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<u>**Araştırma Makalesi/Research Article**</u>

Paper-and-pencil vs Online Assessment in Distance Education: Examining EFL Students' Preferences and Challenges in a Mozambican Tertiary Institution

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the phenomenon of Distance Learning Assessment (DLA), in an English Language Teaching (ELT) Undergraduate Degree at a public university in Zambézia Province, Mozambique. The purposes of this study were (1) to find out students' preferences related to the assessment systems in use at a public higher education institution, and (2) analyse the challenges they face in an online and paper-and-pencil testing system. To achieve these purposes, an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was used. Therefore, quantitative data were obtained from four tests measuring 130 students' progress in the topics previously discussed, and using descriptive statistics and a t-test, their scores from the two testing systems were presented and compared. Furthermore, a qualitative open-ended web-based questionnaire was employed to explore participants' preferences and challenges in distance learning assessment systems. The findings indicate statistically significant differences between paper-and-pencil test scores and online test scores, with participants performing significantly better in the online testing format. Regarding their preference, most of the English as a Foreign language (EFL) students majoring in ELT prefer the online testing system due to its numerous advantages. However, its main challenges included internet service/s, the time the tests took place, and the availability of Moodle learning management system. Regarding the paper-and-pencil testing system, the major challenge reported was the travelling and accommodation costs involved since these tests take place at the resource centres. In alignment with these results, distance education stakeholders should take further steps towards improving the testing systems in use at this institution.

Keywords: Distance Learning, Testing systems, Paper-and-pencil assessment, online assessment, ELT/ EFL, Mixed-methods, Mozambique

Uzaktan Eğitimde Kâğıt-Kalem ve Çevrim İçi Değerlendirme: Mozambik'teki Bir Yükseköğretim Kurumunda İngilizceyi Yabancı Dil Olarak Öğrenen Öğrencilerin Tercihleri ve Karşılaştıkları Zorlukların İncelenmesi

Öz

Bu çalışma, Mozambik'in Zambézia eyaletindeki bir devlet üniversitesinde, İngilizce Öğretmenliği lisans programı çerçevesinde Uzaktan Eğitimde Değerlendirme (UED) olgusunu incelemeyi amaçlamıştır. Bu çalışmanın amaçları (1) öğrencilerin bir devlet yükseköğretim kurumunda kullanılan değerlendirme sistemlerine ilişkin tercihlerini ortaya çıkarmak ve (2) çevrimiçi ve kâğıt-kalem temelli ölçme sistemlerinde karşılaştıkları zorlukları incelemektir. Bu amaçlara ulaşmak için açımlayıcı sıralı karma yöntem tasarımı kullanılmıştır. Bu bağlamda, 130 öğrencinin daha öğrenilen konulardaki performanslarını ölçen dört farklı sınavdan nicel veriler elde edilmiş ve betimleyici istatistikler ve t-testi kullanılarak iki ölçme sisteminden aldıkları puanlar karşılaştırılmıştır. Ayrıca, katılımcıların uzaktan eğitim değerlendirme sistemlerine yönelik tercihlerini ve bu sistemde karşılaştıkları zorlukları araştırmak için açık uçlu web tabanlı bir anket aracılığı ile nitel veriler toplanmıştır. Bulgular, kâğıt-kalem testi puanları ile çevrimiçi test puanları arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı farklılıklar olduğunu göstermektedir ve katılımcılar çevrimiçi test formatında belirgin şekilde daha iyi performans sergilemiştir. Tercihleri konusunda ise, Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce (YDİ) öğrencilerinin çoğu, sayısız avantajı nedeniyle çevrimiçi sınav sistemini tercih etmektedir. Bununla birlikte, ana zorlukları arasında internet hizmeti / hizmetlerinde karşılaşılan sıkıntılar, sınavların yapıldığı zaman dilimi ve Moodle öğrenme yönetim sisteminin kullanılabilirliğine ilişkin sıkıntılar yer almaktadır. Kâğıt-kalem sınav sistemiyle ilgili olarak bildirilen en büyük zorluk ise, sınavların belirli sınav merkezlerinde yapılmasından dolayı ortaya çıkan seyahat ve konaklama masraflarıdır. Bu sonuçlarla uyumlu olarak, konu ile ilgili uzaktan eğitim paydaşları, kullanılan sınav sistemlerini iyileştirmeye yönelik daha fazla adım atmalıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Uzaktan Eğitim, Sınav sistemleri, Kâğıt-kalem ile değerlendirme, çevrimiçi değerlendirme, Yabancı Dil olarak İngilizce (YDİ), karma yöntemler, Mozambik

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted education systems worldwide, forcing a rapid transition to distance learning (Comiche et al., 2024; Dağgöl Dişlen & Akcayoğlu İşpınar, 2023; Ergin et al., 2022). This shift has presented numerous challenges, particularly in the realm of assessment. Students across various educational levels have encountered difficulties adapting to remote assessment methods, while also developing preferences for certain approaches (Pingol, 2022). Research indicates that distance learning assessment poses unique challenges for both students and educators. For younger students, particularly those in early primary school, online assessment has proven problematic due to limited computer skills and the need for parental support (Zubala et al., 2023). Additionally, issues such as internet connectivity, motivation dynamics, and difficulty in understanding learning materials have been reported as common obstacles (Suharsih & Wijayanti, 2021). Despite these challenges, students have shown preferences for certain aspects of distance learning assessment. Many appreciate the flexibility and accessibility offered by online platforms, as well as the opportunity for increased learning autonomy (Souto Romero et al., 2024; Suharsih & Wijayanti, 2021). In addition, students value interaction and communication with teachers and peers, emphasizing the importance of feedback in the assessment process (Pingol, 2022; Qafzezi & Kadi, 2023). As educational institutions continue to deal with the complexities of distance learning, understanding these challenges and preferences is crucial for developing effective assessment strategies that support student learning and engagement.

In Mozambique, many academic institutions offer Distance Learning Courses. Distance learning has been adopted in various Mozambican secondary schools. Initially, it was implemented in schools within one of the northen provinces (Nampula) in 2004 and subsequently expanded nationwide in 2008 (Alberto & Tumbo, 2022). It is also present in higher education institutions (Comiche et al., 2024; Preti & Barbieri, 2013). As a result, a number of mozambian researchers have investigated distance learning focusing on different topics (Mombassa & Arruda, 2018, 2019; Lumbela, 2017; Preti & Barbieri, 2013). Among these topics, we can find the investigation of the expansion of distance learning in higher education (Preti & Barbieri, 2013); mobile learning (M-learning) mode in distance education (Comiche et al., 2024); Challenges of distance education in secondary schools and higher education (Alberto & Tumbo, 2022; Lumbela, 2017); the history of distance education in Mozambique (Mombassa & Arruda, 2018), and the the inclusion of the population in higher education through distance education (Mombassa & Arruda, 2019). Given the current trend of widespread technology utilization, distance learning is a mode of study that is likely to prevail in this country.

Although distance learning is a novel mode of study being adopted by an increasing number of Mozambican higher education institutions, the issue of Distance Learning Assessment (DLA) has been marginalised in the current literature. Instructors, commonly identified as Tutors or Lecturers within this context, as well as students encounter numerous challenges in the assessment of distance learning. It is posited that these difficulties arise from the necessity for adaptation among many learners, tutors, and

distance education administrators whose prior educational experiences were exclusively in-person. Therefore, this study focuses on the challenges students face in distance learning mode in higher education. It aims to fill the existing gap and contribute to literature by discussing the assessment phenomenon in distance education looking at students' preferences and their challenges. Thus, the following research questions (RQs) were utilised to guide the study:

1) To what extent does the assessment system employed in a Mozambican higher education institution influence students' outcome?

2) What are the challenges faced by distance learning students in the two types of testing systems utilised in a Mozambican higher education?

3) What are the students' preferences regarding the types of assessment systems utilised in a higher education distance learning?

Literature Review

Distance education is defined as a method of learning that enables students to access various educational materials electronically, regardless of their location or time constraints (Domaç et al., 2022). Dağgöl Dişlen & Akcayoğlu İşpınar (2023) add that this mode of education "can be implemented as synchronous and asynchronous" (p. 49). These and other authors add that synchronous learning involves a group of learners, with or without an instructor, using a learning management system (LMS) or video conferencing tool to meet and interact at the same time while being separated by location. In contrast, asynchronous learning occurs when participants are separated by both time and place, however, the learning material remains consistently available to students (Amin & Sundari, 2020; Berek, 2025). Therefore, in asynchronous learning, learners adjust the timing and pace according to their individual needs (Alberto & Tumbo, 2022; Ergin et al., 2022). Ergin et al. citing Adıyaman (2002) state that we can find a one-way or two-way method in distance education. The former is characterised by utilising resources such as "Radio or TV programs, audio video tapes, CD/DVD, and printed materials" while the latter predominantly employs "interactive media, telephone, simultaneous training via the internet, e-mail correspondence, messaging, mobile applications, tele/video or internet conferences" (Ergin et al., 2022, p. 44).

