

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on EFL instructors' stress levels

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Abstract

The Covid-19 epidemic, which emerged towards the end of 2019 and has influenced the whole world since then, has had many negative effects, especially in terms of health, social, economic, and psychological aspects. The transition from traditional face-to-face education to technology-based distance education has created many difficulties in education. In addition to the difficulties that resulted from the transfer of education to the online environment, many teachers faced additional sociological and psychological problems in their daily lives. In this present study, a survey consisting of two parts was conducted to identify the stress levels and difficulties faced by 20 EFL instructors during the pandemic. The first part includes demographic information while the second part was made up of 3 pre-defined items and one open-ended item. The analysis of the data revealed that the stress levels of instructors increased during the pandemic. In addition, instructors' commentary revealed that they experienced various difficulties categorized under the headings of social interaction, stress level, and alienation.

Keywords: Covid-19, online learning, stressors, EFL instructors

COVID-19 Salgınının Yabancı Dil Öğretmenlerinin Stres Düzeyleri Üzerindeki Etkisi

Özet

2019 yılının sonlarına doğru ortaya çıkan ve o zamandan beri tüm dünyayı etkileyen Covid-19 salgını, özellikle sağlık, sosyal, ekonomik ve psikolojik açılardan birçok olumsuz etkiye sahip olmuştur. Geleneksel yüz yüze eğitimden teknoloji tabanlı uzaktan eğitime geçiş, eğitimde birçok zorluğa yol açmıştır. Eğitimin çevrimiçi ortama aktarılmasından kaynaklanan zorluklara ek olarak, birçok öğretmen günlük yaşamlarında ek sosyolojik ve psikolojik sorunlarla karşı karşıya kalmıştır. Bu çalışmada, salgın sırasında 20 İngilizce öğretmenin yaşadığı stres düzeylerini ve zorlukları belirlemek amacıyla iki bölümden oluşan bir anket yapılmıştır. Birinci bölüm demografik bilgileri içerirken, ikinci bölüm 3 önceden tanımlanmış madde ve bir açık uçlu maddeden oluşmuştur. Verilerin analizi, öğretmenlerin stres düzeylerinin salgın sırasında arttığını ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, öğretmenlerin yorumları, sosyal etkileşim, stres düzeyi ve yabancılaşma başlıkları altında sınıflandırılan çeşitli zorluklar yaşadıklarını göstermiştir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Covid-19, çevrimiçi öğrenme, stress etkenleri, yabancı dil öğretmenleri

1. Introduction

First reported in Wuhan, China in late 2019 and subsequently spreading to the whole world, the novel coronavirus disease Covid-19 affected the daily life practices of people in almost all aspects like health, education, economy, and social life. Governments tried to take precautions to control the spread of the pandemic and closing the doors of the schools and colleges was one of the swift steps taken to keep teachers, students, staff, and society safe (Chandra, 2021). UNESCO (2020) suggested that educational institutions should shift courses from traditional

face-to-face environments to online platforms to ensure the sustainability of education for all and to reduce the negative impacts of the closure of schools as the number of countries closing their schools in a very short period was 188. Compared to the traditional mode, distance education is more flexible and offers learners opportunities to learn on their own without being affected by any kind of time or space bounding obstacles (Haşiloğlu et al., 2020). However, the emergent transition to the online mode of teaching taking place at home has caused several problems like an increase in inequality in the field of education for students, extra workload for the staff working in this field to make changes in the curricula, and teaching materials. When the impacts of the pandemic are analyzed in terms of gender, women seem to have been affected more because of the assigned gender roles of being a wife and mother (Alon et al., 2020; Fortier, 2020). Working women have faced serious stress because of the challenge of working home along with the increase in their domestic work like watching their kids, doing housework, which they no longer could outsource. Working home was also experienced negatively by teachers teaching online for hours in front of a computer (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020).

