

Using ICT Tools in Distant EFL Classes: The Voice of Teachers and Students

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of information technologies leads to big changes in every part of life involving the education process since they provide opportunities to accomplish various instructional goals by responding to different learning styles (Bagapova, Kobilova and Yuldasheva, 2020). Hence, it is very crucial to be aware of the impact of using ICT tools in language classes in distance education, which is becoming more common with each passing day in the pandemic period and thereafter. Thus, this study aimed to investigate the perceptions of both teachers and students about using ICT tools in synchronous or asynchronous language classes in distance education. The EFL teachers at a state university in Turkey introduced some ICT tools in distance learning during a whole educational year both in synchronous classes and asynchronously via video shares. At the end of the year, both the students and the teachers at the same university were asked to respond to an interview on the implementation of ICT tools into the language classes and their perceptions of them. The results indicated that both teachers and students had common points on the advantages of using web tools in online language classes, particularly for more active participation and permanent learning. The findings of the current study contribute to the understanding of the role of ICT tools in distant EFL classes and suggest for further studies on the relevant issue in other contexts with a wider number of participants. It is also recommended to future educators to integrate such tools into their method of teaching to develop their skills in using technology. To do so, the EFL teachers need to be introduced by recent technologies and tools and how to integrate them into their classes during their teacher training process.

Keywords: ICT Tools, EFL learning, Distant EFL Education, EFL Learners' Perceptions, EFL Teachers' Perceptions

1. INTRODUCTION

We live in an era of rapid changes and development in every field of life involving education and technology. Those two components affect each other reciprocally such that the extensive advancement of information technologies leads to considerable changes also in the education process (Biletska, Paladieva, Avchinnikova, and Kazak, 2021; Hubackova and Ruzickova, 2011). As well as its other gains, new technologies provide opportunities to achieve various educational objectives (e.g., integrated language skills, critical thinking, and cooperative skills) by responding to different learning styles (Bagapova, Kobilova, and Yuldasheva, 2020).

The fast development of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) has changed the language teaching pedagogy for all the constituents as teachers, curriculum developers, and researchers since it has made it possible to design, develop, manage, and assess the learning process (Rathore, 2011). Accelerated by those new impetuous developments in internet technologies, ICT and education have consistently strived to put the most of technology to the best pedagogical use by considering the specific needs of language learners (Trajanovic, Domazet, and Misic-Ilic, 2007). In that, they have always been attempting to find ways of utilizing ICT to be able to assist and enhance language learning (Floris, 2014; Kieu, Anh, Tran, Nga, and Ho, 2021; Qizi, 2021).

Integrating computer and multimedia technologies with language instruction paves a way for English language instructors to increase the quality of language instruction. Moreover, it helps learners to take part in their learning process by developing individual learning. In that, learners can construct their own language learning process by using related software and computer technology (Bagapova et al., 2020; Erbaş, Çipuri, and Joni, 2021). Thus, ICT

has been addressed to enhance the learners' competence to choose the best exercise, work autonomously and make connections between their work in English and other subjects (Korkmaz and Öz, 2021; Rathore, 2011).

Besides the abovementioned opportunities that the ICT provides for the language learning process, it has also made it possible to teach and learn a new language in distance education. Although foreign language teaching seemed to require only a conventional, face-to-face, teaching method until recently, now, it has been clear that the newest teaching methods along with modern technology could be successfully utilized even in language teaching. In that, distance education permits flexibility of time, place, space, and pace, for the learners who cannot be present in a face-to-face classroom unlike traditional classes (Tarchi, Brante, Jokar, and Manzari, 2022; Vorobel and Kim, 2012).

There has been a dramatic expansion of distance education in the last decade with the new opportunities in language learning being made available to new audiences throughout the world. Many teachers, researchers, and language learners have realized the potential convenience of those new opportunities and environments in distance education such as online learning, distributed learning, and blended learning (White, 2006). Therefore, this type of education has been recently adopted by many educational institutions, and it has been expanding remarkably with ICT support (Hubackova and Ruzickova, 2011).

In addition to the rapid changes and developments in technology and the opportunities it provides for language learning environments both in face-to-face and distance learning environments, it has been a must rather than a choice for language instructors to implement those facilities into their classes to the best advantage considering the current condition of the world, being through a pandemic period where most of the countries, including Turkey, have preferred distance education rather than the face-to-face one because of that Covid-19 threat. Besides all other fields of life, the COVID-19 pandemic affected educational institutions negatively since they could not carry out their work face-to-face under pandemic conditions (Karaosmanoğlu, Metinnam, Özen, and Adıgüzel, 2022). Thus, distance education in every branch has gained much popularity among researchers and syllabus designers throughout the world. For this reason, many educational institutions have begun looking for the best and newest teaching models to meet their students' needs, provide more effective learning activities, and promote a distance learning environment that motivates the students (Tayebinik and Puteh, 2012). Asghar, Barberà, and Younas (2021), quite recently, investigated the pre-service teachers' readiness and acceptance of the mobile learning technology in Pakistan during the COVID-19 pandemic and revealed that the willingness to use mobile-learning technology was significantly affected by the level of personal innovativeness, service quality, and social influence. Mobile learning has been accepted as an effective strategy in distance education in addition to computer-based technologies since learners can easily access the required information via their mobile phones. These features of mobile learning have led educators to integrate mobile learning with English teaching and learning in the distance education program (Asghar et al., 2021; Tayebinik and Puteh, 2012).

Despite the development of ICT fostering language education, there are a lot of questions in educators' minds on how to develop an effective online language course. In that, educators might be reluctant to teach online because of the absence of face-to-face communication with their students, an over-emphasis on grading, and their limited skills in technology or pedagogical strategies for online teaching (Andrade, 2015). The list of questions arises in teachers' minds on language teaching online goes on like: "Is it possible to teach an L2 or FL at a distance? What do educators need to know about the difference in context and mode of delivery? Which instructional strategies are most effective in such classes? How should language teachers develop materials and assess students in distance education classes?" (Tarchi et al., 2022; Vorobel and Kim, 2012).

