

An Investigation of Teacher Perceptions about Training on Online Foreign Language Education

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Abstract

Technological advancements have prominently affected foreign language (FL) education. From the early uses of cassette-players to personal laptops and mobile phones, educational technologies have played a transformative role in FL classes through several contributions they have made to foster student achievement including increased motivation, better engagement with learning tasks, and more personalized and meaningful learning. Nevertheless, teachers as the change agents in the classroom feature to be a highly ignored stakeholder in this transformation. Given critical functions that teachers perform in the plan and design of lessons, training teachers for appropriate and maximal integration of educational technologies into FL classes still forms the ‘missing piece of the jigsaw’. Expanding on the extensive experience with educational technologies use during the Covid-19 pandemic, the present study investigated in-service FL teachers’ perceptions about a training program they voluntarily joined to gain and promote their awareness about educational technologies integration into FL classes. Designed as a descriptive study, the present study used qualitative methodologies to collect and analyze data. Delving into FL teachers’ perceptions of educational technologies in line with the training program they joined, the present study shed light on perceived weaknesses and strengths of online FL education apart from possible insider suggestions to improve it.

Keywords: Educational technologies, in-service teachers, insider perspectives, strength, weakness

Çevrimiçi Yabancı Dil Eğitime Yönelik Öğretmen Algılarının İncelenmesi

Özet

Teknolojik gelişmeler yabancı dil (FL) eğitimini önemli ölçüde etkilemiştir. Kaset çalarların erken kullanımlarından kişisel dizüstü bilgisayarlara ve cep telefonlarına kadar, eğitim teknolojileri artan motivasyon, öğrenme görevlerine daha iyi katılım ve daha kişiselleştirilmiş ve anlamlı olmak gibi öğrenci başarısını artırmak için yaptıkları çeşitli katkılarla yabancı dil sınıflarında dönüştürücü bir rol oynamıştır. Bununla birlikte, sınıftaki değişim ajanları olarak öğretmenler, bu dönüşümde oldukça göz ardı edilen bir paydaş olma özelliğine sahiptir. Öğretmenlerin derslerin planlanmasında ve tasarımıyla yerine getirdikleri kritik işlevler göz önüne alındığında, öğretmenleri eğitim teknolojilerinin yabancı dil sınıflarına uygun ve maksimum düzeyde entegrasyonu için eğitmek, hala "yapbozun eksik parçasını" oluşturmaktadır. Covid-19 salgını sırasında eğitim teknolojilerinin kullanımına ilişkin kapsamlı deneyimi genişleten bu çalışma, hizmet içi yabancı dil öğretmenlerinin eğitim teknolojilerinin yabancı dil sınıflarına entegrasyonuna ilişkin farkındalıklarını kazanmak ve geliştirmek için gönüllü olarak katıldıkları bir eğitim programı hakkındaki algılarını araştırmaktadır. Betimsel bir çalışma olarak tasarlanan bu çalışmada, veri toplamak ve analiz etmek için nitel metotlar kullanılmıştır. Yabancı Dil öğretmenlerinin katıldıkları eğitim programı doğrultusunda eğitim teknolojilerine ilişkin algılarını inceleyen bu çalışma, çevrimiçi yabancı dil eğitiminin algılanan zayıflıklarına ve güçlü yönlerine, onu geliştirmeye yönelik olası içeriden önerilere ışık tutmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Eğitim teknolojileri, hizmet içi öğretmenler, içeriden bakış açıları, güç, zayıflık

1. Introduction

Technological developments have dramatically affected foreign language (FL) education. Since the early days of technology integration into FL classes, a plethora of research (Canals & Al-Rawashdeh, 2019; Hakim, 2020) have documented overwhelmingly positive results (such as accommodation of individual learning styles, extension of language instruction beyond the classroom, flexibility and richness of materials, improvement in communicative and receptive skills) along with few negative reports. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic unprecedentedly forced all countries to make a sudden transition from in-person to fully online education.

While the use of educational technologies throughout the pandemic enabled sustainability of education, there were evidently serious challenges of this transition. The challenges of this sudden, fully-fledged transition were unique to such an extent that some researchers (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020) called this type of education as emergency online education. This concept of emergency online education suggested that such forced and sudden transition to online education should be considered in its own right.

One of the basic limitations of this sudden transition to online education was the major disregard for teachers' voice in the design and implementation of online education programs. More precisely, the emergencies of the pandemic in contrast to the limited time (if any) available for planning and preparation urged the administrative bodies to make top-down decisions without eliciting teacher views about if they were ready for online education and how cost-effective this transition would be. Accordingly, many studies (Dahmash, 2020; Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020) revealed concerns about online education during the pandemic including insufficient digital devices, a lack of face-to-face interaction, weak or interrupted internet connection. With this regard, the present study intended to shed light on the largely neglected piece of the puzzle i.e. insider teacher perceptions about an in-service training (INSET) program about online FL teaching, which was designed to promote teachers' awareness about various aspects of online education. Finally, the study investigated possible suggestions the teachers would make about how make online FL teaching more effective. To this end, the present study intended to answer the following research questions:

Research question 1: What are FL teachers' perceptions about the training on online FL teaching?

