

Effects of Lockdown Period of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Turkish Academics' Academic Writing Productivity Performance in ELT

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on Turkish academics' academic writing productivity performance in ELT during the lockdown period. Thirty-four academics volunteered to participate in the study and an online open-ended questionnaire was used to collect data. 19 academics claimed that there are positive effects of COVID-19 on academic writing productivity performance and 28 academics expressed that they tried to prepare and write new articles for publishing, attend online courses and webinars, follow the journals regularly in ELT. However, six academics stated that they didn't conduct any new research in their field, and they postponed studying to the days when the pandemic news would end. Therefore, the study intends to underline that academics need to be aware of the significant changes in their current status and it may be assumed that academia and academic activities may not turn back the days like pre-Wuhan world. The results of the study may enhance the understanding of the changes among the academics' reactions toward the challenging issues and may present some clues about what can be done to surmount the effects of COVID-

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19 pandemic on academic writing productivity performance. The study may also present some implications for lecturers, authorities and academicians who are interested in academic writing and COVID-19 studies.

Keywords: Lockdown, COVID-19, Academic Writing Productivity Performance.

Introduction

Human beings have encountered unnatural disasters such as epidemics throughout history; and the epidemics have obviously influenced on health systems, social relationships, educational activities, and even daily lives (Tutku, İlman & Dönmez, 2020). As an example of the unnatural disasters, Coronavirus has been affecting all over the world since it started to spread December 2019. Unfortunately, there is an inevitable increase of confirmed cases and the death toll because of the COVID-19's consequences. The Coronavirus outbreak may cause social and behavioral changes in every society in a different way. Research on epidemics show that the results of plague may greatly affect humans (Liu, Liu, & Zhong, 2020; Temel & Ertin, 2020; Yıldız, 2014). The relationship between the way people react against the results of a disease and accordingly reorganize their lives is the most important factor during the pandemic. Therefore, as in all areas of life, people have faced a lot of challenges in their academic lives and this study aims to investigate the effects of COVID-19 on academic writing productivity performance during this period. The study may help academicians ensure the awareness of their current status and may present some clues about what can be done to surmount the effects of COVID-19 on their academic lives.

