Voices from Crisis: Perspectives of EFL Learners on Emergency Distance Education After an Earthquake

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This study aims at uncovering the perspectives of tertiary English language learners on the emergency distance language learning practices carried into effect following the devastating earthquakes in Türkiye in 2023. The study adopted a descriptive phenomenological research pattern as a qualitative study to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceived benefits and drawbacks of emergency online education based on the actual experiences of learners during the crisis period. With this purpose, qualitative data were collected from 77 participants through online reflection forms at the end of the online education period. The analysis of the data revealed that the leading benefits of emergency online education were easy access to courses, recordings, and materials; the supportive attitudes and efforts of the instructors; motivational and psychological support; and economization in terms of time and money. On the other hand, internet connection failures, poor technological devices, electricity cut-offs, distractors leading to demotivation, the psychological burden of the crisis conditions, disciplinary issues, interaction and socialization restrictions, and digital literacy of instructors were among the reported drawbacks of practices. As pedagogical implications, it is understood that there is a clear need for preparedness for emergency scenarios, and it is a requirement to equip all the stakeholders with the necessary qualifications needed to implement emergency distance language learning practices.

Keywords: earthquake, emergency distance education, higher education, language learning, learner perspectives

INTRODUCTION

Our planet witnessed one of the most contagious and deadliest pandemics only several years ago. COVID-19 severely affected the entire world population due to its unprecedented rate of spread and relatively high mortality rates (WHO, 2020). The urgent recommendation of social distancing as a precaution against the spread of the disease brought about the closure of schools at all levels at the beginning of the year 2020. On March 13, 2020, the Ministry of National Education in Türkiye (MoNE) declared the cancellation of all the education programs, including the universities, all around the country. Upon the suspension of all face-to-face education, universities had to make a swift transition to emergency distance education practices in a variety of forms. Shortly after the normalization process had begun following the pandemic, Türkiye experienced another catastrophe on

February 6, 2023. Also named the 'disaster of the century', the earthquakes that hit a number of provinces in the south-eastern Türkiye caused more than 40,000 deaths and tremendous damage in the region. Since many schools and campuses were damaged, millions of residents were evacuated from the damaged provinces to safer cities all around the country, it was once again impossible to continue face-to-face education (MoNE, 2023), and the country had to make another swift shift to EDE at all levels, from primary schools to universities. Following both crisis situations in the world and in Türkiye, a new era of 'emergency' teaching and learning also began in the Schools of Foreign Languages that are primarily responsible for offering English preparatory year programs in Turkish universities. Since there was no compelling decision by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) to use any particular platform or software, each school made its own decision depending on the needs, sizes, curricula, and other determining factors. Independent decisions and choices of the institutions, thus, led to context specific practices and learning outcomes, which need to be comprehensively explored and understood.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emergency Distance Education and Language Learning

It is important to note that distance education does not necessarily correspond to emergency distance education, which has to be defined and interpreted separately by considering its unique features (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Aaron Bond, & Jewett, 2021). Distance education (remote teaching) simply refers to "an educational context where the teachers and students are not located at the same time, in the same place" (Allen et al., 2004, p. 403). Emergency distance education, however, differs from the previous conceptualization of education with the causes of existence or emergence. Hodges et al. (2021, p. 6) define emergency distance education (EDE) as "a temporary shift of delivery of instruction to an alternate mode and form due to any unanticipated crisis occurrences such as wars, natural disasters, etc.". While regular forms of distance education entail proper planning, methodology, specially designed and prepared materials and an independent curriculum, emergency distance education may lack many of these due to the swift transition of the mode of delivery in a crisis situation (Bozkurt et al., 2020). Though emergency distance education suggests some instant solutions for unforeseen crisis situation, it is evident in the literature that it is accompanied by a number of challenges and obstacles encountered by the stakeholders in education (Kidd & Murray, 2022; Paudel, 2021; Taşçı, 2021). Since the instruction is delivered either in the form of synchronous or asynchronous online teaching through a variety of tools such as LMSs, video-conferencing tools, and even social media platforms during the crisis times, the competencies of learners and teachers gain importance (Nugroho & Atmojo, 2020). Though the students born after the second millennium are named 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001), their familiarity with technology was far from eliminating the challenges encountered during emergency distance education periods. Hartshorn and McMurry (2020) claim that even the swift transition from real classrooms to virtual learning environments itself exists as an anxiety and stress factor among foreign language learners. Scholars (Ariyanti, 2020; Sison & Bautista, 2021) argue that students' engagement with language learning activities in classes highly depends on their affective conditions. In crisis situations, the existence of demotivation and negative attitudes leads to less engagement in online classes. Lastly, although computer assisted language learning (CALL) and mobile assisted language learning (MALL) practices had been in use in the field of language teaching for a while, even the university teachers were reported to have lacked the appropriate pedagogical knowledge of online teaching they were directed to during crisis situations (Stanistreet, Elfert, & Atchoarena, 2020).

