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Improving undergraduate students' learning through Online Educational Guidance Meetings (OEGMs)

Begüm Ceylan and Bünyamin Bavlı*

Abstract: This study aimed at obtaining reflections on Online Educational Guidance Meetings (OEGMs), executed in the English preparatory program during COVID-19 Pandemic in a university in Istanbul. The OEGMs were voluntary meetings between a student and the instructor. Students were able to ask for suggestions to study more effectively via an online meeting platform. The qualitative collaborative action research design was operated in the study. One-on-one interviews with 8 instructors and focus group interviews with 12 students were conducted to obtain the data. Content analysis method was employed to analyze obtained data. The findings revealed that this new method, which brought the students together with their instructors in personal one-to-one meetings, provided numerous advantages psychologically and academically in the learning process.

Keywords: Higher education; educational guidance; online education; university student.

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I. Introduction

Schools aim at making students gain certain abilities, behaviors and attitudes through educational activities. In order to monitor learning outcomes, schools administer assessment techniques and call the results as academic achievement (Özkanal and Arıkan 2011, 68). As a result of assessment, it becomes possible to discriminate between higher achievers and lower achievers. Many reasons such as lack of planning, psychological factors, lack of motivation, overcrowded classes and lack of technology can play role in learning loss and in low achievement (Al-Zoubi and Younes 2015; Alrabai 2016, 21). Similarly, individuals' low academic self-efficacy, low self-motivation and regulation skills and their possible negative ideas about the school trigger the low achievement (McCoach and Siegel 2001). Furthermore, environment and conditions in which learning takes place, namely the classroom environment, competitive school culture and perfectionism are among the reasons behind underachievement (Siegle 2018, 286). On the way to the solution of the problem, it is critical to discover the reason first, however, it is impossible to apply a single way to clear up low achievement problems for each learner (Siegle 2018, 285-288). Each student has unique learning styles, learning preferences and personal backgrounds. Discovering these unique characteristics will provide educators the opportunity to design instructional process that can increase the learning effectiveness for each student (Chen et. al. 2014, 46). Academic advisory is one way to understand the student differences. In higher education, the faculty staff learns about the challenges that students face and start generating solutions for the challenges in front of student achievement through advisory meetings (Owens 2015, 18).

Instructors wising up to potential reasons are capable of ceasing or lessening their impact on student learning (Rimm 2008, 3). As to the physical conditions, it is better to meet students' basic needs if the idea is to achieve true learning (Rahal 2010). Instructors may get to know students better to identify their physical needs and create a better classroom environment. It is pointed out that in addition to providing skills to study more effectively, universities must take some preventive actions, such as offering strategies to teach undergraduate students how to study (Balduf 2009, 275). In this way, students learn to set clear goals, pace their learning and prioritize their tasks. It is highlighted that making students aware of their own learning is the key to increase achievement (Siegle 2018, 285-286). In a similar way, building discipline, responsibility and diligence among university students is crucial to improve the quality of learning process and outcome (Olowookere et al. 2015). It is evident that to improve students' learning affective problems behind underachievement should also be managed.

Online Educational Guidance Meeting (OEGM) is a kind of guidance for students to be able to overcome the challenges in learning environments regarding each factor in the curriculum (Jan and Mattoo 2018). OEGM is also characterized as a process of achieving objectives and identifying personal development phases at school (Subasinghe 2016, 11). Students must be able to use the process of acquiring knowledge effectively regarding what and how to learn, what kind of support to take and in which ways to make this knowledge permanent, and to actively manage their own learning by combining all these (Ağır 2017, 183). As a result, students' learning motivation can be boosted via OEGMs (Fejes 2008, 654).

Apart from these, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all stages of education. Online education initiated in the world during this period as a way of conducting education at schools or universities. The Higher Education Council (HEC), the authority responsible for higher education in Turkey, also proposed to maintain education online at universities. Starting from October 2020, Universities all around Turkey initiated online education for students. However, the lack of experience in online education led to adversity adapting to the new conditions and to the new roles that students had to take on (Moser et. al. 2021). With this new way of education, university students had some challenges regarding adaptation and digitalization. During the first phases of online education, students all over the world encountered some challenges, one of which was low digital literacy (Eraslan 2021, 359), which ended up with low achievement. Likewise, Turkish university students experienced university-related communication problems and psychological problems caused by physical isolation during the pandemic (Tüzün and Yörük Toraman 2021, 841). Furthermore, students in higher education endured anxiety and pessimism during the physical isolation period (Genç and Köker 2021, 199). It is also highlighted that COVID-19 related learning loss was inevitable among students in all stages of education (Moscoviz and Evans 2022; Donnelly and Patrinos 2021), which means students felt academically weak. Considering all these challenges underlined in the literature, Higher Education Institutions should provide more facilities regarding students' affective domains (Bozkurt 2020, 131). Recent study suggested that the guidance and psychological counseling units in higher education institutions should be more active to support students (Yolsal and Yorulmaz 2022, 469).