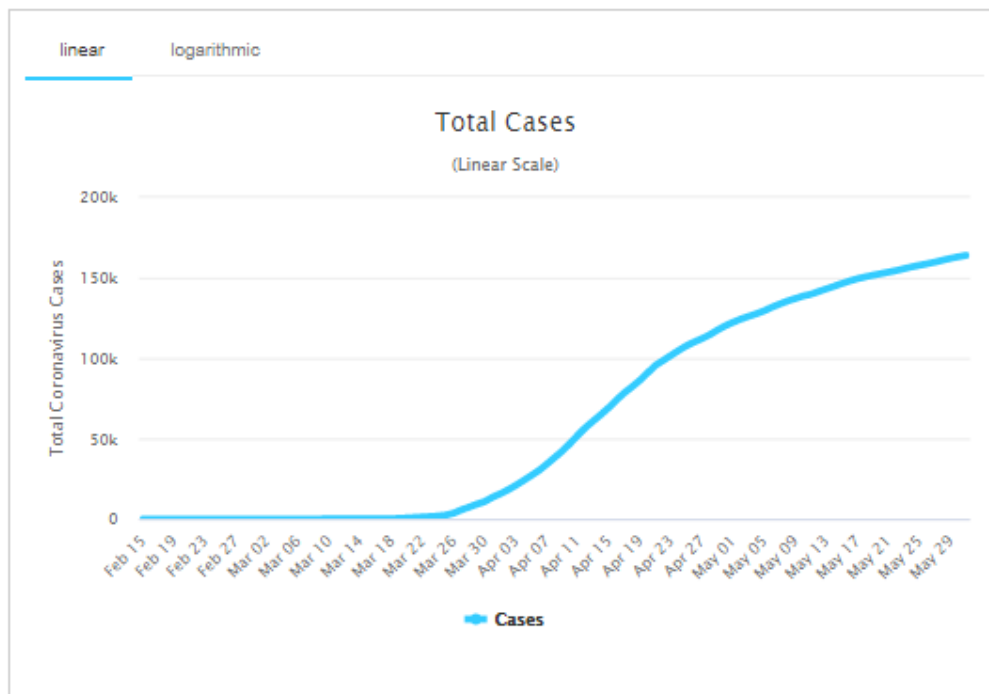
Literature review

Novel Coronavirus Pandemic in Turkey

Novel Coronavirus disease, commonly known as COVID-19 was firstly appeared in a marketplace where people can buy seafood and farm animals in Wuhan, China in December 2019. After 3 months, World Health Organization (WHO) accepted that COVID-19 was a novel coronavirus disease and it began to threaten the whole world. As all other countries, Turkey also has struggled with the consequences of COVID-19 since it was first seen on March 10, 2020. The outbreak of coronavirus has made authorities alarmed therefore, they have taken some important

and urgent precautions to prevent the unaccepted speed of the novel coronavirus disease spreading in advance. Demir, Günaydın and Demir (2020) claim that Turkey has started to overcome the consequences of COVID-19 by finding social and economic ways in the fields of wellbeing, schooling, religious, official, and armed forces. According to the Worldometers website, data of coronavirus in Turkey in June 1, 2020 show that there are 163.942 cases, 4540 deaths, and 127,973 recovered people as illustrated below, and Turkey is the 11th country among 215 countries struggling with COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 1. Coronavirus Cases in Turkey at Worldometers website, June, 2020.



Even though Ministry of Health in Turkey has suggested ‘a controlled social life’ by using ‘life fits home’ application and stressed the importance of keeping hand hygiene and wearing right masks, there are still people who catch the disease because they don’t discern the significance of the recommended precautions. The Turkish Minister of Health, Fahrettin Koca tried to lay emphasis on the importance of providing measures to fight against COVID-19, by stating that the COVID-19 plague has been a global challenge which makes the whole world vulnerable after

World War II, and he added: "The humanity has never faced a pandemic of this scale. Coronavirus is a global pandemic in a globalized world. The pandemic is forcing us to limit movement, isolate, have less contact and live in a controlled manner". Immediately, Ministry of Education has decided to continue the education via mass media such as TV channels broadcasting for primary, secondary, and high schools. In April, all meetings and crowded conventions have postponed, and lockdown started for people above 65 and below 20 for two months.

In addition, in March, 2020 Council of Higher Education in Turkey announced that all undergraduate and graduate students who attend their formal education programs such as in health, teaching, science and engineering departments will not continue the face to face education at universities, and they may go on with online learning and teaching. By the same token, these precautions and changes in work hours and places have impacted the academic activities of most academicians. For example, most of the conferences have postponed to unknown further dates or even cancelled. The overseas ban and the restriction in intercity travel have influenced most pre-determined seminars, congresses, and studies. Obviously, COVID-19 pandemic shows that such small viruses should never be underestimated in comparison to their results (Temel & Ertin, 2020). According to Liu, Liu, and Zhong (2020), COVID-19 has spread with an irrepressible speed and caused deaths and to prevent the disease in advance, any certain vaccine has not been found yet and as a result, people especially learners may be affected and get both mental and emotional problems. Henceforth, it may be assumed that the novel Coronavirus disease will affect academicians too both emotionally and psychologically with some apprehensions such as increase of stress, being unable to continue working and studying for academia, uncontrollable time management, and even feeling depressed.

English has been accepted as the principal language of academic community as it comprises a basis of overarching features of academic writing and international academic publication. In the field of English language teaching (ELT), academicians are required to study and publish in English which is not their first language. Therefore, Turkish academicians of ELT need to possess "an understanding of what is involved in second language writing (SLW) and they need coherent perspectives, principles, models- tools for thinking about second language writing in general and

ESL composition in particular, for analyzing and evaluating competing views” (Silva, 1990, p.11). As it is known, academic writing in second language is challenging for academics. For instance, ELT academics may have difficulties in paraphrasing, paragraph organizations, providing coherence and cohesion, making quotations, proofreading, editing, and making citations (Bhatia, 2004). The present study aims to investigate the effects of novel coronavirus pandemic on academic writing productivity performance among Turkish academics of ELT.

