

## The Impact of Virtual Communities and eTwinning Action on the Education System and Their Implementation in Classrooms

### Sanal Toplulukların ve eTwinning Faaliyetinin Eğitim Sistemine Etkisi ve Sınıflarda Uygulanması

Mehmet Fatih DÖĞER\* Mustafa SEVER\*\*

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#### ÖZET

This article is part of the doctoral dissertation titled 'Teachers in Social Networks'. This study aims to discuss the role of virtual communities and social networks in the future of education, aiming to uncover their use in education. The research was conducted through a mixed-methods approach. The quantitative aspect of the research, includes an online survey directed at 6,005 teachers actively engaged in social networks. Data collected through the survey was analyzed using frequency distributions, mean scores, and percentages. In the qualitative component of the study, online interviews were conducted with twenty-five teachers serving in different regions of Turkey, across various subject areas, and grade levels. The findings of this study indicate the vital role of social networks in helping teachers stay current, track changing and evolving trends, and enhance their personal and professional development. Teachers perceive these networks as valuable resources for disseminating information acquired from social networks and colleagues to their classrooms. However, the research also highlights concerns among teachers regarding security and privacy issues on social networks. It is anticipated that the proposed digital platform will serve as a source of inspiration and guidance for academics, practitioners, and existing literature alike.

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#### ABSTRACT

Bu makale “Sosyal Ağlarda Öğretmenler” başlıklı doktora tezinin bir parçasıdır. Bu araştırma, eğitimin geleceğinde sanal toplulukların ve sosyal ağların rolünü tartışmakta ve eğitimde kullanımlarını ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Karma yöntemle incelenen araştırmanın nicel yönü, sosyal ağlarda aktif olarak yer alan 6.005 öğretmene yöneltilen çevrimiçi bir anketi içermektedir. Anket aracılığıyla toplanan veriler, frekans dağılımları, ortalama puanlar ve yüzdeler kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmanın nitel kısmında ise Türkiye'nin farklı bölgelerinde, farklı konu alanlarında ve sınıf düzeylerinde görev yapan yirmi beş öğretmenle çevrimiçi görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, sosyal ağların öğretmenlere güncel kalmalarında, değişen ve gelişen trendleri takip etmelerinde ve kişisel ve mesleki gelişimlerini artırmalarında hayati bir rol oynadığını göstermektedir. Öğretmenler, bu ağları, sosyal ağlardan ve meslektaşlarından edindikleri bilgileri sınıflarına aktarmak için kullandıkları değerli bir kaynak olarak görmektedirler. Ancak, araştırma aynı zamanda öğretmenlerin sosyal ağlardaki güvenlik ve gizlilik sorunlarına ilişkin kaygılarını da vurgulamaktadır. Bu çalışma sonunda önerilen dijital platformun akademisyenlere, uygulamacılara ve mevcut literatüre ilham kaynağı ve rehberlik sağlayacağı öngörülmektedir.

#### Atf İçin

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\* Dr., Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, Ankara, mfatihdoger@hotmail.com, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5940-450X>

\* Prof. Dr., Ankara Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, Ankara, severmustafa@gmail.com, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3777-0124>

## INTRODUCTION

Technology is widely regarded as an intrinsic and inevitable progression in today's modern society. The digital transformation shaping the future of humanity has led to the diversification of human behaviors, the digitalization of institutions and organizations, and even countries, the proliferation of unmanned vehicles and robotic systems, the integration of artificial intelligence into our lives, and the evolution of work environments (Alkayış, 2021). The advent of the internet, initially conceived for defense purposes at American universities, subsequently expanded its domain to encompass instant communication, email correspondence, information storage, news dissemination, professional growth, entertainment through sharing movies and music, leisure pursuits, electronic commerce, and lucrative business prospects (Nye, 2006).

Technology has catalyzed numerous advancements, innovations, discoveries, paradigm shifts, and transformations across diverse sectors, ranging from transportation to education. McLuhan eloquently characterized technology as an extension of the human body, recognizing its influential role as a tool for social change and progress (Raut and Patil, 2016). His prescient assertion resonates profoundly given the widespread adoption of these technologies by millions of individuals, facilitating accessibility for both individuals and broader segments of society within the educational framework. It is worth noting that individuals spend an average of 6 hours and 42 minutes per day on the internet, with those who sleep an average of 8 hours devoting over 40% of their lifespan to online engagement (Wearesocial, 2020).

The current era of digitalization has ushered in a multitude of advancements, rendering communication more independent, transparent, social, flexible, and interactive (Castells, 2005). Concurrently, technology plays a crucial role in establishing communication systems and contributes significantly to the field of education. In this regard, technology yields positive outcomes by enhancing student success rates, reducing dropout rates, fostering the personal and professional growth of educators, equipping students with 21st-century competencies, offering diverse teaching methods and techniques to teachers, aiding those who face barriers in accessing education, and supporting vocational and technical training (Wellings & Levine, 2009). Furthermore, technology has facilitated proficiency in foreign languages (Terrill, 2000) and has imbued school lessons with elements of enjoyment, ease, and educational value (Budhwar, 2017).

However, the advent of developing technologies in the education system presents its own set of challenges. Despite the widespread usage of social networks and the surge in digital communication, these technologies have the potential to diminish face-to-face interaction, encouraging users to devote excessive amounts of time to digital screens (Dirik et al., 2012). Technological tools, in their quest to generate content, can overwhelm users with redundant information, fostering feelings of alienation and isolation from society. Additionally, they contribute to an uncontrollable acceleration of pace, shifting the preferences of the younger generation from reading books to engaging in online chats (Castells, 2005).

### Virtual Communities

Virtual communities and social networks are digital communities on the web that facilitate communication, collaboration, and content sharing among individuals (Carminati & Ferrari, 2008). The emergence of this technology gained prominence with the establishment of the Facebook platform in 2004 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). These networks, often referred to as web 2.0 tools, encompass various media formats such as blogs, forums, and wikis (Murray, 2008). Virtual communities and social networks provide users with the ability to create profiles, engage with diverse individuals and groups, and interact within a digital environment (Döger, 2023). Presently, they serve as platforms for communication, real-time global awareness, expression of thoughts and emotions, sharing and following photos, images, and videos, earning income, self-improvement, and entertainment. Consequently, social networks have permeated nearly all aspects of society, encompassing cultural, economic, social, and psychological dimensions (Raut & Patil, 2016).

Luthans (2001) delved into the psychological aspects of social networks. According to his analysis, social networks offer individuals the means to regulate their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, connect with a larger audience, boost self-esteem, overcome fears, and bridge emotional gaps through feedback received within these networks. Ultimately, individuals find love, respect, and resolution to their inner conflicts. However, Gao and Bai (2021) shed light on the negative aspects of these networks. Overreactions and alienation can occur within social networks, as users are exposed to false information. Moreover, social media can contribute to unhappiness if users do not receive sufficient notifications, appreciation, and interaction. These researchers also highlight the potential health problems, addiction, detachment from daily life, and disruption of face-to-face interactions that can arise from excessive social media usage and engagement with these platforms.

The proliferation of these networks, embraced by millions of individuals worldwide, has garnered significant importance, with the demand for such platforms escalating by the day. According to the research done by 'we are social' platform, over half of the global population, encompassing more than 8 billion people, utilize these networks, accounting for 51% of the global populace. In Turkey, 13.7% of the population spends an average of 4 hours daily on social networks, with 92.4% accessing these networks through mobile applications (Wearesocial, 2020). These statistics alone vividly demonstrate the prevalent need and immense demand for these networks.

