

SWOT Analysis for the Distance Education Process of Lecturers Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

Nowadays, distance education programs are increasing with the Covid-19 outbreak. Due to the number of options based on distance education, it is aimed to provide a higher quality to service users. One of the important methods to increase the quality of distance education services is SWOT analysis. SWOT Analysis enables organizations to see their strengths (S) and weaknesses (W) and position them according to Opportunity (O) and Threats (T) that may occur in the external environment. The method of this research is phenomenology, one of the qualitative research methods. The study group of the research was selected by purposeful sampling technique. The analysis forms were collected from the lecturers via digital mail on a voluntary basis. Therefore, the study reached 48 instructors teaching Turkish as a foreign language in different regions of Turkey. In the research, a SWOT analysis form (4 questions) was used to understand distance education practices. The data were analyzed using content analysis and descriptive analysis technique. According to the results, the strength of teaching Turkish as a foreign language in distance education is “flexibility in time and place” with a ratio of 58%. Again, “flexibility in time and space” was evaluated as an opportunity with a rate of 42%. The weakest aspect of teaching Turkish in distance education seems to be “technical problems” with a rate of 29%. The instructors rated the “lack of the classroom environment” as the biggest threat with 30%. Finally, it can be asserted that the findings of the study sheds light on distance education practices in the Covid 19 pandemic process in terms of teaching Turkish to foreigners.

Keywords: Distance Education, SWOT Analysis, Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language

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Introduction

In the early 1950s, the first studies on SWOT began in the areas of organizational strategies and environmental relations by George Albert Smith Jr and C. Roland Christensen. SWOT analysis emerged in 1982 in Heinz Weilrich's article titled "The TOWS Matrix, a Tool for Situational Analysis" as the initials of Strength (S), Weakness (W), Opportunities (O) and Threats (T) to examine internal and external factors as a new analysis method in strategic planning (Weilrich, 1982, p.54).

S: Strength (detecting strengths / superiorities)

W: Weaknesses (detecting weaknesses)

O: Opportunities (expressing opportunities)

T: Threats (expressing threats and dangers)

The main function of the SWOT Analysis as a strategic analysis phase is to eliminate weaknesses (W) with strengths (S) and threats (T) with opportunities (O) by revealing the strong and weak points while evaluating the current situation (Öztemel, 2001, p.158). The factors emerging as a result of the SWOT analysis (Luo & Qin, 2012, p.254; Panigrahi & Mohanty, 2012, p.41; Büyükalaca et al., 2009, pp.29-31) are as follows:

Strengths: It is the answer given to the question of what we do well by making the active use of resources to achieve goals, objectives, assets and capabilities that have superiority/power over competitors and must be protected and be at the forefront. With strength aspect, answers are sought for questions such as ‘What are our advantages and strengths?, What resources do we have?, What are the differences that distinguish us from others?, What are our advantages and strong point from the outside?’

Weakness: The economic resources lost as a result of deficiencies, weaknesses, mistakes and constraints in achieving the goals and objectives, competitive advantage and efficiency are examined, and answers are sought for questions such as ‘Which situations are not going well?, Which situations do we need to fix?, Which situations need to be improved?, Which situations should we avoid?, On what subject are our competitors better than us?,’ All these questions require taking necessary precautions to identify weaknesses.

Opportunities: It is necessary to investigate an alternative situation against the current situation, to determine and strengthen the status of strategies and plans, and to have the ability and capacity to evaluate the emerging new situation more comprehensively in order for a development or change to be an opportunity by expressing positive situations in the environment. The following questions are tried to be answered in revealing the opportunities: What are the current opportunities?

What are the current developments in our environment? How can strengths and weaknesses be turned into opportunities?

Threats: It refers to situations that prevent opportunities in the environment and threaten strengths, which should be avoided and objectionable. Answers are sought for questions such as ‘What are the current obstacles?, What could be the potential obstacles?, Are there threatening or dangerous advances in competitors?, Is there a possibility that strengths or weaknesses turn into threats?, Are there any changes in the expectations of the target audience?, Are there any budget or resource problems?, Are there any threatening developments?’