Perspectives on Emergency Distance Language Learning

In the context of language teaching and learning, one of the rising concerns about emergency distance language learning (EDLL) practices has been social inequity. A number of studies (Bol, 2020;

Mabeya, 2020; Stanistreet et al., 2020; Tawil, 2020) have pointed at this issue, addressing the obstacles encountered by the disadvantaged students. Since the delivery of instruction relies heavily on the internet, computers, and mobile devices, the already evident gap between advantaged and disadvantaged learners has become even more apparent (Tawil, 2020). In the Netherlands, for instance, it has been found that students with wealthier parents, and easier access to high technology benefit more from EDE practices than those who are deprived of such advantages (Bol, 2020). Likewise, students in some African countries, such as Kenya, are reported to suffer from insufficient internet access and lack of proper electricity supply (Mabeya, 2020). It is also reported that online learning deprives foreign language learners of adequate amounts of interaction with their teachers and peers, which in turn, turns them into passive receivers of knowledge rather than active practitioners (Fuentes-Hernández & Silva-Flórez, 2020).

In the literature, a recent study by Kamal, Zubanova, Isaeva and Movchun (2021) found that tertiary English as a foreign language (EFL) learners perceived increased amount of spare time, frequent breaks, comfortable learning atmosphere and the absence of commuting time as the leading benefits of emergency online language learning. Similarly, in their study with pre-service teachers, including EFL teacher candidates, who experienced online teaching practicum, Bayır, Dulay and Tekel (2022) found that online practicum provided benefits in saving time, money and energy while it had some limitations like lacking technological skills, collaboration and communication. In his review paper, Erarslan (2021) analyzed 69 studies which were conducted in the field of English language learning and teaching in time of COVID-19, a period of emergency distance education. The findings highlighted the prominence of challenges rather than the benefits of emergency online language teaching and learning practices all around the world. These challenges were mostly found to have resulted from inadequate or unreliable internet access and difficulty in accessing proper CALL or MALL devices. Besides, it was concluded that there were differing views, attitudes, motivations, and reported effects of EDE among language learners. In a similar vein, Octaberlina and Muslimin (2020) carried out their mixed-methods survey design research to explore the views of the participants on emergency remote learning practices and barriers encountered during their learning experiences. The researchers identified three major barriers verbalized as lack of familiarity with e-learning applications, lack of sufficient technology and access to high-end devices, and physical barriers such as suffering from eye strain due to long hours spent looking at screens. EFL learners participating in the study recommended that trainings on the use of learning management systems (LMS), having regular and frequent breaks during online classes, and decreasing the resolution of multimedia used in online lessons could serve as possible solutions to the problems they mentioned. In Turkish EFL context, Taşçı (2021) concluded that technological limitations, insufficient interaction, psychological burden, self-discipline problems, and demotivation were the most frequently reported problems while the ubiquity of learning, opportunity to become more digital literate, and efficiency of time and money were mentioned as the fundamental advantages of EDLL.

To sum up, absence of a widely agreed-upon emergency distance education curriculum and the existence of numerous practices all around the world make it essential to analyze and elaborate on the varying remote language learning practices in order to come up with efficient implementations (Crawford et al., 2020). Likewise, context-specific studies could contribute much to the existing body of research since EDE experiences differ considerably depending on the learning context. Besides, unlike the pandemic-focused studies, the body of research regarding EDE practices in post-earthquake period is relatively scarce in the literature. Finally, most of the previous studies in the field have focused on emergency distance education or e-learning in general, and there is still limited research focusing primarily on tertiary level foreign language learners.