### **Education in Social Networks**

Teachers, who play a pivotal role in shaping the future of the younger generation, have actively embraced virtual communities and educational activities in their efforts (Raut & Patil, 2016). By participating in these social networks, they not only increase their visibility but also distinguish themselves from their peers. Concurrently, the use of digital social platforms by students involved in education and training activities has a profound impact on the educational structure and its functions (Döger, 2022). In today's digital age, individuals utilize technology and communication channels to access information and manage relationships within these networks. For students, technology offers a gateway to expand their perspectives both locally and globally by engaging in communication and collaboration with others (Budhwar, 2017).

Existing literature on the utilization of social networks in education highlights their positive impact on the educational system. For instance, Greenhow and Askari (2015) argue that social networks can be leveraged to provide online educational opportunities, facilitate increased interaction between teachers and students, incorporate educational technologies, foster cultural understanding, and access a wealth of resources. Similarly, LeNoue (2012) emphasizes the multifaceted nature of these networks, highlighting their capacity to encourage content production, enhance communication skills, facilitate the dissemination of work, and create flexible and transparent learning spaces, underscoring the importance of their integration into education. Furthermore, Delello, Mcwhorter, and Camp (2015) conducted a study revealing that students' communication and interaction within these networks positively influence their educational process, leading to increased motivation, practical application of theoretical knowledge, and enhanced academic success. Duncan and Barczyk (2016) observed in their research on university students that courses conducted through these networks enhance students' enthusiasm for learning, promote networking among peers, and foster a greater sense of belonging to both the course and the institution.

Another study affirming the positive impact of integrating social networks into education was conducted by Ajjan and Harsthone (2008). Their findings indicated that incorporating social networks into educational practices promotes learning, increases teacher-student interaction, enhances student productivity, and naturally boosts student motivation. Pettenati and Ranieri (2006) also conducted research with positive outcomes, asserting that social networks contribute to extracurricular learning and foster an enriched learning environment. Schroeder and Greenbowe (2009) investigated the use of social networks in education among students and discovered that these platforms improve reading and writing skills, motivate students who are hesitant in face-to-face education, and are preferred by students as a learning environment.

While some experts express favorable views on the use of social networks in education, others caution against their potential drawbacks, particularly when social networks are solely considered as tools for socialization. Halverson (2011) highlights how social media and social networks can create problems, especially in terms of concealing students' identities, thereby disrupting educational processes and diminishing student achievement. LeNoue (2012) emphasizes the importance of training individuals to effectively use social networks, while also drawing attention to hardware and software limitations in schools that can hinder their usage, and he raises concerns about security issues. Additionally, Schroeder and Greenbowe (2009) underscore the negative aspects of utilizing social networks in education, pointing out that they can compromise privacy and confidentiality, limit the feasibility of hands-on practical sessions, encounter student resistance towards participation, and lack comprehensive features for tracking grades.

### **eTwinning Action**

Given that the focus of this research pertains to technology in education and the incorporation of social networks in educational settings, it is essential to reference the eTwinning initiative. eTwinning serves as the largest school network in Europe, utilized by teachers and school administrators for educational purposes and fostering social connections. Operating across 43 European countries, this free social network allows teachers to collaborate on projects with students, with the primary aim of promoting peer learning and facilitating both personal and professional development among participants (Kearney, 2016). What sets eTwinning apart from other networks is that it is solely a social networking platform for teachers. The eTwinning network is a platform where more than a million teachers collaborate and work on projects with the aim of adapting to current developments, utilizing technology more effectively in education, and making education more efficient (Döger, 2023).

Through the eTwinning platform, teachers can identify potential partners within their own countries as well as across Europe, enabling them to initiate collaborative projects. Moreover, the platform offers opportunities for teachers to engage in various professional development activities, including online and onsite conferences, workshops, courses, and seminars (Vuorikari, 2010; Gilleran, 2019). Teachers' reasons for being in this environment include meeting other teachers from Europe and Turkey, creating groups and projects, participating in online and face-to-face national and international learning activities to enhance their skills in technology use and seeing and sharing new examples of implementation (Döger, 2022). Simultaneously, by actively participating in this network, teachers can enhance their technological skills in educational settings and improve their proficiency in foreign languages by engaging in new practical examples (Pateraki, 2018).

### **Aim and Importance**

The purpose of this research is to understand the usage patterns and purposes of internet and social networks among teachers based on their demographic characteristics, to examine teachers' attitudes towards social networks according to various variables, and to interpret the implications of these networks for both teachers and students. It tries to understand how virtual networks can be effectively utilized for educational purposes and develop corresponding policies considering the role of technology as catalysts for social change in innovative educational models and training methods. This requires updating the technological infrastructure and equipment in educational institutions and revitalizing the learning environments within schools. Within this framework, the problem of this research revolves around determining the purposes and extent to which teachers utilize social networks, as well as whether they integrate their social network experiences into their teaching practices.

In this study, various conjectures have been put forth to be either validated or invalidated. Initially, the proposition was posited that educators predominantly utilized social networks to expand their follower base, occupy leisure time, garner attention, and derive gratification from notifications. Nonetheless, this investigation has unveiled that these were among the least sought-after motives.

Another presumption preceding the study was that individuals utilized online communities to shape their identity, rally for collective persuasion, and sway decision-makers.

Several factors set this research apart from others in the literature. Firstly, the study boasts a notably larger sample size, comprising 6,005 participants, which surpasses many previous investigations. While earlier studies were confined to specific contexts, this research spans across Turkey. Moreover, prior research predominantly centered on individuals or students, with limited attention directed towards teachers. Further distinguishing features include the selection criteria for the study's sample, which specifically targets active teachers who engage with social networks. Additionally, the study's theoretical framework delves into the influence of social networks on educational practices. Finally, the research proposes a digital platform tailored to address the identified needs of teachers, underscoring its practical implications for educational advancement.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This research adopts a mixed methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data to comprehensively understand the research problems and analyze the phenomena (Creswell, 2016). A questionnaire was administered to 6,005 teachers adopting the survey and interviews were conducted with 25 volunteer teachers. The data collected from both methods were used to complement and support each other. The research scope is based on a case study design, employing Yin's (2003) holistic multi-case design, which involves handling and comparing multiple situations comprehensively.

The quantitative study involved the administration of a questionnaire adopting the survey by using SurveyMonkey tool where teachers were asked to provide demographic information, indicate the purposes and frequency of using social networks. There were 16 closed quotations and 2 open questions in the quantitative survey. In line with the objectives of the study, teachers' demographic characteristics and their usage of social networks are interpreted based on data obtained from surveys. This includes how and for what purposes teachers utilize social networks, the role of social networks in teachers' identity formation, and how teachers integrate social networks into their teaching practices.

The qualitative study was done through interviews with 25 teachers actively engaged in eTwinning activities across the seven geographical regions of Turkey during the 2021-2022 academic year. Discussions regarding social networks were conducted online, with audio and video recordings taken. Participants were asked 20 semi-structured and open-ended questions. Creswell (2016) stated that qualitative research can involve working with a small number of individuals or events, ranging from one or two to twenty or thirty, emphasizing the need for detailed preparation for each individual or event under investigation. The qualitative study focused on examining the purposes for which teachers use social networks.

These interpretations are drawn from both the survey data on social network usage and discussions related to social networks. Through this method, systematically collected data are longitudinally examined to understand how real-world interactions unfold (Subaşı & Okumuş, 2017).