The study carried out by Wang et al. (2020) explored the impact of the pandemic on family members and found that the compulsory lockdown caused more anxiety and stress. Their findings indicated that students who had to join online classes at home were reported to have more stress and depression compared to the stress they had because of academic pressure, peer competition, parental expectation within traditional mode of learning. In line with these findings, several other studies (Chandra, 2021; Hartshorn & MacMurry, 2020) revealed that the negative feelings caused by the physical distance- the new practice in daily life- like more anxiety led to poorer academic performance. From the teachers' perspective, their life has become more stressful because their workload has increased due to the requirement of adapting to the new mode of teaching like building new forms of interaction with their students or teaching even without having interaction (Demir & Walker, 2022; MacIntyre et al., 2020; Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2020; Chandra, 2021). "Workloads that were once perceived as substantial have been complicated by a rapid conversion to online delivery for which many language teachers had not been prepared but whose effects seem likely to last for years to come" (MacIntyre et al., 2020). It is difficult for most teachers to balance the work and home life. In addition, it is a big challenge not to have a clear physical and psychological boundary between school and home life. It should also be noted that teachers working home also share their new workplace -home- with family members like children, elderly people that need attention and care. According to crossover theory, work related stress is contagious and closely related to individuals' wellbeing, their relationship with others and eventually their work performance. The main idea behind this theory is that individual's stress will affect others in different contexts. Based on this, teachers play a significant role in facilitating a learning environment and shape their learners' lives; therefore, teacher's stress will have an impact on teacher's instruction and students' emotions and their achievement in the classroom. According to Becker et. al. (2014), 'teachers' emotions are as important as their instructional behavior.'

The uncertainty of the pandemic causes people to have a mixture of such negative feelings at the same time: health concerns for oneself and their loved ones, the new distant form of interaction, restrictions in terms of mobility, social life, no future. Stress not only has negative consequences for teachers; it also results in lower achievement for students and higher costs for schools. How all these feelings will affect the teaching and learning processes and human life in general is not known (MacIntyre et al., 2020).

Some researchers provided data on how teachers were emotionally affected by Covid-19 pandemic in different countries. Lizana et al. (2021) identified that Chilean teachers showed a low quality of life perception because of the Covid-19 pandemic and added that the findings may be closely related to online workload, feelings of uncertainty and fear that the pandemic will get worse. Li, Liu, and Ma (2021) found that the pandemic has caused higher teaching stress and career development stress and has reduced passion towards the teaching occupation among young Chinese teachers and those living in rural areas. To Dabrowski (2020) 'the novel coronavirus has further exacerbated the stresses facing teachers' in Australia as well and supporting teachers should be a top priority. A study in the USA revealed similar findings; according to Diliberti et.al. (2021), the Covid-19 pandemic has added more stress to American public-school teachers. According to another research, teachers' work attitudes affect education quality and student performance (Harris & Adams, 2007). To Lizana et. al. (2021) teleworking has also had a significant impact on professional and personal life, increased stress in workers which is called technostress. To Riedi (2015), technostress is the direct human interaction with ICT that leads mental stress related to technology use.

Based on the findings of the mentioned research above, it won't be wrong to make a connection between the teachers' stress and their performance and then link this connection to student's academic achievement. Since the studies above focus on the psychological impacts of Covid-19 pandemic on teachers in other contexts, it is essential to identify how Turkish EFL teachers have been affected emotionally during the pandemic as the impact of the pandemic on EFL instructors may have potential consequences for students as well (Demir & Sönmez, 2021).

In this regard, the main purpose of this study is to examine the impact of changes resulting from the Covid-19 and explore the stress levels and experience of a group of EFL instructors in terms of online mode of teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic.

1. Literature Review

Following the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic, higher education started to be carried out online all over the world. The online environment is different from face-to-face education in many respects. The swift transition to this new mode of education brought about many positive or negative effects on both students and teachers. There are many studies in the relevant literature examining the effects of online mode of teaching process. In these studies, the negative effects are presented with keywords such as motivation-demotivation, lack of interaction, ineffective use of time, lack of technological devices, lack of active participation in the course, delayed processing of the curriculum, stress and anxiety, indifference towards lessons, excessive homework, and work intensity while the positive ones are mentioned as better digital skills, professional development, and convenience.