On the other hand, other scholars distinguish distance learning from e-learning. They contend that distance learning typically involves students studying primarily at home, with materials and assignments sent and received by mail, while e-learning provides online courses accessible from home through the Internet, highlighting the contribution of technology to enhancing the learning experience (Al-Awawdeh & Kalsoom, 2022; Berek, 2025; Ergin et al., 2022). Aquami et al. (2024) classify such methods of distance learning as "offline, online" and "blending" (p. 1798). In this study, we will use the terms "distance learning" and "distance education" interchangeably to refer to courses delivered through a combination of Internet-based resources and face-to-face tutorials. Our focus will be on examining

how students are assessed within this mode of study and exploring their assessment preferences and challenges.

Distance Learning Assessment

Assessment in language education is used to determine the level of attainment of educational goals either in a course or in a specific degree (Al-Awawdeh & Kalsoom, 2022). Many scholars acknowledge that assessment is a systematic process through which the teachers, lecturers, or tutors collect students' information or data in order to measure their achievement based on the educational aims (AI-Ghazo, 2023). This author adds that it also improves students' academic performance and language skills through the feedback they receive from the tutors. Thus, in any teaching and learning mode, whether face-to-face, online, or in distance learning, assessment is a central part of a curriculum, as it is included as one of the phases of the pedagogical process (Oliveira & Pacheco, 2003). In online or distance learning, assessment is often viewed as both complex and challenging process with most of the definitions being based on the characteristics of face-to-face education (Al-Awawdeh & Kalsoom, 2022).

There are different types of assessment including diagnostic, formative and summative (Arends, 2012; Heil & Ifenthaler, 2023). Diagnostic assessment is often used before learning or teaching takes place in order to check students' readiness, while in formative assessment, tutors or lecturers use it to adapt their teaching methods during discussion of a topic or unit. Lecturers can also use summative assessment to measure students' understanding at the end of a teaching unit or topic, course/subject, cycle, term or year depending on what they want to explore or find out from their students (McNamara, 2000; Qafzezi & Kadi, 2023; Rabelo, 1998; Senel & Senel, 2021). In this study, results from summative assessments were used. In this type of assessment, tutors choose from the existing testing methods, one that best suits their learning methods. For example, in distance education, students can be assessed using paper-and-pencil method or computer-based testing (CBT), which is online. McNamara (2000) considers paper-and-pencil language assessment which is face-to-face as "a traditional test format, with test paper and answer sheet" (p. 135). Though traditional, this is the most used testing method in different educational settings in Mozambique. However, the massive use of technology among other factors allows tutors and universities to opt for an online testing system whenever possible. Thus, minimising the costs of education while maintaining the same quality (Elfirdoussi et al., 2020).

Paper-and-pencil vs Online Testing Methods

The assessment methodologies employed by tutors in distance education have a profound impact on students' study habits and learning outcomes (Arends, 2012). For example, online or computer-based testing (CBT) systems offer numerous advantages within the context of distance education. Gall et al. (2007) describe several benefits of CBT, including: (1) the capability to randomize or systematically vary the sequence of questions presented; (2) the functionality to record or restrict the duration a test-taker spends on each item; (3) the elimination of opportunities for test-takers to look back or ahead to

other sections of the test; (4) a reduction in scoring inaccuracies; and (5) expedited scoring processes. Furthermore, Gyamfi et al. (2019) articulate that online learning empowers students to exert complete autonomy over their learning processes, enabling them to plan, monitor, and evaluate their progress comprehensively.

In addition, McNamara (2000) identifies several advantages of online assessment, including the immediacy of providing exam results, the accuracy and consistency of evaluation, the diagnostic support for teachers and administrators, relief for test writers, and quick access to extensive test item banks. Moreover, test types beyond multiple-choice questions can be administered, and the cumbersome issue of "deciphering student handwriting is eliminated" (p. 118).

While we concur with these authors, we also recognize that paper-and-pencil assessments have their advantages, such as the ability of examiners or tutors to directly monitor or control students and minimize cheating. However, this method has its limitations compared to the advantages offered by online assessments. Thus, when administering paper-and-pencil assessments, tutors need to invest significant effort to achieve the benefits associated with online assessments, although attaining many of these advantages may prove challenging.

Conversely, Arends (2012) discusses the disadvantages of assessment in general, which can be extrapolated to distance learning assessments. He asserts that the manner in which assessment and classification processes are conducted has long-term consequences. These processes also consume a significant "portion of teacher time" (p. 214). Both paper-and-pencil and online assessment methods have their weaknesses in terms of the time required from distance learning tutors or lecturers. For paper-and-pencil assessment, tutors spend considerable time in three main processes: designing the test, administering it, and marking it. In contrast, if tutors choose to implement a variety of closed questions in online testing, the grading process becomes more efficient. However, McNamara (2000) posits that "the use of computers for the delivery of test materials raises questions of validity, (...) different levels of familiarity with computers will affect individuals' performance, and interactions with the computer may be successful for some" (p. 80). He further notes that there is a "high cost associated with computer hardware and software" (p. 80), which affects institutions administering online assessment. This financial burden also extends to students who may need to purchase computers or compatible mobile devices to fully participate in online education (Nyakuleha & Simengwa, 2023.

Each assessment is open to valid scrutiny concerning language choice, measurement techniques, testing processes, and the interpretation of the results obtained (McNamara, 2000; Winke, 2024; Wallace & Qin, 2021). In online assessment, issues of cheating or plagiarism are prevalent, as both tutors and students question whether the individual completing the test is indeed the student or another person acting on their behalf. This concern necessitates deep reflection from all participants in distance education.

Testing methods: Students' preferences

A comparative study conducted by Afacan Adanır et al. (2020) examined the perceptions of online examinations among Turkish and Kyrgyz students. The research revealed that Turkish learners, unlike their Kyrgyz counterparts, viewed online exams as "less stressful and more reliable and fairer than traditional paper-based exams" (p. 1). Similarly, Cross et al. (2023) reported that participants in their study expressed "significantly higher" satisfaction with the online exam environment compared to traditional settings (p. 27). These findings align with a systematic review of online assessment in higher education by Heil and Ifenthaler (2023), who posited that "online assessments have promising potential in supporting and improving online learning processes and outcomes" (p. 187). Babitha et al. (2022) ascertain that "online tests are a fantastic alternative to traditional offline tests" (p. 2458). However, contradicting these positive perspectives, Elfirdoussi et al. (2020) investigated distance education assessment in Moroccan universities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their study concluded that both students and professors concurred that "online learning is not more interesting than ordinary learning" (p. 1).

The impact of online testing on student achievement assessment was investigated by Backes and Cowan (2018). These researchers explored whether the selection of a particular testing mode influences student performance. Their findings revealed disparities in student outcomes, with those completing English examinations via paper-and-pencil format attaining higher scores. Nevertheless, Backes and Cowan note that a huge number of academic institutions in America are embracing online testing methods. In contrast, McNamara (2000) posits that semidirect tests are the preferred approach for evaluating speaking skills in distance learning contexts, citing "cost considerations and the logistics of mass test administration" as factors that render this method "cheaper to administer" (p. 82). Within Zambézia province, some higher education institutions have opted to primarily utilize online evaluation to measure their students' progress during the teaching process. Certain institutions have stipulated that paper-and-pencil assessments be reserved exclusively for final examinations at the end of the semester.

Challenges in Distance Learning Assessment

Regarding the implementation of online exam, Afacan Adanır et al. (2020) indicate that students' "major issue was cheating" (p. 13). To deal with such practice, these authors suggest that with the advancement of technology, higher education institutions may consider the adoption of "more appropriate frameworks and control procedures" which might include the "novel technologies that provide online proctoring capabilities" (p. 13), thus, contributing to the elimination of cheating issues. Guangul et al. (2020) concluded in their study about challenges of remote assessment in higher education that "academic dishonesty, infrastructure, coverage of learning outcomes, and commitment of students to submit assessments" (p. 519) were among the major challenges experienced by their participants. The cheating concern found in both Afacan Adanır et al. (2020) and Guangul et al. (2020) studies is challended by Babitha et al. (2022) to whom "online exams may be performed without cheating" as long

as the higher education institutions promote the use of "AI-based exams and AI proctoring capabilities" (p. 2462).

Students in Distance Learning Assessment face additional challenges. For Kara et al. (2019) such challenges, "vary depending on their age, gender, knowledge and skills as well as the context in which they study" (p. 5). Hara and Kling (1999) conclusion can be used to demonstrate such variation. These authors concluded that their participating students were demotivated due to the delayed feedback, lack of clear instructions, and technical difficulties. However, we contend that this can be observed in any testing system. For example, in a paper-and-pencil testing system, lecturers have to read and provide feedback to their students which demands a lot of time. As a result, they might do it after a long time or sometimes they might simply ignore that they need to provide feedback to their students. This affects the students' performance since their motivation might either increase or decrease based on the way lecturers or tutors behave after a test is done in a given course/ subject.