This study, therefore, aims at exploring the tertiary level foreign language learners' perspectives on the benefits and drawbacks of learning English through EDLL practices at a state university setting

following the earthquake disaster in Türkiye. In order to accomplish this objective, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the perceived benefits of EDLL practices implemented during the post-crisis period following the earthquake disaster?

2. What are the perceived drawbacks of EDLL practices implemented during the post-crisis period following the earthquake disaster?

METHOD

Participants

The participants of the study were English preparatory program students studying at a state university in Türkiye. They were selected mainly through convenience sampling, but since going through the emergency distance education period following the major earthquakes in south-eastern Türkiye was determined as the criterion for participation in the study, the criterion sampling method was also partly utilized. An online reflection form was initially sent to a total of 422 participants at the end of the EDLL period (2023 Spring Term), but with a return rate of 25.59 %, 108 students answered the open-ended question. However, it was seen that some respondents did not answer the question properly and stated their requests for online examinations, exemptions from attendance, and excuses for absence in online lessons rather than reflecting on their emergency distance education experiences. For instance, a respondent stated: "Dear Instructor, I don't think it is fair to force us to sit face-to-face exams as the teaching procedures are all online. We want to have online exams during this period." As this kind of responses (e.g. personal requests) were not relevant to the scope of the study, and did not provide valid research data, they were eliminated from the data set. Thus, after removing those respondents, a total of 77 participants (41 females, 36 males) provided valid data for the present study.

Table 1
The participants' proficiency levels, devices utilized, access to EDLL, and losses

Level			Device Type			Regular Connection			Losses		
	n	%		n	%		n	%		n	%
A1	2	2.6	PC	48	62.3	Yes	59	76.6	Yes	13	16.9
A2	5	6.5	Mobile	23	29.9	No	18	23.4	No	64	83.1
B1	39	50.6	Shared	3	3.9						
B2	31	40.3	Tablet	3	3.9						

All the participants of the present study received online English language education through EDLL practices such as the MS Teams platform which was utilized to carry on teaching synchronously during the emergency. As briefly summarized in Table 1, most of the respondents were either B1 (*n*=39) or B2 (*n*=31) level students. The respondents accessed online classes mostly through their own devices such as personal computers or laptops (*n*=48), mobile phones (*n*=23), and tablet computers (*n*=3) while few of them (*n*=3) had to use shared computers either at home or in a library. Although the majority of the participants had regular access to the Internet (*n*=59), a remarkable number of them (*n*=18) lacked this basic need for online learning. Lastly, and most strikingly, 16.9 % of the respondents (*n*=13) reported that they had lost a family member or a close relative because of the earthquakes that hit the country.

Research Design

As a qualitative inquiry into the benefits and challenges of emergency distance language learning perceived by English language learners at the higher education level, this study utilizes a

phenomenology design. In line with what Willis, Sullivan-Bolyai, Knafl and Cohen (2016) explain, the primary purpose of this qualitative research is to uncover the participants' perceptions regarding the phenomenon of emergency distance language learning. Due to its interpretive aspects, the study adopts a descriptive phenomenological design pattern since it allows the researcher to comprehend the meanings attributed to the experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Data Collection Tools and Procedures

The data were collected through online reflection forms. The participants were asked to comprehensively evaluate and comment on their English language learning experiences during the emergency distance education period in terms of 'access to courses, use of technology and infrastructure, attendance to courses, interaction (teacher-student, student-student), learning motivation, learning efficiency, achievements, difficulties, and/or problems they have experienced'. In order to ensure the validity of the instrument, the reflection question and the guidelines were prepared by each researcher individually and the final version was discussed and agreed on before sending it out to the participants. The responses were qualitatively analyzed through content analysis by identifying codes, sub-themes, and themes. To ensure inter-coder reliability, the analysis was first carried out by the researchers separately, and then all the codes and themes found were compared. In the end, the discrepancies were discussed by the researchers, and some of the codes were merged and several sub-themes were restructured.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the data revealed that two main dimensions of the use of emergency distance language learning practices emerged as the benefits and challenges of EDE at the tertiary level in the aftermath of the 2023 earthquakes in Türkiye (Table 2). These two dimensions have also been reported in numerous studies (Bailey & Lee, 2020; Mozafari, Ghanizadeh & Hamedi, 2023; Paudel, 2021; Pikhart & Obaydi, 2023).