Academic Writing Productivity Performance

Academic productivity includes various sections as writing a journal paper, writing a chapter in a book, writing a book, becoming an editor of a book, writing for a conference, presenting in a conference, translating a book, writing reviews, attending educational seminars, etc. Of all these activities, the act of writing may be considered as the keystone of the academy, therefore its importance cannot be denied. Furthermore, it is obvious that academics need to concentrate on their writing to develop their current knowledge and statues in the field, because writing for academia is “the fulcrum on which many other aspects of scholarship depend” (Murray and Moore, 2006, p.ix).

Academic writing contains its distinctive principles, types, and word selection according to the branches that the academics are interested in researching, writing and publishing. In time, the academics get accustomed to gain knowledge of the requirements of writing in their individual topics, so; there are some general properties in academic writing for all academia. These properties may be considered as prevailing in most of the disciplines and they may let the academics improve themselves in terms of writing academically. According to Leeds University library, academic writing is considered as:

Planned and focused: answers the question and demonstrates an understanding of the subject.

Structured: is coherent, written in a logical order, and brings together related points and material.

Evidenced: demonstrates knowledge of the subject area, supports opinions and arguments with evidence, and is referenced accurately.

Formal in tone and style uses appropriate language and tenses, and is clear, concise, and balanced.

Additionally, the academics need to learn the basic outlines of the academic writing to foster their ideas during writing procedure, so they may be autonomous and create exclusive papers in the field thanks to the following expected sequences. For instance, literature review, writing operational definitions, interpretation of findings, arranging the paper, and writing discussion are necessary to figure the comprehensiveness and guarantee the concurrency between all parts of the writing (Özkara, Özelkan, Arıcı & Enginarlar, 2018). As a result of getting knowledge of how to write, academicians may relieve of the self-judgment as becoming apprentice in the field (Swales & Feak, 2012).

On the other hand, English has been pronounced as ‘lingua academia’ as an outcome of the globalizing world and nearly all international journals have started to publish in English (Bardi, 2015; MacLeod, Steckley & Murray, 2012). Hence, the academics have been influenced by the improvement of English in publications and they have begun to write their articles in English to become a prominent name in the field (Lillis & Curry, 2013). Also, a broader perspective about publishing has been adopted by Güney (2015) who suggests that most of the academicians have the feeling that they need to publish their writing to be accepted as an accomplished research whatever they study and investigate. Academics encounter some inextricable pressures to publish their works because of various reasons such as keeping their current statute at their institutions, stepping up from their position, or informing the audiences’ about what they investigate and contribute to shed light on their research area. In the same way, Casanave and Vandrick (2003, p.1) show that there might possibly be several motives for their desires to write and publish:

It is increasingly important, even critical, for those in language education to write for scholarly publication, and not only for the obvious purpose of securing or keeping an academic position. Researching and writing about teaching and related topics also allows educators to grow professionally and intellectually, to share their ideas with peers, and to become better teachers through the reflective and critical processes of writing for a public readership. Yet many language educators, particularly but not only newcomers, resist the challenge of preparing work for possible publication, feeling intimidated by an activity that seems fraught with obstacles.

All of the studies above support the hypothesis that academics are aware of the importance of writing and publishing and as a consequence, they may feel stressed during writing process because of some disincentive reasons such as time arrangement, motivated brain and current conditions (Murray & Moore, 2006). Regardless of this, to feel more productive, the academics are required to focus on the encouraging results of their existing status to improve their writing and distribute their data for their contemporaries and audiences. As an advantage of writing for publication, it is clear that the writers may not only improve their quality of writing, but also the readers may benefit from them and enhance their ideas related to the field. In conclusion, considering all of this evidence, it seems that academics get prospects to follow new trends and studies issued in their field, and they may send their articles to national or international journals to publish (Çapar, 2014); so, they may keep up with the results of new studies to be active in the field. For that reason, the effects of COVID-19 on academic writing productivity performance among Turkish academics of ELT need to be investigated to shed light on both the current state of academics in the academy and their affected futurity. To this end, the following research questions are asked to guide this study.