In the same way, the lack of clear instructions can be found in both online and paper-and-pencil assessments. When the assessment is online, the third challenge should be considered as the number of technical problems, including connectivity issues faced by students might increase (Nyakuleha & Simengwa, 2023). Besides the challenges we have just reviewed, McNamara (2000), ascertains that computer-based testing is "a potential of double jeopardy (inadvertently evaluating not only language [knowledge] but also computer expertise)" (p. 118). This is a fact in Zambézia context if not in all the country where we still have people whose acquaintance with computers is limited and below the average. Therefore, when using online assessment, students are more likely to be assessed not only their knowledge of the content but also, though indirectly, their competence in using computers or technology (Nyakuleha & Simengwa, 2023). Thus, some students might score low results not because of a lack of knowledge of the subject but because of illiteracy of information and communication technology (ICT).

Method

Research design

To understand students' preferences and challenges they face in the testing systems in use at a public higher education, a four-month study, corresponding to one semester, was conducted with students majoring in English Language Teaching in 2019 enrolled in two modules. Therefore, this study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed method design (Perdede, 2019). In this type of research design, researchers firstly collect quantitative data, followed by qualitative data. As such, we initially gathered data from the students' test scores during the semester, and the qualitative data was collected from an online open-ended web-based questionnaire as detailed in the section about data collection.

Research Context

This study included as its population the first and second year Mozambican EFL distance learning students who were majoring in English Language Teaching in 2019. They were attending a

public university within Zambézia province but they were coming from different provinces within the centre and northern part of the country. At the time we conducted this study, the students were supposed to meet their local tutor every fortnight for presentations of their assignments in different subjects. Therefore, they had both a local tutor, who was a guide for them, and a number of lecturers (speciality tutors) corresponding to the number of modules in each semester. Speciality tutors provided subject-specific support through expert guidance, in their specialised subjects. They could meet the students twice per semester for two in-person tutorials lasting about an hour each. Thus, they mostly used online sessions for most of the learning activities which were conducted through Forums and Chats on a Learning Management System (LMS). However, at the time we collected data, they did not favour online testing. As a result, students were assessed using paper-and-pencil method. Since adopting online assessment would also mean including some tests, and final exams, which were stipulated to be taken face-to-face. Despite this reality, the assessment of participants in this study included both paper-and-pencil and online methods.

Sampling

For the present study, we selected two different modules taught by the same speciality tutor. Module 1, selected from first year, had 112 students enrolled, and Module 2, from second year, had 81 students. In total, they were 193 students in the two modules. As a result, for the quantitative data, using online sample size calculator, with the confidence level of 95%, we obtained 129 or more as the necessary number of participants (see Fig. 1). Since we had two classes, we decided that we would include 130 participants for the analysis of results from the four tests.

Figure 1.

Online sample size calculator

Since we decided to include 130 participants for the analysis of the test results, we selected 75 students from Module A and 55 students from Module B. This decision allowed us to obtain a proportional number from the two classes based on the following calculations:

Module A: $\frac{112}{193} \times 130 \approx 75.4$ **Module B**: $\frac{81}{193} \times 130 \approx 54.6$

For the selection of the participants, a purposive sampling method was used based on the following criteria: (1) all participants had to be enrolled in the module, (2) they should have all the four tests (2 paper-and-pencil, and 2 online).

Similarly, in the open-ended web questionnaire that aimed to collect qualitative data, we displayed the questions to all the students, however, our target was to obtain feedback from the same students who had met our criteria established in the last paragraph. As a result, we received answers from 78 students. After reading the answers we perceived that some answers were similar. Therefore, we purposively selected 30 participants' answers for qualitative analysis. Their answers represent most of the participating students.

Data collection instruments

As we explained in the last section, data from four tests and an online open-ended Web Questionnaire were used for data collection. Many scholars have defended and adopted the use of the results from students' tests to achieve different aims in research (Luckesi, 2011; Sukmawati & Zulherman, 2023). For this study, two different testing systems were used to collect data for the quantitave analysis. Starting from paper-and-pencil tests and followed by an online testing system, four tests were administered in each module, and their results were collected during the 1st semester of 2019. We firstly used paper-and-pencil for Test 1, followed by an online Test 1. The same procedure was followed with Test 2. Thus, in total, we had two paper-and-pencil tests and two online tests for each module. The inclusion of tests results aimed at (1) comparing the results from the two testing systems and seeing whether the participating students scored different results in the two-testing system and see its significance.

After collecting data from the tests, an open-ended Web questionnaire (Züll, 2016) was used in the last month of our study (the last two weeks of June 2019). According to Züll (2016) researchers may determine the mode of the open-ended questionnaire which might take the form of an interview (if face-to-face or using telephone) or the researcher might decide that "the question appears on the computer screen/on paper, and the respondent enters the answer into the text field provided (web or postal surveys)" (p. 1). In this study, our open-ended questionnaire adopted the second option, whereby it was made available on the web system, and lasted 15 days allowing participation of anyone willing to provide answers. The instructions included information that the participants' responses would be used merely for academic purpose and their participation was not compulsory. We set five open-ended questions which allowed the participants to freely express their views about Distance Learning Assessment (DLA) in use at the higher education institution where they were studying. The response rate was good since we obtained data from a total of 78 students from the two modules.

Data analysis

Data collected from the first instrument (Tests results) were analysed and presented using both descriptive statistics and t-test analysis. The t-test was employed following the confirmation of a normal distribution through normality tests. This quantitative data from the tests was presented using SPSS program where scores from each module were introduced separately in two tables, resulting in tables 1, 2, 3, and 4, and then descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse, explain and describe the phenomenon under study (Cardoso et al., 2019; Gall et al., 2007; Sousa & Baptista, 2011).

Since we also wanted to describe students' preferences and the challenges they encounter in distance learning assessment, data collected from open-ended web questionnaire were presented and analysed using thematic analysis technique, that is, all aspects related to the same theme were grouped together (Bell & Waters, 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2023, 2024). Qualitative data were collected electronically, therefore, it was possible to transfer them to a word document format. Following this procedure, I read the answers, coded the data, and analysed them using MS Word. Due to similarities of the responses, only some participants' responses (30) were included in this article. The codification of data and organisation of the corresponding themes were based on the last two research questions which included the distance assessment challenges, and students' preferences when using either paper-and-pencil or online assessment methods.

To enhance the trustworthiness of our qualitative findings, peer debriefing was used (Stahl & King, 2020). Three additional educational researchers, who are my colleagues, were invited to review and analyse the initial data presentation section and provide general comments. Their insightful feedback contributed not only to the improvement of the findings section but also to the overall quality of the article. Furthermore, in 2019, the initial data was presented at a national conference attended by Distance Learning stakeholders who provided valuable suggestions for improving data presentation techniques. When necessary, participants were contacted to provide feedback on the information presented in the manuscript. Stahl and King (2020) consider this practice as "member checking" (p. 27). In cases where misunderstandings arose, prompt corrections were made to ensure that the presented information accurately reflected the participants' intended messages.

Ethical procedures

In accordance with local Mozambican practices, this study was exempt from formal ethical approval processes as it did not involve infants, vulnerable populations, or sensitive topics. This approach is common across most universities, including the institution where I am currently employed. At the time of this study, the university did not have an Institutional Review Board; therefore, the exemption aligned with the standard procedures of the Faculty Postgraduate Directorate.

Nevertheless, I ensured that all necessary institutional permissions were secured prior to conducting the study at the university where this research took place. Approval was granted by the heads

of the Faculty, Department, and the English Division, consistent with the local standard practices for studies of this nature at the time. After this procedure, the lecturer who provided quantitative data through the documents containing students' scores was contacted. He was informed about the study and voluntarily agreed to participate and use the two testing systems. At the end of the semester, he provided the researcher all students' scores from the four tests.

Although the institutional approval was granted orally, all participating students were required to read and agree to the online consent form provided before accessing the online web-based Questionnaire. Students were informed that their participation was not compulsory and that their decision would not affect their grades. Furthermore, it was made clear that their names would never be publicly presented in any circumstances and codes would be used to report their data. They were also informed that if they decided to withdraw after providing data, they could freely contact the author and their data would be removed from the data set. Consequently, only those who agreed to participate in the study answered the open-ended questionnaire. Following this ethical agreement, while presenting data, students' names were omitted for anonymity purpose and we abbreviated Participant as (P) followed by a number (e,g, P. 1), for Participant 1.

Findings

This study was conducted using results from students' tests and an open-ended web-based questionnaire. Therefore, in this section, the results obtained from the two data collection instruments will be presented and analysed separately.

RQ1: To what extent does the assessment system employed in a Mozambican higher education institution influence students' outcome?