Table 2
Themes, sub-themes, and codes regarding the perceived benefits and drawbacks of EDLL

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes	*f*
Benefits and advantages of EDLL practices	Accessibility	Easy access	24
		Recordings	14
		Material support	3
	Instructional	Instructors' effort	18
	Socio-affective	High motivation	9
		Psychological support	5
		Feeling at ease	3
	Interactive	Good interaction	12
		Speaking practice	5
	Economization	Time saving	11
		Money saving	2
Drawbacks and disadvantages of EDLL practices	Technical issues	Connection issues	23
		Poor technology	6
		Lack of PC	6
		Electricity cut-off	4
	Digital literacy	Digital literacy of instructors	4
	Communicative	Lack of communication	9
		Lack of socialization	4
	Demotivation	Distractors	15
		Low motivation	11
		Psychological burden	7
		Lack of self-discipline	6

The findings show that easy access to online classes (*n*=24) during the emergency periods was the most recurring perceived benefit reported by the participants. Likewise, being able to watch the course recordings (*n*=14) whenever and wherever they wanted was another major benefit of EDLL practices. Though few, some participants (*n*=3) mentioned the ease of access to the course and learning materials that were provided by the instructors via the EDLL platforms. The following extracts clearly prove that the accessibility of synchronous online classes, course recordings, and course materials was an outstanding benefit of EDLL for many students.

> *Besides other advantages (of online classes), if I need to make a choice, I prefer online lessons to face-to-face lessons because I can attend the lesson even when I am sick, and I can contact the teacher via Teams whenever I want. (P45)*

> *Since the lectures are recorded, I have the opportunity to revise them day by day and learn the difficult parts by listening to them over and over again. When there is face-to-face education, it is very challenging for me to work while travelling to and from school. (P6)*

The analysis of the interview data revealed that the most prominent perceived benefit of online education emerged to be accessibility. Learners were able to access the courses and their recordings from a wide range of devices, such as computers, smartphones, and tablets (Bailey & Lee, 2020)

regardless of time and location concerns, by allowing them to access the courses at anytime and anywhere (Dağgöl Dişlen & Akcayoğlu İşpınar, 2023; Paudel, 2021). Another benefit related to accessibility or flexibility emerged to be the ease of access to the course and learning materials (Dağgöl Dişlen & Akcayoğlu İşpınar, 2023) which were provided by the instructors via the EDLL platforms. Parallel to this study, the accessibility and flexibility of online education have also been emphasized in some other studies (Dağgöl Dişlen & Akcayoğlu İşpınar, 2023; De Oliveira, Penedo & Pereira, 2018). It is evident from the findings of the present study that mobile devices such as smartphones, laptops, and tablets have already changed the nature of language learning and affected the learners' access to language learning content. Especially when the high rates of mobile device ownership of the participants are taken into consideration, the assumptions of mobile assisted language learning studies have been validated in the present context (Kukulska-Hulme, Lee, & Norris, 2017; Stockwell, 2010).

In the study, the supportive attitudes and efforts of the instructors (*n*=18) were thought to be another positive aspect of emergency online education. Participant 59, who experienced the earthquake and even lost some of her extended family members, clearly expressed her appreciation for the supportive manner of the instructors during such a hard period of time.

> *As a student living in Hatay who was directly affected by the earthquake during the course that started in February, I think that I received full support from my professors in terms of learning motivation due to my situation, no matter how difficult it was for me to attend the lessons despite the internet outage, interruptions due to adverse weather conditions and frequent aftershocks, I think that it was productive and I got efficiency from the lessons I attended, no matter how much I had problems focusing. (P59)*

Similar to this finding, Dağgöl Dişlen and Akcayoğlu İşpınar (2023) have also reported that teachers' supportive attitudes were an advantage of online education. In addition, the findings from this study are also in line with those from the study by Kamisli & Akinlar (2023) who emphasized that online education enabled support for learners both academically and personally.

Another important benefit perceived by the participants was the motivational aspect of emergency online education. During the days of crisis after two undesirable conditions, the swift transition to online education and the teaching practices carried out in EDLL seem to have motivated the students (*n*=9), and even counselled them psychologically (*n*=5) by helping them 'normalize' their lives and keep up with their studies.