Research question 2: What are FL teachers' perceptions about online FL teaching?

Research question 3: What are FL teachers' suggestions about effective online FL teaching?

2. Method

The present study used a qualitative methodology by employing a structured form and group interviews to collect data about FL teachers' perceptions about the training on online FL teaching and overall experiences in online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The training basically addressed issues of possible problems and needs of FL teachers in online education, teaching four major language skills online, possible sources to resort to while designing online lessons. The training was delivered in five consecutive lessons via an online platform. Each lesson lasted about 40 minutes, and the participants were granted a certificate of participation in the end.

The structured form developed by the researcher probed into participants' online FL teaching practices during the pandemic as well as demographic information. The form was disseminated and collected electronically due to the pandemic conditions. The questions in the form delved into the participants' perceptions about the problems they encountered and areas in which they needed the most help, strengths and weaknesses of online education, and suggestions to overcome the weaknesses. The semi-structured group interviews examined the participants' perceptions about the training they received, overall experiences in online teaching and suggestions to improve online FL education.

The interviews included open-ended questions deriving from a comprehensive literature review and the specific foci of this study. Depending on the availability of the participants, the interviews were flexibly scheduled to foster participation. The interviews lasting approximately for half an hour on average each were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the author.

The participants in this study were 54 FL teachers (35 females and 19 males) whose age ranged between 24 to 50, with an average age of 34. The participants were selected purposively according to certain criteria including working in public schools, actively teaching throughout the pandemic and no previous participation in any training about online FL teaching. The reasons for employing these criteria for the selection of the participants included that a) extensive facilities of the private sector schools could have positively skewed teachers' perceptions about online education, b) teachers with no hands-on teaching experience during the pandemic could have expressed perceptions based on hearsay, and c) knowledge and experiences gained from participation in similar training programs could have interfered with the result of this study. The participants were teaching in different grade levels ranging from the 2nd grade of primary school to 12th level of high school. While the oldest participant had been teaching for 25 years and the youngest for 3 years, the participants had seven years of teaching experience on average prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study was designed as a descriptive study that provides detailed information about online FL teaching practices during the COVID-19 pandemic through the perspective of teachers. The study used content analysis to analyze the data collected from the participants. The analysis conducted by the researcher proceeded in two phases suggested by Charmaz (2006). In the first phase, an initial coding familiarized the researcher with the dataset along with tentative identification of the overarching categories, themes, and codes in the participants' responses. In the second stage of focused coding, the researcher conducted an in-depth analysis of the data to decide on the ultimate version of the themes, revise and refine the initial coding.

3. Results

The present study yielded three main categories in terms of the participant teachers' perceptions about online foreign language education. In line with the research questions, the present study firstly elaborated on the participants' perceptions about the training program they joined, which aimed to pinpoint possible foci for prospective in-service teacher training (INSET) programs about teaching/learning FL online. In the second category, the study probed into the participants' perceptions about online FL teaching with specific reference to their extensive online FL teaching experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, the study revealed the participants' insider suggestions about how to handle problems and/or weaknesses of online FL teaching.

3.1. Perceptions about the Training

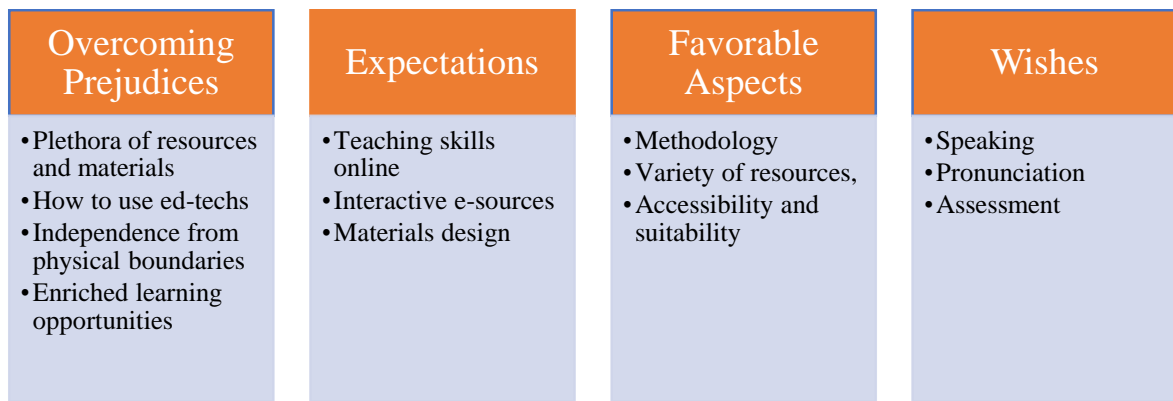
The present study examined the participants' perceptions about the training program within the themes of overcoming prejudices, expectations of the program, favorable aspects, and wishes for improvement. With regard to overcoming prejudices, the participants predominantly emphasized the impact of their participation in the INSET program on the ground that this program largely resulted in overcoming their prejudices about integrating educational technologies into FL classrooms (See Figure 1). Underlying this emphasis, the findings provided a list of certain features of educational technologies which the INSET program introduced and thusly, made the participants revise and refine their perceptions about educational technologies. More specifically, the participants posited that the vast number of online resources and materials, demonstration of how to use educational technologies more effectively, depiction of FL education independent of physical boundaries of the school, and enriched learning opportunities for students of different proficiency levels were some of the sound features of educational technologies that helped them overcome their prejudices about using educational technologies in FL education. The