To answer this question, we used the data collected from the students' test scores, whose findings are presented in the following section:

Paper-and-pencil versus Online Tests' Scores

In the Mozambican context, academic scores range from zero to twenty (0-20). Using SPSS, T-test, the mean and standard deviation (SD) were calculated to compare the results of paper-and-pencil tests with those of online tests. The data were presented in tables that summarize the test scores from the two modules.

Module A

Table 1.

Descriptive Results - Year 1- EFL Students

Test Type	Test	Mean	SD*
Paper-and-pencil	Test 1	8,31	2,43
	Test 2	8,40	2,13
Online	Test 1	10,33	2,97
	Test 2	12,45	2,97

*SD = standard deviation

Our data from Module A, displayed on Table 1, shows that there are significant differences between paper-and-pencil and online test results, with online tests showing higher mean scores and slightly more variability. For the paper-and-pencil tests, the average score for Test 1 was 8.31, with a standard deviation (SD) of 2.43, and Test 2 had an average of 8.40, and the SD decreased to 2.13, indicating moderate variability in scores. The minimum score for these tests was 3.35, for Test 1, and 2.50 for Test 2, while the maximum scores were 14.15 in Test 1, and 13.15 in Test 2. These scores reflect a similar range of performance in the two paper-and-pencil tests. On the other hand, online tests' results demonstrate that the average scores for Test 1 were higher (10.33), with SD of 2.97. In Test 2, the mean score increased significantly to 12.45, with the SD remaining at 2.97. Compared to paper-and-pencil, online minimum scores were 0.00 for Test 1 and 6.00 for Test 2. Out of 20, the maximum score was higher in online tests, that is, 16.63 in Test 1 and 19.00 in Test 2, indicating a wider range of high-performance outcomes. This is also confirmed in the following t-test table.

Table 2.

Independent Samples t-test for EFL undergraduate Students' scores

	Scores	*t*	*df*	Sig (2 tailored)	Mean difference
Test 1	Paper-and-Pencil / Online	-4.565	148	.000	-2.03347
Test 2	Paper-and-Pencil / Online	-5.792	148	.000	-2.46733

Based on the t-test results, we affirm that in module A, there is a strong, statistically significant difference between paper-and-pencil and online EFL students' performance. This fact confirms that the online testing system presents better results, as seen in Table 1. In the following section, we compare the results from Module B, presented in tables 3 and 4.

Module B

Table 3.

Descriptive Results - Year 2- EFL Students

Test Type	**Test**	**Mean**	**SD***
Paper-and-pencil	Test 1	8.38	3.70
	Test 2	8.85	2.34
Online	Test 1	8.63	3.36
	Test 2	9.31	2.51

*SD = standard deviation

Similar to results from Module A, in this Module, based on the data displayed in table 3, participants performed better on online tests compared to paper-and-pencil tests. Looking at the two testing systems, we can see that the average score for online tests are different from paper-and-pencil testing format. This difference was higher in Test 2, while in Test 1, despite online tests presenting a

slightly higher score, the findings suggest that the difference is not worth noting since the score are almost similar.

Variability in scores measured by the SD was higher in Test 1 for both formats. Online tests had consistently lower variability than paper-and-pencil tests, suggesting a more consistent performance among participants in the online format. Added to this data are the minimum and maximum scores which suggest that Test 1 had the lowest score in paper-and-pencil compared to online Test 1. However, in Test 2, the online minimum dropped to 1.00, suggesting some participants faced challenges, possibly technical or content-related. The maximum scores in all tests were below the 20-point maximum, with online tests reaching 15.00 in Test 1 and 14.00 in Test 2. As noted in Module A results, in general, online tests consistently showed higher averages in Module B, indicating possible benefits such as ease of use or accessibility. The t-test was used to compare these testing systems as presented in Table 4.

Table 4.

Independent Samples t-test for EFL undergraduate Students' scores

	Scores	*t*	*df*	Sig (2 tailored)	Mean difference
Test 1	Paper-and-Pencil / Online	-.044	108	.965	-.02727
Test 2	Paper-and-Pencil / Online	-5.721	108	.000	-3.42000

In module B, our results from Test 1 comparison suggest that there is no significant difference between face-to-face and online results. The scores were almost identical for this test, suggesting that the testing mode did not impact performance in this case. In contrast, from Test 2 comparison, a t-value of -5.721 corresponds to a very smaller p-value. This result strongly suggests a significant difference between paper-and-pencil and online test performance.

Overall, the t-test results from the four tests used in two modules indicate that three out of four tests (-4.565, -5.792, -5.721) show a strong and statistically significant difference between paper-and-pencil and online testing systems. One test (-0.044) shows no significant difference, suggesting that in some cases, the testing mode might not matter.

Findings from the open-ended web-based Questionnaires

RQ2: What are the challenges faced by distance learning students in the two types of testing systems utilised in a Mozambican higher education?

The first questions of our open-ended web questionnaire aimed to find answer for our second research question. The focus was on online assessment, since responding to this question would give us the idea they have about the paper-and-pencil testing system that was mostly used at the time we collected data. Based on the participants' responses, the following subthemes emerged:

Time and cost-effective

The results reveal that the majority of students consider that the online testing system, compared to paper-and-pencil tests, saves time and is cost-effective. The following participants' extracts provide a general picture of their perceptions regarding this theme:

> P. 2: "Different from in-class tests, online can help the students to avoid traveling to Mocuba (the resource centre location), because in my case, I live in Molocue and a return ticket from Molocue to Mocuba is fifty hundred, without adding the costs associated with booking a room, and buying food. Online assessment can reduce all these expenses."
> P. 1: "Online test is easy to do and fast, as well as it is economical." … "Online tests would help us save money that we use for transport and the money that we pay for exams papers."
> P. 2: "The time that the online assessment were made available (at night), I did not have time."
> P. 15: "It saves a lot of money for students, e.g., I live in Niassa far from resource centre. It also saves money for the University because in-person assessments need speciality tutors, transport, and papers used during the test."… "There are also costs involved with online assessment softwares."
> P. 3: "Students face many challenges such as computers and phones are very expensive to get them."

In general our participants reported costs involved in both paper-and-pencil and online testing systems for both students and university. For the university, they included costs involved with the online assessment software, while for the students the participants reported costs involved with their traveling, accommodation and additional budget when they are out of their villages, districts, cities or provinces for the paper-and-pencil assessment. In contrast, in online testing they stated that the costs were significantly low for them since they just needed internet, and appropriate computers or cellphone. As they added, though computers and cell phones are expensive, they buy them once for the whole degree.

Flexibility, students' comfort and promptly Feedback

When expressing the challenges participants face in DLA, many students stated that online testing provided them with various advantages compared to in-person testing. Some of the challenges experienced in paper-and-pencil testing which are minimised by the use of online testing include the flexibility regarding where and when they can write tests and immediate feedback. They mentioned that it was more comfortable writing the tests online than in-person, and they received immediate feedback in online testing different from paper-and-pencil system. The following extracts illustrate these facts:

> P. 15: "The students are able to do the assignment anywhere and anytime, multiple students can complete the online assessment at the same time and have feedback about the test on time."
> P. 31: "The environment of performing test is selected by you, like performing listening music or watching TV, performing in silence, etc."
> P. 35: "write the test at home and well relaxed at a good environment"
> P. 27: "We went for distance course because of our incompatibility of time, and with online assessment we do not have to worry with travels, we can do it in our own comfort."
> P. 18: "You do the test in some place alone, noiseless, and without any tutor to control you (because this sometimes disturbs)."
> P. 30: "They are easy to get the feedback assessment after writing the test, and also student get encouraged to study more before he begins to write the test and sometimes we are given to write the second chance."

As can be read in these extracts, the participants' perspectives show that if online tests are adopted there are many benefits for them. They can easily manage their time and they feel motivated when getting feedback as soon as they finish their tests.

The internet connectivity or coverage and test timing

Different from paper-and-pencil tests, the internet network system/coverage and its quality were pointed out as one of the main common challenges and disadvantages in online testing in DLA, as confirmed by most of the participants. As a result, once they open the test, the timer begins, and even if the internet connection is lost, the system continues to count the time. The following extracts illustrate our participants understanding regarding this theme:

P. 31: "Internet problems, and short time of availability."
P. 15: "Technology is not always reliable, there might be connection or internet problems."
P. 8: "Because of the reality of our country, mainly the part of network, it sometimes doesn't help doing online assessment."
P. 36: "Daily, I was supposed to go to my workplace and back, a distance of nearly 30 Km to have access to network coverage and platform." [sic.]
P. 2: "The challenges I faced were: problem of network; lack of megabytes…"
P. 28: "It becomes difficult for me because I work in countryside and there is no network."
P. 1: "Sometimes if the network is bad, then it becomes hard to do the online test."
P. 6: "The tests start counting as the student opens it and when the network is down you automatically fail."

The respondents pointed out that it becomes difficult to overcome the chalenges when the issue of the quality or availability of the Moodle platform is added, as stated by P. 36. The Moodle Learning Management System (LMS) sometimes is not available at the time students need to write their tests. Our participants reported having failed to do some tests due to this challenge.

