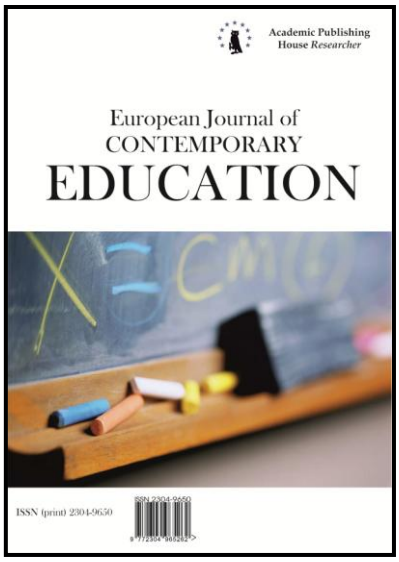
Published in the Russian Federation
European Journal of Contemporary Education
ISSN 2219-8229
E-ISSN 2224-0136
Vol. 15, Is. 1, pp. 147-162, 2016
DOI: 10.13187/ejced.2016.15.147
www.ejournal1.com



Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of After School Online Course

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Abstract

This study analyzes students' and teachers' perceptions of after school online courses (ASOC) undertaken by an institutional private middle school, which manages several campuses across Turkey. The aim of ASOC is to support students when they are home by helping them to revise the lessons, practice topics synchronously with hundreds of other students. The results of the survey, interviews, and observations show that both students and teachers prefer face-to-face lessons to online lessons. They think that ASOC can be effective only if it is implemented in small groups with more interaction and sound instructional design with engaging methods and adequate feedback is structured for students and teachers' needs. This study may contribute to similar future research studies of online education in middle schools by revealing the upsides and downsides of this blended learning environment with recommendations offered.

Keywords: after school, blended learning, synchronous online lessons, perceptions, middle school

Introduction and Related Literature

Various technology-supported lessons are now being used to enhance students' achievements and engagement for educational purposes (Motteram, 2003). One of the most common ways of using technology in education is online learning as an alternative to traditional, face-to-face education (Yang & Cornelius, 2004). Online environments offer opportunities for accessing education from any place at anytime (Gedera, 2014; Hoon, 2008; Stacey & Wiesenberg, 2007). These opportunities can be listed as flexibility (Gedera, 2014; Stacey & Wiesenberg, 2007) and interactive and collaborative communication which seems as a unique feature to face-to-face

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learning environments (Sher, 2009). Also, it is more cost effective and convenient than traditional face-to-face lessons, with more learners being able to benefit from an online lesson (Wattakiecharoen & Nilsook, 2012). Furthermore, by offering access to resources and educators not locally available, they give precious opportunities for students who are not able to attend traditional schools because of some obstacles; such as living in a remote area, having some responsibilities at home, travelling costs, and transportation problems or cultural and traditional values (Richardson & Swan, 2003; Sher, 2009). In addition to this also the teachers have opportunities of serving more students than in a classroom environment (Cavanaugh, Gillan, Kromrey, Hess, & Blomeyer, 2004).

In spite of all these opportunities online learning offer, there are many concerns such as isolation, social development of students, and lack of physical demonstrations about using these methods in education (Cavanaugh et al., 2014). It is claimed that online or web-based education's lack of face-to-face interaction makes it less effective than traditional classroom learning (Richardson & Swan, 2003). To overcome the disadvantages and to make such learning more effective, blended learning environments seek to combine the strengths of both traditional and online learning environments (Orhan, Altun, & Kablan, 2004). Blended learning creates an educational environment combining both online and face-to face learning (Staker, 2011). They maximize the advantages of online materials by maintaining the motivational effects of group learning and teacher support (Tomlinson & Whittaker, 2013).

For these reasons it is obvious that blended learning has been preferred more in education according to recent research studies in the field of education (Yı, 2014). Further, it has been foreseen that, as in the other educational levels, in primary and middle schools blended learning will soon come to gain considerable importance (Sarıtepeci & Çakır, 2014). Many students, across different educational levels - primary, secondary and university - are now taking hybrid, blended and mixed mode online courses as they were born into a totally wired world (Palley, 2012; Singh, 2014). With this in mind, educational institutions should enable and prepare their students and teachers for the adoption of such systems (Gagnon, 2014). While adopting these systems in education students' perceptions of these online courses gains one of the most important role that needs to be questioned (Picciano, 2002).

Also, the challenges in education such as time and place constraints have increased the need of using online learning environments (Cavanaugh et al., 2014). These environments offer an opportunity to learners and educators to communicate synchronously using features such as audio, video, text chat, interactive whiteboard, and application sharing (Martin & Parker, 2014). Synchronous learning environments have many advantages such as chances of communication, engaging students more thanks to the real time communication between the students and teachers, fostering a learning community, authentic and engaging activities supporting higher level of learning compared to purely asynchronous modes and, decreasing the classroom management problems (Hastie, Chen & Kuo, 2007, Hrastinski, 2008, Murray, 2007).

