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From the Eyes of EFL Teachers in Turkey: Synchronous and Asynchronous Online Teaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	In this study, the perceived competency of English teachers working at various education levels in Turkey was investigated. A survey developed by the researchers was used to understand how competent teachers felt in online teaching and reveal their challenges in the process. The descriptive and referential statistics and content analysis in the study showed that English teachers felt competent in lesson planning and teaching grammar and vocabulary. However, they felt less competent in teaching students with disabilities and sustaining student interaction and motivation. This finding was also reported as a challenge along with some technological difficulties. The study presents some implications for EFL teacher training.

Education, like almost every aspect of life, is immensely affected by technology. Therefore, there has recently been an inclination to switch traditional face-to-face education with online education, for which students' aspiration to be autonomous while learning could count as one simple reasons (Akhter & Mahmood, 2018). Indeed, online education has always been a hot topic in the field of education as a

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supplement for face-to-face education. To briefly explain, in traditional education, teachers and students are physically available in a formal teaching setting for educational purposes, whereas online education is "the method of content dissemination and rapid learning through the application of information and internet technology" (Zhou, Wu, Zhou, & Li, 2020, p. 502). Online education, in this vein, could take place either through synchronous or asynchronous modes. Murphy, Rodríguez-Manzanares, and Barbour (2011) make a very clear distinction between synchronous and asynchronous online teaching. In synchronous online teaching, students are taught simultaneously by an educator although they may physically be far away from one another. Synchronous learning is a recent form of online education in which students and teachers are separated from each other in terms of their geographical location (Phelps & Vlachopoulos, 2019). Synchronous online teaching tools might include video or audio conferences, phones, cameras, instant messages, computer programs, or some other tools that allow live and temporal interaction between the parts. In asynchronous online teaching, on the other hand, students are provided curriculum materials online and they work on these materials with the guidance of an educator. Students can work in their own time, pace and space. Because they can determine when they will attend classes or whether they will attend them, asynchronous lessons are considered enticing by students (Glenn, 2018). Asynchronous teaching tools might include emails, forums, social media platforms, blogs, or some websites, and asynchronous teaching could be conducted over different learning management systems (LMSs).

Education is a dynamic and ever developing field. Therefore, the 21st century requires some qualities which may be utilized during synchronous and asynchronous online teaching. For instance, it is important that teachers should be ready for changes, good at collaborating with others, into continuous professional development, aware of the importance of their profession, flexible, and tech-savvy. Teachers should also be competent in critical thinking, problem-solving, teaching innovatively, and adjusting to different conditions by making use of their experiences (Bezzina & Michalak, 2008). Moreover, EFL teachers need to make curriculum appropriate, teach across disciplines, foster thinking skills, stimulate learning transfer, train learners for learning, focus on misjudgment plainly, encourage teamwork, support creativity, and utilize technology in order to enhance learning (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012). As supported in the literature, it is essential that teachers, in the 21st century in which distant learning has begun to be more common, should have some knowledge and skills especially in the integration of technology and in asynchronous and synchronous online teaching tools more than ever before. Similarly, in the Turkish context, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) suggests that EFL teachers in Turkey have some field specific competencies (MoNE, 2017). Particularly, these competencies include employing technological tools in teaching English while planning and arranging the English teaching process. This has become more prominent as an objective for the ministry now that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the use of technology for educational purposes.

The outbreak of COVID-19 in the academic year 2019-2020 has caused countries around the world to take strict measures in the education of their citizens to lessen the severe effects of the pandemic on people's lives. Turkey, in this respect, decided to terminate the traditional system of face-to-face education starting from the middle of March 2020 until the end of August in the same year. It was during this time that the MoNE and Higher Education Council (HEC) in Turkey supported teaching millions of K-12 and university students via distance education. The MoNE started educational broadcasting through a national TV channel, while universities basically relied on their distance education systems to teach classes along with some everyday technological tools. Teachers at K-12 schools and instructors at universities went on teaching both through synchronous and asynchronous online teaching during this time. This sharp transition from the traditional face-to-face education to distance education required the development and use of new skills and tools in distance education on educators' part. They were inevitably required by the system to teach by means of synchronous and asynchronous online tools, for

which they, in some cases, might have lacked training, skills, and means to do so. Understandably, adapting to a new system might come along with some challenges for teachers to consider during distance education. Therefore, the development of technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) of teachers (Koehler & Mishra, 2008) is of great importance.