Although it is evident that ICT facilitates language learning by providing opportunities for both instructors and learners, it is still uncertain how to integrate ICT into language classrooms. It is even more crucial to be aware of the impact of using ICT tools in language classes in distance education, which is becoming more common with each passing day in the pandemic period and thereafter.

This study attempts to investigate the impact of using ICT tools in synchronous or asynchronous language classes in distance education by implementing some tools, namely; Google Forms, Mentimeter, Flipgrid, Kahoot, Quizlet, Duolingo, Hypersay, and Weizer.me to a preparatory class at a public university of Turkey during the pandemic period (for two semesters) and carrying out an online written interview with the students and teachers to get their perspectives on the implementation of those tools in the synchronous EFL classes.

2. THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Current literature on the relevant issue was analyzed and presented by dividing them into three main themes as: implementing ICT tools in language education, language instruction in distance education, and incorporating ICT tools into distance language education.

2.1. Implementing ICT Tools in Language Education

Using ICT tools in language instruction has been a very popular topic among educational researchers with the fast development of technology and web tools and their availability to language learners, particularly in the last decade. As an earlier example of empirical studies conducted on the subject matter, Chen (2008) studied the factors affecting teachers incorporating the Internet into their teaching by implementing a mixed methods design in the Taiwanese context and suggested continuous professional development emphasizing technology implementation in language instruction was necessary. In the study (Fuchs and Akbar, 2013) it was depicted that nearly half of the participants did not experience using technology in teaching in the USA though most of them believed in the importance of using ICT in the classroom. Hafifah and Sulisty (2020) demonstrated that the ICT literacy levels of instructors in Indonesian universities were significantly correlated with their training experiences, the internet frequency usage, and ICTs integration in language teaching. In contrast to Fuchs and Akbar's study, the instructors in Indonesia were ICT literate and ready to implement ICT in their instructional setting. Aşık, Köse, Yangın-Ekşi, Seferoğlu, Pereira, and Ekiert (2020) compared language teacher training contexts in ICT integration in Turkey, Poland, and Portugal, and suggested that the three contexts had parallel strategies and challenges for technology preparation of the teacher trainees.

Addressing a specific tool, Korkmaz and Öz (2021) investigated the impact of the “Kahoot!” game on the reading comprehension improvement of ELT department students studying at a state university in Turkey, and through the findings, they pointed out that Kahoot could be a useful tool to enhance the learners' motivation by improving to their reading skills. Clark and Gruba (2010) indicated that the site Livemocha had some counter-productive pedagogical impediments to language learning such as flaws in site design. Massi, Patrón, Verdú, and Scilipoti (2012) conducted an interesting study aiming to stimulate reflection about the potential of using Facebook, with university students in the ELT classroom. Through the outcomes of the reflections, the systematic use of social networking media was suggested by the researchers since it provides learners with access to open cyberspace in multiple ways. The following year, Back (2013) also relied on the same tool, data from Facebook, to investigate learner interaction during study abroad, and showed that social media data could be utilized to gain a detailed view of learner interactions while abroad. Güvendir and Gezgin (2015) also conducted a study exploring the effect of a Facebook game (Pearl Peril), which requires English vocabulary knowledge, on the same social media tool, on students' English vocabulary development and observed that a social media game could significantly and positively affect English vocabulary development of the learners. Quite recently, Shodiyev (2022) also paid particular attention to the use of Facebook as a social network in teaching foreign languages to people from the older age group and pinpointed that the social community was helpful for adult learners by surpassing the psychological barriers that they have seen before.

Mondahl and Razmerita (2014), from a more general perspective, studied how the use of social media tools in the learning process affected foreign language learning and concluded that social media platforms facilitated collaborative learning and problem-solving. In their quite recent study, Kumar, Malabar, Benyo, and Amal (2021) presented a detailed analysis of the role of multimedia tools and technology in teaching English in non-English speaking nations in their study and underlined that the use of multimedia technology can ensure effective language teaching and enhance learners' linguistic abilities. In a similar study in the same year, Biletska et al. (2021) also pointed out the role of technology tools in enhancing students in completing the tasks assigned to them more quickly.

Regarding the viewpoints of the EFL learners on the employment of technological tools in a language classroom, Awad (2013) found out that seventh graders had relatively positive attitudes regarding using computers in language classes whereas the age of the learners had an impact on the attitudes of learners. Grosu and David (2013) also discussed the issue of e-learning, as perceived by students and foreign language trainers at a university and revealed that the differences presumed before the study was not as many as expected. In the same year, Hsu (2013) searched the issue from the learner's perspective by investigating specifically the end-user's perception of MALL through cross-cultural analyses and clarified that there were significant differences among the participants with different cultural backgrounds.

The study conducted by Martins (2014) concluded that Web 2.0 tools had a positive impact on the communicative competence and motivation of undergraduate English language learners. Similarly, Aljaser (2019) found that e-learning increased the motivations for learning of fifth-grade primary students in Saudi Arabia, and the e-learning environment was effective in the development of the academic achievement of the learners. Another motivation

study was carried out by Henry (2019) on elementary schoolers in Sweden, and likewise, integrating ICT increased their motivation; the learners were positive about blogging. Besides, Lin, Groom, and Lin (2013) explored the experiences of a group of Taiwanese ESL students who used a blog-assisted language learning (BALL) methodology and suggested that second language writing students were enthusiastic about BALL; however, they were not motivated enough to voluntarily participate in second language blogging activities in practice. In a recent study, Xiangming, Liu, and Zhang (2020) examined learners' language anxiety in technology-assisted settings with mobile learning technology in a longitudinal study in China and figured out that the mobile learning tool (Rain Classroom) affected the students positively.

Liton (2015), on the other hand, investigated students' real perception and efficacy of technology-mediated language classrooms and indicated that the students were immersed in the learning process actively and enthusiastically, whereas many of them did not know how to integrate technologies into their learning process. Besides, Basal (2015) conducted a study to find out how English language teacher trainees perceived flipped classrooms and to present how to implement a flipped language classroom and found out that prospective English teachers held positive perceptions toward the application of flipped classrooms in face-to-face courses.

