses. Valenta et al. (2001) assert that online learning and teaching afford the convenience of determining when and where tasks are completed, leading to increased information exchange among participants. According to some researchers, this flexibility saves time and energy (Kuru Gönen, 2019; Lehman & Conceição, 2010; Taghizadeh & Basirat, 2022).

The findings of this study underscore the paramount importance of the permanent record of lectures which allows access to video recordings and course materials anytime. Thanks to this feature, the students have opportunity to review lectures anytime and as many times as they want. Similarly, in large number of studies, recordability of the lessons for future use and accessibility to course materials were perceived as one of the most beneficial aspects of online learning (Avcıoğlu & Altay, 2022; Coldwell et al., 2016; Conrad & Pedro, 2009). In a related study, König et al. (2020) discovered that the availability of tutorials and computer technology in schools was highly predictive of maintaining social contact, providing online lessons, and supporting task differentiation.

Several instructors have pointed out that the flexibility to teach or attend lectures from any location is not only convenient but also cost-effective when compared to traditional in-person classroom meetings. This approach allows participants to avoid many expenses such as travel, accommodation, and dining costs. By the same token, various researchers have underscored

the financial benefits of online education, highlighting its capacity to reduce costs and enhance accessibility to education (Abrami et al., 2012; Avcıoğlu & Altay, 2022; Lehman and Conceição, 2010; Taplin et al., 2013).

Some instructors have highlighted that online education increases accessibility for a wider range of students, including those who are geographically remote, have physical disabilities, or have other commitments that make attending traditional classes difficult. Ghirardini (2011) supports this perspective by affirming that online education becomes an attractive option when students have limited mobility. Correspondingly, institutions like Illinois University (ION) stress the advantages of online education, where disabilities do not present a barrier, and learners can enjoy the freedom to study at their convenience and pace. Lehman and Conceição (2010) further argue that online education effectively eradicates geographical boundaries by enabling interaction from diverse locations.

Another frequently indicated advantage of online education is that it creates a comfortable environment not only for the students but also for the instructors. Students have emphasized the flexibility to participate in courses by lying down, using either headphones or speakers, and wearing casual attire that ensures their comfort. Instructors also acknowledged that they enjoy the comfort of teaching from their own homes, where they can easily have refreshments and wear cozy clothing. Additionally, in contrast to traditional classroom settings where instructors often stand or move around during teaching, online classes allow them to conduct lessons while seated, which is less physically taxing. This finding is substantiated by earlier studies on distance English language teaching (Avcıoğlu & Altay, 2022) and learning (Nurgroho & Atmojo, 2020), all highlighting the increased convenience offered by online education.

In this study, both of the instructors and students indicated that technology can be more readily incorporated into online teaching compared to F2F classroom settings. This affordance stands out as a widely recognized advantage, well-documented in the literature. For instance, Nurgroho and Atmojo (2020) found that usage of different digital technologies such as Youtube, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Google Classroom were very useful in terms of conducting teaching/learning activities such as teaching the content, giving assignments, delivering materials, giving feedback and evaluating the students. A substantial body of research further supports the idea that distance language teaching offers integration of online learning tools and technologies and technology can be used more innovatively (Avcıoğlu & Altay, 2022; Conrad & Pedro, 2009; Falloon, 2012; McKenzie et al., 2000).

Kassop (2003) asserts that online approaches play a pivotal role in enhancing the technological literacy and promoting the professional development of faculty members. This assertion finds support in the experiences of both instructors and students participating in online education. Through online education, they have the opportunity to cultivate their technological skills, such as using the LMS, file sharing, and other ICT tools. Moreover, the instructors have stated that teaching on an online platform contributes to their professional development, as they have a chance to learn about using LMS and integrating technology into their teaching. Consistent with this outcome, Conrad and Pedro (2009) have likewise revealed that university teachers have acknowledged the substantial contribution of online teaching to

their professional development as it enables them to employ technology in more innovative ways to address the needs of distance learners.

Some instructors and students have highlighted the advantages of online education, particularly the possibility to access and compare a vast amount of information. Coldwell et al. (2006) support this observation, as their research indicates that university students perceive a greater variety of resources in online learning when compared to F2F education. Similarly, in another study, the availability of diverse information sources was identified as one of the factors promoting students' success in online language learning (Taghizadeh & Basirat, 2022).

Some of the instructors and students believe that there is a reduced social pressure in online classes, compared to traditional classrooms. They argue that students feel more at ease expressing their opinions and asking questions in an online setting because they are less likely to feel uneasy or embarrassed, without the pressure of social expectations. Another student has stated that there are fewer interruptions in online education such as other students talking, external noise, or disruptions from other classes. As a result, students can better control their environment and experience fewer distractions during online education. However, it's worth noting that in another study, instructors have expressed a contrasting view, suggesting that students can be easily distracted at home (Avcıoğlu & Altay, 2022).