In addition to learning loss and the psychological challenges in the pandemic period, low student achievement in learning English as a foreign language is a common problem in Turkey. It is considered that genuine practices such as OEGM can contribute to the solution of the problem. The aim of this study is to reveal that OEGMs also continue at higher education

in order to foster student learning and make up for learning loss during online education. Considering that online education will be an inevitable part of higher education from now on, it is noteworthy to provide solutions to students' learning challenges and to support them academically. Therefore, this study is valuable in terms of suggesting a solution for the challenges experienced by the students and determined in the literature. Whereby OEGMs are of great importance, the purpose of this study is to uncover instructors' and students' reflections on improving student learning at English Preparatory Programs, which constitute the first year of universities.

II. Method

II.1. *Research design*

Qualitative collaborative action research design was employed in this study to discover both students' and instructors' reflections on OEGMs. Collaborative action research is a type of action research where different parties who act as co-researchers collaborate to understand a social process (Messiou 2019). The basic purpose of collaborative action research is to come up with an improvement in education together with different stakeholders (McNiff 2002). The instructors and the undergraduate students who experienced OEGMs as a process were included in the frame of this study collaboratively.

II.2. *Research content*

The study was conducted in an English Preparatory Program in a private university in Istanbul, Turkey. Since the medium of instruction at the university is English, it is obligatory for all students to prove their proficiency in English according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) before they start their undergraduate education at their faculties. At the beginning of the academic year, students take a placement test in which their proficiency level is determined. Students having B1 and above can take the English Proficiency Test to be exempted from the mandatory English Preparatory Program. Students proving their proficiency test can start their undergraduate education at their faculties but those below B1 level and who failed in the proficiency test are required to take English Preparatory Program. This program is one-year long with the modular system and aims at having students complete B2 level which is demanded during the undergraduate education. Students with B1 level can take the Proficiency test at the end of the academic year. Each module covers 8 weeks and students who complete a module successfully are eligible to take the upper level. In the 2020-2021

academic year fall term when this study was conducted, the university hosted 235 students in the English Preparatory Program offering fully online 24-hour English classes per week due to COVID19 pandemic.

II.3. *Research procedure*

OEGMs between the instructors and students were implemented for eight weeks. The meetings were based on voluntary participation and the instructors were asked to fill in a form about the student following the OEGMs. This form consists of demographic information about the student, strengths, areas for development and goals set for the student (Annex A).

After each completed module, online semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with the instructors and semi-structured online focus group interviews were conducted with the students following the OEGMs.

II.4. *Study group*

All the participants were selected via the purposeful sampling method, managed to identify the richest sources of information in a limited time (Patton 2002). In line with this, Criterion Sampling technique was operated to attain study participants. Criterion sampling technique is one of the most convenient techniques to reach the participants according to a criterion determined for a critical situation which is in line with the nature of the study (Creswell and Clark 2016). The criterion determined for the participants in this study was to have attended the OEGMs. The interviews were conducted with 12 students and 8 English Language instructors teaching at the same school. Students' ages ranged between 17 to 21 and all of them attended at least one OEGM with their instructors. Table 1 presented at the following summarizes the demographic information of the participant students.

Table 1
Demographic Information of Participant Students

Variable	Group	Number
Gender	Female	7
	Male	5
Age	17	3
	18	8
	21	1

Variable	Group	Number
Attending Educational Guidance Meetings	Only once	4
	Two times	6
	More than two times	2

5 female and 3 male instructors attended the semi-structured interviews. They are experienced in teaching English and 3 of them hold a master's degree in English Language Teaching. The demographic information of the instructors is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographic Information of Participant Instructors

Variable	Group	Number
Gender	Female	5
	Male	3
Age	26-28	2
	29-31	3
	>31	3
Experience in Teaching	4-6	3
	7-9	3
	>9	2
Holding Master's Degree	Yes	3
	No	5

As it is seen in Table 2, 5 female and 3 male instructors took part in the interviews. Two of the instructors are aged between 26 and 28; three of them are aged between 29 and 31. Also, there were 3 instructors whose age was above 31. The number of instructors whose experience in teaching is between 4 to 6 years is three. Similarly, other two instructors had 7 to 9 years of experience in teaching English. Only two instructors stated that they had more than 9 years of experience in teaching. Regarding the Master's degree in English Language Teaching, 3 instructors stated that they had master diplomas while the rest stated that they did not hold a Master's degree.

