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Research article

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Abstract

This study sets out to explore how do online EFL (English as a Foreign Language) instructors perceive their roles and competencies. With this aim, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews from eight online instructors who teach Basic English Course at a state university in Turkey. Data were analyzed through content analysis technique using Nvivo software. As a result of the study, five roles and 28 competencies were articulated by the EFL instructors as crucial. Nevertheless, instructors asserted that they cannot perform most of these roles and competencies in their online classes because of the challenges such as poorness of the online platform, interaction problems, lack of student participation, inadequacy of online material support, poorness of technical and technological infrastructure, overcrowded classes, insufficiency of in-service teacher training, and lack of knowledge on online material development, ICT (Information and Communications Technology) skills, integrating technology into teaching, and copyright issues. For a more effective online teaching environment, instructors emphasized the need for a sound technical and technological infrastructure, electronic course content support along with hands-on and continuous professional development training. This study uncovers important implications of the instructional, quality-related, and managerial dimensions of online education to be taken into consideration by higher education institutions to create a successful online language teaching and learning environment.

Keywords: online teacher roles and competencies, online teacher qualifications, online English teaching, online English learning

1. Introduction

Although online and face to face (F2F) learning environments share a lot of common features, online education constitutes unique conditions for teaching and learning such as supporting interaction regardless of time and place, facilitating delivery of content in various formats, allowing reaching content almost everywhere, and offering ‘communications-rich’ learning environment by letting synchronous or asynchronous interaction in different formats (Anderson, 2008). In parallel with these unique features, teaching and learning in online settings has resulted in new challenges, duties, and commitments for all participants. Especially for online instructors, assuming new roles and developing new competencies has become quite essential to be successful (Anderson, 2008; Aragon & Johnson, 2002; Bennet & Lockyer, 2004; Comas-Quin, 2011; Gülbahar & Kalelioğlu, 2015; Yi, 2012). In this respect, online instructors, being at the center of online learning environments, have a critical role as the quality of online education is largely determined by their practices.

In the process of transition from F2F to online education, instructors are expected to take their new roles without refusing or reforming (Rennert & Arieu, 2008). However, each instructor has a different online environment and different personality, so their roles can be reshaped or altered according to their unique conditions. Hence, assigning and expecting pre-determined roles and competencies may be considered unrealistic. In this respect, it is necessary to learn how instructors are affected by this process of transition, how they perceive their new roles and to what extent they can perform these roles along with the challenges they confront during their online teaching journey.

Until now, roles and competencies of online instructors have been identified by various distance education experts (Bawane & Spector, 2009; Goodyear, Salmon, Spector, Steeples, & Tickner, 2001; Egan & Akdere, 2005; Williams, 2003). Among them, Goodyear et al. (2001) conducted a workshop with practitioners and researchers experienced in online teaching. After the workshop, eight major roles along with competencies were reported: (1) *Process Facilitator* role is concerned with facilitating various online activities that supports student learning such as ensuring active participation of all learners, understanding learners' expectations, concerns, needs, and helping learners take responsibility of their own learning, (2) *Advisor/Counselor* role is related to working privately with learners, providing advice or counseling on student engagement in the course, (3) *Assessor* role involves giving feedback, grading, and assessing learning outcomes, (4) *Researcher* role necessitates keeping up with new developments in the profession area, evaluating the effectiveness of online teaching, and improving one's own performance, (5) *Content Facilitator* role includes competencies of selecting relevant learning resources, using appropriate tasks, monitoring progress, and providing feedback, (6) *Technologist* role entails possessing adequate technical skills, using appropriate tools and techniques, diagnosing technical issues and challenges, having capability to organize and update distributed learning resources, and respecting intellectual property rights, (7) *Designer* role demands preparing online learning activities before class, (8) *Manager/Administrator* role requires dealing with enrollment, record keeping and safety issues, referring students to sources of support, and effective time management in online learning environments.

There are relatively few studies that take into account of the perspectives of online instructors while determining their roles and competencies (Alvarez, Guasch, & Espasa, 2009; Chang, Shen, & Liu, 2014; González-Sanmamed, Muñoz-Carril, & Sangra, 2014; Muñoz Carril, González Sanmamed, & Hernández Sellés, 2013). Most of these perception studies were conducted by giving instructors a pre-determined list of roles and competencies, and asking them to accept or reject each role. For instance, Muñoz Carril et al. (2013) used questionnaires to explore competencies of online faculty members with different levels of online teaching experience. Participants declared a highest level of proficiency for 'content drawing' which includes drafting and developing course content, organizing different tutorial methods, drafting and developing learning activities, and facilitating student participation. On the other hand, competency of 'drafting and developing assessment activities' received the lowest score. Participants articulated their training needs to improve their preparedness and awareness towards online teaching requirements, particularly on facilitating student participation. Likewise, Chang et al. (2014) analyzed perceived roles of e-instructors and their practices of these roles by using questionnaires. E-instructors perceived content expert and instructional designer as the most important roles. Results indicated a gap between perceived and practiced roles as regard to online teaching. On this account, a need for a faculty development program with efficient administrative and technological support was declared.



Hampel and Stickler (2005) set forth that teaching foreign languages online necessitates skills that are not only different from those of traditional teaching but also different from other subjects. In this regard, the studies conducted on online teaching in other disciplines may not reflect on teaching language online well enough. In the literature, there are some studies examining the roles and competencies of online language instructors (Compton, 2009; Easton, 2003; Hampel & Stickler, 2005; Hauck & Hampel, 2005; White, 2003). Among them, White (2003) put forward that online language instructors need to have ability to (1) diagnose students' needs and characteristics at a distance, (2) adapt themselves to distance learning environments, and help students to adjust as well, (3) help students regarding unfamiliar elements in online learning environments, (4) deal with various issues and emotional states, (5) provide motivation for students from distance, (6) be a part of a team such as technology experts or learning support staff, (7) embrace continuous innovation and change.