Unavailability of electricity in remote areas

Working in places where there is no electricity makes it difficult to charge computers and cell phones. Many students attending distance learning work in very remote areas, sometimes without access to electricity, which affects them in accessing the distance learning platforms. They end up keeping all the learning activities for the weekend when they travel to nearest villages. That is the reason why they stated the following:

P. 35: "Students who live and work in the countryside don't have electricity power to charge phones."
P. 36: "In order to have access to electricity" this participant travelled a 30 Km distance daily.
P. 28: "Lecturer! Don't give online tests during the week because most of students are working in the bush."
P. 10: "Most of us are working in the countryside."

Based on our respondents, the fact that they spend the five weekdays in remote areas where most of the time there is no electricity poses challenges for them to follow the online activities including online tests.

ICT illiteracy or technology awareness as a challenge in online testing

Some students are not familiar with the use of technology when it comes to online testing, that is, they face difficulties on how to manage computers and cell phones for distance learning activities:

P. 51: "I found big challenge, it was not possible to get in the platform, I tried many times but I did not succeed."
P. 2: "I got low mark on Test 1 because it was the first time that I faced online test, but I'm sure that the next online test I will do my best."
P. 15: "Another challenge is how to manage those devices because it needs some knowledge how to use the devices."

P. 18: "Here in our country we are not really prepared in terms of technology, many students have lack of computers and mobile phones as well."

Data from our participants indicate that technological issues have had some negative impact on students' results when they wrote online tests. Such difficulties were not experienced when writing paper-and-pencil tests. This indicates the need for further training for students on the use of distance learning technological tools.

Test format as challenge or strength

The participants' answers highlight both challenges and positive aspects related to the test format and the type of questions. This was motivated by the fact that in online testing, they mostly answered true/false and multiple choice questions. This fact can be found in the following excerts:

P. 2: "I found it easy because it was multiple choice."
P. 18: "Sometimes the questions are not as clear as possible."
P. 25: "The use of multiple questions and true or false make students lazy in terms of reading".
P. 11: "The questions shoud be multiple choice or true / false."
P. 12: "The students may get lazy due to this kind of test [online]."

As shown here, some participants viewed true/false and multiple-choice questions as an advantage, considering them easier to answer. This contrasts with the paper-and-pencil format, where they were often required to answer open-ended questions that involved writing. On the other hand, some students believe that the question types used in online tests contribute to laziness. They argue that such questions can be answered without reading the material, although this may not be the case.

Cheating in Distance Learning Assessment

Cheating was mentioned by some participants as a concern mainly in online testing. Since they do the tests without any supervision of the tutors, the participants mentioned that some students are free to check their books or other sources while writing the tests. For example, in the following extracts, the participants express their perception regarding such practice:

P. 13: "Student writes without anyone's supervision, he is free to consult certain sources related to the subject in charge, as long he manages the timed time."
P. 10: "It is easier to cheat looking back to the contents forgotten."
P. 12: "Students may copy from the books."
P. 21: "Checking books while writing online tests."
P. 5: "No fraud [meaning cheating] available".

While cheating can occur even in paper-and-pencil testing, it is often beyond the control of tutors or lecturers in online testing, where students take the test in their own environment without any supervision protocols. However, P. 5 statement contradicts most of the participants when he states that in online testing, there is no possibility of cheating.

Strategies students use to minimise the assessment challenges

Having experienced the challenges reported in the last sections, we asked our participants the strategies they adopted to overcome them. They explained that:

P. 26: "To overcome this network problem I used to climb a mountain even at night or midnight as well."
P. 10: "We always get the top of the mountains to see forum, and online tasks."
P. 15: "The solution to the problem (ICT illiteracy) is having lessons about how to manage a computer."
P. 13: "I use to use the internet from another operator [or provider]."
P.19: "There was no way out to overcome network problems."

As revealed by our participants, some of the strategies included using different SIM cards from various mobile operators to access the Internet. Another strategy mentioned was seeking out locations with better network coverage. For instance, some would climb mountain while others would travel to villages or cities during the weekend to have access to internet. Those with lack of ICT skills defended the need to attend ICT lessons to be more familiar and prepared to handle the online activities which include the tests. Some students, who face problems getting access to Moodle LMS, reported that they interact with their classmates, and some tutors through WhatsApp and emails platforms so that they can be informed about what is happening.

RQ3: What are the students' preferences regarding the types of assessment systems utilised in a higher education distance learning?

The second and third questions in our open-ended questionnaire provided data for the last research question (RQ3). Based on the students' answers, two subthemes emerged namely: (1) online assessment, and (2) Paper-and-pencil and online testing.

Online Assessment

To discover students' preferences and whether the online test could be used as the only means to assess students in English language and other courses offered by the institution, we asked our participants two questions. Our results reveal that the majority of the 78 participants (62.82%) prefer and recommend the use of an online testing system due to its advantages. We present some of our participants' answers below:

> P. 49: "English Course should use online assessment without any additional tests at the centre."
> P. 1: "It would be good if we only had online tests without any additional written test at resource centre."
> P. 9: "I recommend the university to use online tests only because it will help us to reduce the expenditure we use for transport and accommodations."
> P. 42: "English course should use online tests because it is a distance course and it should be managed through distance learning platforms."
> Other participants included the following comments:
> P. 2: "I would like to ask for changes in the model of tests. Next year, only online assessment should be used and forget written tests at the centre."
> P. 26: "I could recommend using only online tests because by doing this we could feel confidence, making assessment online and only come for special tutorials and exams which have to be the way how they are (face-to-face)." [sic.]
> P. 11: "Everything can be done through online system."
> P. 20: "Although the network is bad, the online tests are still better way to assess distance learning students."

To support their position, the participants highlighted the reduction in costs, its role in encouraging participants to study, and its potential to decrease the number of students absent from in-person tests due to economic reasons. Moreover, participants understand that those enrolled in distance education have decided to do so because they cannot attend face-to-face classes, therefore, every activity in distance education should be conducted remotely using different technological tools. On the other hand, a number of participants suggested that the introduction of online testing should be accompanied by paper-and-pencil testing, as described in the following section.

Paper-and-pencil and online testing should be used

Some participants (33.33%) advocated for the integration of both systems, specifically the use of online testing alongside paper-and-pencil testing. This second group supported its position based on the internet issues encountered during online tests, as well as the need to develop writing skills through the open-ended questions included in tests administered at the centre, which encourage students to engage in reading.

> P. 6: "We need to be at the centre to write a formal test."
> P. 47: "I would recommend in-person written tests and some online tests. Because if someone misses online test, he/she can have marks from in-person test and vice-verse." [sic.]
> P. 29: "No! Because using only online tests could make students become lazy, so we must use both of the ways of assessment." [sic.]
> P. 51: "Face-to-face assessment helps learners familiarize with the tutors, and we can not abandon the traditional form of assessment immediately."
> P. 50: "Unfortunately we cannot use only online assessment because we could be facing a lot of difficulties."
> P. 19: "Both tests are useful because they complement each other."
> P. 44: "Because it [online] could discourage many students in reading the modules."

Although some students favoured the adoption of both testing systems, our results generally indicate that most of the students prefer online testing system. Their preference is attributed not only to the relatively higher scores achieved in this system but also to the lower costs associated with online testing, as well as the more favourable testing environment it provides, including the absence of tutor supervision.

Discussion

Insights from EFL students' scores

The results of this study indicate differences in performance and variability between the paper-and-pencil and online testing systems across both groups. Our general analysis suggests that online tests resulted in higher average scores, indicating that students performed better overall in online tests and experienced a wider range of outcomes, despite the institution's practice of favouring paper-and-pencil testing. In fact, when this study was conducted in 2019, the institution emphasised the paper-and-pencil testing system, which contradicts the findings of this study, which indicate better results with online testing. Moreover, these results challenge the conclusion of Backes and Cowan (2018), whose study found that students achieved higher scores in paper-and-pencil exams, despite the widespread use of online testing systems in most universities.

However, as described in the data presentation section, the lower minimum score for online tests suggests that some participants faced more significant challenges with this format, which aligns with the findings reported by Zubala et al. (2023). This is consistent with the observations of Hara and Kling (1999) and Nyakuleha and Simengwa (2023), who noted that, despite the advantages of online testing system, it also presented several challenges, including issues related to computer and technical knowledge.

While the differences may reflect factors such as ease of access, engagement with the online format, or other test related variables (Kara et al., 2019; McNamara, 2000), the students' better performance in online testing system suggest that this system could be a more equitable and supportive assessment option for learners in distance education due to its advantages (Suharsih & Wijayanti, 2021). Therefore, online testing may offer higher performance potential to distance learning students, however it may require addressing technical issues and ensuring that all participants can engage with the platform effectively.