2. Literature Review

In TPACK may help create better learning chances for students. It would not be wrong to claim that technology continues to be a part of life and its effect in language classrooms is felt more than ever before. Technology helps access knowledge and information, makes communication easier, and helps learners gain control in their learning process. However, there is always the risk that technology might be mishandled, which can be costly especially in the field of education. Consequently, it is indeed very important that teachers can appreciate the advantages of technology and feel competent enough to use it in their teaching. Teachers in this sense should have both the skills that are technical in nature and the skills of blending these with their pedagogical knowledge (Reinders, 2006). In this sense, it was Schulman (1986) that suggested pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), which is the integration of content and pedagogy into an awareness of how specific subjects, challenges, or concerns are structured, interpreted, and tailored to learners' varied preferences and skills, and addressed for instruction (Schulman, 1986). Based on PCK, Koehler and Mishra (2008) added a component of technology onto PCK and came up with technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge (TPACK). As Koehler and Mishra (2009) explain, TPACK consists basically of three major components of teachers' knowledge of content, pedagogy, and technology. Content knowledge is related to what teachers teach as content, pedagogical knowledge is related to how teachers teach this content, and technology knowledge is what teacher knows about technology that s/he can use. These three components interact with one another in the following ways as seen in Figure 1 below (Koehler et.al., 2014).
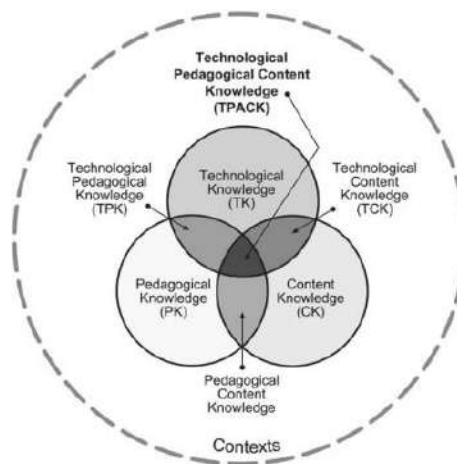
Figure 1**.** TPACK (Koehler et al., 2014, p.9)

More specifically, TPACK is in the words of Koehler and Mishra (2009):
"an understanding that emerges from interactions among content, pedagogy, and technology knowledge …. the basis of effective teaching with technology, requiring an understanding of the representation of concepts using technologies; pedagogical techniques that use technologies in constructive ways to teach content; knowledge of what makes concepts difficult or easy to learn and how technology can help redress some of the problems that students face; knowledge of students' prior knowledge and theories of

epistemology; and knowledge of how technologies can be used to build on existing knowledge to develop new epistemologies or strengthen old ones" (p. 66).

TPACK framework suggests that it is essential that teachers should be competent in these three components and three they interact for effective teaching. It is only when teachers are trained within the framework of TPACK and feel competent in putting it into practice that they may enjoy the benefits of technology in their teaching process and could get rid of the challenges they may face along the way. As started before, however, teachers in Turkey in some cases were neither ready nor trained enough to change their educational mode from the traditional one into a distant one during the pandemic period.

2.1. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to see this transition from the eyes of English teachers and understand how capable they found themselves in synchronous and asynchronous online English teaching and reveal what kind of challenges they faced along the way. The research questions of the study are as follows:

1. In what areas do EFL teachers commonly feel competent in synchronous and asynchronous online teaching?
2. In synchronous and asynchronous online teaching, is there any statistically significant difference in the perceived competency levels of teachers in terms of their:
   a. teaching experience,
   b. current teaching level,
   c. type of institution,
   d. their pre-service and in-service education, or any previous certification on online teaching?
3. What are the common challenges EFL teachers encountered in synchronous and asynchronous online teaching?

There is a growing body of literature on distance education, and synchronous and/or asynchronous online teaching (Akhter & Mahmood, 2018; Asoodar et al., 2016; Baker & Hjalmarson, 2019; Betts et al., 2013; Cho & Byun, 2017; Crouse et al., 2018; Forbes & Gedera, 2019; Gerrard, 2007; Glenn, 2018; Harrison, 2015; Honarzad & Rassaei, 2019; Lamb & Arisandy, 2020; Marteney & Bernadowski, 2016; Massengale & Vasquez III, 2016; McGuire, 2016; Murphy et al., 2011; Nami et al., 2018; Pearson et al., 2019; Peterson et al., 2018; Phelps, & Vlachopoulos, 2019; Rivera Barreto, 2018; Smith & Basham, 2014; Stark, 2019; Zarzycka-Piskorz, 2016; Zhou et al., 2020; Zydney et al., 2019). Nevertheless, there seems to be no study investigating the perceptions of EFL teachers on how competent they regard themselves in synchronous and asynchronous online education. Therefore, this study may make a valuable contribution to research on online education by filling this gap in the literature.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative research methodology, which helps produce reliable and replicable data that could be generalized to other study settings (Dörnyei, 2007). Specifically, a survey research study was used to collect data and answer the research questions. A survey research study is useful for researchers when they want to outline the characteristics of a population and present the opinions, attitudes, or preferences of a large group of people about an issue across one or more variables (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