SWOT analysis aims to identify the strategic situations and internal and external environment with systematic thinking and broad interpretation method, determining the positive or negative factors to the organization, the project or the individual, and to adopt or develop strategies that will harmonize these factors (Gao & Peng, 2011, p.796). SWOT analysis is the process of determining and examining key or important success factors in empirical research and strategic analysis (Bernroider, 2002, p.564). According to Büyükalaca et al. (2009, p.28), SWOT analysis also provides the following benefits:

- Being able to evaluate the future in multiple ways and to ensure harmony
- Developing the right strategies to achieve goals and objectives,
- Discovering more alternatives,
- Preparing more effective plans,
- Knowing the organization better,
- Making decisions faster,
- Having information on time,
- Being able to influence the future with the right decisions to be taken today,
- Giving the opportunity to recognize the risks.

SWOT is the process of analyzing the competitiveness of a certain region, firm or countries and the changing internal and external conditions and situations and designing and evaluating their own resources and plans accordingly (Tabak, 2003, p.222). SWOT Analysis has the feature of "future situation analysis" as it is an analysis that helps to determine and predict the future situation by

examining the current factors by evaluating both internal and external situations (Büyükalaca et al., 2009, p.28).

In the education process, it is necessary to carry out a situation analysis in order to evaluate the schools, which are the key elements in gaining the desired behaviors, and to produce policies regarding the existing deficiencies. At this stage, this current situation is determined by SWOT analysis. It is unimaginable for educational organizations to be independent from the environment. Therefore, educational organizations are open to the influence of all elements in the environment and are affected positively or negatively by this effect. Power analysis (SWOT) is one of the basic methods used to determine the strengths and weaknesses of organizations, to perceive the opportunities and threats, and makes it possible to see the current status of the organization. Organizations see where they are now and determine their future goals with SWOT analysis. This structure is beneficial in terms of focusing on strengths, minimizing threats and utilize the appropriate opportunities (Özan et al., 2015).

In order for schools to follow the changes in their environment and to adapt to these changes, they themselves have to accept this change. Strategic planning is an important point in realizing change as an organization in education. Future goals, vision and mission can be determined with a strong strategic planning, the strengths and weaknesses of schools along with the opportunities and threats they may face can be revealed (Çalık, 2003, p.267).

Advances in communication technologies have led to the spread and increased effectiveness of internet-based education. Distance education has begun to be known by different names, and thanks to the great increase in the number of successful examples, it has attracted great attention from institutions and individuals all over the world. Distance education is a model that differs from standard education models in terms of its implementation. It is an educational activity where students, teachers and educational tools in different places are brought together through communication technologies (Arslantaş, 2014).

Distance education, in the most basic sense, is a requirement that occurs due to the separation of a teacher and learner at a physical distance, unlike face to face. Technological tools such as podcast, video, computer data and published publications that replace traditional education are the link between distance education and traditional education. Education programs provided in this way offer new educational opportunities to adults in addition to the education they receive. This system means the opportunity to increase their knowledge and continue their education in their home office environment for those with time, distance or physical disabilities (Kaya, 2002).

In this sense, the purpose of this study is to reveal the strengths and deficiencies of distance education practiced by the instructors who teach Turkish as a foreign language, and the aspects that they consider as an opportunity and they worry about.

Within this scope, the main problem and sub-problems of the research were formed as follows:

Main Problem Statement: How do instructors evaluate teaching Turkish to foreigners in distance education?

Sub-problems:

1. What are the strengths of teaching Turkish to foreigners in distance education according to the instructors?

2. What are the weaknesses of teaching Turkish to foreigners in distance education according to the instructors?

3. What are the possible opportunities in teaching Turkish to foreigners in distance education according to the instructors?

