

A RESEARCH ON DISTANCE EDUCATION AND ALIENATION IN ACADEMIC STAFF DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, countries have had to review their education policies and make adjustments accordingly. In this regard, distance education has been adopted in universities in Turkiye, and each university has created its own distance education strategy. Distance education, once only a complementary to education, replaced traditional education when the pandemic turned out to be unlikely to end in the short run. Although some universities are experienced in distance education, this sudden pandemic has caused disruptions (digital inequality, technological infrastructure problems, etc.) and unprecedented situations catching most universities off-guard. One of these is the emergence or the change of alienation seen in academic staff due to distance education. The aim of the study is to identify the work alienation of academics during the Covid-19 pandemic and reveal the underlying reasons, with the help of semi-structured interview technique within the framework of the phenomenological approach, one of the qualitative research methods. For this purpose, interviews through the Google Meet application were held with 12 academics. Content analysis was applied to the data obtained from these interviews. As a result, it was found that the interviewed academics were adversely affected by the distance education method and they were not competent enough to use it. It was also revealed that they were unable to identify their demands regarding their economical and technical needs yet at the same time they were not satisfied with the support provided by their institutions.

Keywords: Academics, alienation, distance education, COVID-19 pandemic, job satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

Earthquakes, disruption of natural balance due to global warming, nuclear threats, pandemics, etc. have made us reconsider Ulrich Beck's concept of risk society. As Beck stated, risk society is the society "that cannot be insured". Considering the unpredictability of the future, fear, uncertainty and insecurity with the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, the idea that we live in a risk society is even more ingrained. According to the case table of the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) dated 04.09.2021, the total number of cases in the world is 218.946.836 people and the total death toll is 4.539.723 people.

Challenges like emergent mutations of the virus, the slow pace of vaccination in some countries and the difficulty to predict the end of the pandemic have led countries to impose regional or nationwide lockdowns and therefore their citizens to continue working remotely. These lockdowns have led to significant changes in all areas of life. Daily life, shopping, tourism, travel, education etc. were either totally or partially interrupted. Especially in big cities, the situation of isolated individuals have become dire due to extremely limited natural

habitats. These people spend their days by using various learning applications, participating in certificate programs, watching movies on digital platforms and working remotely. While social media applications had already directed individuals to smart phones and social isolation, this has been worsened with lockdowns and the pandemic. While parents have continued working from home, children have started to attend online classes. The separation between home and work place, which dates back to the industrial revolution in the 19th century, has reverted in the 21st century. School, meanwhile, continues as a virtual institution.

Labor, work and production have been redefined over the centuries from Industry 1.0 to Industry 5.0 and the concept of alienation has changed altogether. Steam and machinery, electricity and assembly line, digitalization, artificial intelligence, and finally, the Internet of things, where the entire production process is done by robots and people have assumed the role of audience. This change also shows that labor has gradually changed hands or digitized. The number of blue-collar employees is gradually decreasing while white-collar employees manage the process by working remotely. Working days and leisure time are intertwined and the boundaries between work and private life are blurred in a society interconnected through smart phones. While remote working had already begun in some sectors, it has become widespread with the pandemic.

Along with the pandemic, educational institutions, particularly universities, have also transitioned to distance education and each university has adopted a distance education system based on its own experiences. In distance education, there is a transfer of content data, images, video, audio, messages and recordings through devices such as laptops, smart phones and tablets. In spite of its advantages like offering a flexible education medium without limitations of time and place enabling students to watch recorded lessons whenever they want, distance education is disadvantageous in other aspects. For instance, academics are unable to determine students' comprehension through nonverbal clues and they have less social relations and also less classroom interaction compared to face-to-face education. Furthermore, academics are merely the provider of information without the ability to use their body language while students are passive recipients seeing their teachers only as a portrait on a screen. These are some of the most important factors underlying the work alienation in academics. Besides, academics are alienated from teamwork, colleagues and even the institutions they work for.

Alienation is a concept that has been very popular in the literature for a long time being the subject of research among academics. Many researchers contributed to the literature with their articles such as Sadi Yilmaz & Pinar Sarpkaya (2009), "Alienation and Its Management in Educational Organizations", Benan Yucebalkan & Nilay Karasakal (2016), "A Study on the Relationship Between Emotional Labor and Burnout Level in Academicians: The Case of Kocaeli University", Ulfiye Celikkalp et al. (2018), "Academicians' Job Satisfaction and Affecting Factors", Sevgi Yildiz & Devrim Alici (2018) "Development of the Alienation Scale to Academician: A Validity and Reliability Study". In this study, however, distance education and resulting alienation in academics during the Covid-19 pandemic were investigated in addition to alienation and academic profession in a broader sense.

In the study, work alienation of academics teaching in distance education due to the Covid-19 pandemic was investigated based on Melvin Seeman's theory of alienation. The study consists of three parts: the concept of alienation and the work alienation in academics due to the Covid-19 pandemic in the first part, the concept of distance education in the second and finally the related research and findings.

THE CONCEPT OF ALIENATION

Alienation is a long discussed concept by sociologists, psychologists and philosophers. The term is derived from the word alienare, which means "to alienate". Previously, it was used to explain the transfer of one's property to another. Today, it still corresponds to the concept of alienable in law (Miller et al., 1995). There are three different concepts that correspond to the word alienation in Marx: Entausserung, Verausserung, Entfremdung. It is the third one that corresponds to the word "alienation" in French and it means alienation from oneself (Aron, 1989).

What does alienation disclose? Is alienation inevitable? Can it be completely eliminated? What is it like not to be alienated in a society with no alienation? The answers to these and similar questions have been thoroughly questioned by theologians, psychologists, existentialists and sociologists (Miller et al., 1995).