II.5. *Data collection*

The data of this study were collected in the fall term of the 2020-2021 academic year when the Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) was initiated due to the COVID19 pandemic. In this collaborative action research, data were collected from the instructors and the students via interviews and focus group interviews. At the end of the first module, OEGM records were examined, and it was noticed that 29 students and 11 instructors attended the OEGMs. Both students and instructors were sent an email informing them about the nature and the purpose of the study and asking for their consent to participate in the study. 12 students and 8 instructors accepted to take part in the interviews. Both the one-on-one interviews and the focus group interviews were carried out via an online meeting platform, called Zoom. The interviews with the instructors lasted approximately 160 minutes whereas the focus group interviews with the students lasted 90 minutes in total. The data collection process took about 3 weeks to be completed.

II.6. *Validity and reliability*

In order to increase the validity and reliability of a qualitative research, using various sources of data such as participants, other members and stakeholders is called data triangulation (Guion et.al. 2011, 3). The data in this study were gathered from not only the students who actively experienced the learning change but also the instructors who were active managers of the OEGMs. The validity of the research was also enhanced as one of the researchers is teaching in the same institution and therefore familiar with the context. However, other field experts were consulted during the data analysis process in order to prevent bias. By giving participants the chance to confirm or dispute the correctness of the data, member checking gives the qualitative study more credibility and helps the researcher assure the appropriate presentation of participant utterances (Creswell and Miller 2000). To provide member checking in this study, the transcriptions of the recordings were sent to the participants to obtain their approval on the interview data.

II.7. *Data analysis*

Content analysis method was executed to analyze obtained data from students and instructors. Content analysis allows the researcher to analyze the qualitative data under codes, categories, and themes based on the similar content. It is data sensitive analyze process and requires the researcher to review the data several times (Kyngäs 2020, 13-21). In line with this, the

interviews were transcribed firstly (see sample transcriptions in Annex B), and the analysis was carried out by two researchers at different stages. In the first stage, one of the researchers conducted the analysis. Then, another researcher reviewed the current analysis via auditing the codes and themes. In the final stage of the analysis, expert reviews were obtained from experts in educational sciences. Following the reviews, final codes and themes were emerged.

II.8. *Ethical issues*

The ethical approval was obtained from the Institution Ethics Committee (IEC) prior to the study. Following the IEC approval, researchers initiated the data collection process. Each participant was invited orally by giving comprehensive information about the study. Interviews were held with each voluntary participant at any time and place. Before each interview, consent forms were presented to the participants, and they were informed about their rights, the purpose and scope of the research. One-on-one interviews and the focus group interviews were all recorded after the participants were informed about the study. Participants' real names were avoided during the analysis. Instead, students were coded as S1, S2, S3 and pseudo-names were adopted for the instructors.

III. Results

This part represents two main themes and ten codes that emerged based on the data obtained from both students' focus group interviews and instructors' interviews.

III.1. *Theme one: Psychological effects*

The first theme emerging from the data is Psychological Effects. Both the instructors and the students underlined the psychologically positive effects of online educational guidance meetings. Psychological Effects theme covers the following codes: increasing motivation, developing self-awareness, developing self-confidence, reducing anxiety, feeling valuable and improving instructor-student relationship.

III.1.1. Increasing motivation

It was detected that the meetings increased the students' motivation towards the lesson and studying in COVID19 period. Student 1 (S1) stated the situation as follows: "That really increased my motivation actually. I wasn't in

a good mood to study, but I have started to study again". These meetings also changed the students' in-class performances by increasing their motivation. S2 said the following regarding this issue: "I told what I have difficulties in understanding. I was always quiet in the lesson. She supported me and told me that I could. I have started participating in activities more". The students whose motivation towards studying increased became more enthusiastic about the lesson and the tasks they planned to do to be more successful. S3 summarized this by the following statements: "I was really excited to keep my promise to my teacher and to do the things we planned together for each and every time".

III.1.2. Developing self-awareness

Students had a chance to learn more about themselves from someone's perspective and they evaluated their own performances, deciding on their weak and strong sides on their own. Some stated that they did not know much about themselves and their learning strengths. S5 shared her experience as follows: "I got information that is going to be useful for me and my learning. It was beneficial for me to know myself better. I have seen my pluses and minuses about learning". Students were given an opportunity to learn more about themselves and they were mostly happy with the result. S6 said the following on this topic: "I didn't know what I was good at or what I was bad at. I thought I was completely unsuccessful. That I have learned about myself is something good".

It was also explored in the interviews with instructors that following the online educational guidance meetings, students gained an insight into their own learning process. They could criticize themselves and recognize their weak and strong sides about learning a foreign language. One of the female instructors, Zeynep, stated that students noticed the best practices for them and tried out them after the meetings. She stated this as follows:

> To be able to see their weak sides, to notice the wrong method or applications that they have adopted so far and to improve studying strategies that are more suitable and necessary for them…. These are the things that educational guidance meetings provided them with.