One of these studies is by Escobar and Morrison (2020) exploring the opportunities and challenges experienced by EFL teacher candidates in Chile. The study used three different data collection methods: online questionnaire, a blog entry, and a semi-structured interview. 27 student teachers participated in this study. The findings of the study revealed four prominent challenges experienced by the participants: lack of interaction with learners, lack of a 'live teaching experience, possible distractions resulting from working home, and technical problems (proper internet connection or not properly working devices). Besides these challenges, the opportunities mentioned by the participants are as follows: professional knowledge developed in ITE programs, more familiarity with online platforms, a necessity for developing new skills in terms of adapting to emergent situations and using different teaching strategies. Another remarkable finding in the study is the answer given to some of the interviews:

"I am not the only one working from home; I also have got my daughter who is participating in online learning too, so I have to take care of that, plus do the house chores and prepare my lessons".
"Challenged me to reorganize my working hours and the time spent in front of the screen which has considerably increased, reaching around 15 hours a day causing physical complications".

For this reason, most of the teachers stated that this new teaching environment is more difficult and tiring than a classroom-based environment because the situation at home is not the most suitable place for doing all the teaching work required of them.

In the study of Giovannella et al. (2020), online mode of teaching was analyzed in the Covid- 19 process from the perspective of teachers. The findings are based on a survey conducted with 336 teachers. The participants found the steps taken by their institutions adequate and they reported that teachers' efforts also contributed to the sustainability of the contact with the students. This effort led to more workload for them, causing difficulty in managing their time, though. Despite the difficulties, the positive aspects perceived by the participants were regarding technology use, digital skills, and the change in their thoughts about the mode of teaching. 30 percent of the teachers showed interest in keeping a blended teaching mode for the future educational processes and their responses showed the importance of the inclusion of digital pedagogy into the teacher training programs. Khatoony and Nezhadmehr (2020) drew attention to technology integration and online classes in their studies, based on the results of the survey and in-depth interviews conducted with 30 EFL students, about the difficulties faced by teachers in Iran during the pandemic process in online education. Within the scope of the study, although Iranian EFL teachers were able to perform the applications and platforms efficiently, many difficulties were encountered such as the lack of necessary materials for the realization of education in an online environment, students' indifference to online lessons, loss of learning motivation, and lack of funding for language institutions.

In addition to teachers, students also experienced very serious disadvantages during the online education process (Bono et al., 2020; Mishra et al., 2020; Lamb & Arisandy, 2020). Lack of access to internet facilities, lack of necessary technology equipment for distance education, communication problems with teachers are some of the difficulties faced by students (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Adedoyin & Soykan 2020). Expecting solutions from teachers to students' problems also causes pressure and stress on teachers. As a matter of fact, the problems faced by students lead to disruption of education processes and deprivation of education. In this case, the workload and responsibilities of teachers increase even more. Mokh et al. (2021) examined the effect of the online learning process in Palestine on the technostress levels of language teachers. Technostress is generally defined as the disturbances that occur in the individual as a result of the individual's inability to cope with technology (Brod, 1984). This results in to over-workload, insecurity, uncertainty and technical problems. The results obtained in the study by Mokh et al. (2021) reveal that the level of technostress among Palestinian English teachers is moderate and the most important factor causing stress is the continuity of technical problems.

Stress, a well-studied concept in psychology, often refers to a psychological response to environmental conditions (stressors) that produce a variety of effects, including threats to physical arousal and well-being (Lazarus, 1996; 2006 cited in Malclntyre et al., 2020: 2). The Covid 19 pandemic, which affects the world, has become the only agenda of all humanity. The epidemic causes intense stress on individuals in this period of uncertainty. Covid-19 epidemic, which threatens human life, affects people deeply not only physiologically but also psychologically and socially. According to the survey data Malclntyre et al. (2020) conducted with a group of more than 600 language teachers who examined how language teachers cope with stress during the pandemic process, they found that teachers faced serious stress during this process.