Rousseau was the first to write about the concept of alienation. In his book called *Social Contract*, he mentions that if the individual cannot freely determine his behavior due to social pressure, he begins to become alienated (Halacoglu, 2008). It is understood that Marx was influenced by Rousseau's statements while forming his own theory. According to Hegel, alienation has existed since the beginning of humanity because people have been gradually moving away from the world they created, leading to alienation (Tekin, 2012). According to Marx, however, if the society based on class and the division of labor disappears, there will be no alienation. Hilav (1993) states that primitive communities, where there is no division of property and labor, are the only ones where alienation does not exist (cited in Demir, 2018). According to these two comparisons, while Hegel refers to self-alienation, Marx mentions the alienation of worker from product and production process in the capitalist system. Alienation has also been discussed in literature and art. For example, Kafka effectively describes the self-alienation mentioned by Hegel in his novel, *The Metamorphosis*. The 1936 film, *Modern Times*, reflects how the worker is alienated from himself, his product and production process in the capitalist order that Marx tried to explain with the character of Charlot, who got stuck in the cogwheel and had to go to a mental hospital due to depression caused by nonstop working.

Unlike Marx, Hegel does not consider alienation as an undesirable situation. Nature is a manifestation of the absolute spirit (geist) and was formed by the alienation of the absolute spirit from itself. The absolute soul undergoes spontaneous changes in the dialectical process. Alienation will exist as long as humanity and nature do (Tolan, 1996). Feuerbach, on the other hand, establishes a connection between alienation and religion, and sees religion as the cause of alienation. According to him, all religious values are nothing but the reflection of the inner nature of the individual. In this case, the existence of God depends on man (Tekin, 2012).

According to Marx, alienation occurs in four stages. In the first stage, worker is separated from product. He has no control over the product. For this reason, his product is now estranged from the worker. In the second stage, the worker alienates from the production process. In the third stage, he loses his creativity and finally starts alienate from his colleagues in the competitive market (Miller et al., 1995). In this sense, according to Marx, the worker is "the crumb of his own body", "the living extension of the machine" (Ollman, 2008). According to Marx, man transforms nature by using his creativity. Individuals become alienated from the product with the prominence of exchange value i.e. with the exchange value of things (commodities) instead of the utility value of commodities (commodity fetishism). Commodity fetishism is at its highest level in a capitalist society where there is a division of labor and specialization (Tolan, 1996).

Marcuse, on the other hand, expresses Marx's alienation of worker from production process with the concepts of standardization and routine, and argues that in this enslaving order, productive and non-productive occupations are similar to each other (Marcuse, 1975). In his book, *Manuscripts*, Marx wrote, "The more the worker produces, the less he consumes. The more value he creates, the less worthy he becomes and then becomes a slave to nature" (Marks, 2013: 77). "Even the free time for a person's education, intellectual development and social, physical and mental activities is empty talk" (Marks, 2003: 236). With the division of labor put forward by Durkheim, organic solidarity has replaced mechanical solidarity, so specialization has increased. Because of specialization, the dependency between business lines has also increased proportionally (Durkheim, 1995). Organic solidarity has assumed an integrative function and helped the formation of collective consciousness (Kongar, 1995). However, can such an integration be achieved in a society struggling with the pandemic and working remotely? Due to the pandemic, people have lost their jobs in some business lines and different types of specialization have emerged in others.

With the introduction of new production technologies, production methods have also changed. After the Taylorism-supported Fordist production came to a halt, computer-assisted flexible production was launched, so new forms of work such as remote working and working from home came to the fore in the Post-Fordist production style (Kocadas, 2020). From electronics to digital, from digital to artificial intelligence and the Internet of things, both the production methods and the concept of alienation have changed. Today, with the introduction of industrial robots, the number of blue-collar workers is highly expected to decrease. Even in some sectors, projections are made that the entire production process will be coordinated by robots. The organization of the productive forces in the table below reflects this change more clearly (Fuchs, 2015: 237).

Table 1. Three Types of Organization of the Productive Forces

TYPE	WORK TOOLS	WORK OBJECTS	PRODUCTS OF THE WORK
Agricultural productive forces	Body, brain, tools, machines	Nature	Basic products
Industrial productive forces	Body, brain, tools, machines	Basic products, industrial products	Industrial products
Informational productive forces	Body, brain, tools, machines	Experiences, ideas	Informational products

ACADEMIC STAFF AND THE CONCEPT OF ALIENATION

Before explaining the concept of alienation in academic staff, it might be appropriate to refer to such questions as what an academician does and what are their job descriptions. In this sense “academics have three main duties:

- Education and instruction
- Scientific research
- To raise the awareness of their society” (Ortas, 2004).

Academics contribute to the social production process both by giving lectures and doing scientific research. However, their payments are based on their workload in teaching (Arslan & Olpak, 2020). Overloaded schedules, crowded classrooms, insufficient time to do scientific research and administrative setbacks etc. cause alienation in academics. These result in a decrease in creativity, scientific research, commitment to work and cooperation with colleagues and productivity (Alparslan, Polatci & Yastioglu, 2021). Obligation to continue education remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic and the uncertainty about the next academic year brought along some problems. Alienation experienced in this period will be explained through the theory of Melvin Seeman.

Eric Fromm and Melvin Seeman, unlike sociologists, looked at alienation from the perspective of social psychology. According to Fromm, large-scale businesses, bureaucratization and capitalism push the individual to loneliness and weakness, and he gets lost and alienated in this deadlock by consuming too much (Tekin, 2012). Moreover, although the specialization of the workforce and the disappearance of tradition, emphasized by Durkheim, liberate the individual, they also lead him to loneliness (Halacoglu, 2008).