This study focuses on the effectiveness of after school online courses which are called as "e-etudes", based on the perceptions of a middle school's students and teachers. Also the perceptions of higher education students regarding blended, online and virtual learning have been investigated in many research studies, but there is a scarcity of similar research studies on elementary and middle school level students' perceptions (Chen, Barnett, & Stephens, 2013; Cavanaugh et al., 2014; DiPiedro et al., 2008; Krause & Lowe, 2014). With findings of this study, administrators, teachers, and instructional designers can come to take advantage of its results describing how students perceive these learning experiences.

The purpose of this study is, from the students and teachers' points of view to obtain information on the perceptions of students and teachers about after school online courses (ASOC) as grouped into four main categories: (1) the perceptions on design of the instructions, its content and its resources; (2) the perceptions on students' participation, interactions and collaboration; (3) the perceptions on feedback, assessment and evaluation; (4) the perceptions on course technology and support. The further aims of this work include exploring the factors affecting students' and teachers' perceptions of after school online courses, discovering whether these lessons are useful for the students, and to guide those researchers and practitioners seeking to undertake similar studies, who already completed such work, or who wish to use this analysis to

improve their existing courses. In addition, possible drawbacks to such lessons and courses will be identified. The study was designed to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What are the students' perceptions of ASOC in terms of design of instruction, content & resources (RQ1.1), participation, interaction and collaboration (RQ1.2), and feedback and assessment (RQ1.3), and course technology and support (RQ1.4)?

RQ2: What are the teachers' perceptions of ASOC in terms of design of instruction, content & resources (RQ2.1), participation, interaction and collaboration (RQ2.2), and feedback and assessment (RQ2.3), course technology and support (RQ2.4)?

Methodology

1. Research Design

This is a quantitative descriptive research combined with qualitative interviews. The researchers collected both qualitative and quantitative data. For the quantitative data, a survey was given to students and teachers in order to collect data about their perceptions of ASOC lessons implemented within the institution. After collecting the quantitative data, the qualitative data were obtained to follow up and support the quantitative findings.

2. Participants

The participants were the students who were studying in grades 6 and 7 of a private school chain in Turkey. The school had 28 kindergartens, 11 primary schools, 12 middle schools and 9 high schools in Turkey. At school there were around 8000 students and 1000 teachers in various campuses but in this study, only students, and teachers from 6th and 7th grades of the main campus were interviewed and observed. The number of students who took part in this study is 204 in total, 91 of these students were in grade 6, and 113 of them were in grade 7.

Other participants were the teachers giving lectures in e-etudes at the same school. Twenty-one teachers from Turkish, Math, Science, Social Studies and English departments from different grade levels answered the survey questions online since ASOCs were implemented in those lessons. Also, one teacher from each department (5 teachers in total) was interviewed and observed. The participants were selected using convenience sampling for this study as it was preferred when a group of participants in a study that happen to be available at the time of data collection (Picciano, 2006).

2.1 Demographics of Students, Teachers, and Course Designer

Questions about the participants' age, grade level, and computer and internet usage were collected as demographic data. Through these questions necessary information about the participants were collected. The results revealed that 44% of the students were in the 6th grade and 56% of them in the 7th grade. Most of the students were 11-12 years old. Majority of the students (97%) had computers and internet connection at home. When the frequency of computer usage was asked, it was found that 45% of them use their computers every day, 24% of them twice or three times a week. Besides, the results showed that 74% of them go online every day.

PASOC questions revealed that 90% of teachers were between 25-35 years old, 14 of them were English teachers, 2 of them were Turkish, 2 of them Math, 2 of them Social Studies and 1 of them was Science and Technology teacher. Majority of teachers go online for work purposes (43%), and 24% of them use internet for surfing on the net.

Also the course designer was interviewed in order to get more information about the aim of the course, design of the instruction, content and materials, and details about the course.

3. Description of ASOC

Within the institution ASOCs were undertaken for supporting the face-to-face lessons through the learning management system (LMS). They were mainly based on revision of the topics that are presented at school in face-to-face lessons. They included five main subjects; Math, Science, Turkish, Social Studies and English. ASOCs were mostly implemented after school when the students arrived at home. The teachers who taught in these lessons waited at school till the students were ready. They had their lessons synchronously with the help of an IT staff in a classroom which had a camera, smart board and a computer. Adobe Connect was used to conduct

these online lessons. The material was projected on the smart board and the teacher used the smart board. The students could see the teacher, smart board screen and the chatting area and/or the voting part. The students wrote their questions, answers or comments in the chat area if it was permitted.

A group of teachers for the target grade level came together and decided on the students' needs. They defined the problematic areas to be revised in e-etudes and one or a couple of teachers were assigned with creating the resources. Usually, the topic was revised briefly in the beginning of the lesson then questions were presented. The questions were multiple-choice questions since they were more proper for these type of courses. The lessons and resources were planned just before the lessons sometimes a week before sometimes a night before. The interaction level of the lessons varied according to the size of the classes.

Some lessons were planned for big groups and around 800-1000 students participated in these lessons. The chat area was closed and the students could only use the voting area to answer the questions. The lesson material was designed as a test document and the students could answer by choosing the correct option. The teacher gave feedback to the whole group after the result of voting. These types of sessions were preferred to reduce the workload of the teachers and to save time and effort.

4. Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Table 1. Data collection procedures for each research question

Research Questions	Participants	Type of Data	Data collection procedures
RQ1. Perceptions of students in after school online lessons	4 groups of students (three to five randomly chosen students in each group) 4 individual students	Qualitative	Interview Observation
	204 students	Quantitative Qualitative	Survey Open ended questions
RQ2. Perceptions of teachers in after school online lessons	5 teachers Course Designer	Qualitative	Interview Observation
	21 teachers	Quantitative Qualitative	Survey Open ended questions

The observation form, interview and survey questions were adapted from the other research studies (Chew, 2011; Çetiz, 2006; Picciano, 2002; Pinto, 2014; Richardson, 2003; Kudrik, 2009; Lin, Chan & Hsiao, 2011; Yang & Cornelius, 2004). The observation form, interview and survey were categorized mainly in six groups; a) Design of instruction, content, resources; b) Course technology and support; c) Students' participation, interaction and collaboration; d) Feedback, assessment and evaluation; e) The attitudes of students and teachers towards ASOC; f) Students' ideas on teachers / teachers' ideas on students. The survey included 49 items with 5-point Likert-type scale to indicate their perceptions ranging from (strongly agree to strongly disagree).

As Zohrabi (2003) stated, to ensure the content validity the research instruments and the data might be reviewed by the experts in the field of research. Therefore, three experts in the field of educational technology analyzed the questions, gave feedback on each question, and some necessary changes were made before conducting the instruments to a sample of students to make sure if the items are understood and spelled correctly. In order to strengthen the internal validity of a research, the researcher should try to collect data through various methods such as observations, interviews and questionnaires (Merriam 1995; Zohrabi, 2003). The researcher used three different

methods to collect data and checked the validity by comparing the results of the data collected through these data collection tools. Zohrabi (2003) mentioned in a study that repeated observations in long-term period can enhance the validity of research. In order to get detailed information, different classes should be observed. In this study, different student groups, different lessons, and different teachers were observed throughout the year. According to Cronbach alpha, the reliability score of the survey was found .776. Therefore the survey was considered as reliable to use in the study.

The lessons were observed synchronously. The researcher observed two different groups of students from 6th and 7th grades in five different subject lessons' e-etudes and the sessions were recorded (8 hours of ASOC observation) and analyzed with a structured observation form with six domains.

5. Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data were collected from the surveys answered by the students and teachers. This research includes descriptive data analysis and provides necessary data collected from a group of individuals. The percentages, mean scores and standard deviation of the results were calculated. For analyzing the data in the questionnaires, the questions were categorized according to the criteria in research questions.

For qualitative data analyses, firstly the interviews were transcribed word by word from the recording. Also the final part of the survey asking the ideas and recommendations of students and teachers on e-etudes were coded and analyzed. After the researcher read the data to overview the common opinions about e-etudes, the themes were identified which were similar to the categories defined in research questions. Finally, the perceptions of students and teachers were derived and findings were added with coded names in the results section.

Results

In this section, the quantitative results of the survey were given within the tables first, complementing with the qualitative results of the interviews later. The results were discussed in the next section.

1. Students' opinions on ASOC

Table 1. Students' perceptions of ASOC (N=204)

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SDA	M	SD
I love e-etudes.	14%	20%	23%	12%	29%	3.2	1.431
I attend e-etudes voluntarily without any pressure.	**23%**	**34%**	17%	9%	14%	2.5	1.345
E-etudes are fun.	12%	9%	25%	**18%**	**35**	3.5	1.368
My achievement has increased after e-etudes.	**10%**	**10%**	31%	24%	23%	3.4	1.237
E-etudes should continue.	25%	21%	21%	**9%**	**22**	2.8	1.480
I prefer not having e-etudes.	**18%**	**12%**	24%	20%	22%	3.1	1.412
There should be more e-etudes.	15%	8%	19%	**19%**	**37**	3.5	1.444
I recommend these e-etudes to my friends.	15%	17%	23%	**12%**	**30**	3.2	1.448
I prefer e-etudes to face-to-face lessons.	24%	7%	12%	**17%**	**38**	3.3	1.619
E-etudes motivate me towards my lessons at school.	18%	12%	20%	**23%**	**24**	3.2	1.426

E-etudes have no influence on my success in face-to-face lessons.	**8%**	**12%**	33%	20%	24%	3.4	1.218
Having synchronous lessons engages me.	**22%**	**26%**	21%	15%	13%	2.7	1.340
I prefer lecturing videos to e-etudes.	**30**	**16%**	14%	12%	25%	2.8	1.595
There is no difference between the lecturing videos and e-etudes.	9%	7%	22%	**18%**	**42**	3.7	1.329
I don't mind whether e-etude lessons synchronous or not.	14%	13%	13%	**16%**	**41**	3.5	1.495
My parents encourage me to attend these e-etudes.	**42%**	**30%**	11%	7%	8%	2.1	1.264
My teachers encourage me to attend these e-etudes.	**46%**	**26%**	12%	6%	8%	2.0	1.253
Sometimes I pay attention to something unrelated during an e-etude.	**30**	**22%**	12%	16%	16%	2.6	1.481

**SA: Strongly Agree A: Agree N: Neutral D: Disagree SDA: Strongly Disagree*

In addition to quantitative data collected through PASOCS, the interview responses, students' opinions and recommendations in the final part of PASOCS show that the students find the lessons boring. The students mentioned that sometimes they pay attention to something unrelated such as watching TV or video, playing games or doing homework during these e-etude lessons. They stated that the face-to-face lessons are better, more enjoyable and effective for their learning. They think that they have assignments for school and spend too much time at school. They added that their teachers and parents sometimes force them instead of encouraging them. The majority stated that they prefer lecturing videos uploaded to LMS.