3.2. Context

As stated before, the outbreak of COVID-19 all over the world has impacted Turkey, so has the teaching of English in this context. Due to the fact that the education system in Turkey was not prepared enough for a transition from the traditional face-to-face education to distance education beforehand, it was a sudden change of dynamics for all stakeholders. The institutions had to revise or upgrade their online education systems quickly and had to make some decisions. For the students in the K-12 state schools of the MoNE, for instance, first all lessons were recorded and broadcasted through the national TV channel as a part of asynchronous teaching, which was then followed by synchronous online teaching. In the case of most foundation/private schools, synchronous and asynchronous online teaching started simultaneously. For synchronous online teaching in Turkey, as in the other corners of the world, some user-friendly computer programs and smartphone applications became rather popular quickly. At universities, on the other side, synchronous and asynchronous online teaching began after the first three weeks of the onset of COVID-19 cases in Turkey, which then started to take some precautions against the spread of the coronavirus. Meanwhile, most universities offered both types of online teaching; nonetheless, some of them left the decision to the lecturers. As it had not been so common in Turkey before the pandemic, almost everyone had some issues with online education, particularly because of not being accustomed to it. In this process, it has especially been EFL teachers who were deeply affected by the recent changes in the way English language was taught in Turkish schools. Considering the relatively new history of online teaching in the Turkish context for EFL teachers, the two researchers in this study aimed to investigate the perceptions of these teachers working at K-12 schools and universities in Turkey on how effective they felt in synchronous and asynchronous online teaching, and the challenges faced during the process.

3.3. Participants

The participants of the study consisted of 155 English teachers (118 female, 37 male), who were selected through purposeful sampling. In their current institutions 53.5% of the participants (n=83) taught both synchronous and asynchronous online lessons; 40% taught synchronous ones (n=62); however, only 6.5% of them (n=10) had asynchronous online lessons.

Table 1
Participants' Demographic Information

	groups	*%*	*n*
age	21-25	30.3	47
	26-30	36.8	57
	31-35	16.1	25
	36-40	5.8	9
	41-45	5.2	8
	46-50	2.6	4
	51 and above	3.2	5
major	ELT	71.6	111
	ELL	13.5	21
	LINGS	4.6	7
	ACL	3.9	6
	ETI	3.9	6
	other	2.5	4
degree	BA	72.3	112
	MA	19.4	30
	PhD	8.4	13
teaching experience	1-5 years	53.5	83
	6-10 years	24.5	38
	11-15 years	11	17
	16-20 years	5.2	8
	21-25 years	2.6	4
	26 and above	3.2	5
type of teaching institution	foundation	43.2	63
	state	56.7	88
current teaching level	kindergarten	4.5	7
	primary	14.2	22
	secondary	32.3	50
	high school	18.1	28
	tertiary	31	48
	Total	**100**	**155**

The participants were between the ages of 21-25 (30.3%, *n*=47), 26-30 (36.8%, *n*=57), 31-35 (16.1%, *n*=25), 36-40 (5.8%, *n*=9), 41-45 (5.2%, *n*=8), 46-50 (2.6%, *n*=4), and 51 and above (3.2%, *n*=5). The majority of the participants majored in English Language Teaching (71.6%, *n*=111), and the others majored in English Language and Literature (13.5%, *n*=21), English Linguistics (4.6%, *n*=7), American Culture and Literature (3.9%, *n*=6), English Translation and Interpreting (3.9%, *n*=6), Architecture (1.3%, *n*=2), German Language Teaching (0.6%, *n*=1), and Philosophy (0.6% *n*=1). 72.3% (*n*=112) of the participants held a bachelor's degree, yet 19.4% of them (*n*=30) pursued their master's degree, and only 8.4% of the population (*n*=13) had a PhD degree.

Besides, 53.5% (*n*=83) of the participants had 1 to 5 years of teaching English experience, and the rest had 6 to 10 years (24.5%, *n*=38), 11 to 15 years (11%, *n*=17), 16 to 20 years (5.2%, *n*=8), 21 to 25 years (2.6%, *n*=4), and 26 and above years (3.2%, *n*=5) of teaching English experience. 43.2% of the participants

(*n*=67) worked at foundation/private teaching institutions, and 56.7% of them (*n*=88) worked at state teaching institutions. 32.3% of the participants (*n*=50) worked at secondary schools followed by the ones teaching at tertiary level with 31% (*n*=48). However, 18.1% (*n*=28) of them worked at high schools; 14.2% (*n*=22), and 4.5% (*n*=7) taught at primary schools, and kindergartens respectively.

Additionally, in terms of their education on online teaching, 85.8% of the participants (*n*=133) expressed that they had not taken a course on this subject when they were a student at university, while 14.2% of them (*n*=22) stated that they had taken such a course as an undergraduate student. Similarly, 72.3% of the participants (*n*=112) did not have any in-service training on online teaching; however, 43% of the participants (*n*=43) had it when they started working. 83.9% of the participants (*n*= 130) did not hold any certificates regarding online teaching, yet 16.1% of them (*n*=25) indicated that they had one.