Seeman, who approaches the concept of alienation from a socio-psychological point of view by leaving social conditions aside, has made a great contribution to the recognition of the concept in American sociology. In his article “On the Meaning of Alienation”, he divided alienation into five stages (Halacoglu, 2008).

Feeling of Powerlessness: It is the state of “a person’s lack of influence and control in the face of events that affect his life in the social system, and a low sense of control for the future” (Kirman & Atak, 2020). This situation corresponds to the concept of “reification” in Marx. In other words, the products produced by the individual begin to be detached from the individual. According to Seeman, powerlessness is used in three meanings: Efforts for an unattainable product, unfulfilled expectations, and the presence of external control. Inadequacy, lack of dominance over the work processes, the frequent changes in the rules and resulting unsolvable problems in the workplace, lack of sufficient equipment to do the job, and lack of contact with the managers cause weakness. According to Marx, employees are alienated from work because they do not have a say in the production process and the product (Tekin, 2012).

Sense of Meaninglessness: Employees want to know and understand their contribution the work, the connection between the work of other employees and their work, and their position in the work process. If employees find their work meaningless, their productivity decreases (Kocadas, 2020).

Normlessness: Seeman said that Durkheim's concept of anomie is related to meaninglessness and powerlessness (Halacoglu, 2008). It seems normlessness arises when one is obliged to resort to anomalous ways in order to do his job in a state of irregularity. The individual who experiences irregularity cannot build a bridge between the present and the future, and sees the future as uncertain (Tekin, 2012).

Self-alienation: The individual abandons his own internal dynamics and begins to act according to the norms of others. After a while, he forgets his own wishes (Kocadas, 2020). Self-alienation is seen in two ways in academics: Lack of academic environment and alienation from work. What is meant by the academic environment is colleagues coming together and exchanging information about their work. Lack of this environment results in withdrawal from work. Although the individual feels competent in his job, he withdraws from teaching and scientific research. (Aydin & Ozeren, 2019).

Alienation from Society: Seeman defines alienation from society as the individual's disregard for the values set by the society. In other words, it is the separation between the individual and the society in terms of expectations. (Tekin, 2012).

DISTANCE EDUCATION

In a study examining the history and subjects of distance education, it is reported that Pennsylvania State University organized 250 different courses in 1892 to educate rural people in agriculture, and 19,000 people enrolled in these courses designed as distance education (Banas & Emory, 1998). It is known that these and similar experiences, dating back more than a century ago, were repeated in many countries in the following years with various needs and served to build distance education. Distance education, which was initially considered to be a solution for the education of those who could not reach formal education for various reasons, has also offered alternative education opportunities over time (Karasar, 2004). In fact, many countries are trying to implement virtual or non-walled university applications, with the claim of turning every possible environment into a university education one by removing the formal education institutions which still faithfully keep their traditional structures and practices (Balyer & Gunduz: 2010).

The idea of benefiting from distance education in Türkiye and the interest in the subject dates back to the founding of the Republic. In a study about the aforementioned history, it is stated that after the studies on the development of the idea until the 1950s, early examples were seen in the forms of making use of the radio and teaching by letter (Bozkurt, 2017). It is said that visual materials in distance education applications in the world were used in the form of educational films after the second world war, and their utilization as educational material was developed by universities providing distance education. (Laaser & Toloza, 2017) Distance education studies in Türkiye also followed the same path. The experience of the Non-formal Higher Education Institution (Yaykur), which was designed to provide higher education with the distance education method, was followed by the Open Education Faculty in 1982, which differed from the previous experiences with the effective use of television (Balyer & Gunduz, 2010; Bozkurt, 2017).

Although the relationship between technology and education is undeniable in any stage and aspect of education, when it comes to distance education, it takes the form of an indispensable relationship. Because of the swift implementation of technological developments in distance education and the radical transformations in practices, this close relationship is easily evident. Distance education has evolved into a completely different process with the introduction of computer technology and the Internet to the field of education, which started to find a place in social life towards the late 1980s. Some distinctive features, listed without considering the order of importance and priority, are as follows:

- No necessity for high-cost, large organizations for distance education
- Maximum individualization of education and its organization as a learning-oriented process
- Access to information anytime and anywhere
- Application of both synchronous and asynchronous education
- Ability to use content and training materials in different formats together
- Application of quick changes and renewal opportunities

The new communication environments created by the cooperation of computer technology and the Internet have created wider and more varied presentation opportunities for educational institutions as well as creating educational environments that were not previously possible in the traditional education system. Web-based distance education via the Internet has transformed distance education, which used to operate in a one-way direction due to technical limitations despite its existence before digitization, into interactive communication mediums and this feature of web-based distance education is among the ones that should probably be emphasized the most. Systems that operated before the Internet, limited to delivering printed materials, audio and video tapes to students and mostly in the form of delayed communication flow, have rapidly turned into interactive online courses, educational conferences and meetings on the Internet. The spread of technology, its lowering costs and the diversification of its capabilities as a tool have changed the content presentation in many aspects. In a short time, it has moved the content transfer possibilities, which were limited to traditional educator himself as the source, to an educational platform where the most qualified examples can be delivered to the student anytime and anywhere. The content presented by the instructor as a narrator with limited opportunities has evolved into a form of presentation in which students virtually witness the environments where information is produced or used. The ability to store information and various contents and deliver them to anyone anywhere anytime has enabled educational institutions to offer wide educational contents as open course resources (Shepherd, 2013).

Having a complementary function for adults who are out of the traditional formal education system or who are no longer involved in it yet whose lifelong education needs continue, distance education has been gradually drawing more attention with the developments mentioned above. The technical developments mentioned so far have strengthened the idea that distance education can work effectively by reaching wider and more diverse social segments faster than it was thought in the past. There are other factors that support this point of view. Distance education is regarded not only as a support element, but also as a future alternative to traditional education, with the contribution of other factors like the predictions that technology can be effective in providing education services at lower costs and the determinations that traditional education systems are insufficient to meet the exponentially increasing education needs.