There is a scarcity of research that focuses on perceptions of language instructors towards their roles and competencies in online classes (Baumann, Shelley, Murphy & White, 2008; Rosell-Aguilar, 2007). Baumann et al. (2008) explored skills and competencies for teaching language at a distance from the perspectives of e-tutors. They collected data through various methods like focus groups, brainstorming, open-ended questionnaires, discussions, and interviews. As a result of the study, eight main categories were articulated by online language tutors that are (1) affective qualities such as being enthusiastic, committed, and supportive, (2) pedagogical expertise such as catering for variety of learning styles and needs, (3) subject matter expertise such as providing appropriate help with grammar, (4) IT skills such as using web sources for communication and information, (5) interactive support skills such as giving feedback with specific examples (6) self-management such as being well-organized with records/materials, (7) group management and support skills such as establishing a friendly and communicative atmosphere, (8) Professional skills such as knowing when to refer a problem on to other support service. Similarly, Rosell-Aguilar (2007) studied the perceptions of language tutors towards their roles in online courses. Qualitative data were collected from 12 tutors, and perceived roles were categorized in three aspects: cognitive, social and administrative. Responses also indicated five main areas of difference between traditional and online teaching: lack of visual clues like boredom or confusion, speaking limitations, too much teacher talking time, difficulty of creating a relaxing environment or sense of community, and facilitating e-mail communication.

Although online education is one of the most hotly-debated issues today, studies on transformation of roles and competencies of online instructors are not at a desired level in Turkey. Aydın (2005) examined perceptions of Turkish e-tutors towards their roles and competencies through a questionnaire. E-tutors perceive assessor role as the most significant one, and they also perform this role the most in their online classes. On the other hand, they consider material producer and administrator roles as less essential than the others, and perform these roles the least. Participants perceive competencies of having ICT skills, following online teaching technologies, and encouraging and motivating students as important although they have problems of performing them. E-tutors indicated that they do not have enough time and competency for designing and developing instructional materials, get little material and moral support from their institution, and demanded more training on online teaching. In another study conducted in Turkey, Kavrat (2013) investigated perceptions of online instructors towards their competencies by using a questionnaire. Accordingly, e-instructors consider content area competencies to be of the highest importance, and educational software design competencies to be of the lowest importance. Instructors also indicated technical problems, lack of student participation, interaction problems, lack of getting feedback from students, and lack of ability to use Learning Management System (LMS).

A review of literature reveals that online instructor roles and competencies can vary across different teaching subjects, institutions, cultures, and countries. In addition, the extent to which these roles and competencies are considered important and put into practice differs in different contexts. Some of the studies investigating the perceptions of online instructors have found that there is a difference between perceived and performed roles and competencies in online teaching. In most of these studies, the instructors have expressed their training needs to improve their online teaching performance.

It is clear that studies defining the roles and competencies have provided valuable insights so far. Nevertheless, there is a gap in the literature that reflects the “real voice” of language instructors as practitioners of online teaching. To the best of the authors' knowledge, there is no study in Turkey that adopts a qualitative methodology and examine the roles and competencies of online language instructors from the perspectives of online language instructors. Hence, present study attempts to fill this research gap by conducting a detailed and in-depth exploration of roles and competencies of online language instructors as perceived by online EFL instructors. Therefore, this study intends to answer following research questions:

1. What are the roles and competencies of online EFL instructors from the perspective of EFL instructors teaching online?
2. Do online EFL instructors think that they are able to perform these roles and competencies in their online classrooms?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative methodology for the collection and analysis of data and takes on case study approach which is “the in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon” (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2003, p. 436).

2.2. Research Setting

The study was carried out at a state university in Turkey. Its online education programs have been coordinated by a Distance Education Centre (UZEM) since 2012. UZEM is responsible for providing all relevant activities in accordance with the administrative, technical, and pedagogical requirements (See <http://www.uzem.mu.edu.tr/>)

Common Compulsory Foreign Language Courses has been delivered online since 2015. As all other potential online instructors, language instructors attended a compulsory online faculty development program provided by UZEM. The program aimed to provide necessary knowledge and skills for potential online instructors. It included basic concepts of e-learning and online learning theories, use of LMSs and virtual classrooms, online instructional design concepts and methods, copyrights, intellectual rights, academic ethics and plagiarism, basic concepts of measurement, assessment and e- assessment, principles of graphic design, creating effective visuals, graphics and multimedia materials, use of social media tools, quality assurance in e-learning. The program was carried out on a LMS, supported by one-hour live, interactive virtual classes plus additional F2F practical classes. Following this training, online EFL instructors started teaching Basic English courses online.

2.3. Participants

Participants consisted of eight EFL instructors teaching Common Compulsory Basic English Course at School of Foreign Languages. They were selected through purposive sampling method for it ensures full awareness and insight on the topic as selected sample of



participants are believed to supply appropriate information about the subject (Ary et al., 2006). In this study, EFL instructors were selected according to their scores which they received from the online instructor certificate program (e-Tutor). So as to ensure maximum variation of the sampling, the scores that instructors received from e-Tutor were separated into three categories as high, medium and low. From each category, instructors were selected randomly on a voluntary basis. According to Patton (2014), there is no rule for determining the sample size of a qualitative study, and the ideal is to stop when there is no new information. In this study, eight instructors were interviewed until the data were saturated. Participants' demographic information is demonstrated below:

Table 1. *Online EFL Instructors' Profile*

Participants	Gender	Age	Highest Qualification	University Teaching Experience	Online Teaching Experience
I1	Male	42	B.A	19	2 semesters
I2	Male	42	M.A	20	1 semester
I3	Male	43	M.A	19	2 semesters
I4	Female	46	M.A	22	1 semester
I5	Female	58	B.A	28	1 semester
I6	Female	39	M.A	16	1 semester
I7	Male	36	M.A	2	2 semesters
I8	Female	48	M.A	23	1 week

(I= Instructor)

2.4. Data Collection

Semi-structured interview was utilized for data collection as it allows formulating and asking impromptu questions when needed in addition to the previously prepared questions (Berg, 2004). Interview questions were developed by the researchers after an extensive literature review. Questions were then checked by four experts, who are university academicians experienced in ELT, online teaching and qualitative studies. Based on the feedbacks related to content and design, second draft was prepared. Then, a pilot study was conducted with one of EFL instructors who teaches online. After the pilot interview, ideas of the instructor were asked related to content and clarity of research questions. After this process, necessary modifications were done and final form of the interview was prepared.