4. What are the possible threats in teaching Turkish to foreigners in distance education according to the instructors?

Method

Research Method

The phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research designs, was used in the study. The aim of phenomenological research is to describe the experiences and perceptions of individuals (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p. 383; Ersoy, 2016, p.55).

Study Group of the Research

The purpose of the research has an important place in determining the study group in qualitative research designs. In this sense, purposeful sampling approach was used in the study. However, the formation of the study group in the study was on a voluntary basis. Thus, 48 academics who study Turkish language teaching to foreigners from different regions of Turkey have been reached. The names of the lecturers participating in the study are not disclosed, thus they are referred to as LECT1, LECT2, LECT3, etc.

Data Collection

The SWOT analysis form (4 questions) was used to understand distance education practices in this study. The analysis form was collected from the lecturers via digital mail on a voluntary basis.

Data Analysis

Firstly, content analysis, a method mostly preferred by historians and men of letters (Merriam, 2013, p.144), was used in the analysis of the data. In this sense, the answers given by the instructors to the SWOT analysis constitute the data of the research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p. 259). Categories and codes were used in the content analysis (Bilgin, 2014, p.12). On the other hand, descriptive analysis was used as a qualitative analysis together with content analysis in the analysis of the data. Thus, the reliability of the research was tried to be increased. Again, the validity and reliability of the content analysis were tested with expert opinions and inter-coders. Harmony between coders was found to be 81% (Miles & Huberman, 2015, p.64; Muijs, 2004, p.73).

Findings

The findings below regarding the strengths of teaching staff in Turkish as a foreign language in distance education are given as frequency (f) and percentage (%).

Table 1. Strengths of Turkish lessons as a foreign language in distance education.

Strengths-Categories	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Flexibility in time and space	32	58
Digitalization	7	13
Communication	4	7
Teaching methods and techniques	6	11
Learning Turkish	5	9
The number of employees	1	2
Total	55	100

When Table 1 is examined, lecturers seem to show the strengths of teaching Turkish as a foreign language in distance education as follows: "Flexibility in time and space" 58% (f = 32), "Digitalization" 13% (f = 7), "Teaching methods and techniques" 11% (f = 6), "Learning Turkish" 9% (f = 5),

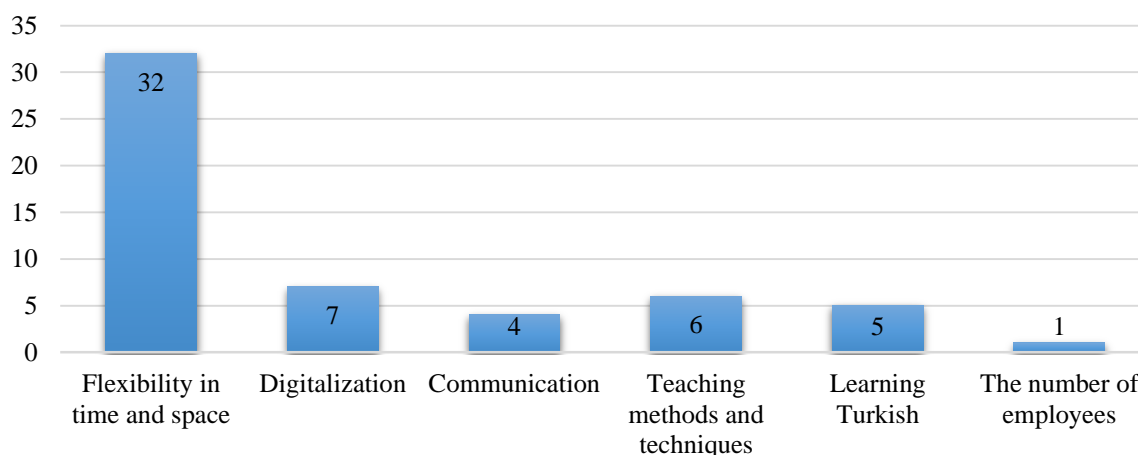


Figure 1. Strengths of Turkish lessons as a foreign language in distance education

“Communication” 7% (f = 4) and “Saving in employees” 2% (f = 1). These findings are schematized in the graphic below.