III.1.3. Developing self-confidence

Self-confidence is another code of the psychological effects. Some students stated that they felt better in terms of what they can do next, and their self-confidence increased after those meetings. S6 stated the following: "I don't know what to say but I became more self-confident about the lesson.

I didn't use to participate in the lesson but then the more I spoke up, the more I wanted to do". Students could realize the changes in themselves, and this made them feel confident about their progress. S8 is one of those who noticed the positive change and stated this change as follows: "I think I definitely improved my grammar and vocabulary. I was nothing at the beginning. I followed everything my teacher told me and a program on my own. In the end, I have seen that I can actually manage this". Instructors also stated that some students were not confident enough to do something on their own and that they felt scared and lonely in the learning process. One of the male instructors, Burak, stated the followings:

> It was just like teaching them how to study on their own. They could easily define the areas they wanted to improve. While saying this, they were a bit desperate too but at the end they understood that they weren't actually alone. We were there to help them in this way. I recommended some websites and books for them. They recognized that they could do.

III.1.4. Reducing anxiety

After the educational meetings, most of the students felt more comfortable as they had a chance to express themselves and there was an instructor listening to them and coming up with suggestions. Feeling relaxed mostly depends on being able to share and express problems regarding learning. And the fact that nobody judged them during those meetings helped them feel better. In this regard, S7 mentioned how he felt during and after the meetings as follows: "I felt more relaxed, and it was good that I could tell someone about my problems". S10 expressed that it was the teacher who made her relaxed during the meetings by saying "At first, I was nervous but my teacher's positive attitude towards me made me feel relaxed, even his voice did this". S11 is one of those who were nervous at the beginning but changed her mind afterwards during the meeting and stated her experience in the following lines: "I got worried, couldn't know what to tell but then the teacher asked me a few questions and we had a chat about my exam results. It was like chatting with a friend. Then I relaxed". Feeling relaxed was followed by 'trust' in some statements. Students associated feeling relaxed with the trust they had in their instructors.

III.1.5. Feeling valuable

As a result of the analyses, it was discovered that those meetings helped the students to feel valuable, which ended up in more participation in lessons. S7

mentioned something he noticed during the meetings and stated the following: "I have noticed the interest in me. The teacher was interested in me. I could tell my problems and she listened to me". Having those guidance meetings one-on-one is another reason why students felt special. They found a space for them to speak up and mention their problems, private issues as they were alone with the teacher. In this context, S9 stated the following: "I felt extremely special. Why? Because it was only me in the meeting. I was alone to speak".

III.1.6. Improving instructor-student relationship

Improving relationship between instructors and students is another code that emerged as a result of the analysis. Instructors mostly highlighted that COVID-19 period decreased the relationship with the students. Educational guidance meetings contributed to eliminate this challenge. Ece, one of the female instructors holding MA in ELT and has been teaching English for over 7 years, stated the followings:

> ….because we don't have any one-on-one communication with students outside of the lesson. Normally we used to socialize with them in the corridors and break times in face-to-face teaching. Now, we can't be that sincere since it is online. You know your students and their private issues and so do they. In other words, you are able to communicate with the students.

The instructors also agreed that educational guidance meetings offered a chance to have a connection between instructors and students during online teaching. If students have a relationship with their instructor, they can feel more comfortable, and the instructor can help them in a better way. Emel, one of the female instructors teaching English for 6 years, stated this as follows:

> I think this lockdown process has affected students as much as everybody psychologically. What I have understood through my meetings (educational guidance), students want to have a special relationship with their instructors, and I guess this need is met with guidance meetings. I have observed that students could express the topics that they normally hesitate to share when with other students, their fears and problems. Therefore, I am for the idea that educational guidance meetings have been beneficial for both students and instructors in this extraordinary process.

Osman, one of the male instructors with 5 years professional experience, also stated the fact that educational guidance meetings helped him get to know his students better especially newcomers to the class in the following modules.

> The communication between students and instructors has been stronger. For instance, I can tell this. As you know, some new students joined my classes. I thought I should invite them to those meetings first to communicate with them, to get to know them and to have a warm relationship with them. If we were in the real class (physical learning environment), we would do this differently, but we managed this perfectly with educational guidance in online education since we are all at home.

III.2. *Theme two: academic effects*

The second theme emerging from the data is Academic Effects. Both the instructors and the students mentioned the positive effects of online educational guidance meetings on the academic issues related to teaching and learning. Theme two covers the following codes: Providing academic support, providing online education orientation, learning how to improve language skills, and exploring learner needs and characteristics.

III.2.1. Providing academic support

Educational guidance was interpreted as an academic support by the instructors. Accordingly, educational guidance was an opportunity for students to overcome the challenges encountered through online education, to learn how to learn on their own and to have a close relationship with their instructors. Guiding students, supporting students, and creating a road map for students are the subcategories of this theme. Within this context, Zeynep, one of the female instructors with 5-year-experience, stated the followings:

> These meetings are meetings that we as instructors had with our students in order for them to have a successful academic year in prep school and to eliminate the possible problems that they may face during this process.