2. Students' perceptions of the design of instruction, content and resources of ASOC

Table 2. Perceptions of the design of instruction, content and resources of e-etudes (N=204)

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SDA	M	SD
I would like to learn the objectives of e-etudes beforehand.	**48%**	**28%**	14%	2%	5%	1.88	1.111
My teachers give information about the content and objectives of the e-etudes beforehand.	**19%**	**32%**	25%	10%	12%	2.63	1.257
The content of e-etudes matches the content of face-to-face lessons.	**37%**	**34%**	17%	5%	4%	2.04	1.085
I think the activities done in e-etudes are fun.	10%	8%	24%	**19%**	**36%**	3.63	1.342
I get bored in e-etudes.	**33%**	**14%**	25%	16%	10%	2.57	1.368
The activities in e-etudes are useful for my learning.	**28%**	**39%**	20%	5%	6%	2.22	1.112
The level of the activities is proper for my level.	**48%**	**37%**	8%	2%	3%	1.75	.957
The resources used in e-etudes are helpful for my learning.	**30%**	**28%**	21%	7%	11%	2.40	1.311
I have difficulties in understanding the content of e-etudes.	3%	3%	13%	**22%**	**58%**	4.30	1.012
I am not able to answer the questions and have difficulties in doing exercises in e-etudes.	6%	4%	8%	**25%**	**54%**	4.17	1.178

Based on the qualitative results on the same research question, some of the students stated that ASOCs are helpful in their learning. They appreciate that they can make revisions in these lessons. They believe that these lessons support face-to-face lessons. On the other hand they believe that these lessons are not enjoyable enough which demotivates them. However, they stated that there are only multiple choice questions and the resources are not interesting. Also, they stated that they want to ask questions to the teachers when they do not understand but this is not possible because of excessive number of students.

3. Students' perceptions of the interaction, participation, and collaboration in ASOC

Table 3. Perceptions of students on participation, interaction and collaboration in e-etudes (N=204)

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SDA	M	SD
I can ask questions to my teachers.	11%	13%	12%	**17%**	**44%**	3.70	1.440
I like interacting with my friends.	**26%**	**20%**	17%	11%	23%	2.84	1.517
I talk with my friends about the lesson during e-etudes.	16%	10%	15%	**22%**	**33%**	3.46	1.470
There should be more interaction.	**43%**	**15%**	20%	8%	12%	2.32	1.414
The other students in e-etudes influence me in a positive way.	**30%**	**19%**	26%	8%	14%	2.59	1.387
E-etudes should be in smaller groups.	**44%**	**11%**	17%	8%	18%	2.46	1.555
I would like to ask more questions to my teachers.	**44%**	**14%**	16%	9%	15%	2.38	1.499

In line with the survey results, the qualitative data collected through interviews, the final part of the survey and observations show that the interaction level is low in these lessons. The students complain about not being able to ask questions to the teachers and they think that the time spent for each question is not enough. As a result, they do not understand some questions in the lessons. They also state that the other students write too much in the chat area and the teachers cannot see their answers because of unnecessary comments. All of them believe that if the lessons could be done with fewer students, it would be much more effective.

"I think the lessons should be in smaller groups because everybody writes at the same time and I cannot understand the question and miss the lesson. The chat area should be closed." (7th grade student Betul, Mart 2015)

Observation notes of the researcher are parallel with the students' perceptions. It was observed that the student-teacher interaction is low while student-student interaction is considerably high. However, this student-student interaction is not related with the lesson and these unnecessary discussions among the students block the answers of other students who really want to participate in the lesson.

4. Students' perceptions of the feedback, assessment, and evaluation of these lessons

Table 4. Perceptions of students about feedback and assessment in e-etudes (N=204)

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SDA	M	SD
I get feedback about my performance from my teachers.	8%	13%	33%	**11%**	**33%**	3.47	1.314
The teachers assess my performance after the lesson.	12%	18%	23%	**12%**	**33%**	3.34	1.424
The teachers praise me.	10%	11%	38%	**14%**	**25%**	3.33	1.264
The teachers do not comment on my performance.	**45%**	**13%**	22%	9%	9%	2.24	1.362
I prefer receiving more feedback about my performance.	**33%**	**12%**	23%	8%	22%	2.73	1.539

Correspondent with the survey results, in the interviews the students mentioned that they could not get immediate and effective feedback from the teachers. It was also observed that there is no assignment or quiz given to the students to assess their learning at the end of ASOC.