Allam and Elyas (2016), also, attempted to explore the perceptions of EFL teachers toward using social media as a tool at the university level in the Saudi context and proposed that most of the participants believed in the instructional value and advantages of using social media in language classrooms. In the same year, with a different sample, Ogwu (2016) compared teacher trainee students' electronic learning technology readiness, competence, and their constraints in Botswana and Nigeria and concluded that students in Nigeria were prepared better and more competent. Similarly, Turgut (2017) also designed a study with a different context comparing TPACK (technological pedagogical content knowledge) among teacher candidates, pre-service and in-service English as foreign language teachers in Turkey and found a significant difference among those three groups of participants. The following year, Phan (2018) conducted a study on the relevant theme by empirically investigating the teacher's perspective on the possible implications of the recent changes in ELT with the Vietnamese context and uncovered the disconnections between ELT teachers' beliefs on their students' needs and their actual practices in the classroom. Ma (2017), on the other hand, investigated the issue from the learners' point of view by carrying out a multi-case study to provide a detailed understanding of Hong Kong university students' perspectives and practices considering their individual mobile learning experiences and found out that the students used varied e-resources and tools for language learning.

Sun, Lin, You, Shen, Qi, and Luo (2017) conducted a more specific study by integrating a mobile SNS into first grade EFL classes in China and indicated that the gains in English fluency by the experimental group were significantly larger while both classes' speaking skills improved. Another study that investigated the academic achievement of the learners' using ICT was done by Karaaslan et al. (2018) and in the study, they concluded that using synchronous and asynchronous games and activities contributed to the university students' intrinsic motivation in a preparatory school in Turkey. In addition, Akay and Gümüsoğlu (2020) investigated how the implementation of LMS affected the language proficiency of English preparatory students and found that the use of LMS by students in their language learning process predicted their proficiency and midterm scores significantly. More recently, Kieu, Anh, Tran, Nga, and Ho (2021) pursued a study about the effectiveness of using technology in learning English for university students and examined the impacts of teaching on the four skills. Relying on the findings of their study, they emphasized that using technology in learning English promoted learners' language skills and promoted the English learning process. In their study with elementary school students, Erbaş, Çipuri, and Joni (2021) indicated that technology served as a facilitator for learning and teaching English besides leading the teachers to a better way of teaching. The same year in the Thai context, Kundu, Jumpakat, and Karpklon (2021) searched secondary school teachers' technology use and perceptions of the use of technology in their classes and revealed that most of the teachers had knowledge of technological tools and had integrated technologies with certain types of tools. In another study, Kundu, Bej, and Dey (2021) examined the impact of teachers' ICT self-efficacy on their perceived online teaching-learning preparedness and concluded that the participants had a low level of ICT self-efficacy which was positively and moderately correlated with their online teaching-learning preparedness.

2.2. Language Instruction in Distance Education

Distance education has become more than a choice for today's conditions both with the rapid developments in ICT and because of the unfortunate pandemic period in the world. Thus, it is essential to explore the ways which promote learning better in distance education for all the subjects involving language instruction. On a related issue, Murphy, Shelley, and Baumann (2010) explored the student perceptions of effective distance tutors and concluded that students look for tutors who were enthusiastic, approachable, supportive, and committed, and who created a group atmosphere. In the same year, Işık, Karakış, and Güler (2010) examined the issue from postgraduate

students' point of view and revealed that there was a generally positive attitude toward distance learning. In a more recent attempt, Ekmekçi (2015) investigated students' satisfaction and needs with English courses in a distance education program and revealed that a great majority of the students were satisfied with the distance education English course. Similarly, Lin, Zhang, and Zheng (2017) examined the roles of motivation and learning strategies, and the mediation effect of learning strategies, in K-12 online learning and concluded that motivational variables did not predict online-learning outcomes while online-learning strategies played an important role in online language learning. Likewise, Çakır, Karademir, and Erdoğan (2018) examined the correlation between distance education motivation levels, online experiences, and satisfaction of university students in Turkey and demonstrated that students' online experience, and computer skills, and students' satisfaction were meaningful predictors of their distance education motivation.

Hurd (2007), on the other hand, examined language learning anxiety in distance learning with a huge sample in Open University in the UK and pinpointed that anxiety was an influential factor in language learning at distance learning, like face-to-face learning, mainly in speaking. Similarly, Pichette (2009) compared anxiety profiles of classroom and distance language learners in Canada and concluded that there was no difference in anxiety profiles between classroom and distance learners. In the same year, Sakar (2009) evaluated the senior students' perceptions of online courses given by the Open Education Faculty in Turkey and showed that there was a high demand for online courses though some only participated in the courses before the exams. Zhang and Cui (2010) also investigated the learning beliefs of distance English language learners in China and revealed that most of the students showed similar beliefs and perceptions as learners in conventional classrooms about language learning; they believed that it took a long time and effort. In their quite recent study with EFL student teachers at a state university in Ankara, Turkey, Yetkin and Alagözlü, (2022), also explored their anxieties in their distant microteaching experience and found a moderate level of anxiety among those student teachers. Göloğlu-Demir and Çetin (2022) also pursued a study on the perceptions of teacher candidates regarding the virtual classroom environment by using metaphors and resulted that there is a problem in virtual classrooms as more than half of the participants produced negative metaphors for the virtual classroom.

Guichon (2010) carried out a case study aiming to design a desktop videoconferencing platform specifically dedicated to synchronous language teaching and presented three functionalities as helping teachers to plan the online session, communicate more effectively, and keep track of some of their learners' production for ulterior feedback. Ng and Confessore (2011) examined the relationship between the levels of learner autonomy among adult learners in a distance learning environment in Malaysia and indicated that learning styles, perceived learning environment, and computer technology experience were positively linked to learner autonomy, and distance learners in Malaysia had a relatively low level of learner autonomy. McDaniels, Pfund, and Barnicle (2016) also designed a mixed-methods study with elderly learners to be able to provide ways of creating dynamic learning communities in synchronous courses. At the end of the study, graduate students and post-doc participants reported high satisfaction with the online training and increased confidence in their mentoring.