following excerpt evidently reflected the contributions of the training program to overcoming the participants’ prejudices about educational technologies.

In this program, there are many benefits of instructional technologies in the development of 4 foreign language skills. With this program, I noticed that there are many useful websites for learning English. I realized that thanks to educational technologies, anyone can find English sites for all levels. Thanks to educational technologies, I realized that learning English will create unique opportunities for enjoyable and permanent learning. (Participant 28, age: 32, female, 6 years of experience)

Figure 1

Perceptions about the training



Considering the participants’ expectations of the program, the present study essentially enlisted three key components of effective foreign language education including teaching skills online, interactive e-sources and materials design. To start with the teaching of the four basic linguistic skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing), the present study highlighted that the participants unequivocally expected to learn about how to teach these skills effectively through online resources. One of the participants summarized their expectation of teaching skills online by stating that it “would be good to learn how to design lesson plans and specific practices for teaching four major skills of foreign language in an integrated way” (Participant 9, age: 37, male, 8 years of experience). Moreover, the findings unraveled sound expectations about learning how to find and use interactive e-sources compared to more traditional activities such as fill-in-the-gap or matching exercises. One of the participants echoed this expectation about interactive e-sources by claiming that “to make maximum benefit of online foreign language education, we need interactive exercises rather than simply traditional worksheets transferred into e-formats” (Participant 4, age: 42, female, 14 years of experience). The other expectation that the participants had of their participation in the INSET program required learning about materials design for online classes. The findings pointed out that materials design had to be paid vast attention as the majority of the participants called for help about “how to plan and carry out an online lesson on online meeting platforms” (Participant 10, age: 31, female, 9 years of experience) and “design some materials by using those web 2.0 tools that can be useful for teaching English language” (Participant 7, age:26, female, 4 years of experience).

As to the favorable aspects of the program they participated in, the present study put forth the role of methodology, variety of resources, and accessibility and suitability in ensuring the participants’ satisfaction with INSET programs. Regarding methodology as one of the aspects of the training program which the participants favored, the present study demonstrated that the manner of delivery was a vital factor in attracting and maintaining the participants’ interest in the program. Prominent in vivo features underpinning the participants’ satisfactions with the training program required “clear presentation of the content” (Participant 29, age: 27, female, 5 years of experience), “detailed explanation” (Participant 14), “rich

information” (Participant 23, age: 29, female, 4 years of experience), “proper pacing” (Participant 41, age: 31, female, 5 years of experience), and “opportunities for practices” (Participant 52, age: 39, male, 11 years of experience). Similarly, variety of resources referred to the differentiated content of the training in that the program offered “audio-visual and textual content taken from a great deal of websites and tools for different skills” (Participant 7, age: 26, female, 4 years of experience). Accessibility and suitability of the content featured to be the other favorable aspect of the training program. One of the participants illustrated her satisfaction with the accessible and suitable content of the program as she commented that “the webtools recommended for the four English skills in the course are free and easy to use by students with different levels and ages” (Participant 46, age: 28, female, 4 years of experience).

Likewise, the present study found that the participants’ wishes for improvement of the program elaborated on speaking, pronunciation and assessment. Even though the participants argued for integrated teaching of the four skills, a large majority of the participants explicitly stated a need to have more training about how to teach speaking in particular through online education. To clarify the emphasis on speaking, one of the participants postulated that “speaking should be given more space” in order to better meet FL teachers’ needs about delivering online teaching. In the same vein, the findings pinpointed the requirement for covering online teaching of pronunciation so that teachers could be better informed of how to achieve an all-encompassing FL teaching.

