



## Views of Students in Higher Education on Distance Learning: Advantages, Disadvantages, Problems Encountered and Recommendations

*Yüksek Öğretimde Öğrencilerin Uzaktan Eğitim ile İlgili Düşünceleri: Avantaj, Dezavantaj, Karşılaşılan Sorunlar ve Öneriler*

Ebru Melek Koç\*

**Abstract:** Due to the increasing number of curricula offered via distance learning at university level every year, there has been a corresponding significant increase in the number of students benefiting from distance learning. However, there are only a few descriptive studies revealing the views of university students related to 5i courses via distance learning. The aim of this study is obtain detailed information about the experiences in the distance learning process of university students who were registered on common compulsory courses, or who had previously taken these courses, via distance learning, as well as to learn their ideas about the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning. The participants of the study consisted of a total of 15 university students studying at three universities. In order to collect data, four open-ended interview questions were used. After face-to-face interviews, the data were transcribed, and then analyzed via content analysis. In general, the findings of the present study revealed that the students seem to have a positive attitude towards distance learning. The participants indicated that having control over the study process and learning environment was the most positive aspect of distance education, whereas limitations for communication and interaction, and lack of opportunity to obtain feedback from the course instructor were the most negative aspects of it. Participants considered both the educational dimension and the technical dimension of the system to be equally important. The recommendation most frequently expressed by the students related to development in the educational area was that learning should be made interactive by adding multiple environments to the system that would increase communication and interaction, both between the lecturer responsible for the course and the students, and among the students themselves.

### Structured Abstract: Introduction

Due to the increasing number of curricula offered via distance learning at university level every year, there has been a corresponding significant increase in the number of students benefiting from distance learning. For this reason, studies related to distance learning in higher education have also become increasingly important

\* Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, İnönü Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, Yabancı Diller Eğitimi Bölümü  
Asst. Prof. Dr. İnönü University, Faculty of Education, Department of Foreign Language Education  
ORCID 0000-0003-3224-7609  
ebrumelekkoc@gmail.com

**Cite as/ Atf:** Koç, E.M. (2020). Views of students in higher education on distance learning: advantages, disadvantages, problems encountered and recommendations, *Turkish Studies-Applied Sciences*, 15(1), 85-108.  
<https://dx.doi.org/10.29228/TurkishStudies.40041>

**Received/Geliş:** 09 December/Aralık 2020

**Accepted/Kabul:** 25 March/Mart 2020

Copyright © INTAC LTD, Turkey

Checked by plagiarism software

**Published/Yayın:** 30 March/Mart 2020

CC BY-NC 4.0

in recent times. It is very important, by examining students' experiences of distance learning, both to determine students' satisfaction and the problems they have in this regard in order to make the distance learning process more effective, and to make the necessary revisions in order to develop the distance learning programmes. There is a relationship between students' attitudes towards distance learning and their level of success in distance learning. When examined from the viewpoint of increasing learning, it is important to learn what learners think and feel about distance learning environments in order to develop their attitudes towards these environments. In this vein, the present study aims to obtain detailed information about the experiences in the distance learning process of university students who were registered on common compulsory courses, or who had previously taken these courses, via distance learning.

### **Method**

The present study adopts a descriptive phenomenology approach to provide a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of university students. The purposive sampling method was used. The participants of the study are 15 university students who are at the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades and who are studying at different faculties in three state universities in Turkey. The participants in the study also who have experience in distance learning.

After reviewing the related literature, the researcher prepared a list of four open-ended interview questions.: 1)What are the advantages of education conducted by distance learning?,2)What are the disadvantages of education conducted by distance learning?, 3)What problems, if any, did you encounter during this process?, and 4)How can the teaching and learning process for courses delivered via distance learning be made more effective? What are your recommendations?. After the piloting phase, the interviews were conducted face to face and in Turkish, and were digitally audio recorded. Then, the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. To analyze the written data content analysis was performed separately on each of the four open-ended questions.

### **Findings**

In general, the findings of the present study reveal that the students seem to have a positive attitude towards distance learning. In regard to the first research question, seven subthemes for the advantages of education were determined by the students. The most common subtheme identified by the students was related to the ability to have control over the study process. Four main themes were identified for the subthemes. These were student-centred learning, strategic investment, efficient use of technology in education, and equality of opportunity. Among these themes, the theme of "student-centred learning" was the advantage most frequently expressed by the students, while that of "equality of opportunity" was the least commonly expressed.

Data related to the disadvantages of distance learning expressed by the students were grouped into three categories: communicational disadvantages, educational disadvantages and technical disadvantages. Students mentioned communicational disadvantages related to distance learning the most. In particular, the biggest disadvantage of distance learning was stated to be the fact that it was not possible to obtain immediate feedback from the instructor responsible for the course.

According to the analysis results, problems encountered by the students can be grouped into two main categories: educational problems and technical problems. Students were determined to have more problems related to education than they had with technology. The educational problems most frequently experienced by the students were lack of communication and, since there was no problem of compulsory attendance, students' failure to follow the lessons regularly or even not to follow them at all. Technical problems encountered by the students consisted of lack of infrastructure in the system, students not having the necessary equipment for following the lessons by distance learning, and logistical problems.

Regarding the 4<sup>th</sup> research question, the data analysis results reveal that for developing the curricula of the common "5i" courses taken via distance learning, half of students' suggestions were directed at developing educational aspects, while the other half were aimed at developing technical facilities. This situation reveals that students considered both the educational dimension and the technical dimension of the system to be equally important. The recommendation most frequently expressed by the students related to development in the educational area was that learning should be made interactive by adding multiple environments to the system. The students mostly recommended that discussion platforms aimed at distance learning courses should be provided. Furthermore, they recommended that the course materials should be supported with visual items, that a system for taking attendance should be applied, and, in order to consolidate learning.

**Keywords:** distance education, higher education, university students

**Öz:** Son zamanlarda ortak zorunlu olan bu derslerin uzaktan eğitim yoluyla sunan üniversite sayısı her geçen yıl artmaktadır. Buna rağmen, üniversite öğrencilerinin uzaktan eğitim ile ilgili düşüncelerini betimsel olarak niteleyen çalışmalar azınlıktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı uzaktan eğitim yoluyla zorunlu ortak derslere kayıtlı olan veya daha önce bu dersleri almış olan üniversite öğrencilerinin uzaktan öğretim sürecindeki tecrübeleri hakkında detaylı bilgi edinmek, uzaktan eğitimin avantaj, dezavantajları konusundaki fikirlerini öğrenmektir. Çalışmanın katılımcıları üç üniversiteden toplam 15 üniversite öğrencisidir. Veri toplamak için dört açık uçlu soru kullanılmıştır. Yapılan yüz yüze görüşmeler sonra her bir soruya verilen cevaplar yazılı doküman haline getirilerek içerik analizine göre veri incelenmiştir. Sonuçlar genel olarak üniversite öğrencilerinin uzaktan eğitimle öğrenmeye karşı olumlu tutum sergilediğini göstermiştir. Öğrenciler eğitim ortamının ve ders çalışma sürecinin öğrenci tarafından kontrol edilebilmesini uzaktan eğitimin olumlu yönleri; dersin öğretim elemanından dönüt alamama, yetersiz iletişim ve etkileşim, motivasyon düşüklüğüne bağlı olarak derslerin öğrenciler tarafından düzenli takibinin yapılmamasını da uzaktan öğretimin olumsuz yönleri olarak belirtmişlerdir. Öğrencilerin uzaktan eğitim uygulamalarının hem eğitsel boyutunu hem de teknik boyutunu eşit oranda önemli bulmaktadırlar... Eğitsel alanda öğrenciler tarafından geliştirilmesi yönünde belirttikleri en sık ifade edilen öneri hem dersin sorumlu öğretim elemanı ve öğrenciler arasında, hem de öğrencilerin kendi arasında iletişim ve etkileşimi arttıracak çoklu ortamların sisteme eklenerek, öğrenmenin interaktif hale gelmesidir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** uzaktan öğretim, yüksek öğretim, üniversite öğrencileri

## 1. Introduction

Distance learning is a teaching method in which the student and teacher are in different places at the same time or at different times, and in which learning is enabled via content transfer and interaction by means of information and communication technologies (Moore & Kearsley, 2011). In distance learning, it is very important for interaction to be enabled and maintained (Caner, 2016; Yıldız, 2011). In learning there are, generally speaking, three types of interaction, and these are: student-student, student-teacher and student-content (Moore, 1989). The fact that all of these types of interaction are found in distance learning affects students' satisfaction and the effectiveness of the lesson completely. Hillman, Willis and Gunawardena (1994) expands Moore's model of interaction and adds a fourth dimension: student-technology interaction.