1. What are the effects of novel coronavirus pandemic on Turkish academics' academic writing productivity performance in ELT?
2. What have Turkish academics of ELT done to keep up with Researching, Organizing and Writing for publication related to their field in this period of time?

Methodology

Participants

“Sampling is central to the practice of qualitative methods” (Robinson, 2014, p.25); therefore, in the present study, the participants were chosen by using purposeful sampling and they were thirty-four academics who were working at Adıyaman University, Anadolu University, Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University, Hatay Mustafa Kemal University, and Osmangazi University in Turkey. 16 female and 18 male lecturers who worked at ELT department participated in the study. The age ranges of the participants varied between 31 and 52 years old. The participants had a minimum of three and a maximum of 22 years of teaching experience. Two of the participants

had a bachelor's degree, 17 of them got their M.A degree and 15 of them graduated from Ph.D. programs.

Table 1. Characteristics of participant academicians

Participants	Gender	Age	Teaching experience (years)
34	16 Female/ 18 Male	31-52	3-22

Instruments

The academicians were required to fill a questionnaire including demographic questions and two open ended questions to make them feel relaxed, evaluate and express their thoughts easily while answering the related research questions of the study. The participants were also required to answer each question without becoming stressed, but they need to consider their current feelings, the changes in their teaching situations because of pandemic, and studying and researching in their field. Coding was made separately by two of researchers, and the opinions of an expert in ELT were taken to ensure the reliability. Also, by using the Miles and Huberman (1994)'s formula ($\text{reliability} = \frac{\text{agreement}}{\text{agreement} + \text{disagreement}} \times 100$), the reliability co-efficient has been calculated as 0.88. According to this formula, if the results are more than 0.70, it is accepted reliable. Besides, verbatim quotations were involved to ensure the validity (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011).

Procedure

The researcher used qualitative research methods by using a questionnaire in the study, because qualitative research is “an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants and conducted in a natural setting” (Creswell, 1994, p. 2). Responses are investigated one by one and coded after classifying according to the common points. Thanks to the open-ended questions, the academicians get the opportunity to be able to elaborate their answers for each research question, and the researcher provided adequate time for the participants to think about their thoughts before writing them.

Data Analysis

The researcher utilized descriptive analysis to analyze the data collected from participants and the data were presented in tables, so the readers and authorities interested in the subject may easily comprehend and interpret the results of the study. Because using tables make the results more practical and facilely accessible. First of all, the responds are coded and then, arranged in the second phase and finally, the results were construed.

Results

1st Research Question: What are the effects of novel coronavirus pandemic on Turkish academics' academic writing productivity performance in ELT?

All of the participant academics articulated their respondents to the questions in English. 15 academics expressed that they encountered the negative effects of COVID-19 on their academic lives and they could not cope with the difficulties caused by COVID-19 on their own. 8 of them were female and 7 of them were male academics. Two of them had bachelor's degree, and eight of them graduated from M.A program and five of them were doctorate. Surprisingly, 19 academics claimed that there were positive effects of COVID-19 on academia and they were happy to find a lot of spare time at home to conduct research and especially write articles for publication. Nearly all of the academics who said that they turned the lockdown days into opportunity for studying are doctorate and have experienced in teaching more than at least 10 years in their department.

Table 2. Academics' responds to the 1st research question

Participants	The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Academic writing productivity performance
19 academics (8 Female - 11 Male)	Positive effects
15 academics (8 Female - 7 Male)	Negative effects

One of the participants (male, 46) who had difficulties during pandemic days tried to elucidate less or more why he had these feelings and considered it so, and he pointed out:

One might think that due to home office one has more time to do research but in fact getting used to the challenges to conduct online education, there was maybe less time available

than if it had been carried out in the classroom. There was an online platform provided by the university and we needed to deal with several problems because the program did not seem to be very suitable. Also, the whole situation was not motivating. There was some discomfort because nobody knew (and still knows) when and how the pandemic will end. All in all, I would say my research performance rather decreased than increased.