Some instructors stated that educational guidance was the academic support given in terms of keeping a developmental track of students and becoming aware of the students' deficiency in learning. Emel, one of the female instructors who is 31 years old and has been an instructor for 6 years stated her opinions as follows:

> Educational guidance means providing academic support for students where teachers can follow their students' skills in the learning process and where psychological barriers to learning are easily noticed and solved. This guidance strengthens the relationship between the teacher and the students, and it is beneficial for both sides.

Educational guidance was also defined as a support provided by the instructors to be able to find out students' weak and strong sides and to decide on the goals to be achieved together with the students. These goals are to help them improve their learning. One of the male instructors, 28-year-old Osman with 5-year experience and holding MA in ELT stated his opinion as follows:

> It is, I mean, educational guidance means to draw a road map for students for their learning by focusing on their weak and strong sides regarding learning. It is also to support them by setting up goals together that they are able to achieve.

Similarly, students who attended the meetings received academic recommendations or suggestions from their instructors to improve their learning. Almost every student stated that they learned alternative ways to improve themselves, received worksheets, learned new websites and mobile applications to study on their own academically. S12 and S5 are two of those students who stated that they have taken necessary academic advice from their teachers and said: "I have learned websites which I can make use of, and I got ideas regarding how to study alone." (S5) and "I asked my teacher about what I could do about English, and he suggested a few ways for that. Like mobile applications and books" (S12).

Finally, it was observed that the students left the meetings with the feeling that everything was clearer in their minds since they had a chance to speak about the problems and learned what to do based on their instructors' advice. S2 summarized this as follows: "When I left the meeting, I knew better what to do and how to study. I learned these. I noticed the things I did wrongly actually. I started to study for the exams more to the point". S11 is also one of the students who expressed that everything was clearer after the meetings and stated: "The things that I should do got clearer. I felt better. I learned how to study. We handled many problems that confused me for so long".

III.2.2. Providing online education orientation

Another code emerged regarding educational guidance is about the challenges in online education. Since this was an extreme situation and all education was maintained online, students had some challenges regarding online education, how it worked and what it included for preparatory schools. When the schools were closed for the first time in spring term in 2020, those students were getting prepared for the university entrance exam, and they could not exactly focus on online education since they all concentrated on the exam. However, having the first experience in providing online education,

especially private universities developed their systems in online education to provide a more effective teaching and learning environment. As a result, when students started the preparatory program, they were a bit confused about what to do. One of the male instructors, Burak holding MA in ELT and 8-year experience of teaching, stated the followings:

> …students didn't have online lessons as we do now. They could ask us when they had a problem. Secondly, they were sure of what to do for the exam last year since they had the book, and they knew what to study. However, they started preparatory program and they had to follow the classroom activities on the internet, do activities on the online platforms, follow their regular main course books, and maintain their online projects. They were all lost about what to do. They could ask their questions in their minds via educational guidance meetings.

One of the female instructors, 34-year-old Miray with 9-years teaching experience, expressed the benefits of educational guidance in terms of informing students about the program to help them adapt the system better.

> Especially for the first module. You know, they have no idea about the school or the system. They are scared and hesitate to ask others in class since they do not know anybody yet. But we were there. They could ask us about what they couldn't understand about the system in the school.

One of the female instructors, Zehra, who has been an instructor for 12 years, is among the instructors who think educational guidance meetings play a role in informing students about the online education that is maintained in the school. She stated the fact that students, especially the newcomers, had difficulties in adapting to the learning environment. She expressed this as follows:

> These students had orientation programs at the beginning of the term, but they all forget, they do not attend, or I mean they are young, and they do not care. But when they realize that the system is complicated, then they understand and want to ask us. There are also those who join the classes late. They have no idea regarding the system. In those meetings I helped them understand what they are supposed to do.

One of the basic benefits of OEGMs was stated by the students to be the support they received from their instructors especially on the difficulties they experienced in online education. Because of COVID19 period, students have been through a difficult period in which they encountered online education for the first time as part of their university and it was not definitely like they had imagined before. The English preparatory program was different from the systems they had been familiar with before, which

ended up having some problems in online education. S8 mentioned the problems he faced through online education and stated the following: "I could tell my teacher about the problems I experienced in online education and asked for her advice. She suggested some ways; these were all practical for me". S1 is also one of those students who had difficulties in online education and received help via guidance meetings. S1 said: "Online education is really hard. Especially at the beginning it was harder. And I started school a bit late, so I asked about everything. That made it easier to follow the tasks".