Before the interview, a written consent form was obtained from the instructors who volunteered to participate in the study. They were assured that the data obtained will only be used for scientific purposes, and their names will stay confidential. Interviews lasted 25 to 45 minutes.

2.5. Data Analysis

After transcription of the interview recordings, content analysis was employed to analyze the data, following the steps stated in Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification. It is important to note that data analysis process in this model has iterative and interactive nature (See Figure 1):

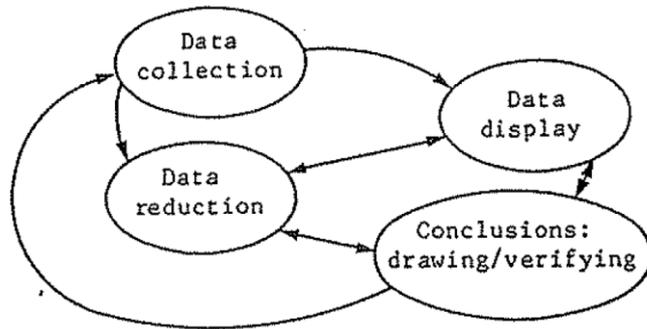


Figure 1. Components of Data Analysis: Interactive Model (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.12)

For the content analysis, a PC-based software program, NVivo v.10, was used to help arranging, classifying, structuring, analyzing and storing the qualitative data in a quicker, less challenging and more effective way (QSR International, 2012). Transcriptions were uploaded to this program, and the coding process started. Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) define coding as “organizing data into themes and categories so that they can be used for the purpose of ongoing analysis, interpretation and conclusion drawing” (p. 253). During iterative coding process, some codes were merged and some codes were reorganized as sub-codes. In order to assure inter-rater reliability, an external code check was arranged by another researcher to examine %10 of the data and recode it. After this process, the similarities and discrepancies were identified, and original codes were revised. After finalizing revised list of codes, second-level coding (Dörnyei, 2007) was realized by recoding the original transcripts according to new codes. After this process, codes were clustered in categories and then themes were defined. Lastly, conclusions were drawn by making inferences and interpretations, specifying relationships between categories and revealing patterns.

3. Findings

Table 2 and Table 3 indicate how do online EFL instructors perceive their roles and competencies in online learning environments.

3.1. Roles of Online EFL Instructors

Table 2. *Roles of Online EFL Instructors*

No		f
1	Facilitator	5
2	Instructor	1
3	Leader	1
4	Source of information	1
5	Role model	1

1. *Facilitator*

When the instructors were asked about the roles of online language instructors, most of them stated that language instructors need to be ‘facilitators’ but they stressed that they cannot

perform this role in online classes because of the interaction problems and lack of student participation.

17: Language teachers always need to be facilitators; they should never be leader and dominate the class... There need to be interaction and communication. However, in online classes, there is no interaction.

14: I need to be a facilitator but in online education there is not such a role. We only give instruction because there are sometimes no students.

2. Instructor

It was put forward that instructors mostly carry out ‘instructor’ role due to limited or no interaction in online classes.

18: When teaching online, interaction is limited, so we mostly give instruction. Therefore, we play instructor role in online education.

3. Leader

One instructor maintained that they perform ‘leader’ role in online classes although it is not appropriate for language education:

16: We perform leader role in online classes, and I think it is not proper for education. For me, the thing that instructor always speaks is not appropriate for language teaching.

4. Source of information & Role model

Another instructor expressed that they need to be a ‘role model’ and ‘source of information’ in online classes:

11: Instructor needs to be a role model and at the same time source of information where students can get answers to their questions.

3.2. Competencies of Online EFL Instructors

Table 3. *Competencies of Online Language Instructors*

No		f
1	Delivering the content	8
2	Using varied teaching methods, strategies, activities, and materials	8
3	Fostering interaction	7
4	Attracting attention	7
5	Pre-class preparation	7
6	Designing instructional materials	7
7	Having basic ICT skills	6
8	Integrating technology into teaching effectively	6
9	Ensuring participation	5
10	Offering & getting feedback	5
11	Promoting peer learning	5
12	Complying with copyright issues	5

13	Reflecting on online teaching performance	5
14	Monitoring student progress or performance	4
15	Being aware of student profile and teaching accordingly	4
16	Being accessible	4
17	Motivating	4
18	Evaluating effectiveness of the course	4
19	Seeking ways for professional development	4
20	Classroom management	3
21	Time management	3
22	Being collaborative	3
23	Giving and checking assignments	2
24	Creating open and friendly environment	2
25	Managing question-answer process	2
26	Adjusting the tone of voice	1
27	Involving students in planning and implementation process	1
28	Adopting a favorable attitude towards teaching online	1

1. Delivering the content

When the instructors were asked about the competencies of online EFL instructors, all of them stressed that they need to deliver the content.

15: Our job is to fulfill the definite aims of the course

18: Normally I need to facilitate learning, but in distance education I am responsible for delivering the content in a specific time.

2. Using varied teaching methods, strategies, activities, and materials

All of the instructors delivered that, teaching English necessitates utilizing a variety of teaching methods, techniques, activities, and materials. However, they pointed out that they cannot use most of the ELT methods and techniques in online classes. For example, they cannot use communicative or constructivist language teaching methods/techniques mostly because of limited interaction and lack of material infrastructure. This results in the usage of lecturing, demonstration, and Grammar Translation Method (GTM) in online classes.

11: Teaching methods and techniques that we use in traditional classes are not applicable for distance education. We normally use eclectic method according to flow of the lesson. However, in online classes, we cannot observe the flow of the lesson. Therefore, we teach everything by using GTM.

13: I can't use constructivist or problem-based methods ... I need a serious material support to do that. Cartoons, videos, etc. Students can watch videos, and are then led to discussions.

Instructors also underlined that the ELT techniques they utilize in online classes are also very limited due to poorness of LMS and material support.

13: In online classes we do not have opportunity of using different activities. We only use question-answer technique.

18: In F2F classes, using dialogues, pair works and group works are efficient way of teaching a language. However, it is not possible in distance education.

13: I cannot use brainstorming technique in online education (...) to use it, I need an intensive material support like comics and various films.

Moreover, instructors have difficulty in using varied and authentic activities/materials due to the lack of online material support and copyright issues. They generally use coursebooks, PowerPoint, pdf or YouTube videos for teaching the content and use grammar and vocabulary activities like fill in the blanks.