3.4. Data Collection Tool and Data Collection Procedure

In the study, a survey was used to collect data from the participants, for surveys are advantageous in collecting a large amount of data from a considerable number of participants in a systematic and disciplined manner (Dörnyei, 2007). To formulate the survey questions, a total number of ten English teachers who were at that time actively teaching online from state or private kindergarten to tertiary level in different parts of Turkey were interviewed, and some codes, categories, and themes were driven for the survey. Besides, English teacher competencies drawn by the MoNE (2017) were taken into account in the formulation of the   survey questions. The survey consisted of three parts: in the first part, the participants were asked some demographic questions; in the other two parts, they were asked to rate their level of competency in their synchronous and asynchronous online English lessons from 1 (not very competent) to 5 (very competent) in a five-point Likert scale respectively. The items required the participants to evaluate themselves across their instructional and assessment skills, and their engagement in professional development, in line with the initial interviews and the competencies outlined by the MoNE (2017). Additionally, the participants were required to fill in two short open-ended questions about the challenges they faced during synchronous and asynchronous online teaching. The survey was prepared online and sent for piloting to a group of English teachers (*N*=41) working at different levels of education through an instant messaging application. The initial reliability analysis proved that the survey was quite reliable (*α*=.962). Following the piloting, some changes in wording were made in questions for the sake of clarity. Also, no items were deleted, yet two more items were added into the survey. In the end, it consisted of 59 items and two open-ended questions. A second reliability analysis was conducted over the actual data (*α*=.977). In order to ensure the validity of the survey, two experts were consulted. The latest version of the survey was sent to the English teachers other than the ones participating in the piloting by means of online teacher sharing platforms on social networking sites. Prior to the data collection, individuals' consent was taken. The overall data collection procedure lasted a month.

3.5. Data Analysis

In the analysis of data, IBM SPSS 23.0 was used for descriptive and referential statistics. Before any statistical analysis was made to answer research questions, a normality test was conducted. Since it was realized that the data were not normally distributed, a non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to understand whether there were any statistically significant differences in the competency levels of English teachers across their teaching experience, current level of teaching, type of institution, pre-service and in-service education, or previous certification regarding online teaching. In addition, a Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to compare the sub-groups of the teaching experience variable. In the analysis of the two short open-ended questions, content analysis was conducted by following the

framework by Huberman and Miles (1994, as cited in Creswell, 2013). Emerging codes, categories, and themes related to the challenges the English teachers faced in synchronous and asynchronous lessons were drawn by hand by the two researchers who worked together in each phase of the content analysis and reached a consensus. In the dissemination of the results, most commonly occurring codes were reported along with their frequencies.

4. Results

RQ I: *In what areas do EFL teachers commonly feel competent and less competent in synchronous and asynchronous online teaching?*

The results show that in synchronous and asynchronous online teaching, EFL teachers rated themselves competent in teaching grammar, teaching vocabulary and lesson planning. However, they felt less competent in teaching students with disabilities and sustaining interaction between students.

In synchronous online teaching, the participants stated that they felt competent in using particular features of a synchronous tool such as sharing screen, recording lessons, or sharing materials and documents (*M*=4.39; *SD*=.86), teaching vocabulary (*M*=4.30; *SD*=.88), giving students feedback (*M*=4.09; *SD*=.89), lesson planning (*M*=4.04; *SD*=.91), and teaching grammar (*M*=4.02; *SD*=1.01). However, they also felt relatively less competent in teaching students with disabilities such as vision or hearing impairment, etc. (*M*=2.85; *SD*=1.31), sustaining interaction between students (*M*=3.09; *SD*=1.35), teaching writing (*M*=3.38; *SD*=1.26), participating in professional development activities such as attending webinars, or online courses, etc. (*M*=3.45; *SD*=1.32), and teaching listening (*M*=3.54; *SD*=1.21).

As far as asynchronous online teaching was concerned, lesson planning (*M*=3.98; *SD*=1.17), teaching vocabulary (*M*=3.97; *SD*=1.15), time management (*M*=3.92; *SD*=1.21), material development or adaptation (*M*=3.84; *SD*=1.14), and teaching grammar (*M*=3.83; *SD*=1.18) were the areas which the participants felt most competent about. On the other hand, they indicated that they felt less competent in sustaining interaction between students (*M*=2.78; *SD*=1.42), teaching students with disabilities (*M*=2.85; *SD*=1.35), teaching speaking (*M*=2.98; *SD*=1.42), teaching pronunciation (*M*=3.16; *SD*=1.33), and sustaining teacher-student interaction (*M*=3.23; *SD*=1.41) during asynchronous online teaching.

RQ II: *In synchronous and asynchronous online teaching, is there any statistically significant difference in the perceived competency levels of teachers in terms of their teaching experience, current teaching level, type of institution, and their pre-service and in-service education, or any previous certification on online teaching?*

The results of Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the participants' perceived competency in synchronous online teaching across their teaching experience (x^2 (*sd*=5, *N*=155)=11.42, *p*=.04 (*p*<.05)). As it can be seen in Table 2, to understand whether there were significant differences between subgroups, Mann-Whitney U test was conducted for comparisons between groups. A significant difference was observed between the group with 1-5 years of teaching experience and the group with 21-25 years of experience, 6-10 and 21-25, 16-20 and 21-25, and 21-25 and 26 and above years of teaching experience.