As can be seen in Figure 1, the strongest aspects of Turkish lessons in distance education are (f = 32) "flexibility in time and space." In addition, sample sentences from the explanations of the lecturers regarding the strengths of Turkish lessons in distance education are given below.

LECT33: “It presents possibility to learn Turkish in a more flexible environment without time and space limitations.”

LECT45: "Being independent of time and place for both learner and teacher, providing access to learners from every country, easy access to different materials during the lesson are among the strengths of distance education in Turkish as a foreign language."

Below, the findings regarding the weaknesses of lecturers in Turkish as a foreign language in distance education are given as frequency (f) and percentage (%).

Table 2. Weaknesses of teaching Turkish as a foreign language in distance education

Weaknesses-Categories	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Failure to provide natural and effective communication	15	25
Failure to socialize	6	10
Technical problems	17	29
Lack of opportunities in learning and teaching methods and techniques	15	25
Inability to learn Turkish	5	9
Assessment and evaluation	1	2
Total	59	100

When Table 2 is examined, the lecturers appear to show the weaknesses of teaching Turkish as a foreign language in distance education as follows: "Technical problems" 29% (f = 17), "Failure to provide natural and effective communication" 25% (f = 15), " Lack of opportunities in learning and teaching methods and techniques" 25%(f=15), "Failure to socialize" 10%(f=6), "Inability to learn Turkish" 9% (f = 5) and "Assessment and evaluation " 2% (f = 1). These findings are schematized in the graphic below.

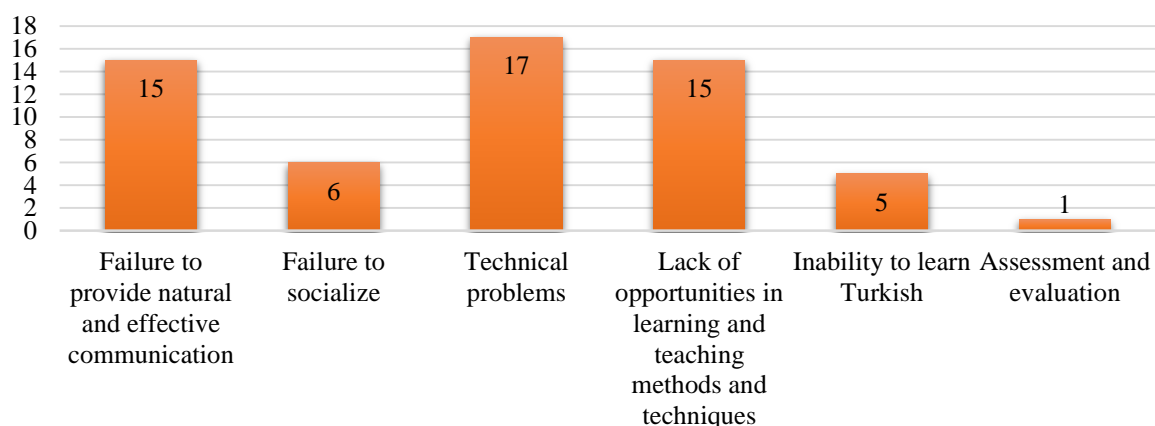


Figure 2. Weaknesses of Turkish lessons as a foreign language in distance education

As can be seen in Figure 2, the strengths of Turkish lessons in distance education are mostly ($f = 17$) "Technical problems." On the other hand, sample quotations from the explanations of the LECTURERS regarding the weaknesses of Turkish lessons in distance education are given below.