Insights from open-ended web-based Questionnaire

Our findings from open-ended questionnaire show that one of the major challenges students face is related to internet coverage and availability when taking online tests. Therefore, these tests should be scheduled on weekends to accommodate students who work in areas without internet access. In contrast, the primary challenges reported with the paper-and-pencil testing system are the higher costs associated with travelling to the resource centres, including accommodation and food. Our results align with other similar studies whose conclusion pointed to the network and costs challenges in DLA (Alberto & Tumbo, 2022; Lumbela, 2017; Nyakuleha and Simengwa, 2023; Suharsih & Wijayanti, 2021). Therefore, similar to Lumbela (2017), our results revealed that using online testing would be a common agreed solution to minimise such students' higher costs.

In fact, compared to the paper-and-pencil testing system, the findings indicate that the participants feel comfortable, motivated, and free as they write online tests since they can be answered while they are anywhere, at any time, and without any supervision or control from the tutors. This highlights the flexibility in online testing, which is not experienced in face-to-face testing (Souto Romero et al., 2024; Suharsih & Wijayanti, 2021).

Furthermore, online testing allows students to get automatic feedback right after finishing writing the test. Thus, reducing the feedback waiting time experienced when they write paper-and-pencil tests. This finding corroborates Pingol (2022) as well as Qafzezi and Kadi's (2023) results regarding the feedback aspect.

The findings from this study also show that sometimes more than one attempt is allowed in online testing, motivating students to study more before their second attempt – a practice rarely observed in the paper-and-pencil testing system. Moreover, online testing ensures greater confidentiality of results, as only the student and lecturer have access to the marks. On the contrary, paper-and-pencil tests lack this level of privacy since, after grading, lecturers send the tests to resource centres. Other staff (the resource center managers and local tutors) receive them and wait until students come back for future in-person activities and deliver the tests, contributing not only to lack of privacy but also to delayed feedback (Hara and Kling, 1999; Nyakuleha & Simengwa, 2023).

Regarding the scheduling of online tests, our results suggest that these assessments should not be scheduled for evenings or nights, nor should they coincide with the same weekend that students are taking paper-and-pencil tests at the centre. Additionally, in terms of question types, closed questions, such as multiple-choice and true/false - were reported to be easier for students.

This study also identified the lack of electricity in remote areas as a significant challenge for some students. Added to this issue is the ICT illiteracy, where some students lack the technological skills necessary to deal with distance learning tools. Many scholars have concluded that familiarity with ICT impacts students' performance in online testing (Alberto & Tumbo, 2022; Nyakuleha & Simengwa, 2023; Zubala et al., 2023).

Cheating was mentioned as a major challenge, mainly in online testing, where no specific measures are in place to minimise it. In contrast, in paper-and-pencil format, speciality tutors are sent to resource centres to control and supervise students writing tests, thereby reducing the likelihood of cheating. Similarly, Afacan Adanır et al. (2020) and Guangul et al. (2020) highlighted that students are more prone to dishonest behaviour during online assessments. To address this problem Babitha et al. (2022) suggested the use of "AI-based exams and AI proctoring capabilities" (p. 2462).

The strategies students use to overcome the challenges they encounter reinforce and validate theories emphasizing the importance of placing students at the centre of distance learning. This supports Gyamfi et al. (2019) view, which defends that online learning empowers students to take full control of their learning process, including planning, monitoring, and assessing their progress. Indeed, students are primarily responsible for identifying solutions to the assessment challenges experienced in distance learning environments.

The results revealed that most students prefer the online testing system. This preference is attributed to numerous advantages associated with this testing system. Similar findings were reported in recent studies by Afacan Adanır et al. (2020) and Cross et al. (2023), where participants also favoured online testing. However, this contrasts with the findings of Elfirdoussi et al. (2020), who concluded that their participants preferred in-person learning over online learning.

Suming up, our findings are parallel to previous studies indicating that time, costs involved, internet availability and quality, Moodle LMS among other factors should be considered when determining which testing system to adopt in DLA.

Conclusion

This study explored the challenges faced by higher education students in distance learning assessment (DLA) and their preferences regarding testing systems. The findings from the students' scores revealed that there were significant statistical differences between paper-and-pencil and online tests scores. A better performance was found in online tests. Despite positive results these participants obtained in online testing system, EFL distance learning students experienced several key challenges in

both assessment systems. Internet connectivity issues was the most challenging aspect that almost all participants reported. In addition, time and cost-effectiveness emerged as significant factors, with online testing offering more efficient solutions in DLA compared to traditional methods. Flexibility and comfort were also highlighted, suggesting that students value the ability to take tests in familiar environments. However, technical challenges such as lack of electricity in remote areas, and ICT illiteracy posed significant barriers for some students. The study also revealed concerns about the test format, availability of the Moodle Learning Management System, and the potential for cheating in online environments.

Despite these challenges, the general preference for online testing systems among students highlights the perceived benefits of this testing system. The advantages of online testing, including increased flexibility and immediate feedback, appear to surpass the drawbacks for many students. This preference suggests a shift in student expectations and highlights the need for educational institutions to adapt their assessment strategies. Distance learning continues to grow in importance, therefore, there is a need of addressing the identified challenges and maximise the benefits of online testing. Educational institutions and policymakers should consider these findings when developing future assessment strategies. For instance, if online tests are to be implemented for distance education, scheduling them on weekends should be considered to help students working in remote areas, allowing them to travel to nearby locations with internet access. In fact, in lign with these results, the use of online testing should be encouraged, accompanied by comprehensive ICT training for students to reduce related challenges. This can be achieved through investments in improved distance learning infrastructure, stronger student support systems, and more secure and reliable online testing platforms to enhance the overall learning experience.

Limitations and future research

This study acknowledges several limitations. Regarding the methodology used, the tests utilised measured similar or identical content within the same year, but they differed in format and question types across the two assessment systems. This discrepancy may have marginally influenced the obtained results. Consequently, in the future, similar research should utilise consistent question types across both testing systems. Furthermore, this study's scope was limited to first- and second-year EFL students majoring in ELT. Other studies should include students from other academic years and disciplines. Future research should focus on developing strategies to mitigate technical challenges, improve digital literacy among students, and assess the effectiveness and integrity of online assessment methods in distance learning environments. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to explore the role of technological advancements, such as AI proctoring, in addressing identified challenges, warranting further investigation. Additionally, research should focus on student-tutor interactions in chats and forums, and the quality of learning materials presented on digital platforms. Lastly, it is recognized that numerous factors may have changed since the data collection period; therefore, a follow-up study should

be conducted to analyze any changes or to determine whether the institutions and lecturers' practices remain consistent.

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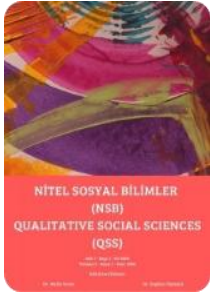
Breastfeeding and Natural Disasters: Women's Attitudes Towards Breastfeeding and the Psychosocial Effects of the Kahramanmaraş Earthquake: A Qualitative Research

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the attitudes of women who experienced the earthquake in Kahramanmaraş, Turkey, towards breastfeeding and the psychosocial effects of the earthquake. In this qualitative study, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 women who were breastfeeding their babies. The data were collected from individuals who experienced the February 6, 2023, earthquake between May 30 and July 30, 2023, through an online semi-structured interview form. The data collected were analyzed using the content analysis method, and the stages of creating codes, categories, and themes were systematically followed throughout this process. As a result of the interviews, three main categories were identified: the category of experiences during the earthquake, the category of baby care and breastfeeding, and the category of long-term effects experienced after the earthquake. The participants exhibited emotional responses such as fear, panic, and helplessness during the earthquake. After the earthquake, they experienced issues such as a decrease in milk production, hygiene problems, difficulties in accessing supplementary foods for their children, and weight loss. Additionally, sleep problems and earthquake-related anxiety were common. The importance of solidarity and the need for social support among mothers were emphasized. These findings emphasize that the care of women who experienced the Kahramanmaraş earthquake was affected after emotional trauma and that solidarity and social support are of vital importance in such emergencies.