Table 2
Kruskal-Wallis Test Results for Teaching Experience and the Mean Scores of the Subgroups (Synchronous Online Teaching)

x^2	df	p		subgroups	teaching experience (years)	N	M
				1st	1-5	83	80.34
				2nd	6-10	39	74.08
				3rd	11-15	17	69.38
11.42	5	0.44	*competency*	4th	16-20	7	101.71
				5th	21-25	4	23.63
				6th	26+	5	109.40
				Total		155	

Still, no statistically significant difference was found between the participants' perceived level of competency in synchronous online teaching and their current teaching level (x^2 (sd=4, N=155)=4.78, p=.31(p>.05)), the type of institution they worked at (x^2 (sd=1, N=155) =.53, p=.46 (p>.05)), or whether on online teaching they took a course at university (x^2 (sd=1, N=155)=.49, p=.48(p>.05)), had in-service training (x^2 (sd=1, N=155)=2.77, p=.09 (p>.05)), or held a certificate (x^2 (sd=1, N=155)=2.21, p=.13 (p>.05)).

Similarly, there was no statistically significant difference between the participants' perceived level of competency in asynchronous online teaching and their teaching experience (x^2 (sd=5, N=155)=10.60, p=.06 (p>.05)), their current teaching level (x^2 (sd=4, N=155)=3.46, p=.48 (p>.05)), the type of institution they worked at (x^2 (sd=1, N=155)=.14, p=.70 (p>.05)), whether they took a course at university on online teaching (x^2 (sd=1, N=155)=3.67, p=.055 (p>.05)), had an in-service training (x^2 (sd=1, N=155)=.06, p=.79 (p>.05)), or held a certificate (x^2 (sd=1, N=155)=.16, p=.68 (p>.05)).

Research Question III: *What are the common challenges EFL teachers have encountered in synchronous and asynchronous online teaching?*

According to the results of the qualitative data from the survey, the common challenges faced by the EFL teachers were dealing with technological problems, keeping students motivated, and sustaining overall interaction in synchronous and asynchronous online teaching.

Table 3
Challenges of Online Teaching

Codes (Synchronous)	f	Codes (Asynchronous)	f
technological problems	44	interaction	27
student motivation	14	monitoring	21
classroom management	13	student motivation	17
lack of technological opportunities	12	technological problems	13
student participation	12	student feedback	13
sustaining interaction	12	material development	10
time management	11		

When they were asked to report the biggest challenge they faced in synchronous online teaching, participants first indicated that they had difficulty in dealing with technological problems (*f*=44). They had unexpected technological problems either with their internet connection, computer, or the online teaching tool they used, such as starting a camera or recording voice, and they could not reach anybody who could

help them. Some participants also indicated that they found it difficult to motivate their students during synchronous online teaching (*f*=14), especially if it was a young learner's class. Next, they expressed that it was hard to sustain classroom management during synchronous online teaching (*f*=13). They stated that it was difficult to get them to work in pairs or groups, keep them focused on tasks, control their screen and understand whether they were following the classroom activities or leaving their computers on and going away. Besides, the participants expressed that students lacked technological opportunities (*f*=12). They explained that students lacked computers, connection to the internet, smartphones, or other technological devices that could help them follow synchronous lessons at home. In addition, the rate of participation in synchronous online teaching was reported to be low (*f*=12), i.e. students tended to stay silent during a virtual classroom even though they were normally quite eager to participate in a traditional class. The participants further indicated that sustaining interaction either among students or between students and the teacher was a challenge (*f*=12). They explained they could not see their students' faces, and they needed to talk into an empty space as sometimes students did not start their cameras or microphones, which was not very comfortable or motivating for the teacher. Finally, some participants reported time management (*f*=11) in synchronous teaching as a challenge on their part.

During asynchronous online teaching, on the other hand, the first challenge the participants talked about was that they had very limited interaction (*f*=27). They referred to the lack of immediate teacher-student and student-student interaction, particularly while teaching speaking. Some of them stated that teaching without having any students online was the most difficult thing for them as they could not see students' genuine reactions. In addition, because they knew that their students could not always ask questions during asynchronous online learning, they wanted to address anything that could leave question marks in their students' minds. The second challenge the participants faced in asynchronous online teaching was monitoring (*f*=21). The EFL teachers were upset that they were neither able to keep the track of assignments, nor were they able to monitor how their students did the exercises assigned. They also could not make sure if their students really did their assignments or just copied them from someone else or the internet. Besides, they stated that they had problems in motivating students (*f*=17) and experienced some technological problems (*f*=13). Another difficulty the participants experienced during asynchronous online teaching was not getting students' immediate feedback and/or reactions (*f*=13). Finding or developing quality materials was the last challenge which the participants encountered (*f*=10). Especially for young learners, it was difficult for them to look for online Web 2.0 tools, which could make their lessons and activities more interesting. They highlighted the issues of the lack of a portal where all the educational and Web 2.0 tools were available, insufficient resources online, and the inadequate and unorganized materials on the Education Informatics Network (EBA).