### **Validity and Reliability**

Several strategies were employed to enhance the validity and reliability of the research. These strategies included seeking expert opinions during the preparation and evaluation of the survey, providing preliminary information about the research and the researcher, confirming data with the participants during the interviews, incorporating both positive and negative questions in the questionnaire, refraining from guiding questions during the interviews to ensure active listening by the researcher, conducting a pre-test with 100 individuals for the questionnaire, and conducting a pre-test with three different individuals for the interviews.



To bolster the reliability and validity of this study, various strategies were employed, incorporating Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four overarching criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, to ensure trustworthiness. Additionally, a mixed methods approach was adopted, ensuring simultaneous collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, thereby strengthening the robustness of the findings through mutual reinforcement.

Additionally, to enhance the reliability and validity of the research, the findings and interpretations of the research were reviewed by experts including members of the Thesis Monitoring Committee and individuals specializing in the use of technology in education at the Ministry of National Education. Expert support was sought in the preparation of the survey and interview questions, the evaluation of the findings, and the formulation of recommendations. Furthermore, in addition to expert opinions in the preparation of both quantitative and qualitative questions, peer review was also conducted. One of the factors that enhances the reliability of a study is participant validation, which involves reaching out to participants involved in the interviews and obtaining feedback from them about the data collected (Merriam, 2013).

### Procedure

Due to pandemic measures and the aim of reaching participants from all regions in Turkey, the questionnaire and interviews were conducted online. The semi-structured quantitative data was collected using the online survey application SurveyMonkey. On the other hand, qualitative data were gathered through online video meetings using the Zoom platform. The participants' video recordings were captured and subsequently transcribed into textual format for analysis.

### Population and Sampling

The population of this research consists of registered eTwinning teachers working in all levels of schools across seven regions in Turkey. The sampling was conducted among those who responded to the questionnaire. Specifically, in the 2021-2022 academic year, there were 331,140 registered eTwinning teachers in Turkey, and 6,005 of them completed the questionnaire. Due to the registration of many schools in 81 provinces for this activity, no restriction has been imposed on the number of schools and the institutional distribution of teachers. In determining the sample representing this population, the sample table recommended by Yazıcıoğlu and Erdoğan (2014) based on the population size was used. As a result, it appears sufficient for the sample size representing the research population to be 1,066 individuals with a 97% confidence level and a 3% sampling error. Consequently, 6,005 teachers were considered as the sample in this context. For the interviews, a maximum diversity sampling method was employed to select 25 teachers as participants (Yıldırım & Şimsek, 2016). The selection aimed to ensure diversity in terms of regions, branches, levels, and genders. Each participating teacher in the interviews was assigned a code number, such as T1, T2, T3, up to T25, for identification within the research. Demographic information of the teachers participating in the interviews is shared in Table 1.

Table 1. *Demographic information of the teachers participating to the interviews*

Teacher	Gender	Subject	Region	Level	Experience in Teaching (Year)
T1	Man	English	Black Sea	High School	32
T2	Man	Physics	South East A.	High School	23
T3	Man	German	Mediterranean	High School	24
T4	Man	English	Black Sea	High School	19
T5	Woman	English	Black Sea	High School	18
T6	Woman	English	East A.	High School	31
T7	Woman	English	Black Sea	Secondary	16
T8	Man	IT	Central A.	High School	20

T9	Man	English	Aegean	Secondary	14
T10	Woman	Primary School	Central A.	Primary	18
T11	Woman	Primary School	Mediterranean	Primary	20
T12	Woman	English	Marmara	Primary	17
T13	Woman	Primary School	East A.	Primary	15
T14	Woman	Primary School	Black Sea	Primary	13
T15	Woman	English	East A.	High School	17
T16	Woman	Primary School	Marmara	Primary	25
T17	Man	Primary School	Central A.	Primary	26
T18	Woman	Pre-primary	Central A.	Pre-primary	25
T19	Woman	Special Teaching	Aegean	Pre-primary	12
T20	Woman	Pre-primary	Mediterranean	Pre-primary	15
T21	Woman	Mathematics	Black Sea	High School	6
T22	Woman	Guidance	Black Sea	Primary	15
T23	Woman	Turkish	Aegean	High School	18
T24	Woman	History	Aegean	High School	31
T25	Woman	Music	Marmara	Secondary	18

## Data Analysis

In the quantitative phase of the study, participants were asked 16 closed-ended questions and 2 open-ended questions. The analysis of quantitative data was conducted alongside the qualitative data. The data from 6,005 participants in Turkey was collected and evaluated using the online tool SurveyMonkey. The data was analyzed using percentage (%), frequency (f), and mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) distribution tables. In the qualitative part of the research, 19 open-ended questions were asked during the interviews. The findings were analyzed using an inductive analysis method. The collected data were systematically described, and these descriptions were then explained and coded to derive results and interpretations based on emerging themes. Generalization was applied to the findings, and overall predictions were made for the future. Both the quantitative and qualitative data analyses aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic and address the research questions effectively.

## FINDINGS

One of the primary objectives of this study is to explore the impact of social networks on education. Within this framework, the findings can be categorized into four key questions: Why do teachers use the Internet? Why do teachers engage in social networks? What are the advantages of social networks? And how do teachers utilize social networks? Regarding the reasons why teachers use social networks, the research participants displayed a strong willingness to embrace these platforms and new technologies. In interviews, teachers emphasized the significant contribution of social networks to their professional lives, considering them indispensable and beneficial tools. They recognized a paradigm shift in the education system, wherein social networks occupy a vital role. From the perspective of interviewed teachers, it is evident that social networks enhance the quality of education, enrich the learning environment, and offer prompt feedback through measurement and evaluation tools integrated into these platforms.

Teachers were asked about the frequency of their internet usage based on the reasons for use. Accordingly, Table 2 lists the mean values of the teachers' reasons for internet usage.

Table 2. *Distribution of participants based on internet usage purposes*

<b>Internet Usage Purposes</b>	<b><math>\bar{x}</math></b>
To acquire information	4.59
To conduct research	4.56
To contribute to professional development	4.48
To contribute to the educational process	4.43
To engage in instant communication	4.42
To stay updated on current affairs	4.28
To streamline daily tasks	4.08
To execute official services	4.07
To follow social media	4.07
To exchange emails	3.86
To share content	3.73
For entertainment (watching videos, playing games, etc.)	3.22
To utilize leisure time	3.12
To engage in online chats	3.09
To view or upload photos of followers	2.68
To post on or read the walls of followers	2.47
To get to know people better	2.43
To access contact information of individuals	2.32
To find new friends	1.95

According to Table 2, the questionnaire responses from the 6,005 participants in this research shed light on teachers' purposes for internet usage. The participants ranked their intentions as follows: obtaining information ( $\bar{x} = 4.59$ ), conducting research ( $\bar{x} = 4.56$ ), contributing to professional development ( $\bar{x} = 4.48$ ), supporting the education and training process ( $\bar{x} = 4.43$ ), engaging in instant communication ( $\bar{x} = 4.42$ ), and staying updated with current affairs ( $\bar{x} = 4.28$ ). Subsequently, the participants indicated that they primarily use the internet to facilitate their daily work ( $\bar{x} = 4.08$ ), fulfill official tasks ( $\bar{x} = 4.07$ ), engage with social media ( $\bar{x} = 4.07$ ), exchange emails ( $\bar{x} = 3.86$ ), and share information ( $\bar{x} = 3.73$ ). Conversely, the least preferred actions among teachers included finding new friends ( $\bar{x} = 1.95$ ), acquiring contact information from people ( $\bar{x} = 2.32$ ), developing deeper connections with others ( $\bar{x} = 2.43$ ), posting or reading on followers' walls ( $\bar{x} = 2.47$ ), and viewing/uploading photos of followers ( $\bar{x} = 2.68$ ). Clearly, teachers perceive the internet as a valuable information source that supports their self-improvement and enables them to stay abreast of current trends. The priorities associated with internet usage revolve around subjects related to education and the training process. As can be seen, teachers see the internet as a source of information where they can improve themselves and follow current trends. Internet usage purposes are listed here and it is seen that the subjects related to education and training process are in their priorities.