5. Students' perceptions of the course technology and support

All of the students mentioned that the software used (Adobe Connect) is a user-friendly program. They did not have any problems about the program during e-etude lessons. On the other hand, they mentioned that they have some problems because of excessive number of users logged in the sessions at the same time. Screen freezes, voice interrupts, slow access speed or connection problems are the most listed problems and these are discouraging for the students. When it is asked how they solve these problems, they mentioned about the Help button but they also added that they cannot get response from there. If they cannot manage to solve the technical problems they face, they log out the session. The students can report their problems to the Deputy Head after e-etude and the problem is informed to the IT department the following day.

6. Teachers' perceptions of ASOC

Table 6. Teachers' attitudes towards e-etude lessons (N=21)

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SDA	M	SD
I like e-etudes.	**23%**	**38%**	19%	9%	9%	2.43	1.248
I have e-etude lessons voluntarily without any pressure.	4%	23%	19%	**33%**	**19%**	3.38	1.203
E-etudes are fun.	**23%**	**28%**	19%	14%	14%	2.67	1.390
Students' achievement has increased after e-etudes.	9%	28%	**47%**	9%	4%	2.71	.956
E-etudes should continue.	**9%**	**47%**	28%	0%	14%	2.62	1.161
I prefer not having e-etudes.	14%	9%	28%	**38%**	**9%**	3.19	1.209
There should be more e-etudes.	9%	9%	33%	**28%**	**19%**	3.38	1.203
I recommend these e-etudes to my colleagues.	**9%**	**33%**	28%	19%	9%	2.86	1.153
I prefer e-etudes to face-to-face lessons.	0%	9%	9%	**23%**	**57%**	4.29	1.007
E-etudes motivate the students to the lessons at school.	0%	28%	**38%**	19%	14%	3.19	1.030
E-etudes have no influence on the students' success in face-to-face lessons.	0%	14%	19%	**42%**	**23%**	3.76	.995
We may have online lecturing videos instead of e-etudes.	**23%**	**33%**	23%	19%	0%	2.38	1.071
Having synchronous lessons engages my students.	**9%**	**61%**	23%	4%	0%	2.24	.700
I encourage my students to attend e-etude lessons.	**47%**	**38%**	9%	4%	0%	1.71	.845
Etudes that we have at school after lessons are better than e-etudes.	**42%**	**38%**	4%	14%	0%	1.90	1.044
I prefer e-etudes to etudes we have at school.	9%	4%	14%	**42%**	**28%**	3.76	1.221

In relation to the survey results, teachers' perceptions were investigated through interviews as well. Most of the teachers believe that various teaching approaches should be used in education and using technology engages the students. Hence, they believe that synchronous online lessons are useful for students. They also added that it is better to have more technology in face-to-face lessons.

Additionally, the course designer also stated that the main aim of these lessons is offering various opportunities to the students for learning and integrating technology into learning. He thinks that the activities done in face-to-face lessons are not enough for effective learning. They need to be enhanced with supportive activities such as e-etude lessons. On contrary, the

teachers stated that they do not have interaction and eye contact with their students. Thus, they believe that face-to-face lessons are more effective and their preference compared to ASOC.

"I prefer having face-to-face lessons to e-etudes because I cannot have eye contact with the students in e-etude lessons. I can assess the students better in face-to-face lessons." (Math teacher Nur, Mart 2015)

All of them complained about the excessive number of the students in ASOC. The participation is considerably high that they cannot answer the students' questions properly. In lower grades, students do not take these lessons as serious as the older students. Therefore, they believe that these lessons should be provided to older students in smaller groups.

"The lower grade students want to have fun. They want to chat with their friends. If we have older students in smaller groups they can be more conscious and the lessons can be more useful." (Social sciences teacher Ferhat, March 2015)

On one hand, some of the teachers stated that they would recommend e-etude lessons to their colleagues and would like them to continue because there are many advantages of these etudes. First of all, they mentioned that they do not have any classroom management problems and there is less distraction in e-etude lessons than face-to-face lessons so that the students can follow the lessons better. They also believe that e-etude lessons are undeniable support for students' success and they reinforce the learning substantially. On the other hand, some of them believe that these lessons do not have any effects on students' learning and success. They stated that they would not recommend these lessons to their colleagues and they think that neither students nor teachers need these lessons. The main reason behind this idea was the planning of these e-etude lessons and materials and having these lessons are extra burden for teachers. They added that lecturing videos uploaded to LMS are great help for students and enough for reinforcing the learning.

7. Teachers' perceptions of design of instruction, content and resources of ASOC

Table 7. Teachers' perceptions of the design of instruction, content and resources of e-etudes (N=21)

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SDA	M	SD
I give information about the content and objectives of the e-etudes to my students.	42%	28%	14%	14%	0%	2.00	1.095
The content of e-etudes matches the content of face-to-face lessons.	57%	23%	9%	9%	0%	1.71	1.007
The students have fun with the activities done in e-etudes.	28%	28%	14%	28 %	0%	2.43	1.207
The activities in e-etudes are useful for students.	38%	33%	19%	9%	0%	2.00	1.000
The level of the activities is proper for the students.	61%	23%	9%	4%	0%	1.57	.870
The resources used in e-etudes are helpful for students.	57%	23%	9%	9%	0%	1.71	1.007

In addition to results showed in the table, the interview results, comments part of the survey and observation notes are in line with the survey results. The teachers mentioned that they cannot present a new topic since all of the students do not take part in these e-etude lessons. As a result, most of the time the topics presented at school are revised in ASOC. They said that content of ASOC match with the content of face-to-face lessons. The majority of the teachers mentioned that they took part in lesson planning process. According to the teachers and course designer, the objectives and outcomes are defined by a group of teachers before planning the lessons by taking the students' needs into account.