5. Discussion

5.1. Lesson Planning and Teaching Grammar and Vocabulary

During their experience in synchronous and asynchronous online teaching, the EFL teachers taking part in this study felt competent in lesson planning. Being competent in lesson planning in synchronous online teaching is of utmost importance since it improves learners' desire to learn and has an indisputable effect on their attainment (Phelps & Vlachopoulos, 2019). Hence, the fact that the EFL teachers in this study felt competent in both synchronous and asynchronous online teaching could be attributed to the importance of lesson planning in online education. In addition, as online education was something new for most of them, and many were not prepared enough for such a change, they may have needed to pay more attention than usual to lesson planning. This well-preparedness could explain why they felt competent in planning their online lessons. Heidari, Azizifar, Gowhary, and Abbasi (2015) state

that teachers prepare lesson plans in order to determine the objectives, comprehend the necessities, decide what materials to use, and be prepared for the problems likely to occur in the class. Therefore, it is pertinent to claim that lesson planning is one of the basic competencies many English teachers should possess, which, with no surprise, may remain the same when they need to teach online. According to the results of a study by Sudirman (2017), teachers know the importance of preparing good lesson plans, and the more lesson plans they write and implement them in classrooms, the better lesson plans they develop. In line with the results of this study, it may be reasonable to suggest that an English teacher, regardless of his/her bachelor's degree, has become familiar with lesson planning at the moment he/she has decided to become a teacher. Accordingly, because the participants were in-service English teachers with a wide range of years of teaching experience, they may have felt competent while preparing lesson plans during synchronous and asynchronous online teaching.

In the study, it was also seen that one of the areas teachers felt competent in synchronous and asynchronous online teaching was teaching grammar. The tendency of English teachers and students in Turkey for traditional deductive teaching of grammar could partially explain why English teachers felt quite competent in teaching grammar in synchronous and asynchronous online teaching. As Önalan (2018) makes it clear, EFL teachers tend to stick to deductive or explicit grammar teaching, and they tend to favor specifically grammar drills in which students have the chance for the repetition of the target structures. Uysal and Bardakçı (2014) explain that though the Turkish MoNE tried to introduce a teaching approach that depended on meaning and communication with the reforms in 1997 and 2005, many English teachers in Turkey went on teaching grammar in the traditional teacher-centered fashion due to some factors such as "teachers' and students' low proficiency in English, time constraints, lack of materials, low student motivation, noise and classroom management problems, grammar-based examinations, clash of western and eastern cultural values, first language (L1) use during group work activities, limited resources and exposure to English, and lack of teacher training in CLT[3]" (pp. 3-4). The researchers add that English teachers believed new innovations cannot be put into practice in their classrooms and developed their own ways of teaching grammar due to "time constraints, crowded classes, low student motivation, noise and classroom management problems, textbooks, central examinations, cultural and L1-related problems, and their lack of special training in teaching English to young learners" (p. 10). Besides, as Sik (2015) puts forward, learners themselves believe grammar is quite important in their learning and prefer deductive teaching of grammar to learn better and teachers felt better when they taught grammar deductively. In deductive or explicit grammar teaching, structures are presented to students directly before students are expected to have some production in the target language. It is oftentimes the case that students directly, and rather passively, receive the grammatical explanations made by their teachers rather than putting a further mental effort and discovering the structures themselves as they would normally do in inductive teaching. Besides, considering the value of learning grammar deductively could also make learners more motivated to learn the structures. Unless they experienced any other problems in synchronous and asynchronous online teaching, especially any technical ones, the teachers may have felt comfortable in teaching grammar as content rather in a mechanical way, which was something they were already used to in the traditional education system. Thus, they may have rated themselves competent enough in teaching it.

The results of this study further showed that the EFL teachers felt competent in teaching vocabulary in synchronous and asynchronous online teaching. Chung (2018) found out that while teaching vocabulary, English teachers aim their attention at particular aspects of lexical cognition and count on very few vocabulary teaching techniques. Consequently, English teachers teaching synchronous and asynchronous English courses may continue to be in the same habit while teaching vocabulary. They

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[3] Communicative Language Teaching

may be paying attention to only a few aspects of words, i.e., pronunciation, equivalents in the mother tongue, part of speech, grammar, etc. they teach; they may use limited vocabulary teaching strategies, which may also be attributed as the limitations of online teaching. In the study of Niu and Andrews (2012), it was reported that explicit vocabulary teaching was vital in language learning and teaching and that the English teachers in the study found it essential during teaching vocabulary. Additionally, the study of Mardali, Siyyari, and Lu (2019) revealed that English teachers' beliefs on vocabulary teaching and their actual practices were different from one another, which may be the case with the results of the present study. The EFL teachers may have thought that they were competent in teaching vocabulary in synchronous and asynchronous online teaching, yet their actual practice may be different from their perceived competency regarding their vocabulary teaching. Nevertheless, since there was no chance to observe the consistency between participants' perceived competencies and their real practices, this issue remains as a blurred picture.