> *My motivation to learn English was higher during the online education period than usual because I believe that having more free time, as I accessed the lessons online from home, was more beneficial for me in terms of both resting and studying. (P71)*

> *From my point of view, the distance education period was good for me. Although I did not lose anyone from my close family in the earthquake, I had relatives who lost, and I think the distance education period was psychologically good. And it was at least better for our friends who lost their relatives and those who experienced the earthquake because it would not be good for them to come to school in such a period and think about their grades. (P25)*

As it could be understood from the statements of the participants, the motivational aspect of emergency online education appeared to be one of the crucial constructs of online education and the teaching practices carried out in EDLL. However, motivation seems to be a contradictory aspect of online education. While studies by some researchers (Bailey & Lee, 2020; Wang et al., 2019) who propose that the motivation of the students may increase via online education support the findings of the present study, some others (Akdağ Kurnaz & Arı, 2024; Mozafari et al., 2023; Pikhart & Obaydi, 2023) claiming that online education causes decreasing motivation contradict the findings from the

present study. It is also important to note that the instructors' supportive attitudes during the EDLL period might have contributed to the learners' motivation.

Interactive benefits, which emerged as the existence of a sufficient amount of interaction during the lessons (*n*=12), and opportunities to practice speaking skills (*n*=5) formed another theme identified from the data. Participant 12 points to the functions of the online education platform that enable the users to interact with each other and practice speaking in pairs and groups.

> *A system with sufficient potential for student-teacher interaction. Depending on whether the student wants or not, he/she can easily participate in the lesson at any time and ask for permission to talk. When the teacher has some speech and discussion activities, he/she has the opportunity to use the 'break-out rooms' function in the meeting and perform this activity in the discussion rooms. (P12)*

Although this sub-theme was also apparent among the perceived drawbacks of EDLL, it was reported to be one of the outstanding benefits. This finding aligns with studies in the literature, such as the one by Halim and Hashim (2019), which indicates that communication skills may be improved through online education. On the other hand, numerous studies contradict the present research. Although effective communication is accepted as an indicator of effective online education (Paudel, 2021), studies revealed that communication skills were developed least during online education (Dağgöl Dişlen & Akcayoğlu İşpınar, 2023), and it caused low communication during online classes (Bayır et al., 2022; Mozafari et al., 2023). These contradictory findings may derive from the context of the participants of this study and the context of the other studies that found online education was demotivating because, in the context of this study, the participants experienced a catastrophic earthquake that destroyed a dozen cities and caused thousands of deaths in the country. The participants might have found online education in which they interact and communicate with others, an escape from their sorrow. Therefore, this could make them more motivated to communicate in online classes and engage in learning activities due to their affective conditions (Sison & Bautista, 2021).

Lastly, the respondents perceived the EDLL practices and emergency online education as timesaving (*n*=11) and money saving (*n*=2), which both fall under the economization benefits sub-theme in the data analysis.

> *Being at home in these difficult times is an advantage. I don't need to make extra expenses, for example, I don't have to pay for transportation to school, and the meals. So I think the pros of the online course are too many. Because I was at home during online education, I was able to work extra on my lessons with the 3 hours left for me. (P45)*

These findings align with the studies by Mozafari et al. (2023) and Bayır et al., (2022) who found that online education is time and cost-saving since it does not require commuting. Similarly, the participants of another study (Kamal et al., 2021) in the higher education EFL learning context reported the increased amount of spare time as a key benefit of emergency online education.

On the other hand, the respondents of the study also reported a number of challenges and disadvantages of switching to EDLL following the earthquake. As Participant 14 mentions, internet connection problems or frequent losses of connection (*n*=23) were among the most predominant challenges experienced.

> *Since the Wi-Fi infrastructure in our neighborhood was not very good, sometimes I could experience disconnection, and therefore I would turn on my own mobile data and join the lesson, but unfortunately this caused a lot of internet loss, too. (P14)*

Since internet connection is at the core of online education, internet connection problems have been also reported by many researchers investigating the perceptions of online education (Dağgöl Dişlen & Akcayoğlu İşpınar, 2023; Mozafari et al., 2023; Pikhart & Obaydi, 2023).