LECT38: "Since language learning and teaching takes place in a natural context, distance education is not effective at this point. As the web-based systems used in distance education are not designed for language teaching and learning, it is not possible to reach the desired competencies in education. "

LECT47: "I think the main weaknesses are the lack of one-to-one communication, lack of interaction, low motivation of students and instructors."

The views of lecturers on opportunities in teaching Turkish as a foreign language in distance education are given below as frequency (f) and percentage (%).

Table 3. Opportunities in teaching Turkish as a foreign language in distance education

Opportunities-Categories	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Flexibility in time and space	21	42
Digitalization and technological transformation	10	20
New learning and teaching methods	13	26
New opportunities in learning Turkish	5	10
Protection from the epidemic	1	2
Total	50	100

When Table 3 is analyzed, the lecturers can be seen to show the opportunities of teaching Turkish as a foreign language in distance education as follows: "Flexibility in time and space" 42% ($f = 21$), "New learning and teaching methods" 26% ($f = 13$), "Digitalization and technological transformation" 20% ($f = 10$), "New opportunities in learning Turkish" 10% ($f = 5$) and "Protection from the epidemic" 2% ($f = 1$). These findings are schematized in the graphic below.

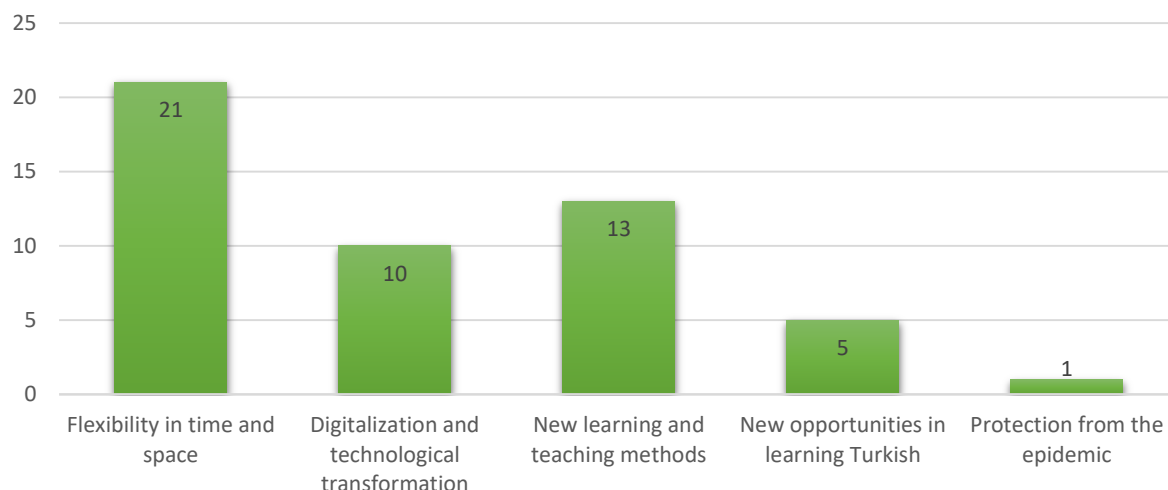


Figure 3. Opportunities in teaching Turkish as a foreign language in distance education

As can be seen in Figure 3, the strongest aspect of Turkish lessons in distance education is "Flexibility in time and space" (f = 21). On the other hand, sample quotations from the explanations of the LECTURERS regarding the opportunities in teaching Turkish in distance education are presented below.

LECT46: "Since distance education brings education to the entire world, students can be made more eager to learn Turkish. Distance education is important in terms of showing students that learning Turkish can be done anywhere with technological tools. This can change students' perspective. Thanks to online products such as applications for teaching Turkish, dictionaries and books, which are presented to students during the course, students can make progress faster in learning Turkish - if they are directed correctly.

LECT32: "It enhances students' computer skills."

The views of the lecturers about threats in teaching Turkish as a foreign language in distance education are given below as frequency (f) and percentage (%).

