



Distance or Face-to-Face Education for Language Learning: A Case of English

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Abstract

Face-to-face education has a history that spans almost with the existence of humanity while the beginning of distance education goes back to the 18th century. Distance education started with basic correspondence through postal service and continued with the wide variety of tools available through the Internet. However, today, distance education is perceived as an umbrella term because it covers a wide range of concepts such as online learning, e-learning, synchronous and asynchronous learning. However, in Turkey, distance education refers to the education in which higher education institutions are planned and carried out on the basis of information and communication technologies, and the courses are given simultaneously by the instructor without having to be in the same place on the basis of the interaction between the student and the instructor and between the students. Nowadays, distance education application and research centers (DEARC) are responsible for the efficient running of distance education in Turkish Higher Education Institutions. Courses generally known as “common courses” such as Atatürk’s Principles and History of Turkish Revolution, Turkish Language and Foreign Language (e.g. English) are controlled and authorized by DEARCs. Since the number of students enrolled in these courses is thousands, it highly deemed to understand whether distance education differs from face-to-face education in terms of learning language (i.e. English). The purpose of this study is to compare student success in the two areas: distance and face-to-face education. 4308 and 6071 students are enrolled in the English course respectively in the spring term of the academic year 2017-2018 and fall term of the academic year 2018-2019. The number of students enrolled in English course are categorized into distance and face-to-face groups. To achieve the aim of our study, first, the grades of students in their mid-term exam, final exam and resit exam are calculated and then compared. With the support of the trial version of the IBM SPSS Statistics, descriptive and inferential statistics were computed. Independent-sample T-Test are used to compare the success of the distance group with the face-to-face one.

Keywords: *Distance, Online, English, Face-to-face.*

1. Introduction

Face-to-face education has a history that spans almost with the existence of humanity while the beginning of distance education goes back to the 18th century [1]. Distance education started with basic correspondence through postal service and continued with the wide variety of tools available through the Internet. However, the increasing sophistication and affordability of technology in the 21st century has fostered the rapid of distance education especially at the university level along with the increased accessibility to the Internet [2]. Today, distance education is recognized all over the world and is imparted in public and private institutions in almost all countries of the world [3]. However, the main characteristic of distance education has not changed since its birth and still focus on the separation of tutors and learners by putting a physical distance between them. On the other hand, distance education is perceived as an umbrella term because it covers a wide range of concepts such as online learning, e-learning, synchronous and asynchronous learning. Today, in Turkey, distance education refers to the education in which higher education institutions are planned and carried out on the basis of information and communication technologies, and the courses are given simultaneously by the instructor without having to be in the same place on the basis of the interaction between the student and the instructor and between the students. Additionally, it is important to note here that the prevalence of distance and face-to-face education in public and private sectors fosters the number of researches on their differences in terms of several concepts such as achievements and attitudes of learners. Nowadays, distance education application and research centers (DEARC) are responsible for the efficient running of distance education in Turkish Higher Education Institutions. Courses generally known as “common courses” such as Atatürk’s Principles and History of Turkish Revolution, Turkish Language and Foreign Language (e.g. English) are controlled and authorized by DEARCs. Since the number of students enrolled in these courses is thousands, it highly deemed to understand whether distance education differs from face-to-face education in terms of learning language (i.e.



English). The purpose of this study is to compare student success in the two areas: distance and face-to-face education. The research questions of the study have been formulated as:

- Firstly, is there any significant difference between the mean score of students' grades in distance and face-to-face education?
- Secondly, might daytime and evening education affect students' grades in distance and face-to-face education?
- Thirdly, to what extent do 2-year and 4-year education affect the grades of students in both distance and face-to-face education?

In this study, the comparison of students in distance and face-to-face education will be specifically investigated in terms of whether they study during daytime or evening. This specific investigation is important since daytime and evening education exist in almost all private and public institutions at the post-secondary education.

2. Methodology

2.1 Population

Table 1 illustrates the number of students enrolled in the English course in the spring term of the academic year 2017-2018 and in the fall term of the academic year 2018-2019 respectively. The number of students enrolled in English course are categorized into distance (N:3437 in the Spring and N: 5509 in the Fall) and face-to-face (N:871 in the Spring and N:568 in the Fall) groups. The study also revealed that the majority of the students study during daytime in the English course in both spring and fall terms as shown in the Table 1. The number and percentage of the students in 2- and 4-year education is also illustrated in the Table 1.