However, it is clear that the technology that has been mentioned so far and the new opportunities it creates will not be sufficient in the assessment of distance education. In order to provide the desired outcomes from distance education, the roles and functions of the educators who will use this method should also be taken into account. It is argued that the approach of educators to distance education, their knowledge and experience on distance education methods as well as their fields of expertise are/will be more effective than technology itself. (Toplu & Gokcearslan, 2012) Many opinions, remarks and data from researches about the approaches and practices of educators on distance education reveal the importance of this situation.

In this regard, one of the important and primary topics to be focused on is the staff teaching in distance education. Who is this academician undertaking the responsibility of giving higher education under the umbrella of “university”, which has hundreds of years of tradition and history? What are their common identity characteristics and their mutual grounds with distance education? What is the attitude of the academician? Such questions that can be further diversified and the background that creates them will lead to results that will directly affect the success of distance education.

In a study about the emergence and formation of academic profession, it is mentioned that there are two basic academician identities in the European tradition where on the one hand academicians are accepted and treated as civil servants such as soldiers, bureaucrats and the like and on the other hand they are regarded as professors in charge of educating the elite professional members of the society and the income and security of whom commensurate with their success in a competitive environment (Schwartzman, 1994). The academician who provides the education is also responsible for the production of the knowledge he will provide, that is, the research. Today, academics are perceived as respected people who produce and manage knowledge in the society, and they are accepted as qualified employees of the university institution where the elite of the society, both in knowledge and profession, are educated. In line with this perception, academics have various duties and responsibilities that complement each other yet differ at the same time. In the studies of Balyer and Gunduz mentioned above, these different/multiple duties and responsibilities are defined as follows under the title of the duties and responsibilities of universities.

“Universities are responsible for educating their students and conducting scientific research in accordance with the science policy of the country and the needs of the society. It is also expected from academicians to undertake social responsibilities outside campus like publishing the results of their research and investigations, contributing to the advancement of science and technology, transferring cultural values, providing social integration and promoting social change... Due to the duties it undertakes, the university is the apple of the eye of both governments and industry because no society or country can progress without adequately equipped individuals who are needed by both groups respectively and whose education the university is responsible for (Balyer & Gunduz, 2010: 35-36)”.

As summarized above, academics who undertake duties whether as the administrator of the institution they work for or the implementer of academic activities have a sense of relative autonomy when making decisions about the quality of their work. The research and studies they carry out in their areas of expertise and their decisions on subjects such as the content of the courses they give are only subject to the supervision of other academicians who have the same qualifications as themselves or occupy even higher positions in the hierarchical order within the framework of the determined academic order and rules. In this case, some premises that will determine the attitude of academicians towards distance education activities from general to specific can be listed as follows. Will the distance education be able to meet the quality standards set in the traditional education environment? In the researches, negative remarks were observed in the approaches of academics to distance education who favor traditional education methods and are suspicious of change. The academics who can be listed in this group find the idea of obtaining a bachelor’s degree through “off-campus education” ugly and may make the following remark. “These new techniques may work in other disciplines, but never in mine.” (Beaudoin, 1990).

It is claimed that behind this disinterested and even hostile attitude, which is thought to be caused by the lack of necessary knowledge and experience of the academicians about the methods and techniques of distance education, lies the fact that the educators are worried about losing their jobs to technology and being unemployed and dysfunctional. (Beaudoin, 1990) Indeed, studies have provided findings and related justifications for the reluctance of academics to prepare materials for distance education and record them to be reused. There are various reasons for this situation.

One of these is the academician’s reluctance to make his (original) content public in such a way that he can lose its control. The emphasis should be on issues such as the fact that he sees problems in terms of copyright of the content that he spends effort and time to produce, with no protection for his work given that such activities are considered to be very valuable in academic success scales. At this point, however, it is useful to look at the other side of the coin. While comfortably using the content classroom environment in traditional formal education, he avoids that in recorded content that can be used over and over again in wider environments outside his control and where copyrights may come into play. Therefore, indifference and reluctance in academics can be observed in the production and use of distance education content (Andrews & Tynan, 2012). In the meantime, it is useful to remember the existence of educators who are fascinated with technology or forget their educational purposes by completely delegating their duty to technological products, and who have a share in inefficient educational activities with excessive use of materials (Beaudoin, 1990).

What has been mentioned so far is about academics participating in distance education with planned organizations. When distance education comes to the fore, experts in the field emphasize that distance education is a team work and that it is necessary for academics who are experts on the subject to receive training on the methods and practices in this medium (Banas & Emory, 1998; Valentine, 2002). Since the spring term of 2020, when almost all universities switched to distance education due to Covid-19, academicians who had never experienced it before have had to use distance education. As a natural consequence of being unfamiliar with the field, unpreparedness due to sudden transition, inadequate infrastructure and various other inadequacies, the first thing they turned to was previous applications in the field. Thus, the presentation technique of television, which was one of the most popular tools of distance education before the Internet, has been reused via the webcam. Lessons of approximately 45 minutes, dominated by “talking heads”, where the instructor’s lecture is recorded with a fixed camera (Laaser & Toloza, 2017). Video images and graphics accompanying this form of expression in television education have been replaced by power point presentations and short graphics or small whiteboards that can be used on a web camera. Although there are differences according to the development level of educational institutions, university institutions which

are structured as the continuation of traditional formal education on campuses and their administrators in fact have not contributed much to the academics who have been in need of training and equipment support for distance education. The result is the expansion of traditional teaching and learning processes by using technological innovations without changing the basic education model. In this context, technology functions as an apparatus that provides access to large databases that are “screwed” into old teaching methods (Gumpert & Chun, 1999).