In a quite recent study, Viktorova (2020) aimed to distinguish pedagogical conditions for an effective distance learning introduction into foreign language education of the elderly with Ukrainian adult learners and confirmed that the ability to learn under certain conditions such as overcoming the age-related stereotypes even increases instead of decreasing at the end of the study. Another study by Zheng, Lin, and Kwon (2020) investigated the effect of the student, instructor, and course factors on high school students' online-learning success in English language and literature courses, using data on their actual learning activity and course-design elements in the USA and showed that individuals' credit-recovery status had a significantly negative impact on learning outcomes while the numbers of logins and login duration and both had significantly positive effects on final grades and interestingly.

Shelley, Murphy, and White (2013) explored language teachers with different backgrounds and their experience moved into distance/blended language teachers at distance universities in the UK and Australia. The study revealed that mostly, the teachers relied on their prior experiences as language learners rather than their pre-service training. In a recent study (Bailey and Lee, 2020) conducted on teachers in South Korea, clear relationships between online teaching experience and expectations were found. Quite recently, Tarchi et al. (2022) investigated how the pre-service teachers perceived online learning during the transition from face-to-face to emergency distance education and suggested for preservice teachers develop a flexible approach to self-regulated learning (SRL) finding underdeveloped conceptions of online learning. As a brand-new study in-press, Dovrat (2022) explored the perceptions of teachers and students on technological tools used for online teaching in an Israeli English for Academic Purposes (EAP). The outcomes of the study yielded that learning management system quizzes and emails were effective learning and communication tools according to the teachers and learners, but they differed in terms the efficacy of videoconferencing, recorded videos, personal phone calls and text messaging. In brief,

technological tools for communication could be harnessed to form and sustain supportive workgroup specifically for the times of crises for online teaching and learning.

2.3. Incorporating ICT Tools into Distance Language Education

With the spread of distance education all around the world especially with the recent pandemic period, it has been more than a need to be able to search and find ways of making use of this type of education with optimum output. It has also been a very crucial issue for language instructors how to manage this process while teaching a language that requires communication and interaction as much as possible. In that, how the implementation of ICT tools fosters language instruction and learning is an important matter to focus on since they could be perceived as the only means of interaction between the learners and instructors in distance education. Hence, the current studies covering this issue should be viewed and more studies are needed to be conducted accordingly to be able to understand and find the best ways to make a profit from this new educational system.

An earlier study in the related field was conducted by Wang (2007) examining videoconferencing-task-design principles in distance language learning (DLL) and revealed that all participants were positive about the technological capabilities and user-friendliness of NetMeeting and its support for task completion. Another early attempt on the relevant topic was made by Hrastinski (2007) in the same year investigating how the use of synchronous chat may affect student participation in online discussions and indicated that the use of synchronous chat affected participation positively. Moreover, Lenkaitis (2020) examined learner autonomy in online synchronous courses using ZOOM and showed that ZOOM provided a collaborative autonomous learning environment that connected students together and allowed them to practice their L2 skills. More recently, Alfadda and Mahdi (2021) analyzed the correlation between the variables of the technology acceptance model (TAM) on using Zoom application in language learning and found a positive correlation.

Concerning the phases that teachers go through, as an earlier study, Levy, Wang, and Chen (2009) carried out a project focusing on understanding and supporting the processes that experienced face-to-face language teachers undergo to become confident and competent online tutors. The main results of the project revealed that though there were differences between the two online tutors featured in the paper, there were many similarities. Meskill and Anthony (2014) also explored language educators' practices while teaching a foreign language in synchronous courses and demonstrated that the online instructors designed their synchronous sessions by using specific structuring strategies. Similarly, Huang (2020) compared students' perception of teacher roles in face-to-face and online learning in a blended classroom context and concluded that the cognitive role of teachers was notable in face-to-face classes while the managerial role of teachers was perceived more dominantly in online classes. On the other hand, Tuncay and Uzunboylu (2012) investigated how English language teachers were successful in the blended and online e-learning course, their e-learning training needs, and how gender, age, workplace, school, and second life usage variables affect this success; and concluded that no matter their background, all the teachers improved their e-learning competences with the training.

Hampel (2009) searched for the teachers' skills that enable them to foster interaction and collaboration in online language learning and revealed that online classroom settings, especially synchronous environments that allowed for speaking, were often characterized by a tutor-centered approach to teaching. Akimovaa (2015), also, examined a distance learning platform, MOODLE, to investigate distant learning technologies in teaching the theory of English and found the module beneficial for its mobility and convenience and it made the students autonomous learners, and even though it provided objective assessment, some students commented about lack or delayed feedback. Likewise, Fryer, Bovee, and Nakao (2014) investigated the motivational patterns of the students in a blended learning course and the possible reasons of the learners for motivation towards e-learning in Japan using MOODLE and KSU myWord and indicated that the students' motivational sources were their ability beliefs, effort beliefs and value of the task dimensions.

In terms of exploring the impact of e-learning, Farooq, Asmari, and Javid (2012) performed quantitative research to analyze the effectiveness of e-learning in English language teaching programs in the distance education context in Pakistan and they concluded that the e-learning facilities in distance education improved the participants' performance in respect of access, interaction, and cost. Matukhin and Zhitkova (2015) explored the effectiveness of the use of blended learning technology in English language teaching and concluded that using technological tools lowered the affective filter of the learners, increased their self-confidence, and self-awareness, and revealed their learning potential. The following year, Politis and Politis (2016) examined the relationship between an online learning environment supported by Blackboard Collaborate and the skills and traits of knowledge acquisition and found out that easy access the Blackboard Collaborate and an effectively designed structure could enhance learners' problem understanding and communication.