Working remotely from home because of the pandemic brought about some psychological obstacles for teachers like increasing stress levels, anxiety, and lack of motivation. In this regard, the study by Hartshorn and McMurry (2020) seems to reveal very significant findings. This study investigated 153 ESL learners and 41 ESL teachers in the US to understand how the Covid 19 pandemic affected the participants' stress levels, learning and teaching English through online classes. Participants reported how important learning and teaching English was before and after the pandemic and responded to an open-ended question soliciting their perspectives on the biggest challenges they experienced during the pandemic. The results showed that although still relatively important, there was a decrease in both practitioners' and students' priority levels for teaching and learning English during the pandemic because of various new stress causing factors in their lives. Results also showed that the five themes identified from the data analysis of teachers' responses were as follows: student well-being, family, social and mental health, transition to online teaching, and finances and employment.

2. Method

The purpose of this study is to explore a group of EFL instructors' stress levels and experience in online education during the Covid-19 pandemic. The research questions are as follows:

1. What is the relationship between demographic factors and the stress levels of EFL instructors?
2. What are the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the stress levels of EFL instructors?
3. What can instructors' commentary tell us about the kinds of difficulties they face during the COVID-19 pandemic?

3.1. Participants

20 EFL instructors from the school of foreign languages from universities in Turkey participated in this research study. The participants were chosen based on the convenience sampling. Table 1 gives the demographic information about the participants. Three of the participants were male while the remaining seventeen were female. 13 of the participants were married while seven of them were single. The table also reveals that more than half of the participants have experience between 11 and 15 years, followed by those with more than 20 years of experience. 90% of the participants have teaching hours of more than 12 hours.

Table 1

Instructors' Demographic Information

Gender	Female n=17 (85%)	Male n=31 (5%)			
Marital Status	Single n=7 (35%)	Married n=13 (65%)			
Experience	1-5 (10%)	6-10 (15%)	11-15 (60%)	16-20 (%5)	More than 20 (10%)
Teaching hours	6-12 (10%)	13-15 (5%)	16-20 50%)	More than 20 (35%)	

3.2. Data Collection Instrument and Procedure

To answer the research questions above, a survey was adapted from the study by Hartshorn and McMurry (2020). The original survey was for both ESL teachers and students, but the one adapted for this study is only for EFL teachers. The survey consisted of two parts. The first part is about demographic information and the second part was made up of three pre-defined items and one open-ended item. The open-ended item was on the challenges that EFL teachers perceived to be the most difficult for them during the Covid 19 pandemic.

3.3. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics was used to describe the participants' demographic information and identify the mean values related to three items in the questionnaire. The data gathered from the first part of the questionnaire which is about the personal information of the instructors, this part was analyzed and the results presented in table 1. Quantitative data analysis was conducted through SPSS software's version 21. The data were analysed through frequency and percentages. Also, the data gathered through an open-ended question in the second part of the questionnaire were analyzed qualitatively through a phenomenological approach. Lester (1999) describes the phenomenological approach as 'it aims to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation and is concerned with the study of experience from individual's perspective. It gathers deep information and perceptions through interviews, discussion, and observation etc.' According to Lester (ibid.), the phenomenological approach does not explain but it mainly describes. The answers to the open-ended question were grouped under four themes which are *social interaction*, *stress level*, *family*, and *alienation* after careful reading of the data twice.

4. Findings

The survey was conducted to get an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of EFL instructors about the introduced online mode of teaching. The results of the first part of the survey were analyzed under three groups: the impact of the pandemic on teaching, stress levels, and feelings about online mode of teaching. The open-ended item of the survey was about the challenges of online teaching experienced by EFL instructors during the Covid 19 pandemic. Themes and the statements of the participants related to these categories were shown in the table below (Table 9).

4.1. What is the Relationship between Demographic Factors and the stress levels of EFL instructors?

Analyzing how demographic factors like gender, marital status, and experience and teaching hours affect teachers' stress levels, the following results were obtained.

For example, 11 of the 17 female participants interviewed stated extremely negative and somewhat negative to the question "How has the pandemic affected your stress level?". 6 women stated neither positive nor negative. Positive views were not found in both male and female participants. All three of the male participants interviewed stated negatively. When evaluated according to their marital status, it is seen that the stress levels of the married ones (extremely negative; somewhat negative) are 76.9%, and the single ones are 57.1%. However, it is seen that instructors with high teaching hours respond somewhat positively (55%).