16: I think for increasing attention, motivation and success of the students a lot of materials need to be used. I think audio-visual and authentic materials need to be varied like videos, cartoons.

16: Due to various reasons, materials cannot be uploaded to the system. Copyright is the most important one; you cannot copy something from the internet and paste it to the system. Therefore, we try to use exercises in our coursebook.

17: I mostly use grammar exercises and seldom use presentation. I sometimes use online games.

3. Fostering interaction

Instructors enounced that fostering interaction is a crucial competence in language education. Nonetheless, they complained that it is very difficult in online education because the current LMS they use does not let verbal or visual interaction between instructor and students, and among students. It was stated that instructors neither hear nor see the students; only the students hear the instructors. Therefore, there is only written CMC (Computer Mediated Communication) which makes asking and answering questions, getting audio-visual feedback, monitoring students and checking comprehension very difficult.

14: You can't understand if students are following the class ... because students do not have a chance to talk back. Each student needs to push a button to talk. Maybe we should change the platform we are using. Or make it more interactive like audio conferencing. They will see me teaching but they will be free to talk when they want. It's not possible with the current LMS.

In addition, class size, technical problems, and lack of participation were shown as reasons for poorness of interaction.

11: As our classes are too crowded, it's not possible to interact from a distance.

18: Once, when I was speaking, my voice was not transmitted to other side [students]; therefore, even if I taught the lesson, it had to be cancelled. It was a waste of time and I had to record my voice again.

11: We suppose students are following the lesson, but when we ask something, we cannot get an answer except one or two students.

4. Attracting attention

Instructors underlined the significance of attracting student attention, and stated that different audio-visual and authentic materials need to be used for this aim:

16: I think for increasing attention, motivation and success of the students a lot of materials need to be used. I think audio-visual and authentic materials need to be varied like videos, cartoons.

16: We need to take student attention in distance education (...) To attract their attention, I try to prepare different materials, use videos or comics.

On the other hand, most of the instructors explained that because of the interaction problems, class size, and lack of student motivation, they have difficulty in attracting student attention.

14: Instructors should attract students' attention or interest but it is impossible in this platform.

5. Pre-class preparation

One of the most reported competencies of online EFL instructors is pre-class preparation. It includes reviewing the content to be taught before online classes:

12: As our materials are prepared by our material development team, I only revise and think about how to use them in which order, and how much time to be allocated for each material.

Instructors expressed that checking the online platform if there is any technical problem before coming to the class is very important.

11: Instructors need to learn how to use technological tools before coming to the class.

Lastly, it was indicated that instructors need to prepare or revise the activities and materials to be used and check if the materials are uploaded to the online platform before the class.

14: We need to go well-prepared and well-equipped (...) Materials need to be prepared and uploaded to the system before the lesson. I think it is the biggest responsibility.

6. Designing instructional materials

According to the instructors, designing instructional materials is a vital competency. They noted that they have a material design and development unit consisting of instructors who design the materials to be used and upload them to the online platform. Yet, most of the instructors complained that the activities and materials designed by the team are not adequate for them to deliver the content effectively:

11: We have material design team; they upload materials to the system. But they are not good enough for teaching the topic.

11: There should be a well-planned, professional content. It should be more than what we do. Like let's establish a content team of 5-6 instructors, they prepare materials for certain weeks, and upload them. There should be really good online materials.

While some of the instructors prepare extra materials and activities, others only use readymade materials prepared by the material development unit. They generally prepare ppt, pdf, and worksheets. Most of the instructors stated that they are not competent enough for designing and developing online materials and uploading them to the system.

13: I do not prepare materials because I do not have enough knowledge related to it. If I prepared materials, I am sure they would be terrible.

12: [In online education] the only competency that we need to have is material development. We are lucky that we have material development unit here (...) If we did not have material team, we would have to work more. We would need to know how to select and develop materials, have knowledge related to copyright issues, know how to upload materials to the system. I think they are the most important competencies that we would need.



7. Having basic ICT skills

It was stated that instructors need to have knowledge about basic hardware and software, know using online teaching platform and deal with technical problems which may occur.

I7: I think the most important one is having ICT skills; if you do not have ICT skills, you cannot teach online.

I3: [Instructors need to have] a good knowledge of computer and internet. They need to know how to use video applications, and online platforms.

However, most of the instructors indicated that they do not have enough ICT skills and stressed that the teacher training they received was not sufficient for them to develop their ICT skills.

I4: As I think that training was not sufficient, I also feel myself incompetent.

8. Integrating technology into teaching effectively

Most of the instructors underlined the importance of integrating technology into teaching effectively. They declared that instructors need to follow developments in instructional technology and learn to use them effectively. Yet, most of them accepted that they cannot use technology efficiently for online teaching aims and articulated their training needs regarding this issue.

I6: Instructors who teach online need to use technology effectively, but I do not think I am competent enough for using technology effectively.

I3: We should integrate technology in our courses. Can we do it though? No. We lack knowledge and skills. We can do it if we are informed on technological developments, etc.

I1: There may be in-service training on how we can find technological tools and use them properly. Since technology is ever changing, I wish there was something that continuously keep us informed.

9. Ensuring participation

Instructors reported that ensuring participation is a crucial competency. Nonetheless, most of the instructors expressed that students do not attend online classes, so making them participate in the lesson is troublesome.

I7: [Involving students to the lesson] is not possible. I mean they can press the button and leave virtual classes. You do not know if they are there or not.

I6: I am trying to make my lessons by asking students questions but I take answer only from two or three students. I cannot control other students, and this bothers me.

10. Offering & getting feedback

Instructors maintained the prominence of offering and getting feedback during online classes. However, they noted that it is neither practical nor possible as most of the students do not attend online classes.

I1: Feedback must be gotten; but as students are not there most of the time, we cannot take feedback.

Apart from this, it is pointed out that it is a challenge to get audio-visual feedback because of the current online platform.

14: I want to get feedback from students, I want to see the output; I mean I want to hear their voices, see their gestures, and body movements. It may be hard in an online platform but I know there are platforms that we can do this.

11. Promoting peer learning

Most of the instructors explained that promoting peer learning is crucial for teaching a language. Nonetheless it is perpetuated that making students work in pairs or groups is not possible because of the current LMS.