Addressing the perceptions of adult learners on both ICT and types of language courses, Arrosagaray, González-Peiteado, and Pino-Juste (2019) explored 627 Spanish adult students' attitudes towards the use of ICT depending on the modality of their courses (face-to-face, blended and distance) and figured out that most of the students found ICT beneficial on their learning regardless of the mode they follow. Moreover, Suwantarathip (2019) explored the satisfaction levels of the students taking an English course at blended learning mode and indicated that students' overall computer literacy, their perception of the instruction, and attitudes towards blended learning had a positive correlation with satisfaction. On the other hand, Norozi, Revzani, and Ameri-Golestan (2020) pursued a study to look into the effect of flipped teaching on the Iranian EFL learners' grammar learning and retention and concluded that flipped teaching improved both learners' language learning and retention. In their recent systematic review, Hein, Wienrich, and Latoschik (2021) analyzed 54 articles and indicated that immersive learning environments can address the challenges of digitization in educational systems.

After examining the existing studies on the relevant topic in the literature, it is seen that the studies are mostly conducted on the students using mixed-methods or quantitative methods of using ICT in language learning. In addition, it is observed that most of the studies are cross-sectional or examined the effect of one specific tool in the classroom setting. It could be concluded that there is a need for more longitudinal and qualitative research on the use of more than one ICT tool in the distance learning setting.

The current study aims to investigate the English language teachers' and learners' perceptions of using various ICT tools (Google Forms, Mentimeter, Flipgrid, Kahoot, Quizlet, Duolingo, Hypersay, and Weizer.me) and the advantages and disadvantages of these tools in distance learning setting in an educational year. The research questions addressed in this study are:

- What are the perceptions of the EFL teachers in the Turkish context on using ICT tools in distant EFL learning?
- What are the perceptions of the EFL learners in the Turkish context on using ICT tools in distant EFL learning?

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study employs a qualitative research design which enables to get detailed information about in a research phenomenon and develop a better understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Given that, the current study follows an online written interview study procedure, which gives sufficient time to the participants to reflect on the questions and answer them effectively (King, Horrocks, and Brooks, 2018). It supplies flexibility in terms of location and availability of the participants and nature of the topic as well as saving time and financial resources (James, 2016; King, Horrocks, and Brooks, 2018). Besides, Opdenakker (2006) argued that online data collection tools which enable asynchronous communication of time and space are advantageous in terms of cost, avoidance of disturbances such as noise, and providing more time to reflect on the questions. According to Mann and Stewart (2002), online interviews allow "contextual naturalness" in the studies examining the internet use of the participants. Considering the above-mentioned advantages, an online written interview procedure was chosen in the present study to collect data.

The participants were administered an online written interview asking their opinions on the integration of ICT tools used in the distance language classes during the two semesters of an educational year. It particularly examined the emerged themes in the students' and teachers' reports on the five open-ended types of questions.

3.1. Participants

The participants of the current study were chosen based on convenience sampling, that is, the participants who were willing and available for the study were included in the study (Creswell, 2012). In this case, the participants of the present study were preparatory school students and teachers from a state university in Turkey in the educational year 2020-2021. The students' age varied from 18 to 20 years. They were from the Department of International Relations of the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Science. The students were at B1 level according to the institutional proficiency test. On the other hand, the teachers were English instructors who had teaching experience varying from five years to ten years. They were graduates of English Language or English Language and Literature Departments and while two of them followed their master's degrees, others were following their Ph.D. in the field of English Language or English Language and Literature.

The teachers and students filled out a consent form that demonstrated that they voluntarily agreed to take part in the research. Then, the students attended twenty-four hours of synchronous English courses during a week. They used various ICT tools, (Google forms, Mentimeter, Nearpod, Flipgrid, Kahoot, Quizlet, Duolingo, Hypersay, and Weizer.me) both synchronous and asynchronously.

3.2. Instrument

The data collection tool was an online written interview in which questions were formed based on the literature and ELT field expert opinion was taken on the question for the validity of the questions. The students and teachers completed the interview via Google Forms. They were asked to indicate and express their opinions on the tools implemented. The following five questions were directed in the interview for teachers:

1. Which web tools did you use in your 2020-2021 academic year synchronous foreign language lessons? (Google forms, Mentimeter, Nearpod, Flipgrid, Kahoot, Quizlet, Duolingo, Hypersay, and Weizer.me)
2. Could you briefly evaluate the tools you used in synchronous foreign language lessons by specifying their positive and negative aspects?
3. Could you briefly compare the synchronous foreign language lessons with which web tools are used/not used?
4. Would you recommend using, continuing (if used), or increasing online tools in synchronous foreign language lessons?
5. If you have any other comments and suggestions, can you specify them?

The five interview questions directed to the students were as follows:

1. What online tools were used in your synchronous foreign language lessons in the 2020-2021 academic year? (Google forms, Mentimeter, Nearpod, Flipgrid, Kahoot, Quizlet, Duolingo, Hypersay, and Weizer.me)
2. Could you briefly evaluate the tools used in your synchronous foreign language lessons by stating their positive and negative aspects?
3. Could you briefly compare the courses in which the mentioned tools were used and those that were not?
4. Would you recommend using, continuing (if used), or increasing (tools) online tools in synchronous foreign language lessons?
5. If you have any other comments and suggestions, can you specify them?

As could be observed above, the interview questions directed to the students and the teachers were all in the same vein to be able to compare their opinions on the use of ICT tools in distant EFL learning properly.