A few instructors have underscored that online education fosters learner autonomy as the students have more control over their own learning and can tailor their coursework to their own learning style and pace. It is thought that, compared to traditional education, students are expected to take more responsibility for their learning in online learning. Simonson et al. (2008) also verify that online education promotes student autonomy as students can study according to their own paces. Additionally, in Taghizadeh and Basirat's (2022) study, students indicate that online education promotes self-regulation. It was further highlighted that thanks to online education, students can take courses on any topic according to their wishes, which contributes to their individual development. Affirming this perspective, Singh et al., (2005) maintain that online education offers a framework for students to acquire the skills needed to be self-directed and independent learners, helping them to become lifelong learners.

5.2. Challenges of Online Language Education

Although the participants accept some of the affordances provided by online education, most of them think that there are further disadvantages, which makes them feel negative about online teaching or learning. According to the findings, it can be deduced that mainly technical, pedagogical and attitudinal challenges impinge on the perspectives of the participants and the success of online education.

The findings predominantly center on concerns regarding the university's technical infrastructure, encompassing issues related to the inadequacy of the LMS, internet connection problems, and the deficiency of technical equipment. Notably, participants voiced dissatisfaction with the current LMS, highlighting its perceived limitation in supporting visual and spoken interactions. However, it is worth noting that the LMS is, in fact, capable of facilitating such interactions. This discrepancy underscores the potential need for enhanced instructor training on the effective utilization of the LMS. The instructors' limited awareness

of the LMS's capabilities appeared to contribute to their negative assessments of its impact on various aspects, including interaction and communication, student engagement, the exchange of feedback, and the monitoring of student progress. In reference to this matter, Cooper (2000) highlights that establishing and maintaining a successful online education program is a demanding task, with factors like the school's technological infrastructure, the expertise of online faculty, and the support system for addressing computer-related issues significantly influencing its success (as cited in Muirhead, 2002).

The study brought to light significant issues related to the insufficiency of internet infrastructure and frequent internet disconnections. Furthermore, participants voiced their concerns about the university's limited technical equipment. Instructors noted the antiquated and non-functional state of the computers available in their rooms, while students expressed dissatisfaction with the outdated and malfunctioning headphones within the university's UZEM system. This finding aligns with prior research in diverse educational contexts. Turkish university teachers, for instance, raised similar concerns, highlighting disparities in students' technical conditions, such as internet access and computer availability. They also pointed out that the poor quality of internet connections during online education can detrimentally affect the quality of the educational experience (Avcıoğlu & Altay, 2022). Likewise, pre-service EFL teachers in Iran reported equipment-related challenges, including insufficient software and hardware resources, along with the additional hurdles of unstable and slow internet connections during online education (Taghizadeh & Basirat, 2022). Moreover, online university students in Australia identified their challenges, which encompass system outages, technical difficulties, and lack of suitable access to internet connection (Coldwell et al., 2006). This shows us how difficult it is to sustain a quality distance education program unless there is sufficient technical equipment and internet infrastructure.

Findings revealed that both instructors and students face interaction and communication difficulties. Participants indicated that, because of the absence of audiovisual interaction, communication is primarily confined to chat and there is mostly one-way (teacher to student) interaction. As a result, asking and answering questions, giving and getting feedback, monitoring student progress are all very challenging. Another significant issue highlighted by students concerns instructors who do not open their webcams during online lessons, which has a detrimental effect on student motivation and engagement. Similar to our results, in vast number of studies, online instructors and learners indicated main drawbacks of online learning as limited interaction, communication problems, and delayed feedback (Avcıoğlu & Altay, 2022; Coldwell et al., 2006; Conrad & Pedro, 2009; Taghizadeh & Basirat, 2022). The participants prefer classrooms that support a variety of communication tools and two-way exchange, allowing for more verbal interaction (Falloon, 2012).

Some of the instructors complained about the lack of visual and contextual elements while teaching. They have indicated that nonverbal cues like nodding head or displaying skepticism is very important for assessing comprehension. However, as they cannot see the students' faces, monitoring their learning becomes very challenging. In alignment with this, Taghizadeh and Basirat (2022) also revealed that pre-service EFL teachers in Iran find absence of tone of voice, body language, and nonverbal communication clues as challenging in online education.

Likewise, Wang (2004) emphasized the importance of nonverbal cues in the language learning environment, stating that they are useful for creating an authentic environment, simulating real-life situations, and reducing isolation and anxiety. White (2003) suggests that, in the absence of paralinguistic clues, language instructors should stimulate and sustain discussions and help the group develop a sense of community.