### **Why do teachers use social networks?**

Within the scope of this study, it is evident that the participating teachers exhibit a strong inclination towards utilizing social networks and embracing new technologies. The teachers who partook in the interviews assert that social networks make a substantial contribution to their professional lives and using these networks has become a necessity due to their utility as effective platforms. They assert that a paradigm shift is underway in the education systems, and social networks hold a pivotal position in driving this transformation. The interviewed teachers unequivocally express that social networks enhance the quality of education, enrich the learning



environments, and facilitate prompt feedback through the utilization of measurement and evaluation tools integrated within these networks. In the quantitative research, the frequency of participants' activities on social networks have been asked. The results are shared in the Table 3 below.

Table 3. *The frequency of participants' activities on social networks*

<b>Actions</b>	<b><math>\bar{x}</math></b>
Posts related to raising awareness and consciousness.	2.97
Congratulations and celebration posts.	2.91
Posts concerning environmental and ecological issues.	2.88
Posts related to special days and weeks.	2.84
Shares regarding new teaching methods and techniques.	2.8
Shares related to my areas of interest.	2.77
Announcement shares (photos, achievements, etc.).	2.77
Shares about things I've recently learned.	2.68
Shares about books I like or recommend.	2.64
Shares related to technology.	2.59
Shares regarding the state of the teaching profession.	2.52
Shares expressing agreement or disagreement with a certain view.	1.73
Shares concerning teacher appointments.	1.62
Shares about economy and money.	1.6
Political and policy-related shares.	1.37

The frequency of participants' activities on social networks is provided in Table 3. In this section, the average frequency of these actions has been taken. According to this, teachers mostly indicated that they engage in awareness-raising and consciousness-building posts (mean = 2.97), congratulatory and celebratory posts (mean = 2.91), posts related to environmental and ecological issues (mean = 2.88), posts about special days and weeks (mean = 2.84), posts about new teaching methods and techniques (mean = 2.8), posts related to areas of interest (mean = 2.77), and subsequently, they expressed making announcement posts (photos, achievements...). In the survey, it is observed that teachers do not engage much in political posts (mean = 1.37), and posts related to economy and money (mean = 1.6), indicating a preference against making these types of posts.

#### *Personal and professional development*

According to all the interviewed teachers, social networks play a crucial role in both personal and professional growth. The research findings revealed that teachers utilize social networks to enhance their professional careers, stay informed about evolving trends worldwide, draw inspiration from their peers, seek answers to their inquiries, and explore subjects of interest. Moreover, teachers emphasized that social networks provide a platform for them to gain insights into cultural diversity at both national and international levels. As articulated by educators classified under codes 5, 10, and 12, these platforms have the potential to significantly enhance their professional growth and development.

*“If we encounter something different on social networks, we try to get it. Or if there is something we hear for the first time, we search it on the net and we try to do it.” (T5)*

*“I firmly believe that social networks, when utilized effectively and with clear intentions, significantly contribute to professional development.” (T10)*

*“Education is our primary responsibility, and I have a personal drive to stay ahead of the curve. I acknowledge that what I know may not always be accurate, and I believe that individuals can thrive in life by constantly adding to their knowledge. Therefore, for*

*teachers, the authentic use of social media should primarily revolve around education.” (T12)*

Another aspect emphasized by educators is the platforms' capacity to keep them abreast of the latest developments and provide opportunities to track ongoing projects.

*“I love the posts that prioritize education and its principles. I follow the quality posts. I transfer the knowledge will add something to me and my students. That's why I follow some people.” (T3)*

*“We follow the agenda with social networks. We stay on the agenda and follow the latest. We plan studies accordingly. In this sense, we have started the studies in line with the goals for our country and for Europe, at least at school level. We actively engage with social networks to stay informed and up-to-date. By following the latest trends and agendas, we can plan our educational endeavors accordingly. For instance, we have initiated projects aligned with both our country's goals and those of Europe, particularly at the school level.” (T5)*

As seen the teachers suggest that teachers stay up to date with projects in the social networking platforms. They may get contact with experts, teachers living abroad, or influential educators who share news, ideas, updates, and research findings relevant to teaching through these channels. By following these accounts and making collaborative projects, teachers can stay informed about changes in curriculum, educational policies, and pedagogical approaches at the school level. Another key point highlighted is the role of technology in education, where educators assert that these networks facilitate the advancement of teachers' professional development, with web 2.0 tools being foremost among them. Within the context of this research, it is evident that teachers who engage with social networks predominantly utilize these tools. Teachers have reported acquiring knowledge about the names and utilization of these tools primarily through their interactions on social networks. It is seen that especially international networking fosters continuous learning and keeps educators updated on the latest trends and best practices.

#### *Peer Learning and Collaboration*

Teachers participating in the survey and the interview, report that they interact with teachers in national and international contexts. They come together in these networks, learn from each other, and boost their professional development. They stated that they like to use web 2.0 tools and they could help other teachers to add value to their professional development. They also reveal that they found the project partners in these networks and that they disseminated their project work through these networks. Teachers prefer to use these networks as it is a space where they can come together, learn together and work together. In this way, teachers can meet other teachers and can exchange ideas in the social networking platforms like eTwinning.

*“Within the scope of the project, we held meetings together with other teachers and integrated them into education. I can say that eTwinning projects have provided this. eTwinning projects and the following successes have made me known.” (T1)*

*“Thanks to eTwinning, we could learn about different approaches of students, especially with other teachers and the other country teams. There are teachers and students from different countries and cultures in the projects. This develops the interaction.” (T2)*

*“While doing eTwinning projects, there were people who touched my heart, and also teachers to whom I touched. It helped a lot when I taught my friends any web 2.0 tool at night. I continue to meet with these people. I have so many great memories. This is a very good thing eTwinning has given. We learn and we transfer information,” (T9)*

In light of teachers' sentiments, it is evident that social networks play a pivotal role in fostering peer learning through various avenues. These platforms enable educators to establish connections

with peers on both local and global scales. By joining specialized groups or communities tailored to their subject area or grade level, teachers can engage in discussions, exchange ideas, share resources, and collaborate on projects. Social networks serve as a medium for educators to transcend geographical barriers, granting easy access to diverse perspectives and expertise worldwide. Within these platforms, educators can disseminate resources such as lesson plans, instructional materials, and research findings, thereby cultivating a culture of collaboration and facilitating mutual learning among peers.

Moreover, social networks provide spaces for educators to actively participate in discussions, seek advice, and pose questions to their peers. This collaborative environment fosters the exchange of innovative ideas and effective solutions to common challenges encountered in teaching and learning contexts. Through social networks, educators have the opportunity to partake in professional development initiatives such as webinars, online courses, and virtual conferences, organized either by peers or educational institutions. Engaging in these activities enriches educators' knowledge base and enhances their pedagogical skills, thus contributing to their continual professional growth.