The teachers complained about the difficulty of preparing questions for e-etudes. It is easier for teachers to create and give feedback with multiple-choice questions. They also mentioned that the activities or questions designed for e-etudes are proper for the objectives but they are not enjoyable. They recommended using more visuals to raise students' interest. Some of them believe that the lessons and resources should be more planned and prepared at the beginning of the year.

8. Teachers' perceptions of participation, interaction and collaboration in ASOC lessons

Table 8. Perceptions of teachers on participation, interaction and collaboration in e-etudes (N=21)

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SDA	M	SD
I can answer the students' questions during e-etudes.	33%	14%	14%	23%	14%	2.71	1.521
Students can interact with each other during e-etudes.	28%	19%	14%	23%	14%	2.76	1.480
Students' attendance and participation are high.	23%	38%	19%	19%	0%	2.33	1.065
Students should be able to ask questions during e-etudes.	47%	33%	14%	4%	0 %	1.76	.889
Students should be able to have interaction with each others.	9%	23%	14%	19%	33%	3.43	1.434
The more interaction the students have the more motivated they are.	9%	33%	28%	14%	14%	2.90	1.221
E-etudes should be in smaller groups.	66%	9%	9%	4%	9%	1.81	1.365

Similar to the students, teachers also think that the interaction and collaboration level is low in e-etude lessons. However, all of the teachers think that the attendance level is considerably high. The course designer verifies this by stating majority of the target group attend these lessons. He also added that the younger they are, the more they attend. The number of students who take part in one e-etude session is around 80-100. This number makes it impossible to interact with the students individually. They think that all of the students should be able to ask and answer questions during these lessons. The teachers and course designer believe that with fewer students they can have more interaction.

"If the students do not participate in the lesson then it is like watching a video for them. There is no difference between the lecturing videos and e-etudes for these students." (The Course Designer, March 2015)

9. Teachers' perceptions of the feedback, assessment and evaluation of ASOC

Table 9. Perceptions of teachers about feedback and assessment in e-etudes (N=21)

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SDA	M	SD
I give feedback to my students during e-etudes.	33%	33%	0%	4%	3%	2.48	1.504
I can assess my students' performance during or after these lessons.	28%	14%	19%	19%	19%	2.86	1.526
I would like to give more feedback to my students during these lessons.	52%	33%	4%	9%	0%	1.71	.956

In addition to the survey results, teachers' perceptions of feedback, assessment and evaluation were investigated through interview questions and observations. All of the teachers think that they cannot give enough feedback to the students and assess their performance with such a large class. Some teachers mentioned that they try to use the students' names while checking the answers and praise them with their names and they believe that this affects students' motivation positively.

"The students like hearing their names in e-etudes. I used some of the students' names when they give the right answers and they got motivated. The following day they came to school and thanked to me for telling their names." (English Teacher Demet, March 2015)

3.10 Teachers' perceptions of the course technology and support of ASOC lessons

They all mentioned that the program used, Adobe Connect, was easy to use. They stated that they did not get any training for online learning before these lessons and some had a brief

explanation about the software right before the lessons by IT staff. The course designer verified that the teachers and students did not need any training for using this program. Some teachers commented that it was difficult to both write on the board and look at the camera or answer the questions of students. They all experienced some technical problems such as screen freezes, voice interrupts and internet connection. When the teachers have such problems, they get immediate help from someone from IT department who is in the same classroom with the teacher.

Discussions and Conclusions

1. The students' (RQ1) and teachers' (RQ2) general perceptions of ASOC

The research questions examine students' and teachers' perceptions within specific conceptual groups: (1) the design of the course, its content and resources; (2) participation, interaction and collaboration; (3) feedback, assessment and evaluations; (4) the course technology and support.

1.1 Voluntary participation. As Zeidler (2014) wrote, students' willingness is crucial to learning and, in this study, despite the students saying that they did not like the ASOC lessons, it was clear that they attended the lessons voluntarily, albeit with the encouragement of their teachers and parents. Some students did report that their parents or teachers forced them to participate, but the majority of them said that they were not under any pressure. In line with the students' responses, the teachers also stated that the students take the lessons voluntarily and the teachers did not force the students to participate, but encouraging them. Nearly 60% of the students responded that they take the courses voluntarily and according to the course's designer, this was enough to consider the course successful.