Another difficulty stems from teaching four basic English skills in online classes. As many researchers (Hampel & Stickler, 2005; Wang, 2004) indicate, oral interaction is necessary for development of speaking and pronunciation skills in language learning. On the other hand, in online classes, speaking and pronunciation activities are considered to be impossible as there is only written communication. Hence, the participants request an improved online platform with advanced verbal-visual interaction tools. In addition, the instructors encounter difficulty of conducting listening activities because of the copyright issues. Moreover, they often perceive writing activities as less feasible in online classes due to lack of interaction and high class size. This issue resonates with the findings of other researchers (Wang, 2004; Wang & Sun, 2001), who highlight the potential limitations in fostering students' language skills in distance education, especially when communication heavily relies on written forms.

So far, the literature has highlighted that teachers' and learners' lack of knowledge and readiness hinder the quality of online teaching and learning process (Crawford, et al., 2020; Nurgroho & Atmojo, 2020). Our study supports this notion, revealing an underestimation of the preparedness of instructors and students during the transition to online education. Instructors voiced concerns about the inadequacy of their in-service training in equipping them with the necessary competencies for successful online teaching, such as utilizing LMS, integrating technology effectively, and creating online materials. This lack of preparedness not only impacts their pedagogical skills but also diminishes their overall confidence in teaching online. This is particularly noteworthy considering the proven effectiveness of various information and communication technology (ICT) tools in facilitating interaction, active participation, and permanent learning in online language classes (Subaşı et al., 2022). Nevertheless, our study indicates that many instructors refrain from using ICT tools in their lessons due to limited knowledge. Parallel to findings of our study, a large body of research has also underscored that many online teachers lack technical expertise and have inefficient online teaching skills; they find developing online courses, assuming new online roles, and keeping up with new technologies as challenging (Aydın, 2005; Kavrat, 2013; Rosell-Aquilar, 2007; Taghizadeh & Basirat, 2022). This highlights the critical need for additional professional and ongoing in-service training to help instructors overcome these challenges. Furthermore, aligning with the proposal by Mirici et al. (2022), offering a course on the effective use of technology in language teaching to teacher candidates in the ELT departments would substantially enhance their preparedness for forthcoming online teaching endeavors.

The present study has unveiled that, in addition to instructors, the students are also not ready for online learning. Results indicate that the students lack motivation towards learning English online and have different English proficiency levels. Some students indicated that they already struggle with learning English in F2F classes, and the online platform makes it more challenging. The students highlighted that the transition to online education was hasty,

describing it as an “extra unaccustomed situation”. Accordingly, it can be deduced that, the students do not have an online education culture and they need orientation for online education. Related to this issue, Coldwell et al. (2006) argue that staff should take a more proactive approach and strive to understand student needs and characteristics in order to better meet their expectations. They propose that wholly online courses should not be offered to first-year students or those new to online learning. Instead, after students have received appropriate training and orientation, wholly online courses should be made available to them.

Another major challenge for the instructors is the lack of material infrastructure required for conducting online lessons effectively. Since the School of Foreign Languages does not have a professional material design team or off-the-shelf online content, online materials are designed by a group of instructors assigned by the school management. Nevertheless, these materials often fall short of effectiveness because instructors lack the necessary competence in online material design. Instructors express their difficulties in selecting, adapting, or creating online materials, activities, and tasks, which results in increased workload and stress. Consistently, many studies have revealed that online teaching means extra workload and stress for the instructors (Briggs, 2005; Conrad & Pedro, 2009; Taghizadeh & Basirat, 2022). In line with this, Anderson et al. (2001) affirm that designing an online course is a significantly more intricate and time-consuming process compared to designing a F2F course. The instructors highlighted the imperative for enhancements in material infrastructure. They emphasized that professional material designers should be responsible for creating content and materials, shifting this responsibility away from the instructors.

Ethical concerns represent a significant barrier preventing instructors from effectively using and adapting online materials and activities. This study has revealed that many instructors have misconceptions about copyright issues, erroneously believing that they cannot utilize web sources in online teaching, including simply providing links to websites or YouTube videos. This misunderstanding limits their utilization of a wide range of online resources for instructional purposes. In this context, Simonson et al. (2008) aptly emphasize that copyright does not prohibit the use of web sources; the critical aspect is providing "appropriate credit in recognition of the authorship of the materials" (p. 201).