It would be appropriate to end the explanations on distance education applications, which are suitable for the context of this study and addressed in a limited way for the purpose of study, by mentioning a popular conceptualization about the effects of Covid-19 on education and the instant solutions produced for the continuation of education. This conceptualization effort that we encountered as Emergency Remote Education (ERE) seems to be derived from the necessity that the achievements of aforementioned distance education should not be compared to the emergency solution methods of this extraordinary situation (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Bond, 2020). With this aspect, it exactly defines the situation of the participants of this research. However, the faculty members who are the participants of this study are academics whose fields of expertise are not distance education and who know/describe the online education they give on the Internet as distance education. Therefore, the concept of Emergency Remote Education was not brought up in the interviews with them, and the definition of distance education was used.

METHOD

Purpose of the Research

Distance education, which was previously used by a small number of universities in our country, has turned into a teaching method that all universities have had to implement due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The purpose of this research is to identify whether the faculty members working in formal education, who were not involved in distance education before, have experienced a sense of work alienation in this process, and, if they have, it is aimed to determine the scope of the alienation and its properties.

Research Method

The study was designed with phenomenology, which is one of the qualitative research methods. Phenomenology is one of the antipositivist approaches such as ethnomethodology and symbolic interaction, and it began with Husserl in the 1900s as a result of giving importance to qualitative methods rather than quantity (Erdogan, 2014). Husserl tried to show how to reveal the essence from the existent. Therefore, essence and reality are different from each other. In order to reach the area of the essence, the existing reality is taken into brackets (epoche) (Mengusoglu, 1992). This means that the researcher acts by putting his feelings, thoughts and prejudices about the phenomenon he is interviewing about in parentheses (Creswell, 2015).

“The main purpose of qualitative research is to focus on the experiences and perspectives of the participants and to reveal their perceptions and experiences” (Tekindal & Arsu, 2020). Phenomenology focuses on the phenomena that we are aware of but about which we cannot reach a detailed conclusion (Yildirim & Simsek, 2011). For this reason, efforts are made in the interviews for the participants to tell their experiences and stories as they are (Gurbuz & Sahin, 2015).

Based on these, the experiences of the faculty members in the distance education process during the Covid-19 pandemic and the question of whether distance education has an effect on alienation were found suitable to be examined using the phenomenological method, and it was aimed to reveal their perceptions and experiences in depth with the semi-structured interview. Thus, each participant was able to convey their personal experiences about alienation in the distance education process in detail.

Population of the Research

All faculty members at state universities that provide distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic in Turkiye constitute the population of the research. The target population of the research was determined as the active Communication Faculties.

Sample of the Research

While Polkinghorne stated that the number of participants in phenomenological studies could be between 5-25 (Creswell, 2015), Wilson stated that the number of participants could vary between 6 and 20, but there was no rigid rule (Tekindal & Arsu, 2020). In this study, first, all faculty members working in communication faculties of state universities in Türkiye were determined and then 4 assistant professors, 4 associate professors and 4 professors were selected by random sampling method. Universities in 7 geographical regions of Türkiye were taken into consideration while making the selections. In order to prevent the identity of the participants from being disclosed, participants were named as code 1, code, 2 ... code 12.

Scope and Limitations

The interviews were held on the days and times determined between 10.06.2021 and 14.07.2021.

Data Collection and Analysis

The first data collection tool that comes to mind in phenomenological research is the interview. Interviewing has advantages (interaction, flexibility, probing with probes) to reveal the experiences of the cases (Yildirim & Simsek, 2011). Interviews with academics were conducted through Google Meet and questions were asked to faculty members in accordance with the semi-structured interview technique. Before these interviews were conducted, the selected questions were tested on a control group and necessary corrections were made. The interviews with each faculty member lasted for an hour on average.

In phenomenological research, the analysis of data is done in a reductionist order. According to the method developed by Moustakas, “a list of important phrases is developed. Next, the researcher finds statements about how individuals experience the subject and lists these important statements. It is then grouped into larger units of data called meaning units or themes” (Creswell, 2015). According to this method, first, all the interviews with the faculty members were transcribed and then the statements that were considered important in the first reading were noted. Similarities and differences were determined and interpreted with content analysis by reading the created new text again.

FINDINGS

We asked the participants the following questions:

1) Has your departure from your workplace due to the pandemic and the transition to a more isolated work environment made you think that you are alienated from your workplace? Also, has your contact and sharing with your colleagues decreased due to the pandemic? If your answer is yes, do you think this has effects on your academic productivity and sense of institutional belonging? How?

7 participants stated that they were adversely affected and 2 participants stated that they observed positive developments in various ways. 3 participants stated that they do not have a positive or negative opinion on this issue. Below are 3 examples selected from the answers given by our participants to this question.

Code 2: “(...)because it was like a ghost campus. (My) Contact with (my) colleagues decreased. We had difficulties in carrying out collective work. In this sense, we can say that we have become alienated”.

Code 9: “The lack of physical connection with the faculty affected me negatively. This situation also damaged (my) institutional belonging. Of course, there was no energy (previously) resulting from coming together with colleagues”.

Code 11: “Because I had the opportunity to conduct classes in different venues, it did not affect my productivity negatively. (Faculty) works were done online. We realized that it was more productive than our face-to-face meetings. We held our department and faculty meetings online. Frankly, I was also professionally satisfied. On the contrary, it had a positive impact”.

2) In your opinion, are students more active or passive in distance education than in face-to-face education? If you think that they are more passive and you see yourself only as a provider of information, do you think that this affects your job satisfaction? How?

While 10 of our participants gave a negative answer to the question, 1 participant gave a positive answer, and 1 participant did not comment. Below are selected examples from the answers given to this question.