Furthermore, social networks facilitate a feedback mechanism wherein peers offer constructive criticism, encouragement, and guidance to one another. This feedback loop promotes reflective practice and fosters a culture of continuous improvement among educators. Additionally, these platforms enable educators to broaden their professional networks by connecting with colleagues, mentors, and subject matter experts within their field. Such connections often lead to collaborative ventures, partnerships, and novel learning opportunities, thereby facilitating personal and professional growth. In summary, social networks serve as dynamic platforms that foster peer learning by facilitating collaboration, resource sharing, professional development, and supportive networks among educators.

#### *Using As a Resource*

Participating teachers express that networks could be valuable resources if they can be used effectively. This network facilitates the accessibility to the content and to the people they want to network with. Thus, they have the chance to communicate and learn.

*“We have kindergarten groups on Facebook and the events are shared there. I have a lot of documents, but I still go there and look if there is something different or if there is something I can move to my children. Here, I learned Web 2.0 tools. These tools have given me a lot. There are people I met through social networks. I can ask everything and they answer.” (T9)*

*“I actively use social networks in the communication, collaboration and assignment processes with students. In addition, I learned the tools of prezi and powtoon from the Facebook group and I used them in my lessons.” (T13)*

When the ideas of teachers are interpreted, it can be said that the main resources of information in social networks are peers, experts, tools, groups, and documents for teachers. Teachers like to learn from their colleagues and try to share the outcomes with their students. As articulated by teachers, the web 2.0 tools shared in these social networks provide interactive and dynamic learning experiences that capture students' attention and promote active engagement with course material. They give the chance to facilitate collaboration among students, allowing them to work together on projects, share ideas and provide feedback to one another. These resources supplement traditional teaching materials, catering to diverse learning preferences and providing additional support for students. Overall, the integration of Web 2.0 tools in lessons enhances teaching and learning experiences by fostering engagement, collaboration, personalization, global connectivity, real-world relevance, feedback, assessment, flexibility, and accessibility. It can be said that by leveraging the power of technology within the social networks, teachers can create innovative and inclusive learning environments that empower students to succeed in the digital age.

#### *Being in Projects and the Safety*

Teachers mention that they can make their voices heard to the managers and decision makers by acting together with other teachers by virtue of social networks. Teachers imply that teachers in social networks are influenced by other teachers and the projects in the networks increase their recognition. Thus, teachers try to fulfill their sociological and psychological needs with social media tools by being more visible in these networks. This study clearly reveals that teachers use these tools to interact with their students during lessons.

*“I still see eTwinning as the best platform if you are working with students. Personal data and safety are very important and this sensitivity is not taken into account in any other social network. It is the safest area to lead students. From teachers around, I see that eTwinning activities have already developed these aspects. What is desired here is actually to use social media and technology correctly.” (T7)*

*“The eTwinning project is slightly different from other social networks. Because teachers who never use social media are also there. There are also our partners. Sometimes, when we think about opening Facebook or Instagram pages, they say that they don't have such accounts. He says he can't open. There are teachers who are against it. eTwinning is a social platform where the privacy of students is taken as a basis and it is only for teachers. A person from outside can not easily enter eTwinning and can not see the posts and other stuff.” (T14).*

When teachers' expressions are interpreted, it is seen that teachers mentioned about the visibility of the teachers in the projects and drew attention to the security risk in social networks. Another teacher said that there are teachers who do not use social media but are on the eTwinning platform highlighting that the most important reason for this is the security and privacy issues. Although the survey in this study was made to the teachers in the eTwinning activity, it was seen that the rate of teachers who do not use social media was close to 3%. This can be interpreted as teachers do not trust social media and prefer safer platforms. Teachers like to integrate the things they learned from the projects into his lessons by giving an example from their students. All in all, safety is a crucial concern for teachers and they expressed the need for a secure platform. While a majority of participating teachers use social media and social networks, they believe that these networks pose a risk to their personal information security. Additionally, teachers do not perceive these networks as devaluing the teaching profession. However, respondents remained uncertain (35%) regarding the notion that these networks track followers' information. Consequently, there is a demand for a more secure social network.

#### *Integration To The Lesson*

Teachers postulate that they use these networks to carry the information they have learned from social networks to the classroom. They use web 2.0 tools, especially in the smart boards in the class. Here, teachers' main purpose is to take part in these networks, follow the posts and accommodate them into their lessons. Some remarks of teachers regarding how they use these tools and how they integrate them into the lessons are shared below:

*“I send the YouTube links of mine to parents via WhatsApp. The children watch my YouTube channel and do the activities there. I prepared animated visuals. I also prepare videos and shared them on my Instagram account. I have added a WeTransfer link to the comments section in my YouTube channel in order to reach more people. The parents were able to access the animated version of my work by clicking and the other teachers also apply them in their own classrooms.” (T2)*

*“Although what we have learned on social networks may seem utopian, it can be easily realized. When I first learned virtual reality, I was very interested. I prepared a video on one piece of paper and we played it virtually. I made a virtual magazine with students. This became a project in the school and it was the students' product. Green screen technology was integrated into this and we released a virtual magazine.” (T6)*

*“My students started learning eTwinning and web 2.0 tools with me and became interested in this field. Now when we make slides, we used to use just power points. We used to post photos before, now we make our avatars and we started decorating our slides with them. I had students who had never touched a computer and who were afraid of it, now they have started to use programs.” (T22)*

As it can be seen, teachers have reached students and even parents and interacted with them by using many social networks. Teachers used augmented reality applications, word cloud tools, movie script creation tools as well as YouTube, Padlet, Chatter pix, Word Wall, Word art tools. Teachers stated that they played games with their students using Web 2.0 tools. They taught their lessons with gamification activities, created virtual magazines with their students, and made pictures with video editing and montage tools. They prepared posters and created drama activities. All teachers agree that social networks and applications make the lessons more enjoyable.

### **What are the Assets of Social Networks?**

In line with teachers' assertions, the most imperative advantage of these networks is that teachers can stay up-to-date and follow changing and developing trends. Teachers expressed that they can follow the changing fields of education and techniques in the world, thanks to social networks. Another benefit is that teachers have the chance to increase their human resources through these networks. They maintain that social networks help to increase the recognition and visibility of teachers, so that people can follow people they want, reach out and learn from the academics. Another advantage is increasing the motivation of teachers and students. In this context, teachers think that sharing makes people feel happy, makes educational practices more efficient and fun and it is very beneficial for the education process.

*“In Turkey, if there weren't any social networks, it would be impossible for teachers to exhibit himself in his profession. Normally, there are very few people around you that you can ask your questions. Social networks actually works for it.” (T1)*

*“I am here to reach more people and to be useful. I trust the work I do. It is beneficial for my students. And it is a good feeling being an example for other teachers and other students by spreading the work of my students. It can be nice to travel, see new places or meet new people thanks to these networks, but I think being accessible is more important. Thus, I like to come together with colleagues and share the work.” (T8)*

*“The works we do on behalf of our school are seen and liked by the senior management thanks to social networks. This makes us work more enthusiastically and increases our motivation,” (T15)*

The inspiring part of social networks as highlighted by the teachers indicates a new form of being recognized by the organization. The visibility of teachers' work to senior management through these platforms can lead to increased intrinsic motivation, suggesting that social networks may be reshaping traditional mechanisms of professional reward and acknowledgement.