Table 4. Threats in teaching Turkish as a foreign language in distance education

Threats-Categories	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Inability to learn Turkish	9	22
Failure to protect personal data	8	20
The lack of classroom environment	12	30
Reliability and validity of assessment and evaluation	7	17
Health problems such as eye and posture	2	5
Limitations in learning and teaching	1	3
Technical problems	1	3
Total	40	100

When Table 4 is examined, the lecturers show the threats of teaching Turkish as a foreign language in distance education as follows: "The lack of classroom environment" 30% (f = 12),

“Inability to learn Turkish” %22 (f=9), "Failure to protect personal data" 20% (f = 8), "Reliability and validity of assessment and evaluation" 17% (f = 7), “health problems such as eye strain and posture” 5% (f = 2), "Limitations in learning and teaching" 3% (f = 1) and " Technical problems" 3% (f = 1). These findings are schematized in the graphic below.

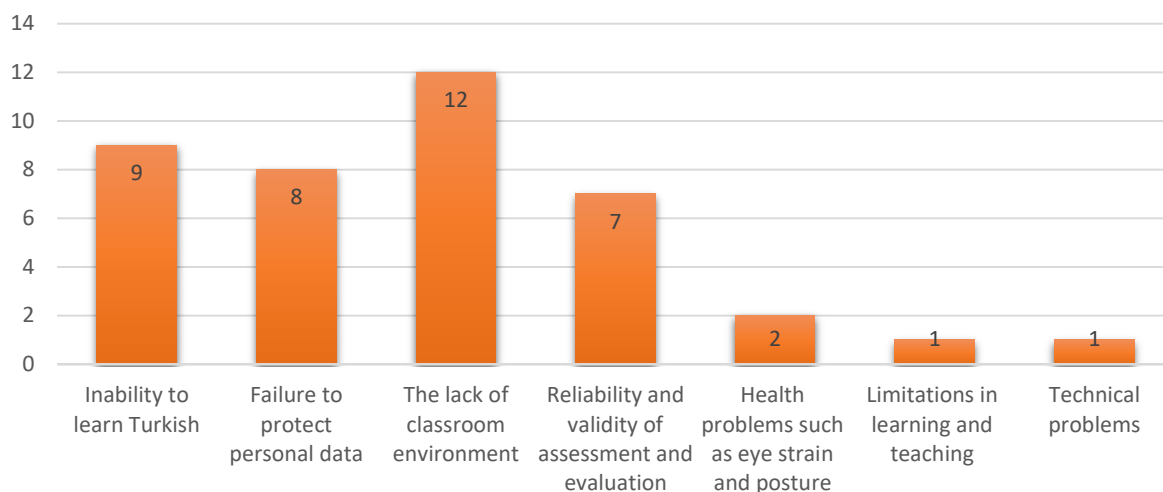


Figure 4. Threats in teaching Turkish as a foreign language in distance education

As can be seen in Figure 4, the most threatening aspect in Turkish language teaching in distance education has been stated as "The lack of classroom environment" (f = 12). On the other hand, sample quotations from the explanations of instructors regarding threats in teaching Turkish in distance education are given below.

LECT45: “The fact that the course contents are not updated according to distance education, the communication breakdown with the learner due to technological infrastructure problems, the students watching the course only from the recording and falling behind in the application, the lecturer pushing the speaking and writing lessons into the background are among the threats of distance education in Turkish language teaching lessons as a foreign language.”

LECT47: "I am worried about the benefits of distance education, especially considering the importance of continuity and practice in language learning."

LECT43: “The student may lose motivation after a certain period of time because the more the student spends time on screen, the more pain and somnolence can occur in the eyes inevitably. In this case, it eventually demotivates the student. It may prevent the face to face, warm classroom setting.”

LECT46: "Students' Turkish language learning, which is interrupted, may not be made up even when face-to-face education begins."

LECT48: "Online exams in distance Turkish lessons can cause problems about the validity and reliability of assessment and evaluation."