Simonson et al. (2008) argue that online courses demand students to assume greater responsibility for their own learning, which some students may find daunting. Corroborating this, present study has shown that, the students find it challenging to take responsibility for their own learning. They tend not to be autonomous learners and prefer more teacher guidance and assertiveness. At this point, as Coldwell et al (2006) note, the students must be helped to become more efficient and effective online learners. To ensure this, universities and educators should support students in developing self-regulated learning skills. As highlighted by Güneş (2023), students can be educated and motivated to employ self-regulated learning techniques, including establishing objectives, identifying their own learning shortcomings, seeking necessary assistance, self-monitoring, and self-evaluating.

Lastly, the study has shown that participants perceive a lack of attention and importance given to the educational aspect of online courses. They believe that the university's policy for online delivery of courses only covers courses regarded as 'less important', which decreases

their motivation. This perspective is supported by Herrington & Oliver (2000), who also found that online education is often perceived as a second-rate substitute for traditional, more-structured education. Addressing this concern, numerous researchers emphasize that online education extends beyond merely uploading information on the internet or engaging in computer-based activities (Ally, 2008; Bates, 2015; Salmon, 2004; Simonson et al., 2008). Instead, it should actively promote content and learning facilities, encourage cognitive and social interaction, facilitate efficient internet use by learners, and adapt to changing needs. Bates (2015) further emphasizes that if the design does not effectively adapt to harness the full potential of technology, the result is likely to be inferior to the traditional classroom model it is attempting to imitate.

6. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

This study set out with the aim of investigating the affordances and challenges of online teaching and learning from the point of EFL instructors and learners at a state university. The findings indicate a convergence of opinions between instructors and students regarding the advantages and disadvantages of online education. Participants view online learning positively when it provides flexibility, accessibility, comfort, effective integration of technology, cost-saving benefits, and opportunities for autonomy and individual development. On the other hand, it was remarked that the transition to online education was hasty, so neither the instructors nor students feel ready enough for this process. Consequently, online education is perceived as demanding and challenging for the participants. The challenges identified include difficulties in teaching language skills and employing language teaching methods, a lack of interaction and communication, insufficient technical and internet infrastructure, limitations of LMS, poor attendance and participation, inadequate teacher training, ethical concerns, large class sizes, insufficient online material infrastructure, low motivation and autonomy among students, increased workload for instructors, and a neglect of the pedagogical aspect. These technical, pedagogical, and attitudinal issues collectively impact the overall perception and effectiveness of online teaching and learning.

Addressing these challenges and adopting a holistic approach to online education are essential for improving the overall effectiveness and acceptance of this mode of learning. It is clear that comprehensive training, better technical infrastructure, and a reimagining of online course design are needed to ensure that online education can provide a high-quality learning experience for both instructors and students.

The findings underscore that the quality of online language education highly depends on needs analysis, careful planning, rigorous curriculum design, support systems, teacher trainings and student orientation. While designing online courses, needs and expectations of students and teachers should be taken into consideration as it is crucial for designing effective and engaging online courses. Course designers should focus on creating online courses that are not just replicas of traditional courses but are specifically designed to take advantage of the online medium. Regarding this issue, adopting a hybrid approach can help bridge the perceived gap between the two modes of education.

Universities should invest in developing robust technical and internet infrastructure that can handle online education. Ensuring the adequacy of technical equipment, including computers and headphones, is crucial for effective online education. It is imperative to guarantee that every student possesses the necessary technical tools and a reliable internet connection. Moreover, universities should use LMSs that provide sufficient audio-visual interaction and after-class follow-up. The instructors should be offered high-quality online material content, or alternatively, a dedicated and professional unit for online material preparation must be established.

The instructors should be supported through on-going faculty trainings in order to equip them with sufficient knowledge and skills for effective online instruction, using LMS and educational technology proficiently, fostering online communication and collaboration, and developing and using online teaching materials in compliance with copyright laws. These trainings can be offered through multiple workshops for smaller groups. Apart from the instructors, an orientation of students towards online education is also necessary regarding the LMS and technology utilization.

Last but not the least, universities should regularly gather feedback from both instructors and students to make necessary improvements. In case of any technical problem, there should be a technical support staff that students and teachers can contact immediately. Addressing their needs and concerns promptly can help shift their perception of online education. Importantly, instructors and students should be consulted on their preferences for online, F2F or blended modes of learning, prioritizing their input over enforcing compulsory online education.

7. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study relies on information gathered from interviews with eight instructors and eight students. Future research could employ a mixed-methods approach with larger participants. The perceptions of instructors and students were collected after they completed one or two semesters of online English courses, indicating limited online course experiences. Subsequent research may benefit from participants with more extensive online education experience. As this study reveals, there are numerous deficiencies in current online education practices. Gathering the ideas of instructors and students could be more effective after necessary improvements are made in technical and material infrastructure. A follow-up study would be beneficial, especially after providing instructors with additional training and offering students orientation.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests and Ethics

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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