One of the participants hinted on his concern about ignorance of teaching pronunciation in the program as he recounted that “teaching four skills is definitely good for improving our students’ communicative competence. But if we could learn about effective teaching of pronunciation through online education, it could be much more useful for us” (Participant 3, age: 32, female, 7 years of experience). An equally important wish for the improvement of the training program was related to assessment because a large number of the participants in this study expressed sound interest in learning more about conducting online assessment. Some participants insistently posed such questions as “How can we prepare online assessment according to students learning level” (Participant 18, age: 34, male, 12 years of experience), “What is the highest quality form of assessment in online classes?” (Participant 51, age: 26, female, 4 years of experience), and “Is there a comprehensive site for the teachers to monitor students’ progress which is also suitable for giving feedback?” (Participant 26, age: 28, female, 5 years of experience).

3.2. Perceptions about Online FL Teaching

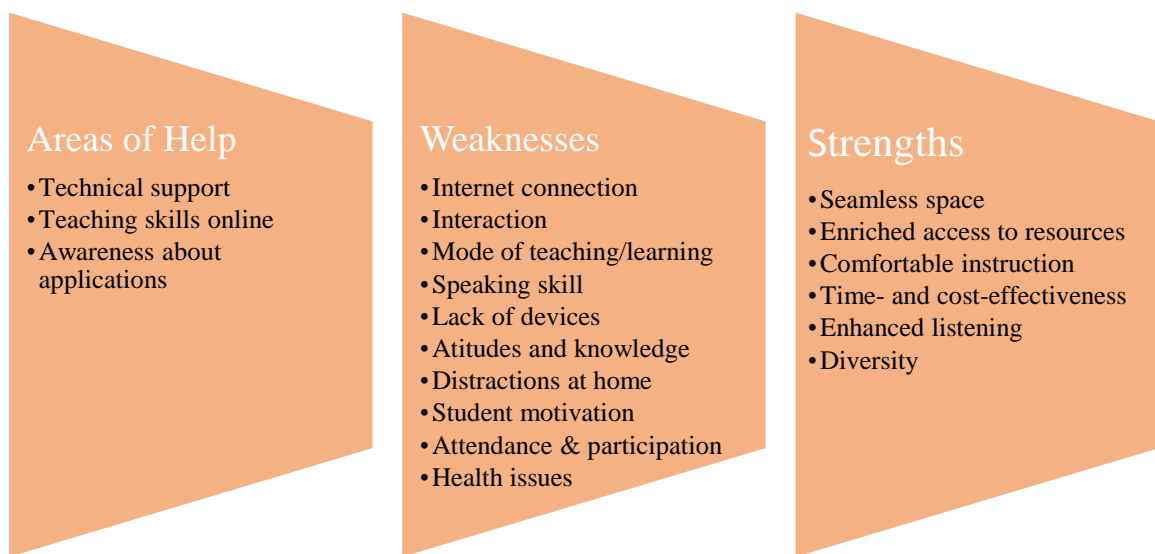
A close investigation of the participants’ perceptions about online FL teaching revealed three main themes: areas of help, weaknesses and strengths (See Figure 2). Referring to possible areas of help based on their hands-on experiences with online FL teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants in this study documented that to successfully deliver online lessons, they needed help basically in terms of technical support, teaching skills online and awareness about applications. With regard to the technical support, the present study underlined the need for a sound online learning management system because some of the participants criticized that there were several cases in which “the system failed or was so slow due to overloading that the teachers or students were logged out and could not enter the lessons for a while” (Participant 26, age: 28, female, 5 years of experience). The study also pointed out that internet connection and bandwidth was another salient area in which the participant iteratively called for help. One of the participants exemplified this issue common to almost all the participants as she recounted that her “internet connection was not reliable for online education. For instance, even though I often had poor connection in the location that I was in during the lockdown, I did not know how to recover this in order to connect to my courses appropriately” (Participant 24, age: 30, female, 7 years of experience).

Similarly, teaching skills online surfaced as another major area in which the participants called for help for a more successful online FL teaching experience. However, it should be noted that despite an overall interest in overall communicative and productive skills, speaking was by far the most frequently referred

skill, with the teaching of which the participants stated explicit dissatisfaction. More precisely, the participants surmised that they “needed help mostly about speaking in online education because most of the English teachers were not able to provide speaking practices during online education” (Participant 41, age: 31, female, 5 years of experience). As to the awareness about online applications for FL teaching, the present study demonstrated that in contrast to the widespread use of educational technologies all over the world, the participants still lacked awareness about identifying and using online applications and programs viable for effective FL teaching. One of the participants formulated the need for such awareness by noting down that “I still need to learn about how to use some of the Web 2.0 tools in terms of facilitating some language skills” (Participant 37, age: 27, female, 4 years of experience).

Figure 2

Perceptions about online FL teaching



With recourse to the weaknesses of online FL teaching, the present study provided a detailed list of problems that the participants encountered while teaching English through online education. In a descending ranking of frequency, the weaknesses comprised internet connection, interaction, mode of teaching/learning, speaking skill, lack of devices, attitudes and knowledge, distractions at home, student motivation, attendance and participation, and health issues. Issues related to the internet connection were so common that almost all participants reported difficulties caused by poor connection. One of the participants hinted on possible threats posed by internet-related issues by narrating that the “first problem was internet connection. I had a very bad connection. That was hindering me to join the classes. Even if I joined the courses, I had breakdowns and that was bringing about staying behind the curriculum” (Participant 23, age: 29, female, 4 years of experience).