Similarly, as a response to the first research question, another academician (female, 40) uttered that she found these days challenging and stressful, and she attempted to support her words as follows:

As for academic life, nothing really changed as I already have been teaching fully online for the last two years. As for my face to face lessons, I have already been using LMS and the only thing I had to do was to transform the instructional design of my course from blended to fully online. The most challenging part was to maintain student engagement not because the students were unprepared but because they found it difficult to concentrate because of the psychological burden of the pandemic. I individually got in touch with all my students via LMS on a regular basis. As for research and academic writing productivity performance, it was difficult to spare time for it as I also had to deal with the distance education of my secondary school son on a daily basis which is a completely another job not mentioning the extra homework...

As another female academician (32) claimed that women in academia had more difficulties than men, and she rendered:

Unfortunately, it affects my academic life very badly. Every new day as a mother and a wife I have lots of things to do at home. I have no time to do research at home especially during quarantine days. I have heard that male colleagues continue to go to office and study. I have a son and he is not going to school because Ministry of Education (MEB) closed the schools to protect our children from the pandemic. So, he is at home and always wants to play with me. I miss my office and my papers waiting to be read and also, I miss to write articles.

By the same token, one of the participants (female, 32) expressed that she couldn't manage the time at home and she couldn't concentrate on her papers because she was distracted, so the Covid-19 pandemic prevents her from giving full attention to her research, therefore she answered the 1st research question as follows:

I couldn't collect the data for my Ph.D. thesis. According to my plan, I had to these three months by conducting interviews, observations etc. But at last, I found myself at home and doing nothing about my research. I am writing these lines in desperate thoughts because these lines may be the only thing, I have done academically in the past three months.

However, three of the participants (32m, 35m, 32f) answered this question similarly as the COVID-19 pandemic had positive effects on their research and academic writing productivity

performance because they had more time to study than they used to have before. One of them (male, 35) explained:

Facilitative effects: I turned the challenge into opportunities firstly caring my family, secondly covered some delayed tasks at my computer, and finally, working on research.

Another academician (male, 32) gave respondent to the same question as he said:

Actually, it affected positively because we have ample time to investigate and read.

2nd research question: What have Turkish academicians of ELT done to keep up with Researching, Organizing and Writing for publication related to their field in this period of time?

Six of the participants stated that they did not study any new projects in their field, and they postponed studying to the days when the pandemic news would end. Conversely, 14 of the participants claimed that they studied and read articles about their research field on the social isolation days more than pre-Wuhan days, and six participants described that they didn't understand how they spent hours so fast at home since they continued to improve their unfinished papers and even sent to the journals to publish some of them. Nine of the participants said that they continued to finish their theses and one of them said that she continued to referee at a journal. Finally, as seen in the Table 3., more than half of the academicians attended online conferences and webinars.

Table 3. Academicians' responds to the 2nd research question

Participants	Academic Activities
6 academicians (4 Female - 2 Male)	Do nothing
8 academicians (2 Female - 6 Male)	Write paper for publication
9 academicians (4 Female - 5 Male)	Study on thesis
1 academician (1 Female)	Continue to referee
14 academicians (8 Female - 16 Male)	Read literature/articles
18 academicians (8 Female - 10 Male)	Attend online conferences/webinars

Almost all of the participants have done something less or more to keep up with researching, organizing, and writing for publication related to their field during lockdown period. Some of them

said that they have not done anything academically and they had obstacles for studying at home such as lack of private study room, special reserved time or peace of mind. There are some quotations of the academicians' respondents to the second research question. One of the participants (male, 41) said that he tried to do research, but he didn't overcome his fears caused by pandemic, so he sustained:

I have enough time for my academic studies without any office work. But, on the other hand, I can't concentrate on academic studies because of the psychological situation while staying at home.

Similarly, another academician (female, 32) maintained that her current feelings made her incapable for studying and she explained her thoughts as follows:

To be honest, I haven't written anything, so I couldn't organize my ideas and publish any research paper. Moreover, I couldn't focus on reading new articles in my field. I couldn't find any time to do it, because my mind is very busy with thinking about pandemic and its consequences. I wonder when we will return our good old days.