5.2. Teaching Disabled Students and Sustaining Student Interaction

In the study, it was seen that the teachers felt less competent in teaching students with disabilities in synchronous or asynchronous online teaching. Undoubtedly, it is important that all students with diverse needs are taken into account in teaching and learning processes, especially the students who are acknowledged to be disabled in their communicative (seeing, speaking, or hearing), mental or physical domains (Betts et al., 2013). In this respect, online learning does indeed provide a viable alternative to traditional learning for these students (Smith & Basham, 2014). Different studies showed that online learning may help students with special needs in terms of providing "the flexibility of course scheduling, flexibility of lesson pace and the ability to take as many breaks as needed, automated feedback and results geared to help students address mistakes immediately, and the reduced pressure of having to perform in front of their peers" (Marteney & Bernadowski, 2016, p. 192). To guarantee that these students with special needs enjoy these benefits and have an equal chance in educational practices, it is of great importance to remember that they should be provided with a proper and well-designed online learning experience with adapted teaching strategies and approaches (Gerard, 2007). Given this, teachers need to understand how accessible their teaching tools and strategies are, and what other ways are available to align students' needs in an effective way (Smith & Basham, 2014). However, it may not always be easy to detect if students have any disabilities on teachers' part (Massengale & Vasquez, 2016), or teachers may not have the necessary skills or self-confidence to the inclusion of these students, however committed they may be to achieve it (Pearson et al., 2019). As Crouse, Rice and Mellard (2018) highlight, there is scarcity in the education of teachers for online learning and teaching disabled students, which could also be true for the Turkish context. In Turkey, in EFL teacher education programs, pre-service English teachers are taught a new class specifically for the teaching of students with special needs or mainstream students, as can be seen in the latest 2018 version of the undergraduate program by the Turkish HEC. However, the course description states that the class is not designed specifically for the teaching of English to these students. Considering this, it is not quite surprising that the participants of this study rated themselves less competent to teach disabled students online, for they may never have had the chance to take a course in the earlier programs, may not have been taught in the latest program how to adapt the course content for teaching of English, or may not have received any special in-service training on the matter.

Besides, sustaining student-student interaction was one of the areas where the EFL teachers felt less competent. Promoting interactions was one of the issues in asynchronous online teaching according to the results of the study of McGuire (2016). Moreover, Peterson, Beymer, and Putnam (2018) also indicate that student-student interaction has been a problematic issue in both synchronous and asynchronous online teaching. Similarly, Nami, Marandi and Sotoudehnama (2018) state that unless

interaction is created, assisted, and controlled thoroughly, it does not work for the benefit of enhancing the quality of online education. Since there was very little time for EFL teachers to get ready for online education, it can be said that what they had made ready in such a short time may have been insufficient in terms of sustaining student-student interaction. It is also possible that they may have focused on what and how to teach online more. In relation with sustaining student interaction, Phelps and Vlachopoulos (2019) mention that if teachers do not ask them to do so, students do not tend to turn on their webcams and microphones in synchronous lessons, instead of which they prefer texting. With such a situation in mind, communicating through texts may hinder student-student interaction, which teachers cannot control due to some legal regulations about privacy. In synchronous online teaching, there are other options for communicating instead of texting; in asynchronous online teaching, however, texting is usually the only option. As a result, the EFL teachers' lack of perceived competency in sustaining student-student interaction in both synchronous and asynchronous online teaching in this study may be considered reasonable.

5.3. Perceived Competency and Teaching Experience

As stated before, there was a statistically significant difference between the participants' level of competency in synchronous online teaching and their teaching experience. It was seen that the more experienced English teachers were, the less confident they rated themselves in synchronous online teaching, except for the group of teachers with 26 years of experience and more. It could be that these more experienced teachers finished their pre-service education long ago, did not need to make use of technology much in previous years of their teaching, or may not have been provided with any pre- or in-service training on the integration of technology or online teaching. The teachers with 26 years of experience or more, on the other hand, may have experienced online teaching or have had in-service training on the matter earlier on. However, there was not a statistically significant difference between the EFL teachers' perceived competency in synchronous and asynchronous online teaching regarding their current teaching level, type of institution, their pre-service and in-service education, or any previous certification on online teaching. This could be partly related to the sample size of the participants; thereof, further studies could be carried out with a larger group of EFL teachers to investigate whether there is any difference between their perceived competency levels and aforementioned variables.

5.4. Challenges of Online Teaching

When asked for the challenges they experienced in synchronous and asynchronous online teaching, most of the EFL teachers reported that they had had difficulty in sustaining interaction in their lessons. While reporting the qualitative data for the challenges, no differentiation between the type of interaction (i.e. either teacher-student or student-student interaction) was made by the participants. Glenn (2018) states that in order to increase interaction in online teaching, conversation journals and live chat rooms can be employed. However, most of the teachers participating the study may not have had such an opportunity due to their excessive workload which may stem from their sudden adaption to online teaching and technology available them to use. Forbes and Gedera (2019) report that in asynchronous online teaching, the more teachers interact, the more interaction will occur between students, who are not willing to do so if their teachers are not so active in terms of interaction during lessons. In the case of synchronous online teaching, nevertheless, teachers may need to use a tool which could allow them to improve not only teacher-student but also student-student interaction (Baker & Hjalmarson, 2019). Some teachers think that interactions in an asynchronous online lesson are not the same as the ones in face-to-face lessons in terms of quality (McGuire, 2016). That is to say, the EFL teachers in the study seeing the

interaction as a challenge in synchronous and synchronous online teaching may have had a bias against interaction in online lessons without trying enough for sustaining interaction. Baker and Hjalmarson (2019) pinpoint the concerns of students - such as peer pressure - towards interaction in online lessons, which may lead to unwillingness to interact with other students or their teachers, which might support the finding of the present study.