Intriguingly, a large number of the participants also referred to a dramatic lack of interaction between the teacher and students as well as among students. In spite of the flexibility of means of communication offered in online FL teaching, the participants proposed that it “was very hard to keep in touch with our students” (Participant 49, age: 30, female, 6 years of experience) and “communication between students and teachers decreased, so education was affected badly” (Participant 15, age: 27, female, 5 years of experience).

Regarding the mode of teaching/learning as a major weakness of online FL teaching, the participants elaborated on the passive nature of online education in terms of the “monotony and boredom induced by increased exposure to the screen as well as the modus operandi of sitting at one restricted spot for prolonged

hours” (Participant 28, age: 32, female, 6 years of experience). Another surprising weakness associated with online FL teaching was related to the teaching/learning speaking skill. Even though speaking was considered one of the most salient skills, the present study revealed several criticisms about the fact that speaking was mostly ignored in online FL education. Sample insider views about teaching speaking through online education elucidated that “students always do not have the chance for improving speaking” (Participant 52, age: 39, male, 11 years of experience), “less room for speaking skill” (Participant 47, age: 29, female, 5 years of experience) “students don’t really have much chance to practice speaking” (Participant 20, age: 28, female, 4 years of experience). Furthermore, the present study pinpointed that lack of devices for delivering online classes dramatically affected effectiveness of online FL teaching. Particularly in cases of the participants with children and spouses who had simultaneously running online classes, shared uses of laptops, speakers and/or webcams considerably limited successfully delivering online classes. One of the participants explicated the challenges posed by inadequate devices as she remarked that “the shortage of devices for online education was another major problem because my son also had classes and wanted to use my computer” (Participant 23, age: 29, female, 4 years of experience).

In addition, teachers’ attitudes and knowledge about online education was a noteworthy weakness in the effectiveness of online FL education. The present study highlighted that contrary to the extensive hands-on experiences with online education, some of the participants expressed negative attitudes and lack of knowledge about employing educational technologies in FL teaching. A close investigation of the participants’ views attributed negative teacher attitudes towards online FL teaching to the lack of training and ever-changing nature of the educational technologies. To illustrate, one of the participants justified possible dissatisfaction with online teaching on the grounds that “I think most of the teachers had a big problem with using computers because they couldn’t keep up with the developing technology. Each time you learn something, there are some new applications or modifications” (Participant 49, age: 30, female, 6 years of experience). Furthermore, the home environment emerged as a weakness in online FL teaching because the participants noted down some distractions at home such as “interruptions by family members in the midst of a lesson” (Participant 13, age: 34, male, 8 years of experience) and “noise deriving from housework” (Participant 27, age: 36, female, 9 years of experience). The very idea of being at home seemed to be critical pitfall in that “home is a comfort zone to me” (24, age: 30, female, 7 years of experience) and “in the home environment, it was very hard to focus on the teaching. It could not be compared with the school environment” (Participant 48, age: 32, female, 9 years of experience).

Similar to the limited focus on effective teaching on the part of teachers, the present study pointed out that lack of motivation on the part of the students was another weakness of online education because students’ “low motivation and no hope for paying attention to the lesson” (Participant 9, age: 37, male, 8 years of experience) had negative impacts on teachers’ practices. Another perceived weakness that necessarily pertained to student learning referred to student attendance and participation in online FL education. Critical of the decision about leaving the attendance to online lessons and opening of webcams to the students’ own discretion, several participants maintained that “in online education, students are free to attend or skip the lessons. That’s why, some students did not show up at all while others who attended were passively hiding behind the devices without interaction in the lessons” (Participant 38, age: 35, female, 10 years of experience). The other prevalent weakness observed by the participants was health issues. The participants expressed some concerns about dried eyes, backache, neck ache and headache along with fear of depression because they “had prolonged hours of exposure to the computer screen in an isolated environment” (Participant 41, age: 31, female, 5 years of experience).

As for the perceived strengths of online FL teaching, the present study documented a comprehensive list of six codes including seamless space, enriched access to resources, comfortable instruction, time- and cost-effectiveness, enhanced listening, and diversity in FL teaching. To start with the most frequently referred strength of FL teaching, the present study indicated that the seamless space (i.e. time- and location-independent virtual environment) provided teachers with incessant flexibility to continue the instructional

practices anytime and anywhere. Such positive remarks as “always available” (Participant 3, age: 32, female, 7 years of experience), “reachable at any time” (Participant 11, age: 39, female, 10 years of experience), “removed distances, maximum accessibility” (Participant 26, age: 28, female, 5 years of experience), and “connect anywhere” (Participant 51, age: 26, female, 4 years of experience) were reflective of the sound contributions of the seamless space to online FL teaching. Equally important was the enriched access to resources during the online teaching practices. The participants in this study recounted that it was a pivotal strength of online education to “easily access to effective online language teaching materials” (Participant 18, age: 34, male, 12 years of experience), be “able to get sources faster” (Participant 21, age: 28, female, 5 years of experience), and thusly, “design the online courses with richer contents” (Participant 49, age: 30, female, 6 years of experience).