III.2.3. Learning how to improve language skills

The instructors mostly mentioned that students lacked in studying techniques for learning a foreign language and OEGMs helped the students with this. Since they did not focus on foreign language classes at high school, they did not know how to study a foreign language which ends in being lost and failure. Studying techniques and language awareness are the subcategories of this theme. One of the female instructors Miray stated her experience regarding this topic as follows:

> For the language…I asked them to tell me where they have problems with and most of them told me that they did not know how to improve their listening and reading skills. I presented some ways to follow and helped them make a study program for themselves.

Similarly, one of the male instructors 32-year-old Niyazi with 10-years of teaching experience stated the followings:

> They have a bad studying habit. They always memorized grammar and vocabulary so far. But it is different here. We are teaching them language skills. And they don't know how to study these 4 skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. They don't know what to do or how to improve themselves. Acquiring skills is something different from grammar or new vocabulary.

III.2.4. Exploring learner needs and characteristics

Exploring learner needs and characteristics include individual needs and differences, lesson plans and classroom management. As a result of those meetings, there were some changes during active teaching in the class as stated by the instructors. Adapting the lesson plan, accordingly, arranging activities and paying attention to students' needs are amongst the changes observed. An instructor who is more aware of students' special needs can

change the way he or she teaches and approach those in accordance with their needs. In some cases, the instructors stated that they could not know students well before the meetings. They had a negative impression about them regarding the lesson. When the instructors noticed the reasons why they behave so in the class, they can act immediately. one of the male instructors Niyazi shared his experience on this topic as follows:

> I have noticed their individual needs; they can tell more comfortably. Secondly, for example, I have noticed that I couldn't know students in the lessons. I mean one of them really studies and tries to do something, but I evaluate that student wrongly because he or she doesn't speak even a word in the lesson. However, with those meetings, I can now get what the students understand or not, so I reteach the topics that I am sure they haven't understood.

According to some instructors, educational guidance meetings have made the teaching process clearer on both sides. Students know what to do and instructors know what is behind the problems, which means a teaching process with more awareness. One of the female instructors Zeynep told her feelings in the following lines:

> Knowing students' weak and strong sides and noticing the questions and problems that they would hesitate to share in class provided me with the opportunity to have a more sincere relationship with the students. At the same time, I have always considered their needs while planning my lessons, which made it possible to have a teaching atmosphere with more awareness.

Knowing students in person lets the instructors be able to understand other students in their classes who have not attended those guidance meetings. In this way, they could develop a more general idea about the students who may have the same problems with their peers, which in a way helped the instructors maintain their classes better. One of the female instructors Ece expressed her thoughts in the following:

> …that's to say, I have cared about knowing students one by one this term. I also tried to create my lesson plan in accordance with the students' demands. Since I know where the students who attended the meetings are weak, this has offered me some generalizable knowledge for the students in that profile. For that reason, I can say that it affected my lesson plans.

IV. Discussion and conclusion

This study aimed at discovering instructors' and students' reflections on OEGMs and improving student learning at English Preparatory Programs.

Instructors in charge of guidance should know non-academic issues have an inadvertent impact on students' academic success (Dey 2020, 99). The findings revealed that the online educational guidance meetings provided the instructors with opportunities to communicate better and more closely with their students and to know their individual needs and demands in a more detailed way during online education. Having more information related to their students, the instructors stated that they made some positive changes in their teaching considering the students' individual needs and characteristics. Similarly, it was revealed in a study that instructors of English adopted some strategies for motivating students and increasing the interaction between instructors and students to compensate for the drawbacks of online education (Shorna and Suchona 2021, 51-52). Educational guidance forms an environment where the responsibility is shared, and students become more autonomous at the end (Owens 2015). According to the instructors, the students benefited from the educational guidance meetings in terms of learning how to study and becoming aware of their learning processes. It was mainly stated that it had always been difficult for students to follow their own learning process and to decide on how to study but it was even more difficult in COVID19 pandemic when students were away from the school environment and their instructors.

Students can acquire the academic motivation and the self-confidence that they need to hold on until they graduate with the help of high-quality interactions via educational guidance (Owens 2015, 24). The findings revealed that the students mostly considered those meetings as a place where they could tell their problems freely and get advice on their weak sides. Based on their statements, it is possible to say that the students benefited from the meetings in terms of psychological issues. They stated that their motivation for the lessons increased, they became more self-confident, and they felt valuable as the instructors were interested in their personal problems and issues. They felt comfortable as they liked their instructor and trusted them. Educational guidance was found to be effective in making students realize their full potential and achieve their goals (Dey 2020). Likewise, the students in this study were also glad to learn more about their weak and strong sides during those meetings. In addition, those meetings with the instructors provided the students with a chance to get academic recommendations to improve their English and study skills. Most stated that they had not known how to study a foreign language and had problems and hesitations especially in COVID19 period. This provided further evidence that educational guidance has also a role of promoting student involvement in university life (Almedina et. al. 2016, 29).