*“A friend had a graduation ceremony during the pandemic period. I thanked him and asked him how well it is. He immediately sent me the photos and explained how he did it. I became very happy with this. I did the same event and I told other teacher friends. Experiencing the feeling of getting a quality label from the projects and rushing to find out how we can make up for what we lack is wonderful.” (T9)*

*“People on social networks keep me up to date from events. I try to learn from webinars. They broadcast them live and invite experts. I find the opportunity to participate in those webinars and I have A chance to ask my questions there. I follow the pages for this purpose.” (T16)*

The interviews suggest that social networks are essential in overcoming feeling cut off because of location or job roles by allowing teachers to showcase their expertise and exchange knowledge within a broader community. This being seen online is important not only for individual



professional development but also for working together to get better at teaching. The teachers' narratives imply that social networks enable a form of a culture where everyone shares and takes part where sharing, collaboration, and peer validation are central to building your professional self and recognition.

Moreover, the teachers explain a perception of social networks as platforms for sharing professional roles and knowledge widely. They engage in groups of people learning together that extend beyond the traditional boundaries of schools and districts, enabling access to a diversified set of resources, expertise, and support systems. This sharing professional roles and knowledge widely is characterized by an increased capacity for innovation, as demonstrated by the adaptation of practices during the pandemic.

The integration of social networks into professional practices also reflects a shift towards choosing your own learning path. Teachers are not passive consumers of professional development; instead, they actively seek opportunities, such as webinars and live events, to enhance their knowledge and skills. This taking action by yourself to professional growth is facilitated by the being direct and interactive afforded by social networks.

### **What are the teachers doing on social networks?**

Teachers claim that they use document, photo, and video sharing tools as well as blog, wiki, and webinar tools, thanks to the social networks featuring a web 2.0 tool. Teachers were asked about the objective of using the teacher networks they used, and the most common actions are: To follow the announcements and news about education, to learn about the developments in the teaching profession, to be informed about the meetings and seminars, to be informed about new teaching materials, to be aware of the developments in the world, to search for and participate in the new project ideas, to disseminate the project carried out, to be aware of the social activities carried out in common, to follow the work done in schools, to exchange information among teachers, to learn about the teachers' personal rights, to get help in profession, to use digital tools in education, to follow or share the legislations related to education, to share information about the results of national and international exams, to share the success of their students, to support teachers in various subjects, to follow postgraduate education opportunities, to share competitions and the competitions results, to establish friendship and cooperation with teachers, to follow funny and entertaining posts.

In fact, the comments of the following teachers with code 5 and 14, summarize how teachers are using and what actions they are doing on social networks.

*“We are trying to transfer the innovative methods and practices in our projects through social networks. We want other students in the class to do the same practices. Therefore, we can easily use many web tools and applications from artificial intelligence to augmented reality or virtual reality with our students.” (T5)*

*“Technology is constantly changing. Education, methods and techniques are changing. Students' interests vary a lot. We are also trying to do something, but we can always learn something from our colleagues and pass it to our students. I am here for this reason.” (T14)*

When the thoughts of teachers are summarized regarding social networks, it can be said that teachers like to use online learning environments. In this sense, they can think flexibly, access the information they want, work to support different learning styles, know how to benefit from the opportunities provided by web 2.0 tools, and not hesitate to communicate and cooperate. It has been observed that they try to integrate social networks into their learning processes.

Teachers desire a platform that recognizes and showcases their achievements, visibility, and success. The research reveals a high level of motivation among teachers and students, with appreciation from school management serving as a significant source of motivation. Consequently, it is believed that rewarding successful project owners who meet specific criteria will make them feel valued.

Lastly, effective communication is another key aspect desired by teachers in a social network platform. They seek a platform that enables collaboration and communication, fostering peer learning and providing opportunities for teachers to learn from their students. Teachers should be able to share their personal and collaborative work with their students. Facilitating project-based learning and encouraging teachers to collaborate on projects with their peers would be a valuable feature. The platform should also provide a means for teachers and students to interact and produce joint products. By engaging in such project-based learning experiences, the aim is to create lasting behavioral changes.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

With the emergence of new technologies in the 21st century, the internet has become a significant element in both individual and societal life, inevitably leading to the formation of virtual communities as daily life becomes increasingly digitized (Castells, 2005). It is possible to say that today social networks have begun to influence every aspect of our lives, penetrating cultural, economic, social, and psychological domains. In this evolving process, these platforms have transcended being mere communication tools and have acquired the characteristic of organized structures where individuals and groups express themselves. Teachers, who prepare the future of society, have also embarked on connecting to social networks in their educational processes, striving collectively to learn and to exist within virtual communities by staying online in almost every aspect of their lives (Raut & Patil, 2016). Thanks to technology, students can expand their visions both locally and globally by communicating and collaborating with other individuals (Budhwar, 2017). It would be accurate to say that the opportunities provided by these networks are a result of the growth of the Internet and social networks. The opportunities provided by social media and Web 2.0 tools, along with their visual diversity and timeliness, have increased the demand for such courses among both teachers and administrators working in the Ministry of National Education, reflecting the changes in the produced knowledge (Arkan & Yünter, 2017).

In the scope of this research, numerous assumptions have been attempted to be either proven or refuted. Initially, it was hypothesized that teachers primarily used social networks to gain more followers, pass time, seek attention, and derive pleasure from notifications. However, this research has revealed that these were the least desired objectives. Contrary to expectations, teachers do not prioritize increasing their follower count, seeking attention from the audience, engaging in comment wars, or deriving satisfaction from notifications. Instead, they view social networks as effective tools for professional development and as necessary for integrating technology into their lessons. A study supporting this view was conducted by Greenhow and Askari. According to Greenhow and Askari (2015), their research found that one-third of teachers are engaged in social networks during their leisure time outside of school. Consequently, they argue that these networks can be used for online educational opportunities and that teachers communicate more with their students through social networks. They also claim that teachers become more knowledgeable about educational technologies by recognizing different cultures, changing their ideas, and accessing more resources. Similarly, LeNoue (2012), in his doctoral dissertation, argues for the use of social networks in education, stating that these networks should be utilized due to their multifunctionality. He asserts that they enhance individuals' communication skills, and facilitate content development and dissemination by learners, thus promoting a student-centered model. Furthermore, he highlights that social networks eliminate hierarchy, leading to more flexible learning experiences, and he suggests that these networks represent a new model and paradigm shift in education.

Another assumption made before the research was that individuals used virtual communities to establish their identity, unite for mass persuasion, and influence decision-makers. Although Hood (2019) suggests that individuals' presence on these networks is driven by society's expectation of sharing and the effort to reflect the desired social media profile, teachers participating in the research do not share this view. While individuals on social networks possess the power to shape the attitudes and behaviors of users and decision-makers, teachers in the research stated that they refrain from sharing political posts, forming pressure groups, and following union-related content.

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that teachers primarily use social networks to connect with others during their education and training processes and fostering collective learning and participating in virtual communities across various aspects of their lives. Their main objectives in utilizing these platforms are to voice their opinions, garner attention, and seek answers to their inquiries.

Although Halverson (2011) expresses concerns about social media particularly in terms of protecting students' privacy, stating that these networks hinder the educational process and do not contribute to the expected career development of students, teachers participating in this research express the opposite view. Correlatively, Raut and Patil (2016) primarily focus on the negative aspects of using social networks in education, suggesting that these networks create addiction among students, cause them to experience concentration problems, decrease their academic achievements, and lead to difficulties in memory and recall processes, teachers participating in the research have tended to highlight the benefits of these networks. Teachers in this research emphasize that social networks provide access to diverse information and multicultural perspectives and support student success, reduce dropout rates, and create opportunities for individuals. Teachers think that social networks facilitate the development of 21st-century skills, enable teachers to employ different teaching methods and techniques, support vocational and technical education, and enhance the quality of the teaching profession.