Distance learning emerged as a response to the need to provide access to learning for people who were unable to participate in face-to-face lessons. Distance learning is divided into two parts, namely asynchronous and synchronous learning. In asynchronous learning, the student can examine lesson content, such as videos, animations, sound recordings and documents that the instructor has previously prepared and loaded into the system, whenever he/she wishes by entering the system, and can address possible questions to the teacher in a message. Since there is no time constraint, asynchronous learning is more widespread and learning is carried out more effectively with well-designed learning content. However, it is stated that since the student may feel lonely with asynchronous learning, much better results are obtained with mixed learning, that is, learning in which asynchronous and synchronous learning are used together (Elçil & Şahiner, 2013). In synchronous learning, a group of students and their subject teacher can communicate simultaneously in a live computer environment, at times designated in the weekly schedule, audially or audio-visually, and can have discussions related to the subject on the board with applications like a whiteboard included in the software. Synchronous systems give students the opportunity to establish voice, visual and written communication with each other and their teachers, and since this type of communication is very close to that in the traditional classroom format, it is more effective than that in asynchronous systems. Owing to the structure of synchronous systems, students can easily express themselves, and in this way, interaction steadily increases and students participate actively in the lesson and feel as though they are part of the class. Regarding whether synchronous or asynchronous learning is more effective, no consensus has been reached. In relation to student achievement, most of the studies reveal

insignificant differences between the two systems (Somenarian, Akkaraju & Gharbaron, 2010; Skylar, 2009) whereas some research highlights the beneficial aspects of asynchronous learning (Baker, 2010; Perveen, 2016). The two systems can be regarded as complementary, since while synchronous learning encourages social interactions among learners that have limited instructional value, interactions in asynchronous learning are mostly content-related (Hrastinski, 2008; Newlin, Lavooy, & Wong, 2005).

In universities in Turkey, the Turkish Language, Atatürk's Principles and History of the Reform, and Foreign Language (English) courses, which are classed as "common compulsory" courses for all 1st year university students and are also known as the "5i" courses, have been conducted not only with the traditional method, but also by means of distance learning from the academic year 2013-2014 onwards. The regulation related to the teaching of these courses is stated in Clause (i) of Article 5 of the Higher Education Law as follows: "In higher education institutions, Atatürk's Principles and History of the Reform, Turkish Language and Foreign Language are compulsory courses". All these courses are scheduled and implemented as at least two-semester courses. Accordingly, in universities throughout Turkey, Turkish Language 1, Atatürk's Principles and History of the Reform 1, and Foreign Language 1 are taught in the first term, while Turkish Language 2, Atatürk's Principles and History of the Reform 2, and Foreign Language 2 are delivered in the second term. For "5i" courses delivered in traditional education, attendance is compulsory. For students who take these courses via distance learning, there is no obligation for lesson attendance. Mid-term exams for these courses are given online, while final exams and makeup exams are done face-to-face.

Due to the increasing number of curricula offered via distance learning at university level every year, there has been a corresponding significant increase in the number of students benefiting from distance learning (YÖK, 2019). For this reason, studies related to distance learning in higher education have also become increasingly important in recent times.

While some studies in the literature focus on the distance learning programmes offered by different departments at associate degree, undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Bahçekapılı, 2015; Bertiz, 2018; Eroğlu, 2018; Gök, 2011; Güvenç, 2018; Kaya, 2012; Orhan, 2016; Özer, 2011; Şişman-Uğur, 2010), some research in the related literature focuses on university students' perceptions, attitudes, and evaluations of distance education in general (Begimbetova, 2015; Yadigar, 2010). In regard to 5i courses, some focus on university students' attitudes, satisfaction and readiness towards the 5i courses (Çakır & Yurtsever, 2012; Doğan & Tatık, 2018; Ekmekçi, 2015; İliniş, 2018; Mercan, 2018; Orhan, 2010; Şirin, 2015), and others focus on the interrelationships of the factors that play a role in the distance learning process of the 5i courses (Doyran & Doyran, 2013; Ersoy, 2015; Türkoğlu, 2015; Ünal & Özdemir, 2008; Yaman, 2015). Among these, very few focus on the university students' lived experiences of distance education. Şirin (2015)'s quantitative study investigated the attitudes of 368 freshman university students towards the Foreign Language I course conducted by distance learning. Similarly, Ekmekçi (2015) adapted both a qualitative and quantitative approach and analyzed 72 freshman university students' perceptions in regard to the Foreign Language I course. The participants indicated that they could not develop their skills in reading, writing or speaking. In a similar study, Orhan (2016) evaluated the 5i Foreign Language course by means of a scale administered to 715 freshman students. He came up with similar results to Ekmekçi's and concluded that the participants expressed negative satisfaction with the programme curriculum and that they failed to develop their speaking skills. A recent study belongs to Mercan (2018), who investigated the opinions and readiness of university students about the three 5i courses (Turkish Language, Atatürk's Principles and History of the Reform, and Foreign Language) offered by distance education at Afyon Kocatepe University. Data were collected from 100 university students by means of a questionnaire. In addition, 20 of the students were interviewed. In the same vein, Doğan and Tatık (2015) conducted a qualitative study with 15 students studying at various departments at the faculty of education.

---

The number of universities offering common compulsory courses via distance learning is over twice the number of universities offering these courses face-to-face (Eroğlu, 2018, p.15). This also increases the need for academic programmes to be developed (Day, 2003). It is very important, by examining students' experiences of distance learning, both to determine students' satisfaction and the problems they have in this regard in order to make the distance learning process more effective, and to make the necessary revisions in order to develop the distance learning programmes. There is a relationship between students' attitudes towards distance learning and their level of success in distance learning (Birişçi, Metin & Demiryürek, 2011). When examined from the viewpoint of increasing learning, it is important to learn what learners think and feel about distance learning environments in order to develop their attitudes towards these environments. The lack of studies on this subject in the literature increases the importance of the present study (Yıldırım, Yıldırım, Çelik & Karaman, 2014). In this vein, the present study aims to obtain detailed information about the experiences in the distance learning process of university students who were registered on common compulsory courses, or who had previously taken these courses, via distance learning. The framing research questions of the present study are:

- 1) According to the university students, what are the advantages of education conducted by distance learning?
- 2) According to the university students, what are the disadvantages of education conducted by distance learning?
- 3) What problems do the university students encounter during education conducted by distance learning?
- 4) What are the university students' recommendations to make distance learning more effective?

## **2. Method**

The present qualitative research aims to investigate experiences of university students who have experience in distance education. In this regard, it adopts the descriptive phenomenology approach. In the phenomenology approach, the emphasis is on providing a deeper understanding of the lived experiences (Norlyk & Harder, 2010). In this section, detailed information is provided about the participants, data collection tool, and data analysis.

### **2.1. Participants**

Purposive sampling is based on the assumption that a researcher's selection of a sample which he/she wishes to discover, understand and gain insight into and can learn many things about is required. In terms of knowledge, rich situations are those in which the researcher can learn many things about subjects that are essential for his/her aim (Merriam, 2013). Therefore, the purposive sampling method was used in this study. Saturation, which is the criterion for judging when to stop sampling, is the most widely used principle for determining sample size and evaluating its sufficiency (Saunders et al., 2018). Urquhart (2012: p. 194) defines saturation as: 'the point in coding when you find that no new codes occur in the data'. In the present study, the sample size was 15. After the analysis of the data, data saturation was achieved, so no further data collection was necessary.

The participants of the study consisted of a total of 15 university students (9 female=60% and 6 male=40%) aged 19-24, studying at different faculties at state A, state B and state C universities (Table 1). The study was conducted at the end of the spring term. The participants in the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades had already taken the 5i common compulsory courses in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, and the participants in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade had been experiencing distance learning since the beginning of the academic year. Therefore, all the participants had sufficient experience of the distance learning process.

**Table 1: Demographic Information of Participants**

Student No.	Gender	University	Department	Grade
Student 1	F	State A	Dentistry	1
Student 2	F	State A	Nursing	1
Student 3	M	State A	Mechanical Engineering	2
Student 4	M	State A	Architecture	4
Student 5	M	State A	Electrical-Electronic Engineering	2
Student 6	F	State A	Art teaching	3
Student 7	F	State A	Mechanical Engineering	1
Student 8	F	State A	Turkish Teaching	1
Student 9	M	State A	Classroom Teaching	3
Student 10	F	State A	English Teaching	1
Student 11	F	State A	English Teaching	2
Student 12	F	State A	Political Science and Public Administration	1
Student 13	F	State B	Mechanical Engineering	2
Student 14	M	State B	Landscape Architecture	3
Student 15	M	State C	Classroom Teaching	1

### 2.2. Data collection

The research questions of the study were adopted as interview questions. The researcher reviewed the studies of Doğan and Tatık (2015), Begimbetova (2015), Ekmekçi (2015), İliniş (2006), and Mercan (2018), who used qualitative data collection tools such as interviews and questionnaires with open-ended questions. After reviewing the related literature, the researcher prepared a list of six open-ended interview questions. After discussing the questions with an expert in the field of ELT, the number of the interview questions was decreased to four (Table 2).