It was also mentioned in Koutropoulos, Gallagher, Abajian, Waard, Hogue, Keskin, and Rodriguez's study (2012) that one of the main structures of online courses is the voluntary participation and this affects learning in a positive way. As Cull, Reed and Kirk (2010) mentioned in their study that online learning environments require self-motivation, self discipline, effective time management, self-directed work, organization and prioritization of effort. Also in interviews high-achiever students mentioned that they took these e-etude lessons for the sake of their own achievements. As a result of these we can assume that these students take their learning serious and they try to attend all ASOCs.

Also, Chen and Lou (2013) concluded in their study that one of the negative aspects of blended learning environments is overwork for the teachers. While the teachers stay late at school for ASOCs, the students wait at home and they can have rest till the lesson starts. As a result working overtime for ASOCs made teachers less willing to have these lessons. As it is mentioned in Alebaikan and Troudi's study (2009), finding a suitable time for both students and teachers is one of the most challenging facets of blended learning.

1.2 Variety in education. As it was discussed in Watson's study (2011), teachers think that integrating technology is a good way to diversify learning activities, and they are willing to use any technology to attract students' interest and to support their learning more. In interview questions asked to the teachers and students it was clear that they accepted these lessons as a variety in education.

1.3 Unfamiliarity and difficulty of adaptation. In contrast with Gagnon (2014), the majority of both the students and the teachers preferred traditional face-to-face lessons to the online lessons, and the students did not want to have more such e-etude lessons. The students also generally stated that they preferred the teachers in their face-to-face lessons. This was because they were used to spending more time with their teachers in the traditional learning environment and, when they had different teachers in their e-etude lessons, unfamiliarity of the teacher became an issue.

Since these lessons were proceeded in line with face-to-face lessons, ASOC could be considered as a blended course. As it was mentioned by Caravias (2014) and Marsh (2014) blended learning environments were considered as learning environments which improve students' engagement, individualize the learning and meet students' needs and different learning styles. However, in this study, students' needs and learning styles were not considered well enough for blended learning environment. In the meantime this might have caused a decrease in the motivation and engagement. As it was mentioned in Naudi's study (2004) the students get motivated more when they think that they need these lessons. This can be ensured with detailed needs analysis and with an attentive content and resource planning.

The teachers who gave lectures in these lessons were not trained or experienced in online teaching. We can accept them inexperienced in online teaching environments. As it was stated in Redmon's study (2011) the teachers feel themselves less comfortable in online lessons since they are used to teaching in face-to-face lessons and this leads them prefer face-to-face lessons to online lessons. Alebaikan and Troudi (2009) claim that one of the biggest challenges in blended learning is the adaption of this learning environment in traditional schools and it is clearly seen in this study.

1.4 Synchronous learning environment. Although students did not want to continue ASOC lessons, they did like taking synchronous online lessons, because it was somthing new for them and chatting with their friends during the lesson engaged them. In contrast to Pallilonis and Filak's study (2009), the participants in this study emphasized that the lecturing videos uploaded to LMS were less boring. Similary in this study, the results revealed both for the students and teachers, lecturing videos were better for their students' learning because they were at their own pace. According to Chen, Barneth and Stephens (2013), one of the biggest advantages of online courses is accessibility and flexibility, the students can attend these lessons whenever they want and this enourages them more.

2. Students' (RQ1.1) and teachers (RQ2.1) perceptions of the design of instruction, content, and the resources of the ASOC

2.1 Needs analysis. The results of the survey and the interview question responses showed that students wished to know the lesson objectives before the lessons themselves. However, it was seen in the results and observations that students were not informed about the lesson objectives beforehand. The students said that they want to participate in a lesson if the lesson objectives match their needs. If these lessons were more planned, if the administration was more devoted and if the teachers were more motivated, it would be possible to have some considerable positive outcomes. According to Naudi (2004), an effective instructional design includes creating motivating and engaging activities to make learners participate more. As it was stated in Brooke's article (2015) the students get bored easily when they think that the online lessons are not in line with their needs. Since there was no detailed students' needs analysis before designing the instruction, this was likely to happen. Also the fact that there hadn't been any effective instructional design damaged the quality of resources. As Caravias (2014) also mentioned, the lesson objectives should be considered carefully and the teachers should decide how to apply the technologies, approaches and resources that will work best for their students' needs. ASOCs can be beneficial for practicing topics only if they are targeted, oriented and well planned in accordance with the students' needs. However, they should be more attractive and feature more interesting resources.

2.2 Quality of Content and Resources. As Kotzer and Elran (2012) mentioned in their study that designing and undertaking online courses require high demands on design, skills and enough time. Similarly as it was found in the Yang and Cornelius study (2004), nearly all of the students did not see the lessons are fun and recommended having more enjoyable activities. As Lochard (2010) stated that joy is one of the key elements in education and it is important for cognitive development. The commentary of both the course designer and of the teachers included the point that the lessons should each have a scenario in order to draw the students' interest. Using only presentation type of material is not a good mode of either teaching or learning (Drew, 2007). The researcher also observed that the activities were not varied. The teachers also mentioned that if these materials had been more enjoyable it might have raised students' interest more and the lessons would have become more effective which might stop students doing something else during ASOC.