While Sarıçam (2015), in their subject-based study examining the extracurricular use of social networks, concludes that these networks lead to students' failure in subjects such as foreign language (English), Turkish, and mathematics and that they have no positive effects on computer technologies, social studies, and science courses, teachers participating in the research do not share the same opinion. Based on the data collected from teachers, it is evident that they utilize social networks primarily for accessing information and benefiting their students, rather than for personal pleasure and entertainment. This shift in behavior indicates that teachers are embracing the requirements of an information society and moving away from being mere consumers.

During the interviews, teachers put forth several suggestions for the effective use of social networks. These recommendations include disseminating national and moral values, conducting original studies within these networks, enhancing the visibility of teachers, providing training programs, ensuring the safety of social networks, improving teachers' technological proficiency in education, staying updated with the latest trends, recognizing exemplary teachers, formulating corresponding policies, and fostering voluntary participation in social network activities. Additionally, regulations regarding the use of social networks, training teachers on social media etiquette, imparting values education, and enhancing teachers' media literacy skills were among the suggestions provided by the interviewed teachers and questionnaire respondents.

All in all, it is seen that teachers aim to enhance their personal and professional development through these platforms. Accordingly, training sessions should be provided to teachers and school administrators, both remotely and face-to-face, in the field of education. In-service training programs should include detailed explanations of the National Social Teacher Platform's usage and functions, along with media literacy training to increase teachers' awareness. Additionally, teachers should receive training on Web 2.0 tools to enhance the quality and visual appeal of education. Teacher training institutions should provide teachers and aspiring educators with the necessary awareness and skills to utilize these networks effectively. Moreover, instead of lengthy in-service training courses aimed at enhancing teachers' professional development, redirecting the target group towards social networks as platforms for peer learning can prove more cost-effective and feasible. Finally, decision-makers should formulate studies and policies that recognize and reward successful teachers engaged in projects aligned with the management's mission and vision.

Consequently, this research has led to the proposal of establishing the "National Social Teacher Platform" to cater to the interests, desires, and needs of teachers. This platform would enable teachers to form groups related to their specific subjects, engage in collaborative brainstorming, share ideas and information, and maintain communication with their students beyond the confines

of the school environment. Teachers would have the opportunity to showcase their work, thereby fostering stronger relationships among parents, teachers, and students. On the other hand, considering the intensity of teachers' usage of social networks, the Ministry of National Education and teacher training institutions should instill the necessary awareness in both current teachers and teacher candidates. Providing both theoretical and practical professional development training in media literacy would be beneficial for more efficient use of social networks in lessons. Additionally, instead of long in-service training courses aimed at enhancing the professional development of teachers and administrators, directing them towards social networks, where they can learn from each other at a significantly lower cost, could be advantageous, thereby increasing awareness among teachers regarding this matter.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest associated with this research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Statements of Publication Ethics

The authors hereby declare that the study does not have unethical issues and that the research and publication ethics have been observed carefully.

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### Uzun Öz

Bugün, sosyal ağların yaşamımızın her alanını etkilediği ve kültürel, ekonomik, sosyal ve psikolojik alanlara nüfuz ettiği görülmektedir. Bu gelişen süreçte, bu platformlar sadece iletişim araçları olmaktan çıkmış, bireylerin ve grupların kendilerini ifade ettiği organize yapılar haline gelmiştir. Toplum hazırlayan öğretmenler de eğitim süreçlerinde sosyal ağlara bağlanmış, neredeyse yaşamlarının her alanında çevrimiçi kalarak sanal topluluklarda öğrenmeye ve var olmaya çaba göstermiştir. Bu ağların sunduğu fırsatlar, internetin ve sosyal ağların büyümesinin bir sonucu olduğu söylenebilir. Sosyal medya ve Web 2.0 araçlarının sağladığı olanaklar, görsel çeşitlilikleri ve güncellikleriyle öğretmenlerin ve Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı'nda çalışan yöneticilerin bu tür kurslara olan talebini artırmış, bu da üretilen bilgi alanındaki değişimlere yansımıştır. Bu çalışmada, 2021-2022 yılı eğitim öğretim döneminde Türkiye'nin 81 ilinde görev yapan öğretmenlerin sosyal ağlardaki eğitim pratikleri incelenmiştir. Araştırmada veri toplama aracı olarak 6005 öğretmene çevrimiçi anket uygulanmış ve 25 öğretmen ile de çevrimiçi görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Karma yöntem tasarımı ile desenlenmiş olan bu çalışmanın nicel bölümü tarama çalışması niteliğinde olup bu verilerin analizinde frekans dağılımları, yüzdeler oranları ve ortalamaları belirlenmiştir. Bu çalışmada bu sonuçların ortalama değerleri paylaşılmıştır. Nicel verilerin analizi ile eş zamanlı olarak, nitel verileri toplanmış, bu süreçte öğretmenlerin bu ağlardaki eğitim pratiklerini belirlemeye yönelik çevrim içi ortamda görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Daha sonra bütün veriler bütüncül bir yaklaşımla ele alınmış ve tümevarımsal veri analizi yöntemi ile değerlendirilmiştir. Bu çalışmada öğretmenlerin sosyal ağlardaki eğitim pratiklerini incelemeyi amaçlamıştır. Araştırma kapsamında, öğretmenlerin bu ağlarda bulunma nedenleri, bu ağların öğretmenlere katkısı, öğretmenlerin bu ağlara yönelik düşünceleri, ihtiyaçları, eğilimleri ve önerileri ele alınmıştır. Ayrıca, bu platformların eğitimde kullanım durumları ve eğitim pratiklerine entegrasyonu anlaşılmasına ve yorumlanmaya çalışılmıştır. Kısacası bu araştırma, teknolojinin ve sosyal ağların kullanımının ve faydalarının açıklanması ve sanal toplulukların eğitim sistemine uyarlanması ve uygulanması üzerine odaklanmıştır. Araştırmada, öğretmenlerin sosyal ağları kullanma nedenleri ve bu ağlarla ilgili görüşleri incelenmiştir. Başlangıçta, öğretmenlerin sosyal ağları daha fazla takipçi kazanmak, zaman geçirmek, dikkat çekmek ve bildirimlerden zevk almak için kullandıkları varsayılmıştır. Ancak yapılan bu araştırma, öğretmenlerin bu amaçlarla bu ağlarda olmadıklarını ortaya çıkarmıştır. Öğretmenler, sosyal ağları mesleki gelişim için etkili araçlar ve teknolojiyi derslerine entegre etmek için gerekli olarak görmüşlerdir. Öğretmenler, bu ağları çevrimiçi eğitim fırsatları için kullanılabilirliğini ve bu ağlar sayesinde öğretmen ve öğrenciler arasında iletişimin arttığını ifade etmişlerdir. Öğretmenler bu ağlarda yer alarak, farklı kültürleri tanıyarak, fikir alışverişini yaparak ve daha fazla kaynağa erişerek eğitim teknolojileri hakkında daha fazla bilgiye ulaştıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Öğretmenler, sosyal ağların iletişim becerilerini geliştirdiğini, öğrencilerinin içerik üretmesini kolaylaştırdığını ve eğitim öğretim sürecinde öğrenci odaklı bir modeli teşvik ettiğini ifade etmişlerdir. Ayrıca, sosyal ağların idari hiyerarşiyi ortadan kaldırdığını, böylece daha esnek öğrenme deneyimlerine yol açtığını ve eğitimde yeni bir model ve paradigma değişikliğini temsil ettiğini vurgulamışlardır. Buna göre öğretmenlerin bu ağları daha çok eğitime ilişkin duyuru, haber ve öğretmenlik mesleği ile ilgili gelişmeleri takip etmek, akran öğrenme sayesinde birbirlerinden öğrenmek ve de bu ağlarda öğrendiklerini derse ve sınıfa yansıtmak için burada oldukları görülmüştür. Bu çalışma sonucunda, bu ağların aynı zamanda öğretmenler için bir kaynak görevi üstlendiği ve öğretmenleri motive ettiği sonucu da ortaya çıkmıştır. Araştırmaya katılan öğretmenler, sosyal ağların doğru ve güvenli kullanıldığı müddetçe eğitim sürecinde kullanılmasında bir mahsuru olmadığını, öğretmenlerin bu sayede farklı öğretim yöntemlerini kullandıklarını ve uyguladıklarını, diğer öğretmenlerden ilham aldıklarını, Web