The interview questions were pre-tested with one 1<sup>st</sup> year and one 4<sup>th</sup> year undergraduate student studying in the English language teacher training programme. The students were asked to give feedback about the open-ended questions so that possible problems could be identified and improvements could be made. The students were asked to indicate whether the questions were easily understood or seemed to make them uncomfortable. Very minor revisions in wording were made, according to the students' comments. The interviews, which were conducted face to face and in Turkish, were digitally audio recorded, and were then transcribed verbatim.

**Table 2: Four Open-ended Interview Questions**

Question no.	Question	Question Type
Question 1	In your opinion, what are the advantages of education conducted by distance learning?	Open-ended
Question 2	In your opinion, what are the disadvantages of education conducted by distance learning?	Open-ended
Question 3	You have taken the first-grade 5i common compulsory courses via distance learning. What problems, if any, did you encounter during this process?	Open-ended
Question 4	How can the teaching and learning process for courses delivered via distance learning be made more effective? What are your recommendations?	Open-ended

### 2.3. Data analysis

After the transcripts of the recordings of the face-to-face interviews had been printed out, content analysis was performed separately on each of the four open-ended questions. The purpose of content analysis is to identify analyzable units (codes) in text data and to summarize them under meaningful labels (categories) (Armborst, 2017, pg. 2). In the present study, at the first stage of the

analysis, the responses given by the 15 university students to the open-ended questions were written one under the other. In the first reading, by reading the combined answers, a general idea was obtained, while in the second reading, the words and phrases that were meaningful for each question were identified and listed on a spreadsheet. Similar statements in the list were grouped together. From each group a sample response was chosen to represent the cluster, and codes encapsulating the sentiment mentioned in the response were created. After the created codes had been placed, similar codes were grouped together. Finally, sub-themes and main themes representing these codes were created. After coding for the existence of a concept, frequencies of code- co-occurrences were also calculated. That is, the number of times a concept appeared in a text was calculated.

In regard to reliability, McDonald, Schoenebeck and Forte (2019) mention that the process of reaching or failing to reach agreement may be more important than its measurement (inter-rater reliability). They highlight the importance of agreement and disagreement among researchers, which refers to discussion on how data should be interpreted in the same way, and the reasons for different interpretations after a few rounds of separate coding. Therefore, in the present study, the researcher asked a scholar of hers in the field of education with experience in content analysis to act as an external coder. Until interpretations of the data were consistent between coders, they independently coded the same document and then made a qualitative comparison. Finally, after two rounds of separate coding and discussion, their interpretations were similar and they applied the same code to the data.

### 3. Findings

The findings of each research question will be presented separately with a table which summarizes the codes, sub-themes and main-themes, and the frequencies of occurrence of these.

#### 3.1. Research Question 1: According to the university students what are the advantages of education conducted by distance learning?

**Table 3:** Codes and Themes Created from Content Analysis of Data Obtained from Interview Question 1

Interview question 1. In your opinion, what are the advantages of education conducted by distance	n	Codes	Subthemes	Main themes
	7	Chance to receive education wherever desired	Having control over learning environment (n=10)	Student-centred learning (n=25)
	3	Comfortable environment		
	9	Receiving education whenever desired	Having control over study process (n=15)	
	1	Opportunity for student to determine own study rate when learning lesson topics		
	5	No obligation to attend classes		
	3	No financial burden resulting from going to and from school	Cost (n=3)	Strategic investment (n=6)
	3	No loss of time resulting from going to and from school	Time (n=3)	
	1	Chance to follow lesson topics again and again when required	Indefinite accessibility of subjects (n=1)	Opportunity for efficient use of technology (n=3)
	2	Opportunity for rapid access to information related to lesson topics	Rapid access to information (n=1)	
	1	Facilitating education for disabled students	Accessibility of education for all students (n=2)	Equality of opportunity (n=2)
1	Facilitating education for working people			

The results of the analysis reveal that the seven subthemes for the advantages of education conducted via distance learning were determined by the students (Table 3). The most common subtheme identified by the students was related to the ability to have control over the study process. Four main themes were identified for the subthemes. These were student-centred learning, strategic investment, efficient use of technology in education, and equality of opportunity. Among these

themes, the theme of “student-centred learning” was the advantage most frequently expressed by the students, while that of “equality of opportunity” was the least commonly expressed.

### 3.1.1. Student-centred Learning

One of the greatest advantages of distance learning expressed by the students was that it provides the opportunity for students to receive their education wherever and whenever they wish. Views of one student related to the learning environment were expressed as follows:

*“Regarding advantages, in my opinion, having the chance to receive education wherever and whenever we wish offers us a great advantage, that is, we are not obliged to go to a specific place....wherever one wishes, at one’s own leisure, without being tied to a place or time....one can study in the comfort of one’s own home without paying a single expense.” (S1)*

Similarly, another student drew attention to the comfort of the environment:

*“I think one of the advantages....turning on the computer in more comfortable surroundings....we can listen more comfortably, even in our pyjamas. I also think that it gains us more time.” (S8)*

Five of the students stated that the biggest advantage of distance learning was that there was no obligation to attend classes:

*“Frankly, the most important advantage that distance learning provides for me is that I am exempt from compulsory attendance, so I don’t have problems like having to go to school.” (S12)*

One student mentioned the importance of being able to study whenever he wished and to determine his own study rate when learning the lesson topics, and that thanks to these characteristics, distance learning was student-centred:

*“....by learning with distance learning, one has the chance to study at one’s own pace. Therefore, distance learning is student-centred.” (S9)*

### 3.1.2. Strategic investment

Stating that during the language learning process, people spent time, money and effort towards this aim, Brown (1994) defined “strategic investment” as one of the cognitive principles. Similar investment applies to the field of teaching and learning. Some of the students in the study regarded the advantage of not going to school to receive education as gaining time and low cost.

*“Users can receive education at any time and from any place they wish, and can, therefore, study at their own pace of learning without being dependent on class times. At the same time, it provides the opportunity for swift and easy access to information. It eliminates extra expenses required for face-to-face learning like transport, shelter, accommodation and food.” (S7)*

Similarly, other students made the following comments:

*“Among the advantages that distance learning provides me with is that there is definitely never any loss of time. Since the education is by distance, I can get connected to the lesson immediately whether in my lodgings or outside, or wherever I am. You can follow the lesson straight away. There’s absolutely no need to go to university.” (S10)*

*“Since distance learning is carried out on a computer whenever we want, it helps to allow the instructor and student to join in the lesson whenever we wish. Moreover, since going to and from school incurs a financial burden for both the students and the instructor, distance learning eliminates this cost. Furthermore, we can enter a lesson at home with 10 minutes to go, and as soon as it is finished, we can turn it off, whereas going to and from school is a great loss of time. Since this loss of time is eliminated, we can devote more time to ourselves and this enables us to develop better. Another benefit is that it enables technology to be used effectively within education.” (S3)*



### 3.1.3. Effective use of Technology in Education

Other advantages of distance learning expressed by students were that lesson subjects could be followed again and again when necessary, and that information related to lesson subjects could be accessed quickly. Some students made the following comments regarding the subject:

“...the videos remain available for a certain period and we can turn them on and watch them again and again.” (S13)”

“...I can turn on and listen to the lesson via video on the internet whenever I want.” (S12)”

### 3.2. Research Question 2: According to the university students, what are the disadvantages of education conducted by distance learning?

Data related to the disadvantages of distance learning expressed by the students were grouped into three categories: communicational disadvantages, educational disadvantages and technical disadvantages. Students mentioned communicational disadvantages related to distance learning the most. In particular, the biggest disadvantage of distance learning was stated to be the fact that it was not possible to obtain immediate feedback from the instructor responsible for the course. One of the students stated that the lack of opportunity to obtain immediate feedback led to failure:

“In distance learning, unlike face-to-face learning, students cannot immediately ask the instructor about questions they may have in their minds, that is, since they ask via text messages and emails after the lesson, they cannot receive an immediate reply, and when the reply comes, it might be too late for the student to receive it. This will decrease his/her success.” (S3)

“...when a student does not understand a subject; he/she cannot get feedback because he/she cannot ask the teacher again.” (S6)

**Table 4:** Codes and Themes Created from Content Analysis of Data Obtained from Interview Question 2

	n	Codes	Subthemes	Main themes
Interview question 2. In your opinion, what are the disadvantages of education conducted by distance learning?	7	Lack of opportunity to obtain immediate feedback to questions related to subject	Communication with course instructor (n=8)	Communicational disadvantages (n=17)
	1	Lack of opportunity to meet instructor responsible for subject face-to-face		
	5	Limited communication and interaction	In-class socialisation (n=9)	
	1	Lack of opportunity to develop group consciousness		
	3	Limitations for socialisation		
	1	The fact that teacher is active, while student is passive		Educational disadvantages (n=5)
	2	Limitations for converting theoretical knowledge into practice		
	2	Students hardly ever following lesson topics via system or even not at all		
	1	Problems with access to computers		Technical disadvantages (n=2)
	1	Problems with internet connection		

Similarly, another student made the following comment:

“I think that face-to-face learning is more effective, because you can communicate with the teachers. In distance learning, there is no communication. Let's say you don't understand a topic, so you ask the instructor, but it cannot be as effective as face-to-face learning....In face-to-face learning, you can ask questions whenever you want and the instructors generally give feedback. In my opinion, distance learning falls rather short in this respect.” (S11)

The second biggest disadvantage of distance learning was stated to be that apart from the instructor responsible for the course, there is no communication or interaction among students themselves. Students stated that this limitation in communication and interaction prevented them from feeling like students, and even that it lowered their motivation. Views expressed by some students related to the fact that there is no classroom environment in distance learning are given below:

*“With distance learning, a student can receive education at home, and so his/her chance to go out and socialise is reduced. I think school is a marvellous environment for socialisation; you can meet a lot of different people. At the same time, you can also see different viewpoints in class; that is, not only with the view that the teacher has stated, but also by hearing a question asked by another student, you can become more absorbed. With distance learning, since a student doesn’t enter a school environment, he/she might not feel like a student, and this may lower his/her motivation. There are a number of disadvantages like this.” (S11)*

*“One of the disadvantages is that you can never capture the atmosphere of the classroom environment. For example, my friend will ask a question I didn’t think of in the classroom, and I will really have learnt that information with the question he/she asked. That’s why I regard the lack of a classroom environment as a disadvantage.” (S4)*

*“With distance learning, the individual is in the position of a passive receiver. The teacher explains and the student listens. Unlike in the traditional education system, certain psychological and sociological elements, such as association among students, development of a group consciousness and cultural interaction, cannot be provided.” (S7)*

*“I think like this: since the lesson is not conducted in a classroom environment, there may be a lack of motivation.” (S6)*

Some students made the point that with face-to-face learning, gestures and movements were also effective for learning:

*“As a disadvantage, we cannot actively see the teacher, since when we see the teacher’s movements and gestures, that is, alive, we obtain more information, I believe. In other words, I learn better this way especially.” (S1)*

*“When interaction is insufficient or absent in distance learning, a student cannot benefit from the teacher’s gestures, body movements, intonation, etc., which are elements that help to directly enhance the teaching.” (S7)*

Besides communication-based disadvantages, students expressed education-based disadvantages of distance learning, such as limitations in converting theoretical knowledge into practice, students failing to follow the lessons regularly, and students being passive in lessons. Comments of students who considered that distance learning was not a suitable format for practical lessons were as follows:

*“...Everything remains theoretical and cannot be transformed into practice. The student cannot understand this clearly and has difficulty in understanding.” (S3)*

*“I am studying architecture and my lessons are mostly practical in nature. The fact that distance learning cannot be carried out in practice will therefore be a great disadvantage.” (S4)*

Although the fact that distance learning does not require compulsory attendance was found to have been expressed as an advantage following the analysis of the first question, some students considered that this could lead to lack of success:

*“I believe that since distance learning does not create an absence problem for me, it has positive aspects, but face-to-face learning is more effective. Since it is distance learning, no one cares about it, to be honest. Or rather, no one studies. That’s why face-to-face learning is more effective. In my opinion, face-to-face learning is better.” (S12)*

*“Since there is no attendance requirement, students do not participate in lessons. That is, it is up to them whether to participate or not. Since they do not participate, they become distanced from the lessons and this leads to lack of success in students.” (S3)*

The last category related to disadvantages of distance learning is technical disadvantages. In this category, students considered the most important disadvantage of distance learning in the technical sense to be that not all students had the chance of access to the technical equipment required for distance learning, such as the internet, computers, etc:

*“Apart from this, no matter how much technology has developed, there are still students with no internet connection and whose financial circumstances do not give them this opportunity. Since distance learning lessons are conducted in an online environment, students who do not have this facility cannot take part in the lessons.” (S3)*

*“I would like to discuss connection to the internet as a disadvantage. In rural areas, access to the internet is still a problem, satellite and cable communication is still not at a level that can meet all needs, and computer equipment is still inadequate.” (S7)*

### **3.3. Research question 3: What problems do the university students encounter during education conducted by distance learning?**

According to the analysis results, problems encountered by the students can be grouped into two main categories (Table 5): educational problems and technical problems. Students were determined to have more problems related to education than they had with technology. The educational problems most frequently experienced by the students were lack of communication and, since there was no problem of compulsory attendance, students’ failure to follow the lessons regularly or even not to follow them at all. Technical problems encountered by the students consisted of lack of infrastructure in the system, students not having the necessary equipment for following the lessons by distance learning, and logistical problems.

**Table 5:** Codes and Themes Created from Content Analysis of Data Obtained from Interview Question 3

Interview question 3. You have taken the first-grade 5i common compulsory courses via distance learning. What problems, if any, did you encounter during this process?	n	Codes	Subthemes	Main themes	
	1	Instruction problems in Foreign Language and Turkish Language classes	Inadequacy of distance learning for instruction of practice-based lessons (n=2)	Educational problems (f=14)	
	1	Ineffective instruction of Turkish Language classes			
	1	Lack of a real classroom atmosphere	Lack of communication and interaction (f=6)		
	4	Lack of opportunity to ask questions about or discuss misunderstood topics with instructor responsible for course during lessons			
	1	Lack of communication with other students during lessons			
	5	Failure of students to watch instructional videos regularly or even to watch them at all	Educational problems originating from students (F=6)		
	1	Lack of motivation			
	2	Incorrect loading of instructional videos into system	System/infrastructure deficiencies (f=3)		Technical problems (f=9)
	1	Inability to enter system with mobile phones			
	2	Not possessing a computer	Students’ lack of technological equipment (f=4)		
	2	Internet connection problems			
	1	Inadequate areas at university for communal computer use	Logistical problems (f=2)		
1	Unsuitability of communal computer areas at university for study via online courses				

### 3.3.1. Educational Problems

One of the educational problems was that for learning subjects like English as a foreign language and Turkish language, practical applications were necessary, and that the distance learning format was not suitable for subjects where these applications were necessary:

*“I have had difficulty in learning a subject like English via distance learning. It is not possible to learn the subject of English, which we have been unable to learn even in a real environment in school for years, in a virtual environment. I can observe this in my friends, too.” (S2)*

Another student expressed his opinion that language lessons would be more effective with face-to-face learning with these words:

*“As someone who is studying English Teaching, I took the first-grade ‘Turkish Language I’ and ‘Turkish Language II’ courses within the distance learning programme. However, since there are translation classes in our department, I considered that these courses would be beneficial to me in order to have a better command of my mother tongue. I believe it will be better to take these courses in the traditional way.” (S9)*

The problem most frequently mentioned by the students was lack of communication and interaction between teacher and students. The students regarded the most important problem as not having the chance to ask questions related to the subject immediately. One student compared the interaction in face-to-face learning with the interaction in distance learning:

*“Communication in a classroom environment is two-way. In a virtual environment, it is more one-way. That is, in a real classroom environment, we can interrupt an instructor’s lesson delivery and ask questions when we don’t understand something, or when the lesson ends, we can consult him/her face to face, there and then. But in a virtual environment, we cannot communicate in both directions with the lecturer; the instructor narrates and we just listen. We cannot inquire about things we wish to learn in more detail. Whatever the teacher has given, we can only take what is given.” (S8)*

Similarly, another student made the following comment related to not being able to receive immediate feedback:

*“I think that when we have a question in our minds, we cannot directly ask that question.” (S1)*

Another student shared his experience related to the communication problem:

*“When I have a question to ask while listening to the lesson, I cannot ask that question immediately. I listened to a simultaneous lesson, I listened to it at the lesson time, but at that moment, the instructor did not notice the questions coming from the distance learning system, and so my question was missed” (S5)*

The same student reported that he could not discuss the points he wished to discuss, related to the subject but to a topic not found in the video narration, with the lecturer responsible for the course:

*“...at the end of the lesson, when you have a more advanced topic related to that subject that you want to discuss it with the lecturer, you miss that opportunity, because you are far away, that is, you cannot come face-to-face with the instructor, you cannot create a face-to-face environment for discussion. That is one of the problems I have experienced.” (S5)”*

Another education-related problem is that students do not watch the lecture videos regularly. A number of students stated quite frankly that they did not take distance learning courses seriously, and that watching the lecture videos in the system was a waste of time:

*“Since the lessons are online and you can also watch the lesson videos later, and because they cannot establish the same discipline as at school, a loss of attention may occur. The lessons should be face-to-face, in my opinion.” (S7)*

*"I don't have much time to study the lessons...., that is, I put them off a lot. When this is the case, they don't contribute much. I do not see anything serious in distance learning. Therefore, the classes are not given much attention. I do not even know the name of the lecturer for my distance learning course. I only chose that lesson when doing registration. I learned what we were responsible for in the exams, and I looked at my results in the mid-term and final exams. In other words, I did not take part in a lesson at all; I did not see the point. I saw it as a waste of time." (S14)*

*"They are unnecessary,. we don't take them seriously. We don't watch the videos, it's a waste of time." (S13)*

One student associated irregularly entering the system and not keeping up with the subject with lack of success in exams:

*"When it comes to distance learning, we say 'If I don't listen today, I can listen later'. But when the lessons mount up, we cannot listen. This of course causes problems at exam time. The topics pile up, and we can only get a low grade." (S10)*

### 3.3.2. Technical Problems

As for technical problems, the problems stemming from inadequate infrastructure at university are reflected in technical/economic problems experienced by students in accessing computers and the internet. One student stated that the university's lack of infrastructure also affected students in economic terms:

*"Since the infrastructure of the distance learning system has not been completely formed, some problems were experienced in accessing the system. Moreover, to enter the system, you had to enter via a computer. You could not enter with a mobile phone. This also constituted a problem for students in financial terms. Students had to obtain a computer. That was another problem we experienced." (S9)*

Another student referred to problems stemming from the system as follows:

*"At the same time, since the school's infrastructure is poor, there can be losses of connection to the internet, or a video is not completely taken....problems such as these can be experienced." (S5)*

Besides internet connection problems originating from the system, students mentioned difficulties encountered in connecting to the internet in places outside their university campus, as well. One of the students gave his opinion on this issue as follows:

*"I would like to share something that happened to me with you. In the first year that I stayed in the state dormitory, which was opened that same year, there was an internet problem. Until the internet system was sorted out, I had difficulty in keeping up with the distance learning courses." (S9)*

One student who had to stop watching the lecture videos due to the problems she experienced with the videos, referred to her experiences like this:

*"Since there was no attendance requirement with distance learning, I did not go to school, and so I listened to the lectures on the internet, but I noticed that in the lessons I followed on the internet, some videos had not been uploaded, and therefore, I had problems....due to these difficulties, I study with the lesson notes." (S15)*

Besides the problems encountered in connecting to the internet, students mentioned problems caused by lack of computers:

*"Not all students have access to a computer; some stay in the dormitory and some stay at home, but they do not have internet or computers at home. There are those who use computers communally, but you go there and have to wait a long time to find a free computer, and you lose time. Then you find a computer, but because you're listening to something with sound, you need earphones or the like. In other words, it's very difficult. That's why education in a classroom environment is nicer, that is, better quality." (S8)*

### 3.4. Research question 4: What are university students' recommendations to make distance learning more effective?

The data analysis results reveal that for developing the curricula of the common “5i” courses taken via distance learning, 50% of students' suggestions were directed at developing educational aspects, while the other 50% were aimed at developing technical facilities. This situation reveals that students considered both the educational dimension and the technical dimension of the system to be equally important. The recommendation most frequently expressed by the students related to development in the educational area was that learning should be made interactive by adding multiple environments to the system that would increase communication and interaction, both between the lecturer responsible for the course and the students, and among the students themselves.

**Table 6:** Codes and Themes Created from Content Analysis of Data Obtained from Interview Question 4

Interview question 4. How can the teaching and learning process for courses delivered via distance learning be made more effective? What are your	n	Codes	Subthemes	Main themes
	1	1	Enriching lessons with subject tests	Course content (n=2)
1	1	Delivering lessons in such a way as to enable participation of students.		
1	1	Integrating video chat tools such as Skype and FaceTime into the system	Creating interactive platforms (n=7)	Educational (n=9)
1	1	Adding applications such as discussion groups and chat rooms to the system		
2	2	Integrating interactive applications into the system		
1	1	Creating a real environment		
1	1	Increasing communication between students and instructor responsible for course		
2	2	Increasing communication among students	Structure and functioning of programme (n=7)	Technical (n=9)
2	2	Adding face –to-face- education to the system		
1	1	Increasing number of lesson hours for Turkish language course	Development of equipment (n=2)	Technical (n=9)
1	1	Monitoring attendance via the system		
3	3	Making students' participation in lessons compulsory	Development of equipment (n=2)	Technical (n=9)
1	1	Providing students with access to computers		
1	1	Strengthening of infrastructure such as internet web	Development of equipment (n=2)	Technical (n=9)
1	1	Strengthening of infrastructure such as internet web		

One of the students made the following comment related to the suggestion that integrating multiple environments with the system would create the opportunity for students to obtain immediate feedback related to the subject:

*“Students should be able to see and obtain each other’s ideas interactively. For students to be able to ask their teachers and lecturers questions and receive their answers immediately in distance learning lessons, just as they can in face-to-face learning, video chat applications like Skype and FaceTime can be reprogrammed to suit distance learning courses and offered for use by students and instructors.” (S3)*

*“For distance learning to be more effective, more interactive applications can be made for students. Applications can be introduced that will increase the relationships among the lecturer and students. A platform can be created on which students taking that subject can message each other, that is, improvements can be made that will make students feel more like students; in my opinion, these will make learning more effective.” (S5)*

Similarly, another student stated that a communication platform added to the system would transform a virtual classroom environment into a real classroom environment:

*“A communication platform should be set up within the system. This may be in the form of discussion groups, chat rooms, or personal correspondences, with the aim of preventing students from getting bored, creating a real environment as much as is possible, and making students less passive.” (S7)*

Another issue mentioned by students in the education field was directed towards enrichment of course contents (n=2). One student stated the opinion that especially after topics had been taught, subject tests should be added to the course content in order to determine shortcomings:

*“For more effective learning, following the videos, unit tests can be included for evaluation; these tests can be added for us to evaluate ourselves better and to better understand whether or not we have understood the subject, in my opinion.” (S1)*

Other matters expressed by the students aimed at improving the system were related to the structure and functioning of the programme and to hardware features. With regard to the structure and functioning of the programme, students mostly stated that there should be compulsory participation. One student, who regarded participation in classes as a problem, gave the opinion that participation in lessons should be obligatory:

*“Since participation in classes is a big problem, by means of enforcement, students can be made to participate in lessons more regularly.” (S3)*

Similarly, another student supported compulsory participation in lessons:

*“A student’s participation in lessons should be monitored and participation should be made compulsory. This will also allow the student to behave in a relaxed manner and participate in lessons more seriously.” (S6)*

However, some students were opposed to compulsory participation since they believed it would lead to inequality of opportunity. Some of these students expressed their views on this subject as follows:

*“Let’s assume that we are all obliged to follow every lesson. This situation would be very difficult for students who have difficulty with access to computers or the internet, or who do not have a computer or internet.” (S8).*

*“In addition, there is inequality of opportunity among students. Smartphones, computers and tablets could be provided to students who do not have these.” (S3)*

One student stated the view that the 2 lesson hours of the Turkish Language I and II courses should be given face-to-face, or that the number of hours per week should be increased:

*“For someone to have a good command of a foreign language, that person should first of all be more effective in his/her own language. I believe that if the ‘Turkish Language’ course, which is currently taken for 2 lesson hours a week, were conducted for 4 or more hours with the instructor in class, it would contribute much more to students.” (S9)*

Some students stated their idea that with the aim of solving the problems experienced by foreign students in the common compulsory courses, the face-to-face format should be included in the system for these students:

*“We have taken these classes for years at secondary and high school, but foreign students only start to take these courses for the first time when they start university, and therefore, they have a lot of difficulty. That is to say, let the student have the chance to ask a question whenever he/she wishes, so that he/she can understand the lesson better.” (S11)*

*“We have a foreign friend in our class. He, for example, doesn’t know Turkish as well as we do. Extra face-to-face tuition can be given to foreign students such as him. Yes, Turkish students can take the course via distance learning, but students coming from other countries can have face-to-face instruction. Thanks to this, they will have learned as well. I don’t think my friend will be able to do the exam. How is he supposed to do Turkish revolutionary history? How can he do Turkish language?” (S12).*

#### **4. Discussion**

The findings of each research question are discussed under four headings: advantages of distance education, disadvantages of distance education, problems encountered, and recommendations.

#### 4.1. Advantages of Distance Education

The findings of the present study reveal that in general, the students seem to have a positive attitude towards distance learning. The related literature shows a complex picture in relation to the attitudes of university students towards distance education. For example, in Begimbetova's (2015) study, it was determined that 785 students at associate degree, bachelor's degree and postgraduate levels at Ahmet Yesevi and Gazi Universities had positive opinions related to distance learning. Similarly, Yadigar (2010), who investigated 62 graduate students' evaluations of a distance education programme in Gazi University, stated that 69% of the students were positive about the programme. In Orhan (2018)'s study, 715 university students taking the Foreign Language I course online indicated an intermediate level of satisfaction with this course. In Aktürk, Şahin and Sümbül's (2008) study, 59% of 53 preservice teachers reported a negative approach towards web-based learning. Similarly, Balıkçioğlu, Öz, and Işın (2019) reported that 84% of the 398 students at the vocational school did not think that distance education was an effective way of learning.

According to the research findings of the present study, students determined the advantages of education conducted via distance learning in these seven subthemes, from the most often expressed to the least often: having control over the learning environment, having control over the study process, low cost, gaining time, indefinite accessibility of subjects, rapid access to information, and accessibility of education for all students. Findings of studies in the related literature show similarity with the results of this study (Table 7).