Code 7: “(The students) can definitely be characterized as more passive. I have taught 5 people in classrooms of 60. These negativities affect my job satisfaction. A relationship developed between me and the laptop, a state of madness developed like I would help the laptop graduate. I used to love lecturing, but now it has turned into a torture”.

Code 11: “I noticed that students who lack self-confidence in the classroom are more comfortable online. I was more satisfied with the participation of students who were physically unable to attend the class. We had students with disabilities, students who worked professionally and followed the lessons with interest”.

3) If you are doing your lessons on video, does the limitation of being only a portrait and being unable to use your body language make you feel alienated from your job?

In response to the question, all of our participants stated that they felt alienated from work. Below are some examples of answers to this question.

Code 1: “I am also an active person when I teach. I can't use the board. We are like in the simulation world”.

Code 9: “Of course, this limitation was uncomfortable. There is no interaction like the one offered by the physical environment. Since the lessons are recorded, the teachers carefully choose and use their words”.

Code 12: “Distance education made me feel very free, my workload has decreased. If there are no students, I turn off the screen. This, too, is freedom. There is a technological limitation that alienates us and hangs over the teacher”.

4) Do you think that the lack of control over the system in distance education (the teaching of the lesson, the exams, etc.) affects your motivation in lecturing? If yes, how?

In response to the question, while 9 of our participants stated it affected them negatively, 3 of them stated that they thought it had a positive effect. Below are some examples of answers to this question.

Code 3: “I spend 2 hours typing questions (into the online system) for a test. Instead, let the student write 100 pages and I will read it”.

Code 6: “Security cannot be ensured in the exams.. They are searching for answers on (their) tablets and phones. Students who were honest got low grades while others got high. We did not have the luxury to (make them fail). The pandemic was an excuse”.

Code 9: “Our system allows us to do a lot of things because it was set up long ago. We can test in a variety of ways whether it be quiz or etc. Therefore, I did not experience its distress”.

Code 12: “Of course it did. You are not in control of the system. What the student understands about the assignment is to cut and paste. The student has no reasoning and cannot improve himself. There are many things that distract the student. You get likes to the extent that you internalize the network culture. What I teach in class does not appeal to instant enjoyment. I'm telling things to brood over. My course is not followed (by students) on their own. The student does not pay attention to classes because he knows that he will not find a job. However, on the other hand, there is the Internet to enjoy. Values from technology surpassed the reality. You give meaning to yourself according to your representation there”.

5) Do you think there has been an increase or decrease in your scientific research since your transition to distance education due to the pandemic?

While 8 of our participants stated that it had a negative effect, 2 of them stated that it had a positive effect. The other 2 participants did not comment on whether it had a positive or negative effect. Academics stated

that they could not do library research due to restrictions, and that they could not do academic research because it takes a long time to prepare courses in online education, and there was even a decline in their research. Academicians who have no dependents stated that they spend more time on research and spend their time more productively. Below are some examples of answers to this question.

Code 5: “My scientific studies decreased because I spent a lot of time preparing for the lesson”.

Code 7: “This period was my most productive academic year. I have no children, and as I have no one to look after, the time is all mine”.

6) Has there been a change in your working hours and free time since you started distance education? If so, how?

In response to the question, 6 participants stated that the identity of an academician is not suitable for separating work and leisure time. 3 of them stated that there was a change and the other 3 said that there was no change. Below are some examples of answers to this question.

Code 4: “Even 24 hours is not enough in the distance education system. The shifts are never ending. The message sent from the platforms, the messages from the administrators, the weekend messages did not end. The rules of the working culture need to be established”.

Code 11: “Online education has increased the workload. There have even been times when I rehearsed before (the class). The process of preparing for the lesson doubled. Of course I got used to it later on”.

7) Have you had any problems in allocating time to your studies due to domestic activities with the Covid-19 pandemic?

9 of our participants stated that they experienced changes in different ways. While 2 participants did not express their opinion on this issue, 1 participant stated that he did not experience any changes. Below are some examples of answers to this question.

Code 4: “Although it is not so intense, one runs out of energy to spare time for hobbies under the bombardment of technology. There is no room for hobbies due to concerns about health and the future. I think (those who claim otherwise) they are pretending”.

Code 12: “I had been experiencing this even before the pandemic. I am a subject who was socialized in the 70s. What was in that time? A Skilled woman.. Roles are already being imposed on you. I see myself as a hypocrite, a three-faced (person). You constantly experience role conflict. Not being able to leave the house has created some opportunity. Women academics have clung more tightly to their domestic roles”.

8) Has it helped you to participate in activities (online certificate, online theater, online museum, etc.) that will contribute to your hobbies and the development of your creativity, since most of your time is spent at home?

While 7 of the participants claimed that the situation caused a differentiation in their social activities, 3 of them stated that there was no change and 2 of them stated that they did not have any perception in this regard. Below are some examples of answers to this question.

Code 6: “I have subscribed to 2 platforms. I watch movies. Although I was invited to many events, I did not attend. Because the distinction between the real and the virtual has disappeared.”

Code 7: “I have had a lot of online friends that I have not met in person”.

Code 11: “I have learned a lot from free online trainings. I even moved the (physical) exercise online. I even looked at cooking videos”.

9) Do you think the contents of the courses you teach are suitable for online education?

7 of the participants stated that their courses are not suitable for online education. 4 of them stated they are suitable, and 1 participant stated that it may change according to the requirements of their courses. Most of the participants stated that the applied courses are not suitable for online education and that online education does not cause any problems in terms of theoretical courses. Below are some examples of answers to this question.

Code 8: “(For) some lessons yes, some no. It is also illegal to give the book as a pdf. Powerpoint has become the alternative. I usually tried to upload articles. It was easier to invite guests to the lecture”.