Keywords: Breastfeeding, attitude, earthquake, qualitative study, woman, experience

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Emzirme ve Doğal Afetler: Kahramanmaraş Depremi Sonrasında Kadınların Emzirmeye Yönelik Tutumları ve Depremin Psikososyal Etkileri: Nitel Bir Araştırma

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye'nin Kahramanmaraş ilinde meydana gelen depremi yaşamış olan kadınların emzirmeye yönelik tutumlarını ve depremin psikososyal etkilerini belirlemektir. Bu nitel araştırmada, derinlemesine görüşme yöntemi kullanılarak bebeğini emziren 10 kadınla görüşme gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çalışmanın verileri, 6 Şubat 2023 depremini deneyimlemiş bireylerden, 30 Mayıs-30 Temmuz 2023 tarihleri arasında çevrim içi ortamda yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Elde edilen veriler, içerik analizi yöntemiyle değerlendirilmiş; bu süreçte kodların, kategorilerin ve temaların oluşturulmasına yönelik aşamalar izlenmiştir. Yapılan görüşmeler sonrasında 3 ana kategori belirlenmiştir: bunlar; deprem sırasında yaşanan deneyimler kategorisi, bebek bakımı ve emzirme kategorisi ve deprem sonrası yaşanan uzun vadeli etkiler kategorisidir. Katılımcılar deprem sırasında korku, panik ve çaresizlik gibi duygusal tepkiler sergilemiştir. Deprem sonrasında ise süt üretiminde azalma, hijyen sorunları, çocuklarının ek gıdalara erişimindeki zorluklar ve kilo kaybı gibi problemler yaşamışlardır. Ayrıca, uyku problemleri ve depremle ilişkili kaygılar yaygındır. Annelerin dayanışma ve sosyal destek ihtiyacına vurgu yapılmıştır. Bu bulgular, Kahramanmaraş depremini yaşayan kadınların, duygusal travma sonrası bebek bakımının etkilendiğini ve bu tür acil durumlarda dayanışma ve sosyal desteğin hayati bir öneme sahip olduğunu vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Emzirme, tutum, deprem, nitel çalışma, kadın, deneyim

Introduction

Natural disasters are defined as events, whether human-made or natural, such as earthquakes, floods, and epidemic diseases, that lead to loss of life, pain, suffering, and significant material damage for people (Giusti, 2022). Among natural disasters, earthquakes are one of the deadliest in terms of humanitarian and economic losses due to their unpredictability and destructive effects (Centre for Research, 2020). Turkey is located on the Mediterranean-Alpine-Himalayan earthquake belt. One-fifth of the world's earthquakes occur along this belt (Kundak & Kadıoğlu, 2011). Due to its location, Turkey is among the regions with intense seismic activity, dominated by orogenic belts and volcanism. There is no place in Turkey where earthquakes are not felt; however, the majority of them are harmless (Özdoğan, 1993).

Many cities in our country are at risk of exposure to one or more natural disasters. In Turkey, earthquakes are the most frequently experienced natural disasters in terms of the number of people affected and the number of damaged settlements. When natural disasters in our country are examined, 58% of disaster victims consist of individuals affected by earthquakes (Altun, 2018).

The earthquake, with a magnitude of 7.7, which occurred on February 6, 2023, had its epicenter in the Pazarcık district of Kahramanmaraş and affected 11 provinces, is one of the largest earthquakes in Turkey and the world in the past 100 years. Nine minutes later, a second earthquake with a magnitude of 6.4 with the epicenter in Gaziantep occurred, and nine hours later, a third earthquake disaster with a magnitude of 7.6 struck the Elbistan district of Kahramanmaraş in the same region. Following the main earthquakes in the region, numerous aftershocks occurred, and these aftershocks are still ongoing (Kipay, 2023). According to a news report published on the Anadolu Agency website, based on information obtained from the General Directorate of Public Health, 4,627 babies were born within 10 days in the provinces affected by the Kahramanmaraş-centered earthquakes, starting from the first day of the disaster (Anadolu Agency, 2023; Ministry of Health, 2023).

Major disasters, particularly earthquakes, not only cause physical destruction but also create significant challenges in accessing essential healthcare services, especially for infants and their mothers. During the post-disaster emergency response phase, women face various reproductive health issues such as pregnancy, birth complications, and breastfeeding challenges (DeYoung and Suji, 2018). The inability to meet basic health needs, such as access to shelter and clean water, can severely impact the health of mothers and infants for months or even years (Brunson, 2017). Inadequate nutrition, the need for assistance with baby care, breastfeeding, and diaper changing further exacerbate parents' concerns (Suzuki, 2022). In this process, breastfeeding plays a vital role in ensuring infants' survival and healthy development (Vilar-Compte et al., 2021). Breastmilk has a unique composition designed to meet infants' essential needs, providing protection against infections with its rich antibody and nutrient content (Scime, 2017). The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months, followed by the introduction of appropriate complementary foods, while continuing

breastfeeding until at least 2 years of age (WHO, 2003). In this context, promoting and supporting breastfeeding practices during disaster periods emerges as a vital necessity for ensuring the healthy growth and development of infants (Gerçek Öter et al., 2021).

The challenges women face during natural disasters and the specific needs of infant care can affect the overall health and well-being of society. Therefore, the present study will contribute to current understanding of the measures that need to be taken to protect the health of mothers and infants in the post-disaster period.

Research Questions

1. What are women's emotional experiences and responses during an earthquake?

2. How has the earthquake affected mothers' baby care and breastfeeding processes?

3. What are the psychosocial problems experienced by mothers after an earthquake, and what coping mechanisms do they use to deal with these issues?

Method

Research Design

This study is a descriptive qualitative research design conducted using the in-depth interview method. Qualitative researchers often use in-depth interviews or participant observation to provide a detailed portrayal of the population they study (Clair &Wasserman, 2007). This design was chosen because it offers a high degree of flexibility in describing a new phenomenon (event or experience) from the participants' perspective, providing rich data and detailing their experiences (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

Research Context

The research was conducted with breastfeeding women living in the earthquake-affected regions of Malatya, Hatay, and Diyarbakır in Turkey between 30.05.2023 and 30.07.2023.

Participants

The population of the study consisted of all breastfeeding mothers who experienced the Kahramanmaraş earthquake. The study was conducted with women who agreed to participate, using a purposeful sampling method followed by a snowball sampling method (Patton, 1987). The sample size was reached using the snowball sampling method by contacting individuals who had experienced the earthquake and their acquaintances. Efforts were made to ensure diversity in the sample, with participants from various socio-economic backgrounds, age groups, and educational levels included in the study. In this study, a semi-structured interview technique, one of the individual interview types, was used for data collection semi-structured interviews are considered the most suitable method for collecting data on others' thoughts and perceptions and capturing the diversity and differences between

participants' viewpoints (Öcal, 2007). Participants were informed about the study, and individuals who voluntarily agreed to participate were asked to refer to other individuals they knew. Data was collected through individual in-depth interviews (lasting at least 45-60 minutes) conducted online (via WhatsApp). While one researcher conducted the interviews, the other researcher took notes on the participants' responses and their reactions to the questions (e.g., facial expressions). Additionally, the interviews were recorded to prevent data loss. As the study was planned as qualitative research, the sample size was considered complete and the study was concluded when it was determined that the responses from the participants began to repeat, and no further data could be obtained. Conceptually, saturation indicates that the data collection process can be concluded when no further in-depth understanding can be developed regarding the phenomenon being studied based on the already collected and analyzed data (Yang et al., 2022). At the beginning of the interviews, verbal consent was obtained from the participants regarding the recording of the audio.

Inclusion criteria for the study

Agreeing to participate in the study

Having experienced the February 6 earthquake

Being a breastfeeding mother

Exclusion criteria for the study

Failing to answer the questions and abandoning the study midway

Having any barriers to communication

Not using the internet

Data Collection Tools

The study data were collected by using a "Personal Information Form" and a "Semi-Structured Interview Form."

Personal Information Form

This form, prepared by researchers by reviewing the literature, includes 10 items addressing the sociodemographic characteristics of women.

Semi-Structured Interview Form

The semi-structured interview form consists of 6 open-ended questions designed to address women's breastfeeding status, their experiences with breastfeeding during the earthquake, and their attitudes toward breastfeeding. These questions are related to the Earthquake Moment and Initial Reactions, Health Status and Hospitalization, Food Supply and Nutrition, Challenges in Breastfeeding, Your Baby's Weight Gain, and Psychosocial Support. The content of the form was prepared based on expert opinions in the relevant field. During this process, consultations were conducted with 2 public

health academics, 2 midwifery academics, and 1 obstetrician. The selection of experts was made with careful consideration of their experience and knowledge in the fields of women's health, public health, and breastfeeding. These experts made significant contributions to the validity and reliability of the form, providing feedback on the scope and nature of the questions. This consulting process was conducted to enhance the content accuracy of the form and to collect in-depth data on women's breastfeeding experiences after the earthquake.

Ethical Statement

All necessary permissions were taken from the Non-interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee of the relevant university to conduct the study (Decision No: 2023/1407093/16.05.2023) (see **Appendix-1**). It was clarified that a recorder would be used during the interviews. Confidentiality of participants' identity and sound records was guaranteed. Written (e-mail) and verbal consent were obtained from the participants.

Data Collection

Research data were collected by using the individual interview method with a semi-structured interview form. During the interviews, the depth of the conversation was increased based on the answers received and the flow of the interview, starting from predetermined questions. Data were collected from breastfeeding women living in earthquake-prone areas of Turkey between 30.05.2023 and 30.07.2023. Each interview lasted approximately. 30-45 minutes. A voice recording device was used to record the data during the interviews, and observation notes were taken by the researcher. Data was collected using the semi-structured interview form and the individual interview method. For increased reliability, the study adhered to the international COREQ checklist (consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative studies) during data collection and report preparation (Tong, 2007). Specifically, the study ensured transparency in areas such as participant recruitment, data collection procedures, and data analysis, aligning with the COREQ standards to provide a clear and rigorous account of the research process.