**Table 7:** Findings of Literature Review Related to Advantages of Education Given via Distance Learning for University Students

Study	Research findings
Cabı,2016; Eroğlu,2018; Karataş,2008;	Enables accessibility of education for all students
Çetin, 2010; Eroğlu,2018; Karataş,2008;	Reduces cost
Bahşi,2019; Fırat,2016; Mercan,2018	Enables individualisation of education
Bahşi,2019; Cabı,2016; Erfidan,2019; Doğan & Tatık,2015; Karataş, 2008; Kubani,2013; Özer,2011; Yadigar,2010	Allows freedom in space and time
Doğan & Tatık,2015; Eroğlu,2018	No problem of compulsory attendance in classes
Eroğlu,2018; Hakkari,2018	Accessibility of lesson materials and subject explanations at all times

One of the most significant advantages of classes delivered via distance learning expressed by the students was the ability to determine their own pace, study area and times when following the lesson topics. In other words, students can individualise their education (Balaban, 2012). According to the findings obtained through interviews by Mercan (2018) with regard to 5i courses delivered via distance learning, the biggest advantages of distance learning were that every student is able to carry out their study at their own pace, there is the possibility to study in a comfortable environment, and online lessons can be repeated as often as is desired.

In his study, Eroğlu (2018) stated that students taking the compulsory English course could watch the video lessons included in distance learning several times and whenever they wished, and that the PDF files that contain the lesson notes for these videos made foreign language lessons more permanent. Similarly, the participants in Kirali and Alcı's (2016) study indicated the opportunity to access the course materials online whenever they wanted as an advantage of distance education.



Similarly, participants in Doğan and Tatuk's (2015) study stated in the responses they gave to the open-ended questions that the two most important advantages were the opportunity to access the system and study whenever they wished, and the fact that there was no compulsory attendance in the classes.

#### ***4.2. Disadvantages of Distance Education***

As a result of analysis of the second research question, three dimensions of disadvantages emerged: communicational disadvantages, educational disadvantages and technical disadvantages. The disadvantage most frequently expressed by students was related to communicational issues. More specifically, they stated that they could not obtain feedback from the course lecturer or communicate with the course instructor and their peers, which made them feel isolated. Another disadvantage most frequently mentioned in this category was the lack of opportunity to obtain immediate feedback. These findings align with the findings of the related research (Erfidan, 2018; Hakkari, 2018). Similarly, most of the (60%) freshmen students in Şirin's (2015) study indicated that the most significant negative aspect of distance education was the lack of interaction and that they could not get feedback (69%). Less than half of the students (41%) expressed opinions about technical problems. The findings of Mercan (2018) also show consistency with these findings. The participants stated in the interviews that there was either very little or no interaction, that there was no active participation from the side of the students in the lesson, and that students may face technical problems. The findings of the questionnaire also indicate that nearly half of the freshmen students (49%) had difficulty in motivating themselves for the courses, individual study, and self-regulation.

Some studies in the related literature also report that another problem experienced by students in relation to application of education by distance learning is that they cannot ask immediate questions to the lecturer giving the lesson, and that even if they write questions on the form created for asking questions, the instructor did not always reply to these questions (Şirin & Tekdal, 2015).

Although the majority of postgraduate students in Yadigar's (2010) study made positive evaluations of the distance learning programme, some students stated that the biggest disadvantages of distance learning were that students were unable to ensure active participation in the learning process and that they could not obtain feedback when they were faced with a problem of any kind.

Students' lack of motivation can also be associated with subject content of the lessons. In his study, Eroğlu (2018) reported that since subjects previously learnt by students taking 5i courses were repeated at university, they found courses other than the foreign language course boring and pointless, and they regarded these as an inconvenience or a burden for themselves. In the same study, students stated that besides the fact that they thought that the content of the foreign language course was simple, they also considered that since it was a practice-based course, it was not suitable for implementation with distance learning and that implementation with face-to-face learning was more suitable.

Lack of motivation experienced by students can also be related to the course instructor (Karataş, 2008; Uşun, 2006). Since instructors are burdened with a heavy workload for preparing the content and materials for courses, these instructors may behave unwillingly and carelessly when preparing online courses, or else they may not possess the required technical knowledge (Eroğlu, 2018).

Some studies in the related literature have associated this disadvantage with lecturers' tedious methods of conducting lessons, using a "direct instruction" technique (Eroğlu, 2018; Yaman, 2015). Eroğlu (2018) reported in his study that students were not willing to watch the lesson videos prepared by the lecturers and loaded into the system, and that the reason for this was that in the videos, the course instructors merely recited the texts they had prepared in a flat or monotonous tone, and that the lesson contents consisted of topics that students were already familiar with.

---

### ***4.3. Problems Encountered***

The students indicated that during distance education they experienced both educational and technical problems. Lack of communication and lack of motivation, which were also indicated by the participants to be the most significant disadvantages of distance education, were revealed to be the most frequently expressed educational problems. Similarly, in Muilenburg and Berge's (2005) study, which investigated the barriers of students to online learning, lack of social interaction was perceived to be the most severe barrier. Özer (2011), in his work, aimed to evaluate distance education programmes through the eyes of university students and university course instructors. His findings revealed that while lack of communication was mentioned by 35% of the students, only 15% of them indicated technical inadequacy as the problems they had experienced.

Not following the online lessons and reviewing the course materials regularly were the other educational problems expressed by the participants. Similarly, Akbaba, Kaymakçı, Birbudak and Kılcan (2016), who investigated the perceptions of university students at Atatürk University on distance learning, found that most of the students did not attend the courses regularly because they are not obliged to do so. As a result of face-to-face interviews with the participants, Mercan (2018) revealed that the lack of obligation to attend the course reduced the desire to participate in the course and that consequently, active participation in the course decreased.

Another finding in the study was that foreign students had difficulty in understanding the Turkish Language course and the Atatürk's Principles and History of the Reform course in particular, and that they also had difficulty in the exams for these courses. Eroğlu (2018) reported that the exam for the Atatürk's Principles and History of the Reform course was more difficult than the exams for the other 5i courses, while Doyran & Doyran (2013) stated that for foreign students, having to learn the history of another country by heart rather than the history of their own countries lowered their motivation.

The technical problems less often expressed by students were related to system/infrastructure deficiencies and students' lacking the required technological equipment such as a computer and strong internet connection. These technical problems are mentioned in a variety of studies (Bilgiç, Doğan & Seferoğlu, 2011; Ersoy, 2015; Yadigar, 2010). This finding achieves consensus with some previous research, in which technical problems are not perceived as important as other problems (Muilenburg and Berge, 2005; Erol-Şahin, 2019). The university's lack of infrastructure, a sub-category of technical problems, was another problem mentioned by the students. Technological requirements such as speed of internet connectivity and bandwidth are essential for the effective implementation of online courses (Childs, Blenkinsopp, Hall & Walton, 2005). Limited bandwidth of internet connection causes slower performance for sound and video, and prevents the software from running smoothly. This finding is supported by the relevant literature (Birişçi, 2013; Karataş, 2008; Özyürek, Begdeb&Özkan, 2016), and indicates that the students demand a strong on-campus infrastructure.

### ***4.4. Recommendations***

The students provided both educational and technical suggestions for the development of the programme. The most frequently mentioned educational recommendation is creating interactive platforms for the participants of the programme to increase interaction among course members. In relation to the structure and functioning, the students suggested that participation in lessons be compulsory. These findings correspond with the findings of Doğan and Tatık (2015) who used a questionnaire consisting of six open-ended questions to gather information about students' perceptions in regard to 5i courses implemented in distance format. One of these questions asked for participants' recommendations to make the programme more effective. The students mostly recommended that discussion platforms aimed at distance learning courses should be provided. Furthermore, they recommended that the course materials should be supported with visual items, that a system for taking attendance should be applied, and, in order to consolidate learning, that subject tests and solutions

should be prepared and loaded onto the website as course materials. The results of the study also showed internal consistency. In the second research question, the disadvantage most often expressed by the students was lack of communication and interaction. Therefore, the fact that the need to increase interaction was the most commonly expressed recommendation also shows that the findings complement and support each other.

## 5. Conclusion

Bilgiç, Doğan & Seferoğlu (2011) reported that instructors who used distance learning systems mostly encountered problems with the issues of content preparation, use of distance learning systems, pedagogical inadequacy, lack of time, student evaluation, and feedback. Similar findings were obtained in the study by Downing & Dymont (2013) examining the competence of university lecturers. In the study, it was revealed that instructors lacked competence in technological and pedagogical skills and that they were in need of support training in these areas. In her study, Yıldız (2015) also obtained findings that supported the previous literature, and stated that instructors' knowledge related to distance learning was not very clear.

For attitudes against distance learning to change in a positive direction, use of synchronous technologies that offer an interactive learning environment very close to traditional learning, with the opportunity for sound and visual communication with multiple environment materials, needs to be extended (Yıldız, 2011). For implementation of online learning, teaching staff need to have skills for using technology on at least a basic level (Özcan, 2019). Therefore, the competence of teaching staff who are to use synchronous distance learning systems with regard to implementing distance learning should be determined, and those instructors who are not at the desired level should take a pre-training programme (Yıldız, 2011).