11: If we are provided with fully equipped computer systems where we can hear students and vice versa, where students can interact with each other, peer learning may be possible. There's something called pair work or group work in language education. We can't do this in online classes.

18: Language learning involves conversations. It is hard in online classes. In F2F classes, we do pair work or group work; but it's not possible in online classes.

12. Complying with copyright issues

Many instructors are aware of the fact that taking copyright issues into consideration while designing/developing materials, and utilizing online materials, websites, and tools is crucial. However, they lack knowledge about this issue. For example, most of them think that they cannot use online materials that they did not prepare, though they actually have right to use them by providing links.

14: Sometimes we use activities and materials from the internet but using something that we do not prepare is not legal in terms of copyrights. Therefore, we are trying to use our own materials.

18: I wanted to use websites but I had some doubts related to copyright issues, so I did not use them.

13. Reflecting on online teaching performance

Instructors delivered that reflecting on online teaching performance is significant for ensuring effective online teaching experience:

11: If we consider this as a responsibility of the instructor, I should do a self-criticism. What did I do wrong? What did I do well? That's how we can improve ourselves.

On the other hand, most of the instructors confirmed that due to the lack of interaction and feedback from students, they cannot understand what was effective in their teaching or what went wrong. Some instructors stated that they reflect on their teaching performance and think that they are not competent enough for teaching online.

14: I evaluate myself. I compare how it happens in the classroom and here [virtual class]. (...) I do self-assessment. I don't think I'm good. I think this course could be more pleasant and useful. I am doing my best, I am trying to engage students, but I can't do anything to make them sit in front of the computer.

14. Monitoring student progress or performance

Instructors highlighted the magnitude of monitoring student progress during and after online classes. Nevertheless, most of them maintained that it is impossible or very limited in online education. Instructors complained that they can get neither oral nor visual feedback from the students. One of the most indicated problems is the lack of nonverbal clues like nodding head or looking skeptical. As the instructors cannot see the students' faces, they cannot understand



if the students grasp the topic or not. It was indicated they only get written feedback which is neither sufficient nor practical. Therefore, monitoring their progress or performance become impossible.

14: I want to get feedback from students, I want to see the output; I mean I want to hear their voices, see their gestures, and body movements. It may be hard in an online platform but I know there are platforms that we can do this.

It was also sustained that student progress after the class cannot be monitored because of the current LMS they use:

17: The main objective after the lesson is to monitor student progress. In an ideal LMS, you can see the progress of each student; which exercises they did, how many right or wrong answers they give to the questions, their strengths or weakness etc. But the system that we use currently does not provide this, so it is not useful.

17: We need to see the logs ... We should be able to see students' progress, their strengths and weaknesses. Currently we only lecture in front of the computer. Maybe our infrastructure has it, but we can't manage after-class follow-up yet.

15. Being aware of student profile and teaching accordingly

Some of the instructors underlined that being aware of student profile and then teaching accordingly is of the essence, so activities and materials need to be chosen according to student characteristics, needs and interest.

15: Interactive content should be prepared and uploaded because today's students do not like reading from books or listening. They want to do fun things. We should have fun activities.

One of the instructors expressed that duration of the activities should not be long, as students can get bored:

13: We should provide this new generation "Z" with compact content like 5-10 minute videos or short presentations. This is our first responsibility.

It was also noted that students have different needs. Therefore, needs of the students should be assessed well, and then they need to be guided accordingly:

17: Teachers ought to know how to guide students, and analyze their needs. One can't address all students in the same manner; maybe distance education allows more for individual education (...) One should be able to guide a student having problems with grammar to grammar activities or another with reading problem to online reading materials. One may actively use mobile devices in the classroom. One may use social media. Students all have different needs.

16. Being accessible

It was put forward that instructors need to keep in touch with students and be accessible when needed.

11: Instructors should be accessible after class as a source of information.

16: We should be in direct contact with students in online education because I think they miss out things in online classes (...) They should be able to reach us when needed.

17. Motivating

Half of the instructors pointed out that online instructors need to motivate students; thus, a variety of activities and materials should be used.

13: First of all, it requires theatrical skills because you need to motivate a large number of students who you have never seen. Therefore, you need to perform ice-breaking very well, it is very important.

12: I think diversity of materials is paramount. For instance, students enjoy videos which they can understand. Various activities should be used; students need to listen, watch, make gap filling, or matching activities. When activities are varied, students' motivation increases at the same level.

Nevertheless, most of the instructors endorsed that they have struggle to motivate students. The online platform and overcrowded classes were shown as reasons for inability to motivate students from a distance.

11: The lesson needs to be attractive; students need to be motivated to make them follow the lesson, but I do not know how to do it.

17: How can I motivate 167 students who have different characteristics? It is out of question.

18. Evaluating effectiveness of the course

Half of the instructors reported that online instructors should evaluate the effectiveness of the online course. When they evaluate the online course, they perpetuated that online ELT courses are not beneficial as the pedagogical aspect is mostly disregarded.

13: Turkey's perspective for online learning is limited. It is assumed as less employment, fewer instructors, fewer technologists, and removal of physical processes meaning less paperwork and fewer buildings. I think its educational dimension is mainly disregarded.

19. Seeking ways for professional development

Seeking ways for professional development was perceived as essential for improving online teaching experience. It was stated that they need to follow developments in instructional technologies and new teaching theories.

11: Of course, one should be technology-proficient, but needs to make research too. How can I use tools? People use a lot of technology for language teaching worldwide. And there are a lot of tools to use, and an instructor should follow up developments and learn which technological tools to use for teaching.

15: [Instructors need] To feel ready, to complete missing parts... To follow latest developments, new theories, new methods, new technological developments... I call it a person's renewal of himself. To follow updates, and to feel refreshed. To apply innovations... That is to feel the teaching profession.

Most of the instructors believe that their skills are not sufficient for teaching online successfully, so they need to improve themselves by following developments around the world or getting training:

13: We need to examine issues like organization, motivation, and to see international examples on site. I completed my education 17 years ago. Educational technologies were nothing like that 17 years ago, and I need to be trained on educational technologies.

20. Classroom management

Instructors declared that they need to have classroom management skills. However, they put that managing students' conversations is very problematic in online platforms.