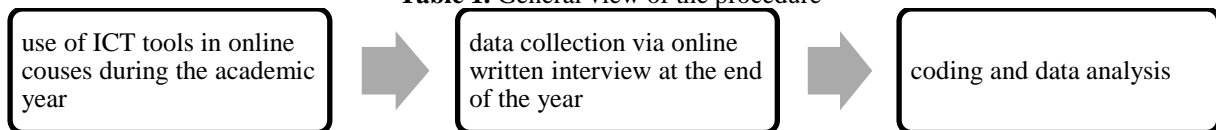
3.3. Procedure

The students attended twenty-four hours of synchronous English courses during a week. The instructors introduced some ICT tools in distance learning during a whole educational year both in synchronous classes and asynchronously via video shares. They used various ICT tools in the synchronous main course and skills classes they took. They used tools like Google Forms, Mentimeter, Nearpod, etc. in synchronous courses while using the tools like Flipgrid asynchronously. At the end of the year, both the 42 students in the preparatory classes and the 15 teachers at the same university were invited to respond to an interview on the implementation of ICT tools into the language classes and their perceptions of them. 18 out of 42 students actively participating in the online synchronous classes and 8 instructors of the foreign languages department delivering online synchronous EFL classes during the year responded to the interviews via the Google Forms platform in a written way. The consent of the participants was taken for the interview in terms of ethical issues and the interview was completed in L1, Turkish, to overcome any possible language barrier.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data gathered from the open-ended questions in the online written interviews were analyzed based on the qualitative content analysis scheme of Creswell (2012). The data was first translated to English and divided into chunks. The chunks were coded, the emerging themes were decided accordingly by the two researchers separately and the different ideas were discussed together to establish reliability. The inter-rater reliability was measured by calculating percentage agreement, which resulted in a clearly acceptable level of interrater reliability (91%). Emerging themes and sub-categories were provided with their frequency, and they were discussed in-depth in the results section.

Table 1. General view of the procedure



3.5. Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the current study was enabled via data triangulation. Data triangulation aims to increase the validity of the present study (Golafshani, 2003). The data triangulation was carried out via the inclusion of different

groups of participants such as the instructors and students. Moreover, the interview questions which were formed based on the literature were checked by the three ELT field experts. Lastly, the coding process was performed separately by three researchers. Then, they came all together to reach consensus on the coding procedure, in this way, the inter-rater reliability of the study was increased. All the steps mentioned contributed to the trustworthiness of the present study.

4. RESULTS

Through the analysis of the data, four emerging main themes were the tools used in language classes, the positive and negative aspects of using ICT tools in distant EFL classes, the comparison of the distant EFL classes with and without ICT tools, and the views on the continuity of using ICT tools in distant EFL classes.

4.1. Tools used in language classes

From the teachers' and students' responses, it was observed that various tools were used in the online EFL classrooms during the term by both students and the teachers at that university. In the utterances of students and teachers, the most used web tools were Google forms, Mentimeter, Nearpod, Flipgrid, Kahoot, Quizlet, Duolingo, Hypersay, and Weizer.me.

Table 2. Percentages of the ICT tools used in language classes

	With ICT tools vs without ICT tools	<i>f (n)</i>	<i>f %</i>
Teachers	Google forms	6	27%
	Mentimeter	5	23%
	Flipgrid	5	23%
	Kahoot	2	9%
	Nearpod	2	9%
	Other tools	2	9%
Students	Google forms	14	14%
	Mentimeter	16	17%
	Flipgrid	16	17%
	Kahoot	17	18%
	Nearpod	14	15%
	Other tools	18	19%

4.2. Positive and negative perceptions of using ICT tools in distant EFL classes

As could be clearly observed from the answers of both teachers and students in Table 3, which demonstrates the number of people who mentioned each of the advantages and disadvantages of using ICT tools in distant EFL classes, on the use of ICT tools in synchronous EFL classes, the positive sides of using those tools are perceived and emphasized more by the two components whereas only the technical problems were mentioned as the negative side of using ICT tools by both the teachers and the students.

Table 3. The perceptions of teachers and students on using ICT tools in distant EFL classes

	Positive perceptions	<i>f (n)</i>	<i>f %</i>	Negative perceptions	<i>f (n)</i>	<i>f %</i>
Teachers	Interaction	4	50	Technical problems	2	1
	Benefits	2	25			
	Feedback	2	25			
	Assessment	1	13			
Students	Facilitator for grammar learning	7	39	Technical problems	5	28
	Facilitator for vocabulary learning	5	28			
	Benefits	5	28			

On the use of ICT tools in online synchronous EFL classrooms, as for the positive side, all the students indicated that those tools helped them to actively take part in the lesson and practice their vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Student-7 said: *'I do not think there is a negative side, I think that we participated in the lesson more actively, which was positive'*. In the same vein, Student-11 stated: *'The tools used in the courses enhanced our learning since the words and topics were easier to memorize.'*

Also, the students reported that the tools used helped them to monitor their learning process and practice on the subjects that required more practice. For instance, Student-3 indicated: *'On the positive side, we were able to see where we made more mistakes. The negative aspect was that online education was sometimes difficult to understand.'* Student-13 said: *'I was able to see my strengths and weaknesses. After the topics were over, they had positive effects on me for repetition. I learned more words.'*

However, some of the students reported that the tools like Flipgrid and Live Worksheets did not work well in practice as they had some technical problems. For instance, Student-1 said: *'It's all very nice, but I got a little bored using the Live Worksheets.'* Similarly, Student-2 commented: *'Mentimeter, Kahoot, and Live worksheets have been an online tool that helps a lot in terms of vocabulary and topic reinforcement. I think that the Flipgrid application does not have a positive side because we had a lot of trouble uploading homework due to both my connection and technical problems with the application.'*

Like the students, the teachers also highlighted the advantages of using online tools in synchronous EFL classes. To exemplify, Teacher-1 said: *'It provides the active participation of the students. It provides the opportunity for the students to see and interpret each other's activities. I don't think there is a drawback when used correctly.'* Teacher-2 gave detailed information on which skills those tools helped more by saying: *'Google forms as a writing tool (helpful for tracking students' writing performance instantly); Mentimeter as a tool for students to give instant opinions about the subject in the lessons (The answers given were especially useful in warm-up activities); Flipgrid for speaking activities (useful to create a classroom environment where students can see each other's videos, the option to put subtitles, etc.)'* Teacher-5 also listed the 3 main advantages of using the mentioned tools as: *'1. They are very useful for feedback and measurement evaluation. I can see how successful they were when they completed the activities quickly and practically. I can give feedback accordingly, or I try to address the missing points in the lesson. They bring up a lively and different atmosphere in the lessons. Including different tools instead of following the books like recipe books helps to keep the excitement alive. 3. Each tool has its own pros and cons (free account features, etc.). It is very advantageous to be able to use the tool that suits what I need. If a tool does not consist of reporting activities, I include it in in-class activities. I prefer those who provide detailed reports for assignments. So, it is shaped according to the needs...'*