In the present study, lack of opportunity to obtain immediate feedback to questions related to subject was informed to be a significant disadvantage of distance education. Provision of rapid feedback by the teacher is one of the principles of effective education (Çakmak & Kaban, 2016; Graham, Cagiltay, Lim, Craner & Duffy, 2001). Mikulecky (1998) stated that due to delay in feedback in the asynchronous system, students gave late answers and in this way, became disconnected from the discussion. Being aware of the importance of immediate feedback, the course instructors should use e-mails or interactive platforms to give feedback, which in turn may encourage active participations of the students.

One of the most striking findings of the study was that students stated the most important disadvantage of distance learning to be lack of communication and interaction. That is, students do not prefer learning environments that do not provide the facilities for adequate teacher-student and student-student interaction. Therefore, in applications conducted with asynchronous lessons, instructor-student meetings at regular intervals should be supported (Yaman, 2015), or else these lessons should be provided in a synchronous learning environment rather than an asynchronous one.

Conducting pre-studies related to determining whether universities have an infrastructure for implementing distance learning, the extent to which teaching staff possess the academic and technical faculties required for providing effective education via distance learning, and the degree to which this education is productive in universities that implement distance learning, will enable more effective application of distance learning. This study has presented detailed information about deficiencies in implementation and problems experienced regarding distance learning from the viewpoint of university students. One of the limitations of the study is that the participants consisted only of university students. Conducting similar studies with teaching staff who are involved with implementation of distance learning is very important in terms of developing education provided through distance learning; at the same time, cooperation of expert researchers in the fields of subject areas in which distance learning is given, curricula, computer technologies and measurement and evaluation, is required. For the development of distance learning applications, universities need to

provide the necessary research facilities by providing their researchers with the required financial and technical support, besides professional development of the course instructors (Poon, 2013). This study, moreover, provides data that enable better quality applications to be made by universities that have not yet begun to implement distance learning for common compulsory courses.

### References

- Akbaba, B., Kaymakçı, S., Birbudak, T. S. & Kılcan, B. (2016). Üniversite öğrencilerinin uzaktan eğitimle Atatürk İlkeleri ve İnkılâp Tarihi öğretimine yönelik görüşleri. *Kurumsal Eğitim Bilim Dergisi*, 9(2), 285-309.
- Aktürk, A. O., Şahin, İ. & Sünbül, A. M. (2008). *Bilgisayar öğretmen adaylarının web temelli öğ - retime karşı tutumları*. 8. Uluslararası Eğitim Teknolojileri Konferansında sunulmuş bildiri, (6-9 Mayıs 2008). Eskişehir: Anadolu Üniversitesi
- Armborst, A. (2017). Thematic proximity in content analysis, *SAGE Open*, 7(2), 1-11.
- Bahçekapılı, E. (2015). *Uzaktan eğitim öğrencilerinin akademik başarılarının bireysel özellikler ile yordanması* (Doktora tezi). Atatürk Üniversitesi, Erzurum, Türkiye.
- Bahşi, A. (2019). *Uzaktan ve örgün eğitim öğrencilerinin eğitsel düşünce ve uygulamaları* (Yüksek lisans tezi). Fırat Üniversitesi, Elazığ, Türkiye.
- Balaban, E. (2012). *Dünyada ve Türkiye’de uzaktan eğitim ve bir proje önerisi* (Yüksek lisans tezi). Işık Üniversitesi, İstanbul, Türkiye.
- Balıkçioğlu, N., Çınar-Öz, D. & Işın, N.N. (2019). Üniversite öğrencilerinin uzaktan eğitim derslerindeki memnuniyet araştırması: Aşık Veysel Meslek Yüksekokulu örneği, *C.Ü İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Dergisi*, 20(1), 462-473.
- Baker, C. (2010). The impact of instructor immediacy and presence for online student affective learning, cognition, and motivation. *The Journal of Educators Online*, 7(1), 1-30.
- Begimbetova, K. (2015). *Uzaktan eğitimde öğretim elemanı ve öğrencilerinin memnuniyet düzeyi* (Yüksek lisans tezi), Gazi Üniversitesi, Ankara, Türkiye.
- Bertiz, Y. (2018). *Farklı bilişsel esneklik düzeyine sahip öğrencilerin uzaktan eğitime karşı motivasyon düzeylerinin incelenmesi*. (Yüksek lisans tezi). Gazi Üniversitesi, Ankara, Türkiye.
- Bilgiç, H. G., Doğan, D. & Seferoğlu, S. (2011). Türkiye’de yükseköğretimde çevrimiçi öğretimin durumu: İhtiyaçlar, sorunlar ve çözüm önerileri. *Yüksek öğretim Dergisi*, 1(2), 80-87.
- Birişçi, S. (2013). Video konferans tabanlı uzaktan eğitime ilişkin öğrenci tutumları ve görüşleri. *Journal of Instructional Technologies & Teacher Education*, 2(1), 24- 40.
- Birişçi, S., Metin, M. & Demiryürek, G. (2011). İlköğretim öğretmenlerinin bilgisayar ve internet kullanmaya yönelik tutumlarının incelenmesi: Artvin ili örneği. *Eğitim Teknolojileri Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 2(4), 1-18.
- Cabı, E. (2016). Uzaktan eğitimde e-değerlendirme üzerine öğrenci algıları. *Yükseköğretim ve Bilim Dergisi*, 6(1), 94-101.
- Caner, M. (2016). Distance language education: teaching beyond the walls. In İ. Yaman, E. Ekmekçi, & M. Şenel (Eds.), *Current Trends in ELT* (pp. 214-225). Ankara: Nüans Publishing.
- Childs, S., Blenkinsopp, E., Hall, A., & Walton, G. (2005). Effective e-learning for health professionals and students: barriers and their solutions: a systematic review of the literature-findings from the HeXL Project. *Health Information and Libraries Journal*, 22(2), 20-32.

- Çakır, G., & Yurtsever, B. (2012). An implementation of distance education program for teaching common necessary courses in formal education: Karabük University sample. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 55, 187-195.
- Day, D. (June,2003). *Enhancing quality through integrated educational development: A model* . The quality dialogue: Integrating quality cultures in Flexible, distance and eLearning (s. 101-107). Rhodes, Greece: European Distance Education Network:.
- Doğan, S. & Tatık, R.Ş. (2015). Evaluation of distance education program in Marmara University according to the views of students. *Route Educational and Social Science Journal*, 2(1), 247-261.
- Doyran, F. & Doyran, M. (2013). Atatürk İlkeleri ve İnkılap Tarihi dersi zorunlu ders olmalı mı? Üniversite öğrencilerinin görüş ve önerileri. *Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic*, 8(3), 163-177.
- Downing, J. & Dymont, J. (2013). Teacher educators' readiness, preparation and perceptions of preparing pre-service teachers in a fully online environment: An exploratory study. *The Teacher Educator*, 48(2), 96-109.
- Elçil, Ş. & Şahiner, D. S. (2013). Uzaktan eğitimde iletişimsel engeller. *Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Dergisi*, 5(2), 525-537.
- Ekmekçi, E. (2015). Distance education in foreign language teaching: evaluations from the perspectives of freshman students. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 176, 390- 397.
- Elliott, V. (2018). *Thinking about the coding process in qualitative data analysis. The qualitative report*, 23(11), 2850-2861.
- Erfidan, A. (2019). *Derslerin uzaktan eğitim yoluyla verilmesiyle ilgili öğretim elemanı ve öğrenci görüşleri: Balıkesir Üniversitesi örneği* (Yüksek lisans tezi). Balıkesir Üniversitesi, Balıkesir, Türkiye.
- Eroğlu, F. (2018). *Üniversitedeki zorunlu ortak derslerin uzaktan ve yüz yüze eğitim uygulamalarının değerlendirilmesi* (Yüksek lisans tezi). Gazi Üniversitesi, Ankara, Türkiye.
- Erol Şahin, A.N. (2019). Atatürk ilkeleri ve İnkılap Tarihi dersinin uzaktan eğitim yoluyla öğretilmesi hakkında öğretim elemanlarının görüşleri. *Gazi Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 39(1), 477- 502.
- Ersoy, N. (2015). Uzaktan İngilizce dersinin farklı değişkenler açısından incelenmesi. *Eğitim ve Öğretim Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 4(3), 95-106.
- Fırat, M. ( 2016). 21. yüzyılda uzaktan öğretimde paradigma değişimi. *Yükseköğretim ve Bilim Dergisi*, 6(2), 142-150.
- Gillies, D. (2008). Student perspectives on video-conferencing in teacher education at a distance. *Distance Education*, 29(1), 107-118.
- Glaser, B.G. & Strauss, A.L.(1967) *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine, Chicago.
- Gök, B.(2011). *Perceptions of faculty perceive the current status of distance education* (Yüksek lisans tezi). Gazi Üniversitesi, Ankara, Türkiye.
- Graham, C., Cagiltay, K., Lim, B., Craner, J., & Duffy, T. M. (2001). Seven principles of effective teaching: A practical lens for evaluating online courses. *The Technology Source*, 30(5), 50.