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

In the study, lecturers highlight the strengths of teaching Turkish as a foreign language in distance education in the categories of "Flexibility in time and space", "Digitalization" "Teaching methods and techniques", "Learning Turkish" "Communication" and "The number of employees", respectively. They emphasized that with the dimension of flexibility in time and space, the time and space limitations of students and lecturers are largely eliminated. As a matter of fact, the removal of limitations in terms of time and space and allowing the use of multimedia tools are the characteristic features of distance education. (Karakuş, Ucuzsatar, Karacaoğlu, Esendemir & Bayraktar, 2020). Therefore, the findings obtained from the participants are also institutionally meaningful.

The lecturers stated that the distance education process is a good preparation stage for students' adaptation to the digitalized world. The reason why they see the Turkish learning dimension as a strength is that participants from different countries can take part in education. According to the lecturers, an international medium for foreign language learning has thus been gained. They also considered distance education to be a good communication channel for shy students, digital course materials and online teaching methods and techniques as strengths.

The instructors listed the weaknesses of teaching Turkish as a foreign language in distance education, mostly in the categories of technical problems and the inability to provide natural and effective communication, limitations in learning and teaching methods and techniques, not being able to socialize, inability to learn Turkish and assessment and evaluation. Technical problems can occur in terms of both the student and the learning path. Considering the body of literature, it is shown that technical problems are possible in terms of distance education. (Pilanci, 2009; Karakuş et al., 2020; Bayburtlu, 2020; Keskin & Kaya, 2020; Aytaç, 2021).

The lack of natural and effective communication is considered the biggest deficiency compared to face-to-face education. Similarly, the inability to use teaching methods and techniques that can be done in face-to-face education is considered as another deficiency. It is because the lack of face-to-face communication has been seen as a limitation not only for today's pandemic education process but also for foreign language education before (Pilanci, 2009).

Considering socialization as a deficiency is an expression of a correct approach to education. As a matter of fact, education provides students with cognitive and affective gains, as well as socialization. The most emphasized weakness in assessment and evaluation is the inability to control students. On the other hand, the statements regarding not being able to learn Turkish are about the

distant language learning in its natural context. Again, the lack of real communication in language learning is one of the most emphasized factors. Motivation strategies in distance education can be applied to overcome the theoretically mentioned limitations (Karakuş et al., 2020; Uçar, 2016).

The instructors stated the opportunities of teaching Turkish in distance education as flexibility in time and place, new learning and teaching methods, digitalization and technological transformation, new opportunities in Turkish learning, and protection from the pandemic, respectively. The categories under this theme are in line with the previously mentioned elements. When considering new opportunities in learning Turkish, it is understood that educators see digital resources such as online digital dictionaries and books as opportunities. In reality, distance education or distance education settings offer opportunities for language learners and teachers. For example, videos presenting environments where the target language is spoken are one of them. (Pilanci, 2009). On the other hand, the fact that distance education mostly affects the use of educational technologies and professional development positively (Bakioğlu, & Çevik, 2020) makes the research findings meaningful.

Additionally, the most common threats of Turkish teaching in distance education are the lack of the classroom environment, the inability to learn Turkish, and the failure to protect personal data, reliability and validity of assessment and evaluation, health problems such as eye and posture, limitations in learning and teaching, technical problems, respectively because the unreal classroom environment in distance education is a threat to both language learning and socialization.

In addition, the lecturers emphasized not only psychological negative conditions but also physical negativities such as eye and posture health for students. The course contents not being updated according to distance education, the communication gap between the learner and the lecturer due to technological infrastructure problems, the students watching the course only from the recording and falling behind in terms of practice, the lecturer pushing the speaking and writing exercises to the background are among the threats of distance education in teaching Turkish language as a foreign language. Findings of the research and literature on the subject show the need for certain legislative and pedagogical improvements in terms of infrastructure, access, security, content, design, implementation, quality in distance education in Turkey (Can, 2020).

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