In contrast, one academician (male, 46) presented his challenge during his research process as he tried to explain below:

I had two abstracts that were refereed, and according to one decision I was busy with modifying the paper. I tried to make use of the situation (in terms of research) by collecting students' products (audio files) and I also collected feedback from students about their learning during the Corona pandemic. I tried to organize a group with some students (kind of reflective learning) but the students were not very interested. A general problem is that whole situation is demotivating our students and so it is difficult to get data from them (even about their lack of motivation). The data that I collected- I don't know how to use it, but I hope I can find some interesting things in summer in the data and will see then how I can convert it into a piece of research.

Most of the academicians claimed that they prepared new articles for publishing, attended online courses and webinars, followed the databases, journals, and twitter regularly. They articulated that they were aware of how many people turned the pandemic into academic advantage by doing research and so they got encouraged about researching and writing articles by considering new trends especially related to their field. In the same vein, nine of the participants said that they had time to study or finish doctorate dissertation and master thesis and even some of them sent and presented their related papers in online conferences. Two of them claimed that they kept in touch

with their supervisors and colleagues via zoom meeting, phone calls or whatsapp to overcome the bad effects of pandemic on their research process.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study was conducted to determine the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on academic writing productivity performance and it reveals that the academicians have encountered both positive and negative effects of COVID-19 on their academic writing productivity performance. The results of the study make several contributions to the current literature. With respect to the 1st research question, it was found that 19 academicians stated that they turned the lockdown days into opportunity for studying at home office, because it may stem from that they are doctorate and have experienced in teaching more than at least 10 years in their field. It may be interpreted that the more experienced academicians are, the more they tend to study even if the circumstances are so difficult and overwhelming such as COVID-19 pandemic process. This finding is parallel with the data given in the study of Demir, Günaydın and Demir (2020) as they expressed in every fields of life, people have tried to overcome the difficulties and adapt to changes as results of the lockdown.

Another important result is that there are some parallelisms in the respondents of the 1st research question among some female participants. It may be caused that they are married, or they have kid/kids who need/s to be cared and this situation may be the reason why they couldn't do more research and be active in academia as they desire. They tended to base their current situation on the cause of family life by struggling with the pandemic at home and they are at the age of 30s and they may have younger children than their supervisors. Also, they continued to give lessons online at home; so, they may not finish their papers or research on time according to schedule program and they may postpone or even quit studying on their theses. This finding is consistent with the study of Başarır and Sarı (2015) as they found that female academicians felt conflicted because of their multitasking and responsibilities, and they had to compromise their family life and even sleeping habits. Therefore, to demonstrate their academic success, they need to have more extra time to spend on researching.

Moreover, social sciences have been influenced intensely by the pandemic (Liu, Liu, & Zhong, 2020); for instance, face-to-face interviews and classroom observations were not conducted because of the taken precautions to fight against COVID-19 pandemic. However, some academicians have continued to collect data via internet, whatsapp, and meeting online, and it shows that the willingness to study encourages the academicians to find new ways to study for academia. Also, most of the institutions have started to hold virtual conferences even though they couldn't organize face-to-face conferences during pandemic. This alternative solution may make the academicians feel a part of academia without moving away from studies as Güney (2015) claims that academicians tend to have the emotion that they are required to publish their writing to be accepted as an accomplished research whatever their subject is. On the other hand, the present study suggests that communication with colleagues and supervisors may help the academicians to cope with difficulties in writing and researching during hopeless days.

One unanticipated finding was the extent to which some of the academicians said that they didn't study, do research, and even read anything during the pandemic process. It may be caused they feel so stressed and have anxiety since they do not know how their future will be after pandemic. These results reflect those of Murray and Moore (2006) who also found that existing conditions affect the academicians' feelings and thoughts during writing since people naturally tend to be affected the challenging situations such as pandemic (Liu, Liu, & Zhong, 2020; Temel & Ertin, 2020; Yıldız, 2014). So, it may demonstrate that academia and academic activities may not turn back the days like pre-Wuhan world.

The results of the study may enhance the understanding of the changes among the academicians' reactions toward the challenging issues. The study presents some implications for lecturers, academicians, authorities and whoever interest in research and COVID-19 studies. Practically most academicians of the study try to find possible solutions on their own to overcome their fears and challenges during pandemic, so authorities and administrators at their institutions may provide more available time, clean and disinfected office and technical platform to study as much as they want.

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