Table 1. Population

Year	Term	Education	Year	Distance		Face-to-Face		Total	
				n	%	n	%	n	%
2017-2018	Spring	Daytime	2	1119	32.56	319	36.62	1438	33.38
2017-2018	Spring	Daytime	4	1787	51.99	341	39.15	2128	49.40
2017-2018	Spring	Evening	2	251	07.30	170	19.52	421	09.77
2017-2018	Spring	Evening	4	280	08.15	41	04.71	321	07.45
Total				3437	100,00	871	100.00	4308	100.00
2018-2019	Fall	Daytime	2	2907	52.77	73	12.85	2980	49.04
2018-2019	Fall	Daytime	4	1838	33.36	418	73.59	2256	37.12
2018-2019	Fall	Evening	2	464	08.42	13	02.29	477	07.85
2018-2019	Fall	Evening	4	300	05.45	64	11.27	364	05.99
Total				5509	100,00	568	100.00	6077	100.00

2.2 Statistics

With the support of the trial version of the IBM SPSS Statistics Toolbox, descriptive and inferential statistics were computed. Independent-sample T-Test are used to compare the success of the distance group with the face-to-face one. To find out the success of the students in the English course, first, the grades of students in their mid-term exam (40%) and final exam (or resit exam) (60%) are used to calculate their grade average in the course and second, relative evaluation system was applied to find out the letter grade of the students in the course.

3. Findings and Discussion

This section is divided into two parts: The first part reports the descriptive statistics of the students' average grade in the English course whereas the second part compares their average grade in terms of whether they take the English course through distance or face-to-face education. Additionally, the differences among students based on their faculties are also examined in this part.



3.1 Descriptive Statistics

The number mean and standard deviation of the students' average in both terms are presented in the Table 2. As specified in the table, in the spring term of the academic year of 2017-2018, the average grade of the students in distance education was 41,10 out of 100,00, which is higher than the one of the students in face-to-face education with 33,20. However, the difference changed in the fall term of the academic year of 2018-2019. As illustrated in the table, the score of face-to-face students was better than the one of the students in the distance education.

Table 2. Number, Mean and Standard Deviation of Students' Average Grades

Year	Term	Distance			Face-to-Face			Total		
		N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
2017-2018	Spring	3437	42.10	20.96	871	33.20	20.17	4308	40.30	21.10
2018-2019	Fall	5509	31.01	23.28	568	33.19	25.00	6077	31.21	23.45

In the spring term of the academic year 2017-2018, the school attendance in both distance and face-to-face education was compulsory. The students in both types of education was asked to attend the 70% of weekly lectures whether lectures are delivered online over the Internet or face-to-face in the classroom. However, in the fall term of the academic year 2018-2019, the university senate did not impose the compulsory school attendance on distance education. This might make us think that the compulsory school attendance is critical for the success of students in distance education.

Table 3. Differences in 2- and 4-Year Education

Year	Term	Year	Distance			Face-to-Face		
			N	M	SD	N	M	SD
2017-2018	Spring	2-year	1370	36.34	20.45	489	30.08	19.49
2017-2018	Spring	4-year	2067	45.92	20.21	382	37.29	20.34
2017-2018	Spring	Total	3437	42.10	20.96	871	33.20	20.17
2018-2019	Fall	2-year	3371	26.47	21.53	86	22.85	22.75
2018-2019	Fall	4-year	2138	38.17	24.14	482	35.04	24.95
2018-2019	Fall	Total	5509	31.01	23.28	568	33.19	25.00

However, the results of the descriptive statistics of the students' average grade in terms of the students' associate (two-year) and bachelor's degree (four-year) in Table 3 cause a change in our thoughts. As shown in the table, the average grade of the students studying in distance education are higher than the ones in face-to-face education whether they study in a 2-year or 4-year degree. As illustrated in the table, the increase in the number of the students in 2-year programs had an impact on the general average grade of the students. On the other hand, the compulsory school attendance might be thought as a positive factor on the success of the students in distance education because there is a decrease in the amount of the average grade from 45.92 to 38.17 in 4-year education and from 36.34 to 26.47 in 2-year education. Additionally, Table 4 also illustrated the differences in daytime and evening education.

Table 4. Differences in Daytime and Evening Education

Year	Term	Time	Distance			Face-to-Face		
			N	M	SD	N	M	SD
2017-2018	Spring	Daytime	2906	42,97	20,97	660	34,90	19,85
2017-2018	Spring	Evening	531	37,37	20,23	211	27,90	20,29
2017-2018	Spring	Total	3437	42.10	20.96	871	33.20	20.17
2018-2019	Fall	Daytime	4745	31,80	23,80	491	33,99	25,62
2018-2019	Fall	Evening	764	26,09	19,06	77	28,09	19,97
2018-2019	Fall	Total	5509	31.01	23.28	568	33.19	25.00

As illustrated in the table, the mean score of the daytime students in both distance and face-to-face education is higher than those of the evening students. This points out that evening education has a



negative effect on the success of the students regardless of whether they study through distance or face-to-face education.