I3: We can't control students' reaction in online classes. There is a chat box in the virtual classroom, and students may use it for irrelevant things. It is similar to WhatsApp or Facebook groups I have for my classes. I am experiencing serious problems. There is no web tool exclusively for student-student interaction. That was my problem.

I7: In Turkey, we are addicted to social networks. If you put social networks in classroom, you can't take students out of it ... I don't think it's controllable.

21. Time management

Time management was also indicated as an important competency in online classes.

I4: You should decide beforehand when and what to share with students. Otherwise, you lose time.

22. Being collaborative

It is delivered that online instructors need to collaborate with teaching, technical and administrative staff for ensuring an effective online education environment.

I7: Instructors should work collaboratively (...) We should work with the technical team, also work alone. This is a system ... There is a LMS we use which is technical, there are people preparing question bank, some prepare course material, some teach but we are all on a pace. This is a team effort, and we should know how to work as a team.

23. Giving and checking assignments

Instructors uttered that giving and checking assignments is important in online teaching although it is very problematic because of the class size, the LMS, and the student profile.

I5: Our class size is 50-70 students. I don't know how I can follow and check homework.

I7: You can give and take assignments in distance education, but we do not have this interaction in our system.

It is indicated by one of the instructors that rather than giving homework, s/he just advises students to do some activities from the internet, by providing them web links:

I4: It is enough for me if I can keep them in class. If I give homework, they won't come to the class. I give them web links and tell them it is useful for them. I tell them to ask their questions in the next session.

24. Creating open and friendly environment

Two of the instructors enounced that, creating open and friendly environment is important.

I5: If an instructor can make his students love the course in F2F, it will continue online too. For example, we actively use chat box in virtual classes. It is very nice; I really enjoy it.

25. Managing question-answer process

It is asserted by two of the instructors that, managing question-answer process is quite essential in online platforms. For this, it is put that rules must be set beforehand.

I3: You should be able to organize question-answer sessions well. When students ask question, you may lose the integrity of the class to answer that question. Same question comes again after 5 minutes. You should make rules beforehand.

26. Adjusting the tone of voice

One instructor stressed that when delivering the content, it is important to adjust the tone of voice so as not to make students feel bored.

18: Voice is an important factor. If your tone of voice is tired or overwhelmed, students will feel that. I always control my voice to the last minute in online classes, keep it energetic. Because it is not F2F, students may see you on webcam but your tone of voice plays a crucial role.

27. Involving students in planning and implementation process

One of the instructors posited that, online education is useful for students who take responsibility for their learning; and thus, students should be involved in planning and implementation process of online teaching.

13: The instructor should prepare a good lesson plan; share and discuss it with the students beforehand. This plan should be applied in online environment with students. Students should know everything about the course.

28. Adopting a favorable attitude towards teaching online

Lastly, one instructor posited that the success of online teaching mostly depends on having a positive attitude towards teaching online.

15: The instructor should have a positive attitude. Someone who does not favor online education will not feel good when teaching online.

Yet, most of the instructors stated that they do not have a positive attitude towards teaching online because of its challenges.

14: Before teaching online, I used to have a very positive attitude towards integrating technology into lessons and using technology in education. However, once delivered online, I realized that our training is not enough, and students also need to be trained. I think, as the School of Foreign Languages, our transition to online education was hasty.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study has sought to examine perceptions of EFL instructors towards their roles and competencies in online learning environments. In total, the instructors indicated five roles and 28 competencies as being essential in online teaching environments. Among the roles, facilitator role was perceived as the most important, while instructor role was performed in online classes most of the time. The most articulated competencies were delivering the content, using varied teaching methods, strategies, activities, and materials, fostering interaction, attracting attention, pre-class preparation, designing instructional materials, having basic ICT skills, and integrating technology into teaching effectively.

One central finding of this study is that the online EFL instructors perceive ‘facilitator’ role as the most important one. As facilitators, instructors are expected to create a student-centered environment and facilitate student learning. This finding is substantiated by a vast number of studies (Aydın, 2005; Chang et al., 2014; Egan & Akdere, 2005; Goodyear et al., 2001; Muñoz-Carril et al., 2013). According to Goodyear et al. (2001), as content facilitators, online instructors should use relevant learning sources, create suitable tasks, monitor student progress, provide feedback and orient students about pedagogical and technical issues. According to Warschauer and Healey (1998), online language instructors need to be facilitators rather than information providers. As facilitators, they need to know about student needs and characteristics and utilize variety of materials and technological tools accordingly.

Even though facilitator role was perceived as a fundamental role of language instructors, majority of the instructors emphasized that they act an ‘instructor’ most of the time mainly stemming from the interaction and communication problems in the online platform. In the

literature, instructor role has also been identified by some of researchers (Aydın, 2005; Bawane & Spector, 2009; Thach & Murphy, 1995; Williams, 2003). According to Thach and Murphy (1995), instructor role involves planning and instructional design skills. For Williams (2003), this role includes content knowledge, needs assessment skills, presentation skills, and evaluation skills.

Source of information role was articulated by one instructor. In a similar vein, a lot of research (Aydın, 2005; Chang et al., 2014; Salmon, 2004) found out that online instructors need to be content experts. Content expert role includes “knowledge and experience to share, willingness to add own contributions” (Salmon, 2004, p. 55). In addition, leader role was mentioned by one instructor which is also indicated by several researchers (Bawane & Spector, 2009; Egan & Akdere, 2005; Muñoz-Carril et al., 2013; Williams, 2003). Lastly, one instructor indicated that instructors should be ‘role model’. Williams (2003) also declared that online instructors need to model behavior/skills.

Apart from the roles, 28 competencies that online language instructors need to possess were addressed by the participants. All of the participants agreed that online instructors need to deliver the content, so they need to have sufficient content knowledge and teaching skills. Confirming this finding, previous research also put that online instructors need to have content knowledge (Kavrat, 2013; Salmon, 2004) and presentation skills (Baumann et al., 2008; Bawane & Spector, 2009; Darabi et al., 2006; Williams, 2003). In addition, while delivering the content, adjusting the tone of voice was perceived as an important competency of online instructors.