Comfortable instruction as another prominent strength of online FL teaching represented the relief of teaching from home during the particular case of the pandemic, in which social distance was a prerequisite to avoid the risk of infection. One of the participants clarified her comfort with teaching from home by reporting that it “was psychologically comforting to know that we were staying away from the community and we would be teaching in our own homes” (Participant 40, age: 27, male, 3 years of experience) while another similarly proposed that “teaching the courses from home was very comfortable because we were not getting in contact with anyone, and just opening the courses from our phones/laptops by staying at home” (Participant 24, age: 30, female, 7 years of experience). Closely associated with the comfort of teaching from home, the present study highlighted that time- and cost-effectiveness was a noticeable strength of online FL teaching given that on the one hand the participants did not “have to waste time on the road, no transportation problems” (Participant 11, age: 39, female, 10 years of experience), and on the other hand “except for the case of having a computer/a tablet, there was no need to pay for food, transportation, etc.” (Participant 29, age: 27, female, 5 years of experience).

Still another strength was the enhanced listening practice offered in online education. The present study indicated that the participants favored the extensive opportunities that online FL teaching provided for “students to improve their listening skills because they can listen remarkably more while taking the online classes” (Participant 14, age: 30, female, 7 years of experience). The last main strength of online education was related to ensuring diversity in FL teaching. The notion of diversity in this study covered a wide-ranging perception of choice in FL teaching in terms of teachers, materials, and online learning management systems. More precisely, the participants capitalized on diversity to refer to “the opportunity to take courses from native speaker teachers or teachers from other countries” (Participant 23, age: 29, female, 4 years of experience), “different types of materials like movies, videos games, podcasts, articles” (Participant 10, age: 31, female, 9 years of experience), and “a variety of programs like zoom, blackboard, google classroom etc.” (Participant 17, age: 32, female, 8 years of experience).

4. Suggestions

In the light of the problems and weaknesses that the participants encountered about the integration of educational technologies into FL teaching, the present study yielded several suggestions to make educational technologies use more effective (See Figure 3). Among the prevalent suggestions were attendance, support by the government, connection quality, interactive activities, alternative and varied e-sources, awareness-raising, close rapport, hybrid education, and parental involvement. Given that attendance to the online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic was optional in Turkey, the participants in this study primarily suggested that attendance “should be mandatory for helping students learn how to discipline themselves and continuously attend the classes” (Participant 41, age: 31, female, 5 years of experience). Secondly, the present study shed light on the role of financial support by the government in helping teachers to successfully conduct online lessons.

In particular, support by the government was essentially required regarding the provision of digital devices (e.g.: laptops, webcams, speakers etc.) for conducting online lessons. Henceforth, the participants postulated that “the government should help us to buy some technological devices” (Participant 49, age: 30, female, 6 years of experience). Another viable suggestion about the provision of digital devices was that “schools' computer rooms can be used for teachers who do not have computers and may be open to students and teachers at the weekend” (Participant 45, age: 29, female, 7 years of experience). Closely related to the government interventions, the present study ascribed some additional responsibilities for the government to improve the quality of internet connection to promote effective online education. The participants' suggestions about the connection quality emphasized that “the government must solve the problem of poor connection by increasing the internet speed and strengthening the infrastructure” (Participant 24, age: 30, female, 7 years of experience).