3.2 Inferential Statistics

Independent-sample t-test was used to verify statistical significance of differences in mean scores on various variables namely between associate's and bachelor's degree, among different faculties and colleges and between daytime and evening education with the utilization of the IBM SPSS Statistics. The difference between distance and face-to-face education is always assumed to be a controversial. However, it is not consistently observed in all cases. On the other hand, Table 5 shows that students in distance education in terms of the spring of the academic year of the 2017-2018 show higher success in the English course because there was a significant difference in the mean of the students' grade ($t=11.27$, $p < 0.01$)

Table 5. Differences in Distance and Face-to-face Education in terms of Year

Year	Term	Education	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.	t	Sig.
2017-2018	Spring	Distance	3437	42.10	20.96	0.15	0.901	11.27	0.000
2017-2018	Spring	Face-to-face	871	33.20	20.17				
2018-2019	Fall	Distance	5509	31.01	23.28	6.47	0.011	-1.99	0.046
2018-2019	Fall	Face-to-face	568	33.19	25.00				

Table 6 illustrates the mean score of the student's grade in terms of whether they are studying during the daytime or evening through distance or face-to-face education. As shown in the table, there is significant difference between the mean score of students in distance and face-to-face education regardless of whether they study during the daytime or evening while they are taking the English course.

Table 6. Differences in Distance and Face-to-face Education in terms of Daytime and Evening

Term	Time	Education	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.	t	Sig.
Spring	Daytime	Distance	2906	42.97	20.97	0.63	0.43	9.01	0.00
Spring	Daytime	Face-to-face	660	34.90	19.85				
Spring	Evening	Distance	531	37.37	20.23	0.20	0.66	5.75	0.00
Spring	Evening	Face-to-face	211	27.90	20.29				
Fall	Daytime	Distance	4745	31.80	23.80	6.56	0.01	-1.82	0.07
Fall	Daytime	Face-to-face	491	33.99	25.62				
Fall	Evening	Distance	764	26.09	19.06	0.00	0.93	-0.88	0.38
Fall	Evening	Face-to-face	77	28.09	19.97				

Table 7 illustrates the mean score of the student's grade in terms of whether they are studying in 2-year (i.e. associate degree) or 4-year education (i.e. bachelor's degree) through distance or face-to-face education. As shown in the table, there is significant difference between the mean score of students in distance and face-to-face education regardless of whether they study in 2-and 4-year education in the terms of Spring while they are taking the English course. However, there is no significant difference between the mean score of 2-year students in distance and face-to-face education. On other hand, the significance exists in the mean score of 4-year students.



Table 7. Differences in Distance and Face-to-face Education in terms of 2- and 4-year Education

Term	Time	Education	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.	t	Sig.
Spring	2-year	Distance	1370	36.34	20.45	0.528	0.47	5.89	0.000
Spring	2-year	Face-to-face	489	30.08	19.49				
Spring	4-year	Distance	2067	45.92	20.41	0.502	0.48	7.68	0.000
Spring	4-year	Face-to-face	382	37.20	20.34				
Fall	2-year	Distance	3371	26.47	21.53	0.003	0.96	1.54	0.124
Fall	2-year	Face-to-face	86	22.85	22.75				
Fall	4-year	Distance	2138	38.17	24.14	1.279	0.26	2.56	0.011
Fall	4-year	Face-to-face	482	35.04	24.95				

4. Conclusion

The main goal of the study to investigate whether there is a difference between face-to-face and distance education in terms of the mean of the students' grade in the English course in several aspects. This study revealed that there is significant difference between distance and face-to-face education on the students' school success as the statistical results point out in the IBM SPSS. Moreover, it was discovered that the compulsory school attendance in distance education has a positive effect on the success of the students registered in the English course. Moreover, the mean scores of students studying in a program of 4-year education is higher than those in 2-year program in both distance and face-to-face education. This may indicate that the motivation of students in 4-year programs is higher in terms of pursuing their education in Turkey. However, it should be noted here that the findings of the study is limited to the number of students enrolled in the English course in the fall and spring terms of the academic year 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 respectively in Harran University and may not be generalised to other contexts or domains. However, our empirical findings might heighten the awareness on differences in distance and face-to-face education.

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