Table 2

Gender differences and the stress level

How has the pandemic affected your stress level?		Extremely negative	Somewhat negative	Neither positive nor negative	Total
Gender	Male	2	1	0	3
	Female	5	6	6	17
Total		7	7	6	20

Table 3

Marital status and the stress level

How has the pandemic affected your stress level?		Extremely negative	Somewhat negative	Neither positive nor negative	Total
Gender	Male	4	6	3	13
	Female	3	1	3	7
Total		7	7	6	20

Table 4*Teaching Experience and the stress level*

How has the pandemic affected your stress level?					
		Extremely negative	Somewhat negative	Neither positive nor negative	Total
Experience	More than 20	0	1	1	2
	16-20	1	0	0	1
	11-15	2	5	5	12
	6-10	3	0	0	3
	1-5	1	1	0	2
Total		7	7	6	20

Table 5*How has the pandemic affected your feelings about online teaching?*

How has the pandemic affected your stress level?						
		Extremely negative	Somewhat negative	Neither positive nor negative	Somewhat positive	Total
Teaching hours	More than 20	0	1	2	4	7
	16-20	1	2	2	5	10
	13-15	0	0	0	1	1
	6-12	0	0	1	1	2
Total		1	3	5	11	20

4.2 What are the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on stress levels of EFL instructors?

Following the outbreak of the pandemic, learning processes were transferred to online platforms. The participants started to use the online platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, GOOGLE MEET, etc. to teach. In this context, one of the questions asked to the participants is as follows: How has the pandemic affected your teaching? Half of the participants (50%) answered as somewhat negative, 40% as neither positive nor negative, and only 10% as somewhat positive.

Table 6*How has the pandemic affected your teaching?*

		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Somewhat negative	10	50,0	50,0	50,0
	Neither positive nor negative	8	40,0	40,0	90,0
	Somewhat positive	2	10,0	10,0	100,0
	Total	20	100,0	100,0	

When the participants were asked about the effect of the pandemic process on their stress levels, 70% of them said negative and 30% said neither positive nor negative. None of the participants gave a positive answer to this question.

Table 7*How has the pandemic affected your stress level?*

		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Extremely negative	7	35,0	35,0	35,0
	Somewhat negative	7	35,0	35,0	70,0
	Neither positive nor negative	6	30,0	30,0	100,0
	Total	20	100,0	100,0	

Finally, the participants were asked how the pandemic affected their feelings. The answer given by most of the participants (55%) to this question is positive. 20% of the participants gave a negative answer to this question.

Table 8*How has the pandemic affected your feelings about online teaching?*

		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Extremely negative	1	5,0	5,0	5,0
	Somewhat negative	3	15,0	15,0	20,0
	Neither positive nor negative	5	25,0	25,0	45,0
	Somewhat positive	11	55,0	55,0	100,0
	Total	20	100,0	100,0	

4.3 What can instructors' commentary tell us about the kinds of difficulties they face during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The answers given to the open-ended question asked to instructors about the difficulties they faced during the Covid-19 pandemic were grouped under 4 themes as can be seen in Table 9: social interaction, stress level, family, and alienation. Their responses to the open-ended item give a deeper insight into the answers they gave in the first part of the questionnaire.

Table 9*Difficulties of online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic*

Research Question	Themes	Responses of instructors
	Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Not being able to socialize with my friends has been the most difficult part of Covid 19 pandemic (T1). ✓ Not being able to socialize and not being able to see my friends (T2). ✓ Not being able to see my friends (T3). ✓ Not seeing anyone (T4). ✓ The boredom that comes with the lockdowns, not seeing friends, being alone (T5). ✓ Not being able to see my friends (T6).
	Stress level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ I feel like I am losing my health day by day. My eyesight has already gotten worse, and I have to take pain killers for my headache every two days (T7). ✓ Keeping stress levels down, planning daily activities, getting quality sleep (T8).