Upon exploring the situation from multiple perspectives, it can be seen that educational guidance meetings are beneficial not only academically but also affectively. Affective domain in Bloom's taxonomy is defined as the domain that includes attitudes, beliefs, and values and that shapes human behavior. Therefore, it is possible to say that if individuals adopt a value, a belief, or an attitude, they behave accordingly (Gömleksiz and Kan 2012, 1175). If students, especially the lower achievers, develop a positive attitude towards learning through educational guidance meetings, they will be more motivated for learning.

Although it has been a long time since the first COVID19 period, contemporary considerations of solutions still cover many aspects of higher education such as student performance during digital learning and support services (Greere 2021, 203). The students who attended the meetings within the research felt more comfortable and clearer, knew themselves better and felt more valuable, all of which affected their learning processes. Hence, it can be said that educational guidance meetings are a good opportunity to support students in their learning journey in addition to helping the instructors learn more about their students even when they are physically away from their students in cases like COVID19 pandemic.

V. Recommendations

As a result of the study, educational guidance meetings are recommended to be included in the English programs at university level as it is found to be beneficial for both the students and the instructors. It is also clear that online education will be a part of our educational activities from now on and it is significant to monitor and support students with this. It is also recommended that educational guidance meetings can be effective in boosting learning in face-to-face education not only for language education but also for other disciplines.

As the current study was conducted at a private university with 8 instructors and 12 students, future studies may be carried out at a state university with a larger study group to be able to see the differentiation and to generalize the findings to all students.

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Annexes

A) *Online Educational Guidance Meeting Form*

EDUCATIONAL GUIDANCE FORM (This form should be filled with the student during the meeting.)	
Student Number:	
Name- Surname:	
Module- Class- Level:	
Department:	
Strengths:	
Areas for Development:	
Goal Setting & Advice: (The goals should be set together with the student)	
Name of the Instructor:	
Date and Time of the Meeting:	

B) *Sample Transcription from the interviews*

<u>**Interview Transcription for Instructors**</u>
Instructor pseudo-name: Burak
Year of experience: 8 years

Education: MA in ELT
Date & Time: 20.11. 2020 / 19:00-19:30

1. How do you define educational guidance?

Immm, for me, educational guidance is helping students. Supporting them in the areas where they need. This can be about lessons, school, their weak sides and also their motivation. This is guidance in terms of everything especially during online education…

2. Do you think guidance meetings are beneficial for your students at COVID-19 period? Why? Please explain.

Sure. It is beneficial for students. I told you before. This emergency online education has made the students confused. Actually, they started online education in the spring term but since they were in high school last year and getting ready for the national university entrance exam, they did not pay extreme attention to the online courses. Some did not even experience online lessons because they continued to study for the exam. Some attended the online lessons, but it was not a case for them to continue. You know our country's exam system. But, this year is totally different. Now that they have started their university education and they need to follow our English Program before they start taking lessons in their departments, they have to pay special attention for our courses, do assignments and projects online, and follow the online lessons etc. This is the time when they need guidance most. Ha, okay…. Also it was good for their mental health. They are all alone at home. Some days even it is forbidden to go out just for the supermarket. This was an opportunity for them to talk to someone about something rather than teaching and learning. What I mean, sometimes we had just chatting too.

3. What areas does educational guidance help your students in? How? Please explain.

As I told before, this online education is new to the majority of students. So, first of all the guidance meetings served as a way of introduction of the system and the school. Students didn't have online lessons as we do now. They could ask us when they had a problem. Secondly, they were sure of what to do for the exam last year since they had the book, and they knew what to study. However, they started preparatory program and they had to follow the classroom activities on the internet, do activities on the online platforms, follow their regular main course books, and maintain their online projects. They were all lost about what to do. They could ask their questions

in their minds via educational guidance meetings. Also, students do not understand or see their week sides in language learning. They were unaware of the parts where they had problems. I saw students who claimed they were good at writing but actually could not produce accurate sentences in line with their levels. With educational guidance meetings, we were able to make them aware of this. They noticed that they should do something for these areas to improve themselves. Sometimes we need to be clear about the problems students have and tell them those problems just to make them aware of the situation. They have wrong implications of themselves. Yeah, this is it. That's why guidance meetings were good for students.

4. What areas does educational guidance help you teach in? How? Please explain.

My teaching… yes. It helped me to change my style according to my students' weak areas. If I had not known those, I would have continued with my own way ignoring their weaknesses, emotions or problems. These weaknesses do not have be academic all the time. This is isolation period. This is the first time we are experiencing something, pandemic…We are older than them and we can manage maybe but they are just 18 years old. They want to socialize, they have just passed an important exam to enter the university. You know they spend their years to study for this exam. And what is the conclusion? They are at home. They feel alone. They have some mental problems blah blah blah... Knowing these helped me direct my teaching accordingly. I integrated more group work to make them socialize more with each other. Also, this educational guidance meeting was just like teaching them how to study on their own. They could easily define the areas they wanted to improve. While saying this, they were a bit desperate too but at the end they understood that they weren't actually alone. We were there to help them in this way. I recommended some websites and books for them. They recognized that they could do. Otherwise, they were totally lost. This is the case we experienced. I think this is enough for this question.