- Gürbüz, F. (2014). Students' views on distance learning in Turkey: An example of Anadolu University open education faculty. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education-TOJDE*, 15(2), 239-250.
- Güvenç, E. (2018). *Zeki karar destek sistemi kullanarak uzaktan eğitim öğrencilerinin performanslarının değerlendirilmesi* (Yüksek lisans tezi). Muğla Sıtkı Koçman Üniversitesi, Muğla Türkiye.
- Hakkari, F. (2018). Meslek yüksekokulu öğrencilerinin uzaktan eğitim derslerine yönelik görüşleri. *Journal of Social Humanities and Sciences Research*, 5(3), 1140-1151.
- Hillman, D. C. A., Willis, D. J., & Gunawardena, C. N. (1994). Learner-interface interaction in distance education: An extension of contemporary models and strategies for practitioners. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 8(2), 30-42.
- Hrastinski, S. (2008). Asynchronous and synchronous e-learning. *EDUCAUSE Quarterly*, 31(4), 51-55.
- İliniş, Ç. (2006). *An evaluation of on-line- language course at Adana Vocational School of Çukurova University*. (Yüksek lisans tezi). Çukurova Üniversitesi, Adana, Türkiye.
- Kaban, A. & Çakmak, E. (2016). Uzaktan eğitim kalite standartlarının belirlenmesi. *Kastamonu Eğitim Dergisi*, 24(2), 719-736.
- Kaya, M. (2012). *Distance learners autonomous language learning skills in the distance English language teaching (BA) program*. (Yüksek lisans tezi).Eskisehir, Türkiye.
- Kaya, Z., (2002). *Uzaktan eğitim*. Ankara: Pegem.
- Karataş, S (2008). Interaction in the Internet-Based Distance Learning Researches: Results of A Trend Analysis. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 7(2), 11-19.
- Kıralı,F. N. & Alcı,B. (2016). Üniversite öğrencilerinin uzaktan eğitim algısına ilişkin görüşleri, *İstanbul Aydın Üniversitesi Dergisi*, 30, 55-83.
- McDonald,N., Schoenebeck,S. & Forte, A. (20119). *Reliability and inter-rater reliability in qualitative research: Norms and guidelines for CSCW and HCI practice*. Proceeding of the ACM on human computer interaction, 3, 1-23.
- Mercan, A. (2018). *Üniversite öğrencilerinin uzaktan eğitim ile ilgili görüşleri ve hazır bulunuşlukları*: Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi (Yüksek lisans tezi),Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi, Afyon, Türkiye.
- Merriam, S. B. (2013). *Nitel araştırma desen ve uygulama için bir rehber*, (Çev. Selahattin Turan), 3. Basımdan Çeviri, Nobel Akademik Yayın: Ankara
- Mikulecky, L. (1998). Diversity, discussion, and participation: Comparing Web-based and campusbased adolescent literature classes. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 42(2), 84-97.
- Moore, M. G. (1989) Three types of interaction. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 3(2),1-6.
- Moore, M. G. & Kearsley, G. (2011). *Distance education: A systems view of online learning* (3th Editon). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Muilenburg, L.Y. & Berge, Z.L.(2005). Student barriers to online learning: A factor analytic study. *Distance Education*, 26(1), 29-48.
- Newlin, M., Lavooy,M. & Wang,A. (2005). An experimental comparison of conventional and web-based instructional formats. *North American Journal of Psychology*, 7, 327-336.

- Norlyk, A. & Harder, I.(2010).What makes a phenomenological study phenomenological? An analysis of peer-reviewed empirical nursing studies. *Qualitative Health Research*,20(3),420–431.
- Orhan, A. (2016) *Uzaktan eğitimle yürütülen yabancı dil dersi öğretim programının bağlam, girdi, süreç ve ürün (CIPP) modeli ile değerlendirilmesi* (Yüksek lisans tezi). Düzce Üniversitesi, Düzce, Türkiye.
- Özcan, S. (2019). *Uzaktan eğitim veren kurumlarda öğretim elemanlarının çevrimiçi öğretime bağlılığının incelenmesi* (Doktora tezi). Gazi Üniversitesi, Ankara, Türkiye.
- Özer, B. (2011). *Uzaktan eğitim programlarının öğrenci ve öğretim üyesi görüşleri açısından değerlendirilmesi (Sakarya üniversitesi örneği)* (Yüksek lisans tezi). Abant İzzet Baysal Üniversitesi, Bolu, Türkiye.
- Özyürek A., Begdeb Z., Yavuz N.F. & Özkan İ. (2016). Uzaktan eğitim uygulamasının öğrenci bakış açısına göre değerlendirilmesi. *Karabük Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 6(2),592-605.
- Perveen,A. (2016). Synchronuous and asynchronous e-learning: a cse study of virtual university of Pakistan. *Open Praxis*, 8(1), 21-29.
- Pittinsky, M.& Chase, B. (2000). *Quality on the line: Benchmarks for success in internet-based distance education*. The Institute for Higher Education Policy. Washington, DC: National Education Association
- Poon,J.(2013). Blended learning: An institutional approach for enhancing students’learning experiences. *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 9(2).
- Ramazan,S. (2016). *Eğitim fakültesi I. sınıf öğrencilerinin uzaktan eğitime ilişkin tutumları ile İngilizce dersine ilişkin tutumları arasındaki ilişki*( Yüksek lisans tezi). Abant İzzet Baysal Üniversitesi, Bolu, Türkiye.
- Skylar, A. (2009). A comparison of asynchronous online text-based lectures and synchronous interactive web conferencing lectures. *Issues in Teacher Education*, 18, 69-84.
- Somenarain, L., Akkaraju, S.& Gharbaran, R. (2010). Student perceptions and learning outcomes in asynchronous and synchronous online learning environments in a biology course. *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 6(2), 353–356.
- Şahinkaya, H., Şahinkaya, Y. & Tat, M. (2017). *Uzaktan eğitimle ders alan öğrencilerin e-öğrenme hazır bulunuşluğunun incelenmesi: Mustafa Kemal Üniversitesi Örneği*. 5 th International Instructional Technologies & Teacher Education Symposium ,Abstract Proceedings, 433-434.
- Şirin, R. & Tekdal, M. (2015). İngilizce dersinin uzaktan eğitime yönelik öğrenci görüşleri. *Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences*, 14(1), 323-335.
- Şişman-Uğur, S. (2010). *Views of learners with different learning styles on the e-course designs: The example of Anadolu University Distance Education Program* (Yüksek lisans tezi). Anadolu Üniversitesi, Eskişehir, Turkey.
- Türkoğlu, T. (2015). Meslek yüksekokulunda örgün öğretim programındaki öğrencilerinin uzaktan öğretim dersine karşı yaklaşımı. *Electronic Journal Of Vocational Colleges*, 31-38
- Urquhart, C. (2012) *Grounded theory for qualitative research: A practical guide*, London: Sage Publications.
- Uşun, S. (2006). *Uzaktan eğitim*. Ankara: Nobel Yayın Dağıtım.

- Ünal, M. & Özdemir, M. Ç. (2008). Eğitim fakültelerinde ortak ders olarak okutulan yabancı dil derslerinde öğrencilerin bilişsel hazır bulunuşluk düzeylerinin akademik başarıya etkisi. *Ahi Evran Üniversitesi Kırşehir Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 9(1), 13- 22
- Vistven, L. & Blom, D. (2003). *Training the trainers: A Strategy for quality assurance*. The quality dialogue: Integrating quality cultures in flexible, distance and e-Learning (s. 342-346). Rhodes, Greece: European Distance Education Network:
- Yadigar, G. (2010). *Uzaktan eğitim programlarının etkinliğinin değerlendirilmesi Gazi Örneği* (Yüksek lisans tezi). Gazi Üniversitesi, Ankara, Türkiye.
- Yaman, İ. (2015). Üniversitelerde zorunlu İngilizce (51) derslerinin uzaktan eğitim yoluyla verilmesinin artı ve eksiler. *International Periodical for the Languages. Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic*, 10(7), 967-984
- Yıldız, M. (2015). *Uzaktan eğitim programlarında ders veren öğretim elemanlarının uzaktan eğitime yönelik bilgi, inanç ve uygulamaları arasındaki ilişkiler* (Yüksek lisans tezi). Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Ankara, Türkiye.
- Yıldız, E. (2011). *The effects of the synchronous web conferences on the attitudes of the candidate teachers to the distance learning and their acceptance of synchronous technologies* (Yüksek lisans tezi), Balıkesir Üniversitesi, Balıkesir, Türkiye.
- YÖK (Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı),( 2019), Yükseköğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi, Yükseköğretim İstatistikleri, Retrieved from <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr> on 12 November 2019