What can instructors' commentary tell us about the kinds of difficulties they face during the COVID-19 pandemic?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Stress, having to look after a kid while teaching at home (T9). ✓ The boundaries between my professional and personal lives have disappeared, which increased my stress level drastically. Our workloads should have been reduced as we are not alone at home and have a lot of responsibilities domestically on top of professional ones (T10). ✓ Continuing education in a home environment is incredibly demotivating. The pandemic has already restricted daily life in many ways, and it is annoying to teach lessons on the computer until the evening. On the other hand, I have a 10-month-old daughter at home, it is sad to be on the computer all the time instead of spending time with it. Not interacting with students negatively affects the performance of the education process. In short, the increase in work intensity increases the stress coefficient of being trapped inside the house (T11).
	Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ I have a 16-month-old baby and it is very difficult for me to deal with home and baby and lessons altogether (T12). ✓ Being stuck at home, not being able to go out, taking care of the household and working from home (T13). ✓ Teaching from home with kids is a nightmare. I also worry about the health of me extend (T14). ✓ Having to juggle housework-work and the kids at the same time. Also not being able to go out/socialize has taken its toll (T15). ✓ Finding a quiet place to teach is somewhat difficult in my house. The internet connection is not always stable. I have a 12-year-old daughter and she keeps asking for things while I'm teaching (T16).
	Alienation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Fear of getting infected. The feeling of being confined to a specific place. The losing freedom of mobility (T17). ✓ Working all by yourself, like an astronaut. And too much screen time (T18). ✓ Making sure that students can comprehend the content of our classes (T19).

4.3.1. Social Interaction

The most important constraint imposed by the pandemic on daily life is that it has almost ended social relations in the way people are used to. With the pandemic, many venues were closed; curfews were imposed; social distance rules were imposed, the prohibition of social activity (theater, cinema, concert, etc.) and the prohibition of travel deprived people of joining social activities and becoming a part of social interaction, which led to a serious feeling of isolation. From the viewpoint of instructors, leaving the school environment suddenly ended the interaction with other instructors. Khatoony and Nezhadmehr (2020) have shown in their study that although Iranian English teachers can efficiently implement applications and use platforms, there are many challenges, such as lack of appropriate materials, lack of attention and motivation of students towards online lessons, lack of funding and support for language institutions. With the education completely confined to a room at home and a computer screen, teachers had a serious socialization problem. As a matter of fact, this problem was observed in most of the answers given by the participants. Excerpts from teachers are as follows.

T1: "Not being able to socialize with my friends has been the most difficult part of Covid 19 pandemic."

T5: "The boredom that comes with the lockdowns, not seeing friends, being alone".

4.3.2. Stress level

During the pandemic process, while instructors were worried about their health on the one hand, they had to work intensively to prevent interruption of online education.

T7: "I feel like I am losing my health day by day. My eyesight has already gotten worse, and I have to take pain killers for my headache every two days".

There are many empirical studies showing that teachers' stress levels and workloads increase with the pandemic. (Mal McIntyre et al., 2020; Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2020; Chandra, 2021). Increase in stress level also leads to decreased job performance and loss of motivation. With the pandemic, education has been completely moved to the home environment and this has put both students and teachers in isolation (Chandra, 2021). Factors affecting teachers' stress levels include increased workload, loss of control over family health and work, blurred lines between home and work, online teaching stress, irregular hours, and online teaching time in their study (2020:7). Similarly, in this study, most of the participants showed their stress levels among the difficulties they faced. For example, one of the participants expressed her feelings during the pandemic process as follows:

T11: "Continuing education in a home environment is incredibly demotivating. The pandemic has already restricted daily life in many ways, and it is annoying to teach lessons on the computer until the evening. On the other hand, I have a 10-month-old daughter at home, it is sad to be on the computer all the time instead of spending time with it. Not interacting with students negatively affects the performance of the education process. In short, the increase in work intensity increases the stress coefficient of being trapped inside the house".

With the pandemic, the distinctions between private and public spaces, work and home have completely disappeared and are intertwined.

T10: "The boundaries between my professional and personal lives have disappeared, which increased my stress level drastically. Our workloads should have been reduced as we are not alone at home and have a lot of responsibilities domestically on top of professional ones".