For the disadvantages of using the ICT tools in language classes, the teachers mostly complained about the technical and linking problems. For example, Teacher-2 specifically mentioned the difficulties of using Flipgrid: *'I think that Flipgrid application does not have a positive side because we had a lot of trouble uploading homework due to both my connection and technical problems of the application.'* Teacher-5 stated more generally about the tools saying: *'Technical problems can be the biggest disadvantage. If I use it in class, there is usually a problem with the link, some students are somehow unable to participate in the activity. In this case, I usually can't do much and I have to tell the student to follow my screen sharing. Also, when I use it as homework, there may still be problems and therefore I receive a lot of emails/messages, which means extra time for me.'* Teacher-6 directed attention to the timing issue of using such tools in online classes by stating that they required preparation in advance and when it was used for the first time, the students had difficulty in understanding how to use it, in that, time was wasted in the lesson until students got used to it.

4.3. The comparison of the distant EFL classes with and without ICT tools

As shown in Table 4, both teachers and students had common points on the advantages of using web tools in online language classes, particularly for more active participation and permanent learning.

Table 4: The comparison of the distant EFL classes with and without ICT tools

	With ICT tools vs without ICT tools	f (n)	f %
Teachers	Interaction	5	63
	Pedagogical appropriateness	2	25
	Fun	1	13
Students	Facilitator	7	39
	Interaction	6	33
	Fun	5	28

When the students compared the classes during which the ICT tools were implemented with the ones without using them, they attracted attention to the functionality of the tools by helping to make them actively participate in the lesson and make their knowledge permanent. Student-2 specified on one of the tools by stating: *'I think that in the lessons where Mentimeter is used, I and my friends in the class have more active participation compared to the lessons that we do not use.'* Student-4 also added that those tools make the lessons more competitive and fun by claiming: *'When we use it, the lessons are more fun, and we are in a race in the classroom. After the lessons, using*

these tools enhances our understanding.' Student-5 shortly summarized those two functions as: 'It made the lesson more enjoyable, we had more fun, we learned more.' Quite similarly, Student-14 stated: 'These applications make the lesson more interesting and understandable.' Student-16 focused on how those tools helped them to take part actively in the online lessons by stating: 'Thanks to the tools used in the lesson, I wanted to participate more, but when they are not used in some lessons, I was in the backstage.'

Although most of the students did not remark on the lessons, they did not use the mentioned tools, and some of them drew attention to how they were affected negatively when those tools were not used. In that, they indicated some issues like; learning could not be permanent, the students are distracted easily, and lessons are more monotone. Student-9 drew attention to that issue by indicating 'When these tools are not used, the lessons taught are hardly remembered. And after two or three days we can completely forget what we learned' Student-12 shortly mentioned the distraction issue by stating: 'I was easily distracted in lessons without online tools.' Student-13 also pointed out 'When we do not use these tools, the lesson is a bit unattractive and when we use it, it keeps the lesson more dynamic.' Student-17 also emphasized the advantages of the tools in making the recently introduced knowledge more permanent by pinpointing: 'In lessons where tools are not used, whether it is a word or a subject, we sometimes do not remember it when we study again, but when we learn in an enjoyable way, that is, when we use the applications, we listen to the lesson without getting bored, and when we do an activity or test after the lesson, we remember it earlier thanks to the applications in the lesson.'

When the teachers compared the lessons with ICT tools to the ones without those tools, they mostly focused on the advantage of those tools in making the students participate in the lessons more actively. Teacher-1 stated on that issue: 'I think that the interest of the students is higher in the lessons where I use web tools and that such activities contribute positively by increasing the sense of belonging of the students to the community.' Teacher-2 attracted the same advantage by adding the enjoyment and feedback factors by indicating: 'When web tools are used, lessons become more fun and student participation increases. Positive feedback is received from students.' Teacher -5 also added the function of tools in following the students in distant education by claiming: 'When it is used, student participation increases, I think that it makes students feel that they are under control and their participation in the lesson is important.'

About the lessons without using web tools, the teachers drew attention to the monotony of the lessons. Teacher-4 directly indicated that lessons without web tools were more monotonous. Teacher-7 also underlined the same monotony issue and added that lessons became more teacher-centered when the tools were not used by indicating 'When web tools are not used, lessons become more monotonous, and students are less active. Lessons seem more boring, unattractive and became more teacher-centered.'

Only one teacher (Teacher-6) highlighted the use of those web tools appropriately in the right context by stating: 'Actually, using a web tool is not something miraculous. Of course, my class doesn't have to go well just because I used some web tools. The important thing is to use the tool with the appropriate pedagogy. I don't find it right to use a tool just for a change. I mean, I also had a lesson that went bad by using a tool or vice versa, I did not use a tool, but the desired goal and motivation in the lesson were achieved. To sum it up, if these tools are used according to the pedagogical relevance and dynamics of our classroom, then they will be fruitful.'

4.4. The continuity of using ICT tools in distant EFL classes

The statements of both teachers and students in this study demonstrated that using web tools in online synchronous EFL classrooms should be sustained since they make the classes more interactive and beneficial.

Table 5: The continuity of using ICT tools in distant EFL classes

	Eager to continue to use ICT tools		Cautious to continue to use ICT tools	
	f (n)	f %	f (n)	f %
Teachers	8	100	4	50
Students	18	100	1	6

As a common point to be stated by all the teachers was the eagerness of the continuity of using those tools, and the number of tools used in the online EFL classrooms, all the teachers who responded to the interview agreed on the continuity of using those tools. Whereas some of them suggested being precautious about increasing the number of tools to be used. For instance, Teacher-3 suggested: 'Yes, I recommend the use of online tools, although it is difficult for teachers to go out of the regular class. But I think even the current number of these tools is, in fact, largely sufficient. Unfortunately, most of us do not know about it because we do not use it much.' Teacher-5 stated: 'I strongly support its use, but I think the number of tools used should be limited.'