In the study, it was also seen that the teacher participants felt less competent in sustaining students' motivation in synchronous and asynchronous online teaching. In the literature, different studies point out the motivating effect of online teaching/learning tools on students' learning and academic performance (Asoodar, Marandi, Vaezi, & Desmet, 2016; Zarzycka-Piskorz, 2016; Cho & Byun, 2017; Rivera-Barreto, 2018; Honarzad & Rassaei, 2019; Lamb & Arisandy, 2020). However, as Stark (2019) found in her study, students may not be all the time intrinsically or extrinsically motivated to learn via online teaching and may find their online courses less interesting and useful than their traditional face-to-face learning experience. She speculates that in online learning students may feel isolated and disconnected from their teachers and peers, which may lessen their motivation, or alternatively students may perceive their online courses less difficult and thus may have less motivation to be successful in their online courses. These reasons may understandably pertain to the students in the Turkish context as well, and the teacher participants may thus have felt to be less competent in sustaining students' motivation in synchronous and a synchronous online teaching.

Another challenge encountered by the EFL teachers during synchronous and asynchronous online teaching was technological problems. Likewise, in McGuire's (2016) study, technology was too reported to be problematic by the teachers because of challenges faced by their students in online exams. Since in the study there were some participants working at tertiary level whose students needed to take English exams online as HEC (2020) required them to do so, they may have had the same problems, which may have resulted in such a challenge to be reported by them. According to a study by Harrison (2015), asynchronous online lessons are believed to have some technological challenges for students to deal with. The fact that these technological challenges are faced by EFL teachers could be accepted quite normal since they needed to engage in technology in synchronous and asynchronous online teaching for developing or adapting materials, sharing them with learners, monitoring their progress, or giving assignments, implementing quizzes or exams, and so on. Teachers also believe that in synchronous online lessons, not only activities but also exams should be prepared in such a way that they can be compatible with online teaching (Phelps & Vlachopoulos, 2019). Therefore, the possibility that lessons and exams may not have been fully compatible with technology may have caused the EFL teachers in this study to see technological problems as a common problem during synchronous and asynchronous online teaching. Zydney, McKimmy, Lindberg, and Schmidt (2019) claim that some teachers need some technological aid during their synchronous online lessons especially while struggling to teach. The EFL teachers of this study might not have had such external or additional support and hence may have encountered a variety of technological problems in online teaching.

6. Conclusion

The results of the study showed that EFL teachers in Turkey believed they were competent in planning their lessons and teaching grammar and vocabulary in both synchronous and asynchronous online teaching. Nevertheless, they did not believe they were equally competent in teaching students with disabilities and sustaining interaction. It was only between the teaching experience of the participants and their perceived level of competency that a statistically significant difference was found. Additionally, the participants reported technological problems and sustaining student motivation and interaction in both synchronous and asynchronous online teaching as the most commonly faced challenges in the study.

Depending on the overall results, as Smith and Basham (2014), Betts et al. (2013), and Pearson et al. (2019) would agree, it should be noted that EFL teachers should be provided training during their pre and in-service education so that they could successfully teach disabled students not only in the traditional but also in blended and fully online education system. Especially pre-service education programs, as Crouse, Rice and Mellard (2018) support, should focus on ways of teaching disabled students online to increase the effectiveness of their teaching for these students. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies could be conducted to determine the difficulties EFL teachers face in the teaching of disabled students in online education to shape the content and extent of the education of EFL teachers. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the education of teachers and taking into account disabled students in the process should be achieved, as suggested by Betts et al. (2013), with the collaboration of the official bodies responsible for disabled children, professional development of teachers, and distance education. Similar training facilities and constant support should also be provided for teachers on how to achieve interaction and motivate students. In order to foster student-student and teacher-student interactions, the materials to be used in the future in online English lessons can be prepared in a way to allow more interaction. There could be some in-service training for teachers concerning the technological problems EFL teachers may encounter if synchronous and asynchronous online education is to continue. This in-service training might specifically be on the use of tools and possible solutions to technological issues. In addition, institutions may consider hiring support staff to whom EFL teachers may turn in the face of technological challenges.

7. Suggestions and Limitations

To this end, future needs analysis studies could be conducted to see further into the challenges EFL teachers face in synchronous and asynchronous online teaching and decide on the pre- and in-service training they need to develop the competency to deal with these challenges, for which teacher training programs, faculties of education, the MoNE, and HEC should all collaborate. Finally, this study did not specifically require the participants to report why they believed they were competent or less competent in teaching synchronous and asynchronous online classes. Consequently, our explanations regarding their perceptions could merely be assumptions based on literature. Therefore, further studies could be conducted to specifically understand the reasons behind their perceptions.

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