3. Students' (RQ1.2) and teachers (RQ2.2) perceptions of participation, interaction and collaboration in ASOC

3.1 Lack of interaction. It was clearly shown through the surveys, interviews and observations that student-teacher interactions were not satisfactory. As it was revealed in Gillani, Yasseri, Eynon and Hjorth study (2014) in online courses it is difficult to keep the interaction level high. Similar to the study conducted by Ya Ni (2013), the teachers said that with a higher interaction level they would be able to engage their students more easily (Posey, Burgess, Eason & Jones, 2010).

3.2 Number of students. As a matter of fact, the participation level was quite high, most of the students were extremely willing to write their questions and answers, but due to the number of the

students partaking in these lessons, they were either unable to ask questions or the teachers were unable to see their answers. When the students were thus prevented from asking questions or receiving answers, they couldn't understand the topic in depth and their motivation and understanding decreased. An empirical research study carried out by Bandiera, Larcinese, and Rasul (2010) revealed that when the number of students increases the achievement of students decreases.

Similar to this study, in Sher's study (2009), students like sharing their learning experiences with their friends and a feeling of belonging to a learning community existed amongst the students. However, there were also some students who chatted about unrelated subjects, which created a problem for teachers, students and for the technical support team. As Hrastinski (2008) mentioned, synchronous lessons engage students more since they can communicate with their peers and teachers as if they are in face-to-face lessons but if the class size is big, it can be a distraction.

Having no interaction with teachers in terms of asking about the content, no feedback about their performance are challenging issues with big group of students, therefore, smaller number of groups with more interactive environment along with instant feedback is suggested for this target audience. If there is only one single class of 20 to 24 students, ASOCs may not have such problems, the teachers can pay more attention to their students and the interaction levels may increase (Arzt, 2011).

4. Students' (RQ1.3) and teachers' (RQ2.3) perceptions of feedback and assessment in ASOC

4.1 Lack of immediate and individual feedback. High number of students in ASOC prevented teachers from giving immediate and effective feedback to their students which resulted with low level of interaction. As Poe and Stassen (2002) mentioned, students get engaged more when they get immediate feedback from the teachers. The students wanted to receive feedback, but most of the time the teachers were unable to supply the feedback desired. The main reason for this was simply that they did not see and catch the students' answers in the chat area. The teachers thought that effective and varied types of feedback were crucial to learning (Hatziapostolou & Paraskakis, 2012). However, the same teachers felt that it was nearly impossible to give feedback individually when there were too many students. Furthermore, the students wanted to hear the teachers' comments about their success, and they would like to be praised more. Although the teachers claimed that they assessed the students' performance, the students thought the opposite. It is concluded that higher levels of interaction and a more effective assessment system are crucial for the success of such courses.

4.2 More than one task at a time. Another reason of this can be; only one teacher cannot manage everything at the same time such as lecturing, checking the chat area, answering the questions, giving immediate feedback. According to Samuels (2014) when people multitask, it often takes them twice as long to complete a task, and they do it half as well. Teachers need to multitask during these online lessons and as Rekart (2011) stated the brain is designed to focus on one single task at a time. Since the teachers both tried to teach and followed the students' questions/answers from the chat area they could not fully concentrate on the comments written.

5. Students' (RQ1.4) and teachers (RQ2.4) perceptions of the course technology and support

As it was revealed in study of Zumor, Refaail, Eddin, and Al-Rahman (2013), technical problems are the most challenging obstacles that must be overcome in online learning environments and synchronous courses (Posey, Burgess, Eason, & Jones, 2010), it is obvious that these problems discourage students. In ASOCs, both the students and teachers experienced technical problems including the screen freezing, the voice interrupt or internet connection problems, all similar to the problems faced by participants in Gedera's study (2014). Subsequently, they complained about not receiving any help from the IT department during these lessons. It was observed, however, that since there were so many students logged into the system from their home, it was nearly impossible for the IT staff to assist them during these sessions. They could only help the teachers when the teachers experienced a technical problem. Consequently, the teachers were satisfied with the help provided, and they did not have any complaints about the course's technical support. Therefore, technical support should be provided to the students as well, to prevent students' discouragement. Nevertheless, similar with the results of Pina's study (2012), the students and the teachers enjoy using the program and see it as completely easy-to-use.

Summary

This study sought to investigate how students and teachers perceive an ASOC run at their school. Both the students and the teachers describe the course as tedious, and majority of them think that ASOC is not an effective way of learning. The major reasons for this perception are the lack of time, the extra burdens for both students and teachers in their busy lives, inadequate interaction and feedback because of the excessive number of students in the sessions, the dull lesson content, only a single form of educational resource (lecturing with presentation), the lack of proper scheduling and planning, and some minor technical problems.

On the other hand, their general response is that the course is useful as a learning resource although they are not fun or they have difficulties in understanding. The reasons for this perception are having an opportunity to revise and practice at home, an advantageous form of support for the traditional learning environment, taking a part in a learning community including their peers and teachers, the reliable resources used and, lastly, using various modes of technology-integrated teaching and learning environments. However, not being able to ask questions and get response is a major challenge for students. The results of this study enrich and extend our existing inferences about blended and online learning environments for middle school students. We are in the process of transition to more blended learning environments but we should do it correctly especially for younger students not to estrange them from online learning.

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