Code 9: “Some of the courses I teach are theoretical, some are applied courses. I terminated all my applied classes”.

10) Would you approve of the idea that a distance education student in your field can be taught as effectively as in formal education?

All but 1 of the participants stated that they were of the opinion that online education could not reach the quality of formal education. Below are some examples of answers to this question.

Code 6: “I disagree. The student wants to be in school, they graduate with education that lacks these (opportunities) in online education. The concept of university, however, is not this. It is campus life, sharing, self-development”.

Code 7: “They memorized, learned theories and concepts, but the discussion part was missing”.

Code 11: “They were able to get the same quality of education. My friends at the faculty also made great effort in this regard”.

11) Do you think you have sufficient training and experience in preparing materials and producing digital content for distance education?

Half of the participants said that they were competent in this regard, and the other half said that they were not, but it can be concluded from their expressions that even those who said that they were competent enough stated that they needed a training. Below are some examples of answers to this question.

Code 7: “Unfortunately, I do not think so, but our university has opened a training program for us. How will we use this system? How will we create online materials? But this new situation has turned into something we have to spend incredible time with. It has been impossible in our (daily) pace of life”.

Code 9: “Our system is very advanced. However, I think that pedagogical training should be given about this”.

12) Does the new situation (the pandemic period) make you think that you are not in control during the assessment and evaluation phase?

7 of the participants stated that they thought they were not. While 1 participant stated that he was able to maintain his control, 3 participants said that they did not have a clear opinion. Below are some examples of answers to this question.

Code 2: “Yes, this is the point where we have the most trouble. This is the most flawed part of distance education”.

Code 3: “I think students cheat in the exams. I do not believe that it is a healthy assessment”.

Code 5: “I think things have completely got out of my control. According to a formal letter we received, we were asked not to do too many tests. Even if (a student) cheats, we have to accept it as true”.

13) Do you think you need outside help in preparing course content in the new situation (the pandemic period)?

While 10 of our participants thought that they needed such support, 1 of our participants stated that they did not need support, and 1 of our participants did not make a remark on this issue. Below are some examples of answers to this question.

Code 5: “We cooperated with the instructors in the school. By teaching each other different programs.”.

Code 11: “We received training from professionals in the Training of Educators and we benefited a lot from it”.

Code 12: “My course content is what is in my head. If they had told me to prepare a visual, I would have prepared a Power Point (presentation)”.

14) Do you agree with the idea that distance education will continue for a longer period of time and with a larger scope in higher education?

To this question, 7 of our participants answered yes and 5 answered no. Below are some examples of answers to this question.

Code 8: “I think it will not work. I think it is a very suitable format for the sector. It simplifies some things. There may be hybrid models. It may be suitable in more niche areas, in areas where there is a shortage of teachers. (The whole higher education system) should not be like this.”

Code 12: “I totally agree. The control of education policies will move out of nation states and become global. Just as there have been global marriages in the field of economy, there will be similar ones in the field of education. The Bologna process is an example of this. If so, will there be quality? Education has lost ties with the field of employment”.

15) Do you think that your institution provides the necessary and sufficient economic and technical support to give distance education courses? What is your assessment in terms of its relevance to method and quality?

8 of the participants stated that support was provided and 4 of them stated that it was not provided. Below are some examples of answers to this question.

Code 4: “No, I wish they had asked if I have a computer”.

Code 8: “I think there is no support. Especially technologically. One laptop equals one salary. For the first 6 months, we could not teach via our own system”.

16) Do you think you are a good digital media literate?

9 of the participants answered yes to the question and 3 answered no.

17) Has there been any difference in your determining the schedule and content in the teaching process? Have you encountered problems in practice different than in formal education?

While 7 of the participants answered yes and 3 of them answered no to the question, 2 participants did not express an opinion. Below are some examples of answers to this question.

Code 2: “With the effect of the current socio-political climate, I had to be more careful with my sentences in terms of the contents of the recorded courses. I could not talk about everything like in the classroom environment. I think we are behind in terms of academic freedom. I think that online education has a serious place in the surveillance society discussions. I think that the panopticon system also works in the meantime”.

Code 7: “There is a thing called copyright. Due to the conjuncture in Turkiye, I gave lectures by excluding some subjects”.

Code 9: “For example, while I was showing an average of 100 photos in photography class, I had to limit it to 3 in the online (class). I was doing the lesson in a different atmosphere in the movie theater. Here, (however) on the screen...”.

18) Do you agree with the statement that even a very confident instructor is a little nervous when it is time for class? Has the distance education application you have faced affect or contribute to your assessment on this subject?

While 9 of the participants stated that it had an impact or contribution in response to the question, 3 participants did not make a remark. Below are some examples of answers to this question.

Code 9: “No matter how many years of experience you have, there is excitement and it actually feeds you. Unfortunately, this excitement is not available in online education”.

Code 12: “I felt so worthless in distance education”.

19) How would you describe yourself in terms of morale, motivation and job satisfaction (better / worse) when you give online education compared to traditional (formal) education? Are there any reasons you can identify?

In response to the question, while 11 of our participants stated that they felt worse, 1 participant did not express an opinion.

Code 1: “I feel worse. I think that efficiency, interaction and sincerity are missing. The most valuable form of communication is face-to-face. Even as communication technology improves, lessons will be best (when) face-to-face”.

Code 5: “I do not feel very motivated emotionally”.

Code 7: “My performance dropped by 50%. Worse in terms of job satisfaction. It was good only in terms of academic publications”.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Some of the questions used in the research were designed to get clues about how sincere and consistent the answers of the participants were. This was also seen as useful in terms of questioning the existence of a meaningful relationship between the perceptions and experiences of the participants. For example, participant number 11 maintained his positive attitude about the existence and contributions of distance education applications in almost all of his answers.