All of the participants expressed that online instructors need to use a variety of teaching methods, strategies, activities, and materials to promote learning which was affirmed by several researchers (Hampel & Stickler, 2005; Muñoz-Carril et al., 2013; Rosell-Aguilar, 2007). According to Bates (2015), when switching from F2F education to online, as the content is already defined, the main responsibility is to provide learners with adequate online activities. However, instructors stated that they use very limited teaching methods, materials, and activities due to the poorness of interaction and content support along with lack of knowledge on copyright issues.

One of the prime competencies articulated by participants is fostering interaction and communication which is consistent with previous studies (Bawane & Spector, 2009; Darabi et al., 2006; Muñoz-Carril et al., 2013; Thach & Murphy, 1995; Williams, 2003). Murphy and Cifuentes (2001) argue that building knowledge occurs when ‘interactive online instruction’ is promoted where learner have to undertake an enterprise to interact with their friends and the instructor (as cited in Anderson, 2008, p.31). In this regard, White (2003) indicates that two-way technologies such as e-mail, audio conferencing, video conferencing, interactive databases and computer conferencing stimulate interaction and communication between online participants. However, instructors complained that the current LMS they use does not support oral or audiovisual interaction which makes asking and answering questions, checking comprehension, getting and giving audio-visual feedback, and monitoring student progress very difficult. In fact, the existing online platform they use supports both oral and visual interaction which shows that the instructors lack knowledge on the current LMS. Apart from this, they stated that campus networking is not sufficient enough, and the computers they have in their offices are very old and do not function properly. Lastly, class size and lack of student participation in online classes were shown as a reason for inability to assure interaction and communication effectively.

Most of the participants emphasized that online language instructors need to attract the attention of the students and motivate them from a distance which is in agreement with earlier

research (Aydın, 2005; Bawane & Spector, 2009; Goodyear et al., 2001; Muñoz-Carril et al., 2013; White, 2003). For ensuring this, instructors stressed the utilization of a variety of attractive, audio-visual, and authentic activities and materials in accordance with students' ages and interests. Nevertheless, a majority of the instructors uttered that because of the interaction problems, lack of material support, student profile, and class size, they are having problems in attracting student attention and motivating them from a distance. In his study, Aydın (2005) also found that e-instructors in Turkey have difficulty in encouraging and motivating students in online classes.

A large number of participants stated that online instructors need to be prepared for the online lesson that involves planning the lesson, revising the topic, deciding on which materials and activities to use and how much time to be allocated for each activity, controlling the online platform if everything is all right, preparing and uploading the online materials to the system or checking if materials are uploaded to the online system. Having planning skills is also emphasized by previous studies (Alvarez et al., 2009; Thach & Murphy, 1995) which involve planning of the course, organizing teaching-learning process, creating online interactive content, and establishing time parameters.

Nearly all of the instructors asserted that online language instructors need to have competency for designing effective online activities, materials, and tasks. A considerable body of research (Alvarez et al., 2009; Bawane & Spector, 2009; Chang et al., 2014; Goodyear et al., 2001; Muñoz-Carril et al., 2013; Thach & Murphy, 1995) found that online instructors need to be instructional designers, and draft/develop digital learning materials, activities, tasks. Nonetheless, many instructors stated that neither they nor the material design team is competent and professional enough to achieve this. This finding is consistent with previous research (Aydın, 2005; Chang et al., 2014; Kavrat, 2013) which unveiled that although online instructors perceive instructional designer role as being very essential, they seldom or never perform it due to lack of competency.

Instructors also maintained that while designing/adapting online materials, copyright issues need to be taken into consideration which is consistent with other studies (Alvarez et al., 2009; Bawane & Spector, 2009; Goodyear et al., 2001; Williams, 2003). Yet, the instructors think that they cannot use online materials that they did not prepare because of the copyright issues, although they actually have right to use them by providing links for students. This shows that they do not have sufficient knowledge on copyright issues.

A great number of participants emphasized the importance of having basic ICT skills and integrating technology into teaching effectively. A large body of research (Alvarez et al. 2009; Anderson, 2008; Baumann et al., 2008; Bawane & Spector, 2009; Chang et al., 2014; Compton, 2009; Darabi et al., 2006; Salmon, 2004; Thach & Murphy, 1995; Williams, 2003) also emphasize the role of technology expert/technician/technologist in possessing basic ICT skills, technical skills, knowledge of instructional technology, and utilizing digital materials appropriately. Nevertheless, findings unveiled that some of the instructors do not have basic ICT skills, and most are not capable of integrating technology into online teaching properly. Lack of faculty training has been shown as a justification for this incompetency. Similarly, Aydın (2005) and Kavrat (2013) also found out that e-instructors lack ICT skills and have problems in integrating technology into their teaching effectively.

The instructors highlighted the significance of ensuring participation, offering and getting feedback from the students, promoting peer learning, and monitoring student progress during and after online classes. Monitoring progress and providing feedback in online classes have also been identified by earlier studies (Alvarez et al., 2009; Goodyear et al., 2001; Darabi et



al., 2006; Muñoz Carril et al., 2013; Thach, 1994). In addition, many researchers (Anderson et al., 2001; Bawane & Spector, 2009; González-Sanmamed et al., 2014; Goodyear et al., 2001; Muñoz-Carril et al., 2013; Simonson et al., 2008) found that online instructors should promote active participation of students. On the other hand, instructors stated that most of the students do not attend online classes; they just press the button and leave. Therefore, they complained that very few students participate in the lessons, and it is very hard to involve other students in the lessons. Likewise, it is declared that they have struggle in offering and getting feedback from the students, and promoting peer learning. Instructors indicated that monitoring student progress is also very limited during online classes as they cannot get oral or visual feedback from the students. It was also added that monitoring student progress after the class is also not possible because the LMS they use do not let them manage after-class follow up. Corroborating this, in Kavrat's (2013) study, e-instructors also complained of lack of student participation and feedback in online classes.

Instructors attached importance to learn about student characteristics, needs and interests, and then teach accordingly which are in congruence with a number of earlier studies (Baumann et al., 2008; Goodyear et al., 2001; Warschauer & Healey, 1998; White, 2003; Williams, 2003). Similarly, Simonson et al. (2008) and Bates (2015) argues that the process of designing online courses should start with assessing learner needs to determine goals, evaluating students' characteristics, and knowledge backgrounds. According to Anderson (2008), learning must be meaningful, and learning materials need to be appertaining to learner profile to let learners 'personalize the information' to achieve this. The instructors reported that the online content needs to be attractive, variable, and enjoyable; and their duration should not be too long in accordance with the needs and interests of this new generation Z. Likewise, Richards et al. (2004) noted that, the content and activities needs to be delivered in small chunks (about 10-15 minutes) in online education.