Another leading problem emerged to be not having a personal computer (*n*=6) to join the synchronous online classes. Even if some participants had a PC at home, they had to share it with their siblings, who also needed to access online classes during the EDE period.

> *It was easy for me to access the online English lessons on the MS Teams platform. But it was rather difficult to share the computer with my siblings because I had two brothers me, but I was very pleased with my teachers. (P61)*

This finding is evidence for the fact that the sudden switch to online education deepened the already existing gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged learners during this period since the delivery of foreign language instruction was carried out through computers and mobile devices (Tawil, 2020). The findings reflecting the technological inequities among the EFL learner participants of this study seem to justify the notion of the 'digital divide' (UNESCO & Jung, 2005), which refers to the disparities across the world in terms of basic technological infrastructures.

In the analysis of the data, frequent electricity cut-offs (*n*=4) were also stated as a serious drawback, especially in the earthquake zone. One of the participants from the zone expressed his experiences as follows:

> *In this process, I could not follow my online live (synchronous) lessons very closely and I did not have my book and any course materials with me, most of the time our internet access was restricted in my location and our electricity was not supplied due to the collapsed debris. (P58)*

Although several technical issues were verbalized as challenges in the previous studies (Dağgöl Dişlen & Akcayoğlu İşpınar, 2023; Kamisli & Akinlar, 2023; Koç, 2020), specifically, the electricity cut-offs that were also stated in the present study were not mentioned as a serious drawback except for a limited number of studies conducted in the underdeveloped contexts. To exemplify, Mabeya (2020) enounced the lack of proper electricity supply as an obstacle to accessing online education in Kenya. Though Türkiye is neither an underdeveloped nor an African country, the devastating impact of the earthquakes might have led to such a finding in the current study.

The drawbacks reported were not limited to the student or technology related ones. Indeed, another theme emerged as the technological literacy or capabilities of instructors (*n*=4), which affected the students negatively during class hours. For instance, Participant 72 emphasized the use of technology by the instructors as an important reason decreasing the efficiency of the online courses.

> *I personally did not have a different problem, but I could not show the same performance as my face-to-face performance while joining the lessons. Apart from these, while I had no problems, we saw that the school or instructors sometimes had problems, for example; microphone problems, ambient sound problems, and light problems on Teams. They could not even use it (the software) properly. (P72)*

This finding could result from the fact that the digital literacy of both teachers and students has gained utmost importance in online education since it is heavily dependent on technology (Bozkurt et al., 2020). For instance, in a recent paper, Wang (2023) similarly draws on the reality of the incompetence of teachers in using digital tools properly due to a lack of sufficient pedagogical knowledge of online education during the EDE periods. Additionally, Octaberlina and Muslimin (2020) suggest that learners and teachers should be provided with training on how to make use of online tools effectively for better results.

In the communicative dimension, lack of sufficient communication with others (*n*=9) also appeared as a drawback, and some respondents also complained about the lack of opportunities to socialize (*n*=9) in online education as they do not see each other during or after the lessons.

> *When we are sent to different groups (break-out rooms) to talk to each other during the lesson, most people don't talk to each other and we can't communicate like face to face. Since we did not have one-to-one contact with our teacher, my participation in the lesson could not be very healthy, and at the same time it was a very shallow period in terms of sociability, of course, this reminds us again of the advantageous aspects of school. (P65)*

These findings can be explained by the early MALL studies' claims that online and mobile learning can lead to limited mutual interaction due to the nature of the devices used (Colpaert, 2004). It is also reported that technical constraints result in restricted communication and socialization among learners during emergency online periods (Fuentes-Hernández & Silva-Flórez, 2020).

In the last sub-theme of the drawbacks of EDLL practices, the online EFL learners overwhelmingly referred to distractors (*n*=15) resulting from the nature of online learning and joining the synchronous online classes from home. Distractors such as family house comfort, family members, visitors, siblings, and daily household responsibilities led to demotivation (*n*=11) among some of the participants.