When it comes to the students' opinions on the same matter, only one student (Student-10) reported that the amount of the tools used in the synchronous EFL classes during the year was adequate and there was no need to increase the amount and frequency. All the others expressed their pleasure and suggested further and more frequent use of web tools in their lessons. Student-3, for instance, stated: *'I would definitely recommend it because when we do not understand the subject, we have the opportunity to immediately correct our mistakes when we do something about it.'* Similarly, Student-9 stated: *'I would definitely recommend it, it helps a lot with the lessons. I wish this one and the other similar applications were used more.'*

5. CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

Implementation of ICT tools in the language classroom has been a crucial issue for all the components of language education since there has been a rapid change in every part of educational contexts because of the technological developments all around the world. Furthermore, the concept of distant learning has been widely considered and accepted by many institutions considering its convenience and advantages. In addition to those changes in education, the pandemic period has pushed people towards distant education all around the world emergently without a long and proper preparation process. In that, the implementation of ICT tools into language classes, particularly in distant learning, is a crucial and new issue which is needed to be studied further.

Considering that scarcity, the current study aimed at investigating the students' and teachers' perceptions of using ICT tools in synchronous EFL classes by delivering an online written interview to the teachers and prep students at a state university in Turkey after a whole educational year during the pandemic. The two research questions addressed at the beginning of the study were answered by analyzing the responses of the participants to the interview questions by implementing a thematic analysis with two coders by realizing a percentage agreement.

For the first research question considering the teachers' perceptions on the use of web tools in distant synchronous language lessons, it was concluded that teachers perceive positively using those tools, especially for making the lessons more interactive and fun. Additionally, they suggested further usage of those tools appropriately and in a cautious number according to the pedagogical needs of the students and the requirements of the lessons. In the same direction, as an answer to the second research question considering the students' perceptions, the students who took part in this study also indicated that they found the lessons with web tools more beneficial and interactive, particularly helping them to participate in the lesson easily and to remember the recently learned grammatical rules and vocabulary.

The present study contributes to the understanding of both teachers' and students' conceptions of online language learning in distance education in line with the study of Tarchi et al. (2022), which involved only teachers. Similar to the outcomes of the study of Asghar et al. (2021), it is hoped that the findings of this study would be helpful for teacher education institutions to develop infrastructure, policy, and instructional strategies to enhance language teaching with technology and better learning of the students. As stated by Demir and Sönmez (2021), becoming an alternative to face-to face instruction during the pandemic, distance teaching was proved to be an indispensable part of future teaching practices, and what's more, hybrid teaching (partially online and partially in-class) would be the demand of educational institutions rather than solely having face-to-face education; therefore, it is suggested that universities train their teaching staff for this type of education. It is also suggested that ICT courses and e-learning classes should be the integral components of the curriculum of teacher education to encourage teachers to cope with this new mode of teaching (Razkane, Sayeh and Yeou, 2022).

Through the outcomes of the current study, it has been evident that the use of multimedia technology fosters learners' thinking and linguistic abilities; thus, these technological devices could be utilized more effectively in language classrooms owing to the fact that technology-enhanced foreign language learning offers authentic materials, opportunities to practice language skills and enjoyable activities to be participated (Amin and Sundari, 2020). As it was also suggested by Kumar et al. (2021), this study also proposed for language instructors to teach English using multimedia technology in their classrooms since this might lead their students to become more involved and responsible for their learning compared to the face-to face learning environment (Demir and Walker, 2022). To exemplify, some tools might make an effective change in learners' roles from passive receivers to active respondents and even feedback givers and providers (Saeed, Alharbi and Yassin, 2021). In brief, online learning opened opportunities for students to cultivate self-discipline and self-control over their studies and life and paved the way for them to work on their own using online resources to become independent and autonomous learners (Zhang and Wu, 2022).

To be able to realize the previous suggestions, teachers and students should be introduced and educated on the web tools which could be implemented in their classrooms considering the levels of their students. As Qizi (2021) also suggested, most of the issues in language learning could be overcome through incorporating technology and

appropriately trained teachers. In that, more courses on how to integrate technology in language classrooms both in distant and in face-to-face formal training should be added to the curriculum of the teacher training programs, particularly in terms of compulsory and elective courses. Hence, the importance of introducing courses on using new technologies in classrooms should be considered to develop future teachers' digital skills (Biletska et al., 2021) in addition to in-service training workshops to make teachers familiar with the internet web-based technology and its pedagogical aspects (Öz, 2014) because the findings of Civelek, Toplu and Uzun's study (2021) revealed that the EFL teachers, who had been taught about the educational technologies have more positive attitudes online instruction and they are more capable to implement this type of instruction. The scope of this in-service training could also be on the use of tools and possible remedies to technological problems that EFL teachers may encounter during synchronous and asynchronous online education (Erdoğan and Yazıcı, 2022). That's to say, upskilling of EFL instructors in increasing digital competences to establish successful online teaching and overcome the mentioned shortcomings might help to fill the teaching gaps encountered by many of these teachers (Krsmanovic, 2022).

This study also underlines the fact that schools have the appropriate materials and conditions to develop teaching with technology, such as the internet and computers. Erbaş, Çipuri, and Joni also (2021) pointed out the importance of technology integration in the curriculum and supplying the appropriate conditions at the schools for both the teachers and the students. To illustrate, institutions may consider hiring support staff helping ELF teachers while dealing with technological challenges (Erdoğan and Yazıcı, 2022) since these teachers need to be familiarized with the effective use of tools and applications and armed with some tactics to find out sound solutions to technological issues (İpek and Üstünbaş, 2021). As a final implication, as Koet and Aziz (2021) stated after a systematic review regarding teachers' and students' perceptions toward distance learning during the pandemic, educational policymakers, authorities, and other stakeholders should investigate each issue in-depth and find feasible solutions to help teachers and students who are under big pressure of distance learning.

Although this study posed an important issue by investigating a current matter via qualitative tools, the findings are difficult to generalize because of some limitations. First, it has involved a small sample of only one institution. In that, involving different institutions with different grades and departments might be better for further studies to make the results more comprehensive. Secondly, this study used only qualitative data which could be supported by some quantitative and experimental ones in further studies.

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