Interview Transcription for Students
Focus Group Number: 1
Number of Students in Group: 6 students (S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6)
Date & Time: 18.11.2020 17:00-17:37

1. How did guidance meetings influence you?

S1: Teacher, I think it influenced me in a positive way. I attended the meetings with my teacher, and I was, ımmm, how can I say, I was weak in

English. There are some topics I have problems in. In the meeting I shared my ideas with my teacher and that really increased my motivation actually. I wasn't in a good mood to study, but I have started to study again.

S5: Yes, teacher, the same is for me, too. I got information that is going to be useful for me and my learning. It was beneficial for me to know myself better. I have seen my pluses and minuses about learning.

Silence.

Researcher: E.g. Influence on your attitude, motivation, achievement? etc.

S5: Teacher, I have learned websites which I can make use of, and I got ideas regarding how to study alone.

S2: For me, good influence. I told what I have difficulties in understanding. I was always quiet in the lesson. She (the instructor) supported me and told me that I could. I have started participating in activities more.

S1: Also, online education is really hard. Especially at the beginning it was harder. And I started school a bit late, so I asked about everything. That made it easier to follow the tasks at sch….

S3: Teacher! I promised to study more in the meetings. I was really excited to keep my promise to my teacher and to do the things we planned together for each and every time.

S6: It was good for me.

Researcher: Dear S6, can you elaborate on it?

S6: Hmmm, I didn't know what I was good at or what I was bad at. I thought I was completely unsuccessful. That I have learned about myself is something good. Good sides as well.

Researcher: Thank you! Is there anybody who wants to add another thing?

Silence.

2. What kind of experiences did you have after the guidance meetings? Do you think there is a difference before and after? Why? Please explain.

S2: Teacher there are a lot of differences before and after. When I left the meeting, I knew better what to do and how to study. I learned these. I noticed the things I did wrongly actually. I started to study for the exams more to the point. Namely…

S5: For example, me. I have learned websites which I can make use of, and I got ideas regarding how to study alone. I used those websites later, after the meeting.

S4: There is a difference, yes.

Researcher: What kind of difference?

S4: I agree with my friend. I learned websites where I can improve my English from my teacher.

S6: Can I speak teacher?

Researcher: Sure, please go ahead.

S6: I don't know what to say but I became more self-confident about the lesson. I didn't use to participate in the lesson but then the more I spoke up, the more I wanted to do. After the meeting, I participated in the activities more.

S2: I have one more opinion I want to share about the meeting. I told what I have difficulties in understanding. I was always quiet in the lesson. My teacher supported me and told me that I could. I have started participating in activities more.

S5: Well, teacher I want to say something. I asked my teacher about what I could do about English in the meetings, and he suggested a few ways for that. Like mobile applications and books. After that, I used those to study. I changed my way of studying.

S1: Teacher, I changed my way too. I learned how to use Cambridge dictionary online and form my own vocabulary list there. After the meeting, it was easy for me to study for vocabulary.

Researcher: Thanks a lot. Do you want to add anything else?

S2: No teacher.

3. If you want to relate guidance meetings and COVID-19 process, what do you want to say? Please explain.

S6: Can I start?

Researcher: Sure, please.

S6: Covid period is very difficult for me. My family have to work. They are not at home in spite of the regulations. I do not have sisters or brothers. I see nobody these days. But the meetings…In the meetings I talked to the teacher. The teacher listened to me, my problems and my sentences. It was a long time….I feel better to be listened.

Researcher: So, how do you feel?

S6: I feel valuable, teacher. Covid made us lonely people.

S4: I have a similar idea, teacher. I think it was good because it was only me in the meeting. Normally I cannot speak in the lesson but in the meeting. There is the teacher. Ready to listen to me. She cares my ideas.

S1: Teacher, Covid period is a time that is worrying for all of us. We see many sick people. In our families too. Some people die. Thanks to these meetings, I became less worried. I talked to my teacher. She understood me. Her existence was enough.

S3: The meetings helped me understand online education.

Researcher: Oh, how? How did it help you?

S3: Teacher, we just started the online education very quickly. This is university. This is our first time. I did not do any online writing assignment before. I do not know how to use Google Classroom. Even websites. I do not know which website to click. But in the meetings, I got opportunity to ask my questions to the teacher.

S1: I thought we were all alone in the process and I did not believe in myself because of the covid pressure. But then, the meetings were enjoyable.

Researcher: Okay, thank you everybody.