2.0 araçlarını derslerinde öğrencilerle beraber kullandıklarını, son olarak da sosyal ağların eğitim pratiklerini daha verimli ve eğlenceli hale getirdiğini ifade etmişlerdir. Literatürde yapılan çalışmalar, özellikle öğrencilerin gizliliğini koruma konusunda sosyal ağlardan endişe duyulduğu ifade ederken, bu ağların eğitim sürecine engel olduğunu ve öğrencilerin beklenen kariyer gelişimine katkıda bulunmadığını belirtmektedir. Bu araştırmaya katılan öğretmenler ise bu durumun tersini ifade etmişlerdir. Birçok araştırma, eğitimde sosyal ağların kullanımının negatif yönlerine odaklanarak, bu ağların öğrenciler arasında bağımlılık yarattığını, konsantrasyon sorunlarına neden olduğunu, akademik başarılarını azalttığını ve hafıza ve hatırlama süreçlerinde zorluklara yol açtığını öne sürerken, araştırmaya katılan öğretmenler bu ağların faydalarını vurgulama eğiliminde olmuşlardır. Bu araştırmadaki öğretmenler, sosyal ağların çeşitli bilgilere ve çok kültürlü perspektiflere erişim sağladığını, öğrenci başarısını desteklediğini, okul terk oranlarını azalttığını ve bireylere fırsatlar yarattığını düşünmektedir. Öğretmenler, sosyal ağların 21. yüzyıl becerilerinin geliştirilmesine yardımcı olduğunu, öğretmenlerin farklı öğretim yöntemlerini ve tekniklerini uygulamasına destek olduğunu, mesleki ve teknik eğitimi desteklediğini ve öğretmenlik mesleğinin kalitesini artırdığını düşünmektedir. Sosyal ağların ders dışı kullanımını inceleyen konu bazı çalışmalarda, bu ağların öğrencilerin İngilizce gibi derslerde başarısız olmalarına neden olduğunu ve bilgisayar teknolojileri, sosyal bilgiler ve fen derslerinde olumlu etkilerinin olmadığını sonucuna varırken, araştırmaya katılan öğretmenler aynı fikri paylaşmadıkları görülmüştür. Öğretmenlerden toplanan verilere dayanarak, öğretmenlerin bu ağları öncelikli olarak bilgiye erişim ve öğrencilerine fayda sağlamak için kullandığı, kişisel zevk ve eğlence için kullanmadıkları ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu davranış eğilimi, öğretmenlerin bilgi toplumu gereksinimlerini benimsemelerine neden olmakta ve bu ağlarda sadece tüketici olmadıklarını göstermeleri açısından önemlidir. Görüşmelerden elde edilen veriler ışığında sosyal ağların etkili kullanımına ilişkin bazı önerilerde bulunmak faydalı olacaktır. Bu öneriler, ulusal ve ahlaki değerlerin yayılmasını, bu ağlar içinde orijinal çalışmalar yapılmasını, öğretmenlerin görünürlüğünün artırılmasını, eğitim programlarının sağlanmasını, sosyal ağların güvenliğinin sağlanmasını, öğretmenlerin eğitimdeki teknolojik yetkinliklerinin artırılmasını, yenilikleri takip etmelerini, örnek çalışma yapan öğretmenlerin daha fazla tanınmasını, buna uygun politikaların oluşturulmasını ve sosyal ağ etkinliklerine gönüllü katılımın teşvik edilmesini içermektedir. Buna ek olarak, diğer öneriler arasında sosyal ağların kullanımına ilişkin yönetmeliklerin belirlenmesi, öğretmenlere sosyal medya nezaketinin öğretilmesi, değerler eğitiminin verilmesi ve öğretmenlerin medya okur-yazarlık becerilerinin artırılması yer almaktadır. Diğer taraftan, öğretmenlerin bu platformlar aracılığıyla kişisel ve mesleki gelişimlerini artırmayı amaçladıkları da görülmektedir. Bu nedenle, eğitim alanında öğretmenlere ve okul yöneticilerine, uzaktan ve yüz yüze eğitim sağlanmalıdır. Hizmet içi eğitim programları, Ulusal Sosyal Öğretmen Ağı Platformu'nun kullanımı ve işlevleri hakkında detaylı açıklamaları içermeli, öğretmenlerin farkındalığını artırmak için medya okuryazarlığı eğitimi sağlanmalıdır. Ayrıca, eğitimin kalitesini ve görsel çekiciliğini artırmak için öğretmenlere Web 2.0 araçları hakkında eğitim verilmelidir. Öğretmen yetiştirme kurumları, öğretmenlere ve öğretmen adaylarına bu ağları etkili bir şekilde kullanma konusunda gerekli farkındalık ve becerileri sağlamalıdır. Ayrıca, öğretmenlerin mesleki gelişimini artırmaya yönelik uzun süreli hizmet içi eğitim kurslarının yerine, akran öğrenmesi için sosyal ağlar gibi platformlara yönlendirilmesi daha ekonomik bir uygulama olacaktır. Son olarak öğretmenler, karar vericilerin, misyon ve vizyonla uyumlu projelere dahil olan başarılı öğretmenleri tanıyan ve ödüllendiren çalışmalar yapmaları gerektiği ve buna uygun politikalar geliştirmeleri gerektiğini düşünmektedir. Kısaca öğretmenler, başarılı çalışmalar yapan öğretmenlerin takdir edilmesi ve ödüllendirilmesi gerektiğini ve aynı zamanda eğitim sisteminin ve öğretmen eğitimlerinin sosyal ağlar üzerinden değerlendirilebileceği önerisini getirmektedir. Tüm bu veriler, öğretmenlerin istekleri, ihtiyaçları ve beklentilerine yönelik "Ulusal Sosyal Öğretmen Platformu" adı altında bir ağın geliştirilmesini gerekliliğini ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bu dijital sosyal ağının akademisyenlere, uygulayıcılara ve alanyazına katkı sağlaması, aynı zamanda da eğitim sisteminde var olan ihtiyaçlara ve başta bilgi güvenliği olmak üzere bu alanda yaşanan sorunlara çözüm getirmesi beklenmektedir. Bu platform, öğretmenlere özgü konularla ilgili gruplar oluşturmalarına, işbirlikçi beyin fırtınası yapmalarına, fikir ve bilgi paylaşımlarına ve okul ortamının sınırlarının ötesinde öğrencileriyle iletişim kurmalarına olanak tanıyacaktır. Öğretmenler, çalışmalarını sergileme fırsatına sahip olacak, bu da veliler, öğretmenler ve öğrenciler arasındaki daha güçlü ilişkilerin oluşmasını teşvik edecektir.