Most of the participants stated that they were adversely affected by talking about the decrease in communication with their colleagues and institutions during the pandemic period. The answers to the questions about how these effects occur can be summarized as follows: It was observed that female academicians mentioned the changes in interest brought about by not being able to leave the house due to restrictions, which indicates a significant increase in housework and women's roles. For example, they stated that they had problems in accessing research materials because they could not go to the institution and library due to the lockdown. It has been determined that there is a tendency to watch television and participate in online activities under these circumstances. In addition, by mentioning the difficulty of a clear separation between work and leisure time as a result of their academic profession, they stated that the changes in the use of leisure time do not mean much to them.

Except for 2 of the participants, all of them think that students who participate in online education are more passive. This indicates a serious lack of knowledge and preparation regarding the design of online courses. In fact, this situation may be interpreted as the fact that the participating faculty members are not aware of the problems and the needs because they do not have sufficient knowledge and experience in distance education. Regarding this issue, when the participants were asked whether the quality of formal education could be achieved through distance education, all but one responded that the quality of formal education could not be achieved with distance education. This interpretation, which can be accepted as a coherent summary of the answers given to the previous questions, seems as a sign of serious lack of knowledge and preparation of the participating faculty members in the field of distance education. Of course, their thoughts and attitudes about the potential threat of distance education to the traditional education system and its possible consequences should also be taken into account in this perspective.

The participants, who believed that face-to-face communication with students was multi-channel and therefore they were deprived of a high level of impact without it, gave negative answers to the question prepared on this subject. The opinion of one of the participants (C12) that the online system makes him feel more free, and the opinion of another participant (C11) that students with low self-confidence are more participatory and productive in online education were significant findings. Again regarding this issue, the motivational effects of the participants' lack of control over the system were questioned. The participants stated that this situation led to low motivation by a wide margin and stated that they had to do extra work that was not required in formal education. They stated they were of the opinion that the assessment and evaluation was ineffective due to reasons such as the inability to ensure the security of the exam and the inability to prevent the copy-paste incidents in cases where assessment is made with homework. When it was questioned whether they made changes in the education program and content due to the necessity of transitioning to distance education,

the participants stated that they had to make the necessary changes. A remarkable point in the answers given is that the faculty members stated they did not feel free in their recorded lessons as they did in traditional classroom environments, and that they felt that they were under observation. It was seen that this issue was also mentioned in the answers given to other questions. In addition, it is observed that there were copyright concerns in the use of course material, due to the fact that the course was recorded and the limits of publicity were not known by the faculty member. In the answers to the question about the suitability of the courses conducted by the participating academicians for online education the opinion that the applied courses were not suitable for distance education emerged prominently. The answers of the participants are significant in terms of showing the relationship between quality and conformity in this study, which is limited to faculty members of communication faculties. It seems obvious that the issue of the functionality of the solution methods and techniques which are monist or target the general in the university education environment, where there are a wide variety of content and teaching requirements, should be handled rigorously.

The question about their perceptions of competence in preparing materials for distance education and producing digital content was answered as yes and no equally. However, even the participants who thought they were competent stated in their answers to other related questions that they needed support and training.

When asked about whether distance education will expand and continue, it is seen that the participants think this development will continue with a small difference. However, there is no observed belief that distance education can gain a prevalence that can eliminate the traditional education system. Instead, it is seen that the development of hybrid models and distance education can be effective and useful in niche areas.

In addition to the faculty members who say that they feel “worthless” in the online course platform, there clearly exists a participant group who thinks that distance education is far from meeting the excitement and satisfaction of traditional education. In this context, when the participant faculty members were asked to make a conclusion based on comparison, all of them expressed themselves as less productive and unhappy, except for one participant who did not express an opinion.

In this study, alienation in academic staff giving online education during the pandemic period was investigated based on Melvin Seeman’s concept of alienation. Considering the findings of the research, the following can be concluded according to Seeman’s distinction:

Due to the transition to distance education during Covid-19 pandemic, there have been problems such as lack of control of the academicians over the distance education system, changes in issues such as exams, grading and the style of teaching in distance education. The academics felt lonely in the problems they faced due to lack of in-service training in distance education. There was insufficient technical support and academics were not consulted about distance education. Furthermore, academicians who could no longer enjoy the classroom atmosphere had difficulty in communicating with their students and they were not able to teach as effectively in distance education as they did in face-to-face classes. All of these problems and issues are thought to be among the factors that cause the feeling of powerlessness in academics.

In distance education during the pandemic, there has been no active teaching as in face-to-face education and the academicians were only the provider of information and the students were passive recipients. The feedback on lesson comprehension was insufficient and there was lack of supervision in the exams made by the academicians, and cheating in the exam was easy to do but difficult to identify. Because of such problems and the like, academics cannot make sense of their work in distance education and become alienated from their jobs.

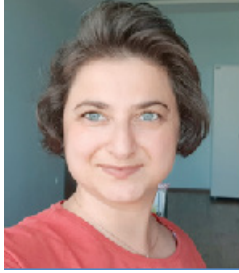
The uncertainty about when distance education will end, how lessons will be taught from now on and whether distance education will continue after the pandemic makes it difficult for academics to make plans for the future.

Due to the flexible working hours that come with distance education, academics have not had the opportunity to meet with their colleagues as they mostly work from home. Meetings were conducted remotely. With distance education, some ongoing rituals among colleagues have been interrupted.

According to the results of the research, although there is a prevalent view that distance education cannot replace face-to-face education, it is possible that hybrid models can be developed and distance education can continue in niche areas. For this reason, if this subject is researched in different disciplines and in different fields, there can be conclusions about which education will be face-to-face, hybrid or distance.

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