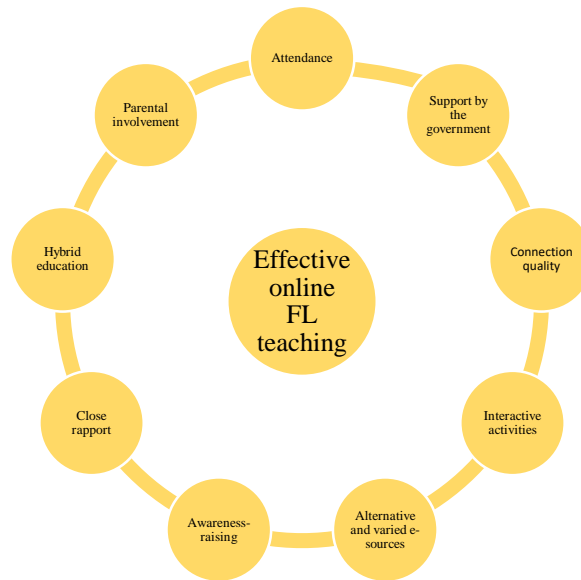
Moreover, the present study underscored the need for interactive activities as a crucial suggestion to overcome issues related to perceived boredom associated with the mode of online teaching/learning practices. To make the online lessons more interactive, the participants hinted that “we could create more interesting and joyful online environment by having more group or pair work activities, or interactive online project assignment” (Participant 23, age: 29, female, 4 years of experience). Likewise, the present study revealed several calls for presenting alternative and varied e-sources that would effectively supplement various aspects of online FL teaching including “giving feedback, interaction, group work, discussion, active participation etc.” (Participant 25, age: 32, female, 8 years of experience). With respect to using alternative and varied e-sources, one of the participants maintained that “various platforms, applications and websites should be used to diversify teaching in such a way that if one fails (like the failures in the Zoom), another can readily be used” (Participant 38, age: 35, female, 10 years of experience). In the same vein, the present study underlined that a worthwhile suggestion about offering due variety and preventing/solving possible problems stemming from the web tools or websites used for online teaching referred to some awareness-raising about how to design effective online classes and handle technical problems. As a straightforward way of such awareness-raising, one of the participants argued that “to professionally use digital tools and creatively solve the problems, teachers should attend some seminars or webinars, since this is the only way to ensure uninterrupted teaching in distance education” (Participant 25, age: 32, female, 8 years of experience).

In addition, a close rapport between teachers and students surfaced to be the sine qua non of effective online education because “a reliable and active correspondence between the teacher and students can be the best solution to solve possible problems timely” (Participant 14, age: 30, female, 7 years of experience). To achieve such rapport, the participants suggested “widespread use of social media tools, WhatsApp, and e-mails as well as offering e-office hours” (Participant 12, age: 27, female, 5 years of experience). Despite the overwhelming appreciation of the contributions of educational technologies to FL teaching and learning, the present study indicated that some of the participants viewed hybrid education rather than fully-fledged transfer to online education as a notable alternative for solving online-related problems. Some remarks favoring the preference for hybrid education mentioned that “students and instructors can sometimes be gathered in a classroom environment for the cases requiring practice” (Participant 24, age: 30, female, 7 years of experience) and “it could be better by making some classes face to face” (Participant 4, age: 42, female, 14 years of experience).

As regards the parental involvement, the present study demonstrated that collaboration with parents would prove fruitful for achieving a more effective online education. The participants underpinned the need for parental involvement by claiming that “the teacher may contact the families and request that the appropriate environment be provided to the student” (Participant 18, age: 34, male, 12 years of experience). Given that teachers cannot control the teaching/learning in online education, parental involvement can considerably promote the effectiveness of online teaching/learning practices.

Figure 3

Suggestions about online FL teaching



5. Discussion

The present study revealed salient results for a more effective online FL teaching/learning experience. Based on the abovementioned findings, the present study pinpointed the drastic role of planning in online FL education. Given that the participants’ perceptions about online FL education relied largely on the emergency conditions triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, the present study premised that effective educational planning by the major stakeholders of education (e.g.: school administrations and ministries of education) would be the primary requirement for ensuring a safe transition to online education. This result confirmed Schleicher’s (2020) argument that effective and efficient reactions for future emergencies would directly be a function of how well governments were ready and prepared.

As part of such planning, the present study demonstrated that infrastructural refinements in terms of internet connection and bandwidth and provision of technical devices should be on top of the to-do-list for the governments. Several studies (Dahmash, 2020; Zhou et al., 2020) found that success of the transition to online education during the pandemic was hampered due to the lack of access to technological devices and reliable internet connection. As the issues about internet connection and digital devices were internationally prevalent, practical suggestions to resolve them would merit immediate consideration. To this end, Dahmash (2020) proposed that live classes should be recorded and shared with students through online management systems so that those students suffering from poor connection or lack of devices could view and review the lessons at their own disposal. Echoing Zhou et al.’s (2020) findings, the present study similarly suggested that the governments should launch or fund projects to strengthen the internet connection infrastructure and provide digital devices to students and teachers who lack adequate devices.

As another important aspect of planning for effective and efficient online FL education, the present study called for awareness-raising activities. More specifically, the present study underlined that INSET programs about online FL education were still one of the dire needs of online FL education. Although FL teachers were urged to have extensive hands-on experience with online teaching practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, this mostly occurred in a sink-or-swim approach. That’s why, FL teachers as the most disregarded stakeholders of educational reforms (Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010) were left alone in their struggle