4.3.3. Family

Teaching online and at home has affected teachers who have children even more. Teachers who have this obligation are expected to attend online lessons on the computer and to do their routine work at home. This problem especially experienced by instructors who have children was expressed by many participants. For instance, some of the participants stated their thoughts in the following quotes:

T12: "I have a 16 month-old baby and it is very difficult for me to deal with home and baby and lessons altogether".

T14: "Teaching from home with kids is a nightmare. I also worry about the health of my extend."

T15: "Having to juggle housework-work and the kids at the same time. Also not being able to go out/socialize has taken its toll."

In addition to their care and work, it is often difficult for teachers to find quiet environments at home where they can do their online education.

T 16: "Finding a quiet place to teach is somewhat difficult in my house. The internet connection is not always stable. I have a 12-year-old daughter and she keeps asking for things while I'm teaching".

4.3.4. Alienation

Alienation is the exclusion of a person from his / her job and social environment. In their study, Li et al. (2021) found that young teachers have shown lover passion for the profession of teaching. With the outbreak of the pandemic, suddenly moving away from face-to-face interaction and social environments caused a deep feeling of loneliness in the individual. This was addressed by T 18: *"Working all by yourself, like an astronaut. And too much screen time"*. Teachers who teach for hours on a computer and often on a blank screen have lost their perception of time and place over time. In the pandemic, online education has brought teachers a third dimension. T17's excerpt clearly shows this: *"The feeling of being confined to a specific place. Losing the freedom of mobility"*.

5. Discussion

This study aims to explore the stress levels of EFL instructors who started online education following the Covid-19 pandemic and to understand how they were affected by the pandemic. It has found out that teachers' stress levels increased, and they faced many challenges. The most important finding obtained in the study is that the use of technology, which has become an important part of teachers' daily lives, the increasing workload with online education, and learning and teaching away from face-to-face interaction and limited to the computer screen increase the stress levels of teachers. During online education, teachers faced many difficulties in terms of social

interaction, family and alienation, as well as increased stress levels. For example, the lockdowns experienced during the pandemic limited the chances of socializing. In addition, it has become difficult for teachers to manage the online education process as they are supposed to simultaneously provide household chores, childcare etc. at home which has also become their workplace. Also, they faced various challenges to build the necessary social interaction with the students, which caused them to feel alienated from the education process. Realistically, it is not possible to eliminate all the factors that increase teachers' stress, but technostress levels can be eliminated or at least reduced by providing technical support to teachers and students, especially in the use of technology. The increasing workload in the online education process could have been better planned. In addition to technical support, psychological support could be provided to teachers so that they can cope with the difficulties experienced during the pandemic (for example, the problem of not being able to socialize, increased workload,) and post-pandemic challenges. Although now Covid-19 has left behind, it has long-term emotional consequences and knowing such results are always valid as they have long-term effects which affect academic performance at schools and are the precursor for the future studies as some studies maintain that many teachers still come to school with the symptoms of stress or with the stress of being at risk of illness from COVID-19 (Yao & Xu, 2023). To create balanced and healthy schools not only students but teachers should also be given training and counseling opportunities on how to cope with stressors to build up and regulate their emotional skills and manage their feelings. Through that way, teachers may also help their students to regulate their stress and create healthier classrooms. Studies published even 2023 still indicate the concerns (Yao & Xu, 2023) of teachers about COVID safety measures and in a study mentioned that the teachers were concerned for students' well-being and inadequate support and inclusion of teacher perspectives; (Valido, Drescher et al. (2023). To Valido, Drescher et al., 'this may lead to teacher shortages and deterioration of teacher mental health, and ultimately worse outcomes for students.

6. Implications and suggestions

Since adverse conditions have long lasting effects on individuals' stress level, recognizing such feelings may help teachers to gain coping skills like self-regulation and this will empower teachers. In addition to this, the teachers should receive psychological support including other stakeholders of the education process: students and their families.

This study examined the opinions of a limited group of people due to pandemic restrictions by the time this study was conducted. Larger groups may be included in future studies and this will eventually produce more accurate data for the related field.

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Note on Ethical Issues

The authors confirm that the ethical committee approval was obtained from Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University (Approval Date: 09/03/2023).

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