Some instructors indicated that they need to evaluate effectiveness of the online course, reflect on online teaching performance and seek ways for professional development. Supporting this result, a large number of studies (e.g., Alvarez et al., 2009; Anderson et al., 2001; Bawane & Spector, 2009; Darabi et al., 2006; Goodyear et al., 2001; Muñoz Carril et al., 2013) also stress the significance of evaluating the efficiency of online teaching process. In addition, many educators (e.g., Bawane & Spector, 2009; Darabi et al., 2006; Goodyear et al., 2001; Muñoz Carril et al., 2013; Weller, 2005) argued that online instructors need to reflect on their online teaching and try to update their knowledge and improve their performance. On the other hand, the instructors generally delivered that online courses are not effective enough and they perceive themselves not competent enough for teaching online. Thus, they believe that they need to follow latest developments, get teacher training, and improve their online teaching performance.

Findings also unearthed the importance of managerial roles of online instructors. Accordingly, competencies for classroom management, time management and management of question-answer processes were perceived as essential in online classes. Many studies also emphasize the importance of managing classroom, time and student interactions (Alvarez et al., 2009; Bawane & Spector, 2009; Baumann et al., 2008; Goodyear et al., 2001; Muñoz-Carril et al., 2013). However, instructors indicated that achieving these competencies is more difficult in online classes compared to F2F. Resonating with this, Hampel and Stickler (2005) indicated that instructors may experience classroom management problems such as organizing turn-taking and dealing with "parallel conversational threads" during synchronous online classes which utilize written CMC (Computer Mediated Communication) for interaction (p.314).

It was argued that online education necessitates involving students in planning and implementation of teaching process. In this regard, lesson plan needs to be discussed with students, so students know what they are going to do before online classes and take their own learning responsibilities. In relation to this, Goodyear et al. (2001) propose that learners need to be encouraged to express their learning needs and concerns and take responsibility of their own learning. William (2003) also states that a collaborative and student-focused online environment needs to be established. In a similar vein, Illinois University (ION) proposes using learning contracts when there is a variety of learner needs and interests. Learning contract is an agreement between learners and instructor which include what is to be learned, how is to be learned, time period and assessment criteria. Learning contracts are useful for sharing the responsibility of learning and deeper engagement of learners in online classes.

The instructors emphasized that the instructors need to be accessible outside of the online classes which is in line with earlier research (Baumann et al., 2008; Gülbahar & Kalelioğlu, 2015). It is also mentioned that online instructors need to be collaborative, and work as a team with instructional, technical and administrative units which is also affirmed by many researchers (Muñoz Carril et al., 2013; Thach, 1994; White, 2003; Williams, 2003).

Finally, adopting a favorable attitude towards online teaching and creating an open and friendly atmosphere in online learning environments are shown as important to secure a successful teaching and learning environment. Similarly, many researchers stressed that online instructors need to demonstrate commitment and favorable attitude towards online teaching (Anderson, 2008; Bawane & Spector; 2009; Salmon, 2004; White, 2003) and establish a friendly and relaxing environment (Aragon, 2003; Baumann et al., 2008; Bawane & Spector, 2009; Darabi et al., 2006; Muñoz Carril et al., 2013). On the other hand, most of the instructors indicated that they have negative attitude towards teaching online because of the mentioned challenges.

Findings of this study are in accordance with a good number of studies that examined online instructor roles and competencies. To summarize the results, EFL instructors think that online education necessitates new and more demanding roles and competencies than F2F classes which is in parallel with earlier research (Arah, 2012; Baran et al., 2011; Bawane & Spector, 2009, Goodyear et al., 2001). Roles and competencies as perceived essential by the instructors are broadly consistent with earlier studies.

One of the most significant findings to emerge from the study is that there is a great difference between what is perceived as an important role or competency, and what is actually performed in online classes. This finding matches those observed in earlier studies (Aydın, 2005; Chang et al., 2014; González-Sanmamed et al., 2014). The instructors indicated that because of challenges such as interaction problems, lack of student participation, poorness of LMS, inadequacy of technical and content infrastructure, copyright issues, class size, poorness of faculty training, they cannot perform most of the roles and competencies that they perceive as essential. The results also uncovered that instructors do not have enough knowledge and skills to use the LMS effectively, design and develop online materials, lack ICT skills, and lack knowledge on copyright issues which is consistent with the findings of previous studies (Aydın, 2005; Rosell-Aquilar, 2007; Kavrat, 2013). For a more successful online delivery, instructors underlined the need for a sound technical and technological infrastructure, efficient electronic content support, and hands-on and continuous professional development training.

5. Implications for Future Development

This study uncovers important issues to be taken into consideration by higher education institutions to create an efficient online language teaching and learning environment:



1. Higher education institutions should have a sound technical and technological infrastructure for online teaching.
2. Higher education institutions should provide instructors required start-up training to be followed by regular refresher's training and workshops about the latest technological developments and their integration into teaching. Training activities should consider instructors' teaching load in terms of timing, and include hands-on experience with LMS and video-conferencing system of the organization.
3. Importance should be given to the use of high-quality electronic course content in online courses. Higher education institutions should either purchase commercial, off-the-shelf products or provide the instructors on how to select, adapt or create online materials, activities or tasks in compliance with copyright issues.

6. Implications for Future Research

1. This is a qualitative study conducted with a limited number of participants through interviews. To ensure generalizability, quantitative or mixed-methods research studies may be conducted with a variety of data collection tools to shed light on a wider scale.
2. A follow-up study would be beneficial after providing instructors with further training.
3. The participants of this study have only one or two terms of online teaching and learning experience. Further studies can be done after instructors have gained more experience about online teaching and learning.
4. This study focuses on roles and competencies of online instructors with important implications of the instructional, quality-related and managerial dimensions of online education. Future studies may be conducted on a larger scale to consider such aspects of online education to see the big picture.

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