to survive amid the pandemic conditions. Nonetheless, the present study hinted on a possible framework of an effective INSET program in the light of the participant views and previous studies (Doghonadze et al., 2020; Hakim, 2020; Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020). First and foremost, the present study emphasized the need for an INSET program informed by a comprehensive needs analysis because any top-down decisions about the content of the training, irrespective of how useful it might be, would fall short of addressing the needs of the participant teachers. Secondly, Hartshorn and McMurry (2020) claimed that such programs should ensure promoting familiarity with possible exercises, activities and homework that would particularly foster FL development. Moreover, part of INSET programs should cover effective use of the particular applications and online management systems that FL teachers would be required to use by their institutions (Doghonadze et al., 2020; Hakim, 2020). It was also of grave importance that online assessment should adequately be handled in such programs as several studies (Al-Samiri, 2020; König et al., 2020) reported assessment as one of the main challenges of online FL education. Finally, the present study indicated that INSET programs about online FL education should raise awareness about online teaching of the four major linguistic skills. Confirming Hartshorn and McMurry's (2020) emphasis on speaking skills, the present study documented speaking as the least amenable skill to online education and thusly, requiring the most elaboration in INSET programs.

As for the perceived strengths of online FL education, the present study confirmed that the comfort with teaching from afar enabled teachers and students to save time and money as they did not spend time and money on using transportation (public/personal) for physically going to schools (Şendoğan Erdoğan, 2020). Moreover, the finding about enriched access to e-resources corroborated previous research (Banditvilai, 2016; Canals & Al-Rawashdeh, 2019), which proved that the wealth and diversity of materials in online environments would foster achievement in FL education. The present study premised that the possibility of access to a wide range of multimedia resources might not only facilitate teachers' job in materials selection and design but help students enjoy varied opportunities to learn in line with their needs and interests. Likewise, the present study found that listening was the most amenable skill for improvement through online education. Several studies (Canals & Al-Rawashdeh, 2019; Öztürk Karataş & Tuncer, 2020) justified this finding by reasoning that the extensive exposure to listening practice during the online lessons significantly contributed to students' attempts to listen more effectively.

Conversely, the present study highlighted that lack of interactivity in online education featured as a dramatic shortcoming. Widespread opportunities for communication, nonetheless, lack of interactive practices perplexingly hindered satisfactory engagement with online FL education. Coupled with the boredom of sitting across the screen for prolonged hours, lack of interactivity echoed the well-established preference for a blended rather than merely online education (Coman et al., 2020; Waicekawsky et al., 2020; Demir & Walker, 2022), in which systematic face-to-face encounters in physical classrooms would pay considerable service to engage students and teachers in real communication. Intriguingly, the present study suggested that online office hours should be integrated into online FL education so that close rapport between students and teachers could be established. Evişen et al. (2020) further asserted that attractive activities and materials could help to resolve issues about monotony and boredom associated with online FL education. In the same vein, such activities and materials might help to handle attendance and participation problems.

Yet, the present study more explicitly argued for a mandatory attendance principle to ensure that students would attend online classes properly, which echoed Dahmash's (2020) view of mandatory attendance as a must for more active engagement with learning. Nevertheless, the finding about distractions at home should also be considered due to the role they played in hindering participation in online FL education. In particular, interruptions by family members on the part of both teachers and students caused failures in smooth progress of online classes (Coman et al., 2020; Evişen et al., 2020; Öztürk Karataş & Tuncer, 2020). Yet the present study maintained that access to self-access rooms or computer labs at schools (if available) could provide a safer environment conducive to online education. Similarly, collaboration with parents and family members to promote their awareness about possible limitations caused by distractions (e.g. noise,

households etc.) on online FL education might help to reduce the adverse effects of the distractions at home (Hakim, 2020). Finally, the present study underlined a largely unnoticed side effect of online FL education including health issues. Connoting with the presumptions about threats to physical, social and mental health particularly during the pandemic (Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020; OECD, 2020), the present study pinpointed that due attention had to be paid by educational authorities to taking measures that would minimize the risk of compromising participants' health during online FL education.

6. Conclusion

Use of educational technologies is an integral component of effective learning and teaching practices in the 21st century classrooms. Based on the extensive hands-on experience with the sudden transition to online education driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers and students worldwide have gained realistic views and opinions about the necessity for coming to grips with online education. Underpinned by this assumption, the present study described teacher perceptions about online FL education along with the training they joined on online FL education. The results shed light on perceived areas of help, strengths and weaknesses, and insider suggestions to handle shortcomings associated with online FL education. In particular, the study revealed a dire need for effective planning and training in order to better handle possible hindrances in transitioning to online education. Similarly, the comfort of virtual classrooms and rich multimedia resources could contribute to the design of a more effective FL education once the perceived weaknesses of online education such as lack of interactivity and attendance could be handled by means of the insider suggestions made by the participants. Nevertheless, it should be noted that results of the present study should be interpreted with caution due to certain limitations including the limited number of participants, reliance on merely qualitative methodology and analyses done individually by the researcher. Henceforth, further studies designed with mixed methodologies and a larger group of participants might yield more generalizable results for a more effective online FL teaching/learning experience.

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Note on Ethical Issues

The author confirms that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrity rules in their country (Date of Confirmation: 04/06/2023).

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