> *In addition, learning in the home environment is much more difficult than in the school environment because at school everyone is a student and everyone has to work, but in the home atmosphere, this is not the case, there is a family life that is constantly flowing. Online education has factors that can greatly reduce motivation. (P22)*

Distractors resulting from the nature of online learning and joining the synchronous online classes from home have emerged as drawbacks of EDLL practices in other studies in the literature (Dağgöl Dişlen & Akcayoğlu İşpınar, 2023; Mozafari et al., 2023). For some of the participants in the unique context of the current study, the reported distractors were often inevitable since they had to evacuate damaged houses and take shelter in their relatives' homes or tents, where they had to share limited space with many other people.

Furthermore, some participants (*n*=7) also verbalized their experiences of psychological devastation due to the earthquake disaster and the crisis situation in the country. Indeed, the sudden transfer to the EDLL and accommodation to the new learning context in a virtual environment seem to have put much pressure on them. What is worse, some students either had to stay in tents or share their houses with relatives who were victims of the disaster.

> *The earthquakes and devastation in the region forced some of my relatives to leave their homes. My aunts moved to our house from the earthquake zone and I was very sad for them and it affected my psychology, so I could not focus on the lessons. (P9)*

As Hartshorn and McMurry (2020) also argue, the sudden transfer to the EDLL and accommodation to the new learning context in a virtual environment seem to have put much pressure on them. Besides, the fact that some students either had to stay in tents or share their houses with relatives who were victims of the disaster might have exacerbated their levels of stress, as highlighted by Koç (2023). This could be because people who have experienced an earthquake are expected to be in a psychological state of uncertainty, fear, and anxiety (Elhaty & Elhadary, 2023).

Difficulty in maintaining self-discipline without external controlling factors like rigid class hours, face-to-face communication with the instructors, and the physical atmosphere of the school was expressed as another disadvantageous aspect of the EDLL period by six other participants.

> *Maybe we don't take it seriously enough as students, we can go to school in person, and attend the lesson efficiently with our books in front of us, but now we don't even open books, maybe many of us, and I can't even study my lessons properly because I can't see that seriousness. (P7)*

This situation has not been reported directly in any studies, but in their study, Dağgöl Dişlen and Akcayoğlu İşpınar (2023) found that traditional classes are more disciplined compared to online lessons. Constant exposure to screens during the EDLL practices might have also served as a source of demotivation that resulted in the loss of self-discipline among the learners (Ariyanti, 2020).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The present study was carried out to explore tertiary level foreign language learners' perspectives on emergency distance language learning in a specific context following a devastating earthquake disaster. As a result of the analysis, two major themes – benefits and drawbacks of emergency online education arose. While the advantages of EDLL were collected under accessibility, instructional, socio-affective, communicative, and economization issues; the drawbacks perceived were related to technical problems, demotivation, communicative restrictions, and digital literacies of instructors.

The findings could shed light on the current practices of online education as well as future implementations of emergency online education in any possible crisis scenario. Especially if the drawbacks and challenges mentioned by the participants are taken into consideration by the educational administrators, policy-makers, and EFL instructors, switching to EDLL when needed could be more seamless and flawless. Another remarkable implication for educational policymakers could be to provide the EFL teachers and instructors with proper pieces of training on the use of online and digital tools utilized during the emergency distance education periods. As there were recurrent views regarding the psychological support of the instructors during online teaching, it would be beneficial for instructors to be equipped with the basic skills of psychological counselling during emergencies. In this way, they could support and motivate the learners more effectively. It should also be noted that, in light of the findings, a distinct emergency distance language teaching curriculum could be planned, designed, and developed to be used in crisis contexts. Such a curriculum could encompass implementing a properly defined online teaching pedagogy, placing more interactive course content, and using software with lower technical requirements such as connection speed or device properties. For instance, courses regarding digital literacies such as basic computer skills and LMS use, and motivation-triggering interactive games can be embedded into the emergency curriculum.

Despite its comprehensive scope and relatively large number of participants for a qualitative research design, the present study also possesses a few limitations to be taken into consideration. To begin with, this study solely focuses on the perspectives of the language learners who are thought to be the actual victims of the swift transition to emergency online education rather than eliciting the experiences of all the stakeholders of EFL education. Further studies could, therefore, adopt a more comprehensive approach by collecting data from all the stakeholders including instructors, administrators, and educational policymakers. Another limitation of the study is that it was carried out in a single higher education institution in the west of Türkiye. Considering the geographical diversity and inequities among the different parts of the country, conducting similar research with participants from all around the country would yield more generalizable findings.

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