Data Analysis

Participants' socio-demographic data were analyzed in terms of numbers and percentages, mean, and standard deviation.

Content analysis was performed to analyze the semi-structured interview data. The data were organized into similar concepts and themes, and the findings were interpreted to enhance the readers' understanding. This analysis followed a four-stage process:

Coding the Data: The researchers examined the collected information and attempted to identify the conceptual meanings behind participants' statements. The coding process was performed by considering the purpose of the research and conceptual framework, with the data being categorized according to the concepts identified during the analysis. The coding was carried out manually, and to ensure the reliability of the analysis, three researchers independently reviewed and coded the data. Any

discrepancies were resolved through discussion, which enhanced the consistency and trustworthiness of the analysis. This collaborative approach was crucial in maintaining inter-rater reliability and ensuring a robust analysis.

Identification of Themes: Based on the identified codes, the researchers categorized the data under specific themes. During this process, the researchers ensured that meaningful categories were formed, and similar concepts were grouped under the same theme.

Organizing and Labeling Data Based on Codes and Themes: During the stages of coding and theme identification, direct quotes reflecting the participants' views, thoughts, and suggestions were used without introducing the researchers' opinions or interpretations (Çelik & Dalfidan, 2022). To facilitate the identification of interviewees, each participant was assigned a unique code (e.g., K1 for participant 1).

Interpretation of findings: In this final stage, the researchers examined the coded data and the identified themes to derive meaningful insights. The aim was to interpret the underlying meanings behind the responses and explore how they aligned with the research questions. This section serves to connect the data analysis with the broader conclusions drawn from the study, providing context for the findings and ensuring that the research outcomes are meaningful and relevant (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Findings

During the earthquake (6 February 2023), interviews were conducted with ten breastfeeding women approximately 3-5 months after the emergency. They were all affected by the earthquake and had to evacuate their homes.

The mean age of the women was 32.80 years. Four women reported having spontaneous vaginal births, whereas six women stated that they had cesarean section. "When examining the locations where participants were during the earthquake, 3 were located in Malatya, 3 in Antakya, Hatay, 2 in İskenderun, Hatay, 1 in Yayladağı, Hatay, and 1 in Diyarbakır. The average age of the babies during the earthquake was 6.00 months, and their current average age at the moment of interviews was 10.00 months. The average pre-earthquake weight of babies was 6.50 kg, and their current average weight at the moment of interviews was 8.62 kg.

Table 1.

Categories of experiences during and right after the earthquake

Theme	Code	Participants
Emotions	Fear	K1, K2, K5, K6, K7, K8, K9
	Shock/Panic	K3, K5, K7, K8
	Indecision	K4, K10
	Helplessness	K1, K3, K5, K6, K7, K8, K9
Search for Security	Fundamental needs	K1, K2, K3, K4, K5, K7, K8, K9
	Protection of the baby	K1, K3, K6, K8, K9
Disaster's effects	Destruction and loss of house	K4, K6
	Negative effects of environmental factors	K1, K3, K4, K5, K7, K8, K10

Category 1. "Experiences During the Earthquake" (Table 1): The experiences during the earthquake include the participants' emotional experiences, their search for safety, and the effects of the earthquake.

Emotions

In the theme constructed based on the participants' expressions, the code "fear" is the most frequently expressed one and it ranks at the top. In this code, one participant used the following statements: "The fear we felt was indescribable, really; at that moment, I thought we were going to die" (K6).

Some participants stated that they felt an important shock and were disoriented. In the code "shock and panic", one participant made the following statements:

> "We woke up with an incredible quake. I immediately took my baby from the crib and told my husband that it was an earthquake. My husband said we needed to get out of the house immediately. I couldn't get up; my knees gave way, and I couldn't stand. Then, he took our child from my lap and went to the entrance of the door, saying 'Hurry up, we need to hold on'. I couldn't hold on anymore; I couldn't even walk. My husband kept holding me from both sides. And he had our child in his arms, yelling at me, saying we need to get out!" (K3).

Two participants emphasized that they were uncertain about whether to go outside immediately after the earthquake. One participant stated:

> "When I first felt the earthquake, I thought it was mild because earthquakes happen all the time in Malatya, so I thought it was only one of them, and I wasn't scared at first. My husband was very scared. After that, I saw that everyone had gone outside, and I was the only one left. I got my child ready, and then I went outside" (K10).

Some participants' expressions in the code "helplessness" are as follows:

> "People trapped in the wreckage were screaming, their cries for help could be heard, but we couldn't do anything. We were already in a very difficult situation ourselves. We couldn't even talk...paused...crying... I mean, it was like doomsday everywhere. Everyone was outside; it was like doomsday out there. We could hear voices from under the wreckage, but we couldn't do anything. My husband gave water to our child...that's it" (K1).

> "After the earthquake, we continued to stay in our house. Our baby was sick and had a fever. We felt very helpless. It was already cold outside, and it would have been even worse outside, so we stayed inside. Our baby's fever was high, and pharmacies didn't open after the first earthquake. So, we went upstairs to get medicines and things. We were caught in the second earthquake at that time" (K6).

Search for Security

Some participants' expressions related to meeting basic needs are as follows:

> "My husband was going back and forth to the center, and he provided for our needs. Aid was coming in. Besides, all the markets were looted. I mean, we tried to get things from the aid centers as much as possible. Everything was there in the house we went to. We tried to eat there" (K1).

> "To meet our needs, we did something in the early days. All the markets in Antakya were destroyed and looted; everything was scattered on the ground. We used to go into those markets. Even in the markets, we couldn't find much; things like diapers, wet wipes, and such" (K4).

Five participants stated that they first tried to protect their babies during the earthquake. Some participants' statements are as follows:

> "We thought our house was collapsing, and we wouldn't survive. Our only concern was to protect our child. The earthquake lasted a very long time" (K8).

> "I was scared and alone; my husband was on duty. I just covered my son and waited like that, waiting for the earthquake to pass" (K9).

Effects of Disaster

Two participants mentioned that their homes collapsed during the earthquake. One participant's statement is as follows:

"At that time, we were not in our house in Antakya. So, it's a good thing we went to Yayladağı that night. This place also shook like a cradle, but there was no destruction here. Our house in Antakya collapsed" (K4).

In the code "negative impact of environmental factors", participants mentioned being affected by factors such as cold weather, rain, and power outages. One participant's statement is as follows:

"The electricity went out, and it was already raining heavily outside. The outside was quite scary, you know" (K4).

Table 2.

Baby care and breastfeeding category

Theme	Code	Participants
Fundamental Needs	Heating	K3, K5, K8, K10
	Shelter	K1, K2, K3, K5, K7, K9
	Sleep	K1, K4
	Diapers	K1, K3, K4, K5
	Breastfeeding	K1, K5, K7, K8
Nutrition	Complementary food	K1, K6, K5, K8
	Baby Formula	K2, K5, K7
	Reduction/Cease of Milk Formation	K1, K2, K3, K5, K6, K7, K8, K9, K10
	Decrease/Stop of Gaining Weight	K5, K6, K7, K8, K9

Category 2. "Baby Care and Breastfeeding" (Table 2): The experiences related to the category of baby care and breastfeeding include the participants' experiences with feeding and basic needs.

Fundamental Needs

While five participants stated that they had difficulty with heating, one participant made the following statement in the code "heating":

"During the time we stayed in the tent, there was no electricity, and it was very cold. I tried to warm our child by putting hot water on the stove and using its steam" (K1).

Most participants mentioned seeking a safe place for shelter and considered this process one of the most challenging situations. In the code "shelter", some participants' statements are as follows:

"We stayed outside until sunrise, then we got into the car. Around seven in the morning, if I remember correctly, my husband's aunt had a detached house in the highlands, so we went there. I stayed there for almost a week. After that, I returned to Konya. In Konya, a house was arranged for us by a generous person" (K1).

"Our car didn't have a place where we could stay inside. So, we just took our food and ate outside. Then, we set up a tent. There was an empty space on the side of our house, and we set up a tent there. We stayed in a tent for almost 1.5 months and spent the nights there. We would just come and get our meals in the daytime and then go back" (K1).

In the code "sleep", one participant's statement is as follows:

"My 2-year-old son used to wake up a lot at night, crying. I was really scared that night. The baby didn't feel anything; he cried a little, but he didn't feel much. My older son felt it a lot" (K1).

In the code "diapers", participants emphasized the difficulties they experienced. In this code, some participants' statements are as follows:

"We entered the house after the earthquake, which happened at around 1 AM. We were in the car before that. We went in to get the babies' necessities" (K1).

"Then the aid trucks started coming, and they brought diapers, wet wipes, and such Alhamdulillah." (K1).

Nutrition

Four participants stated that they had difficulty finding a safe place for breastfeeding. One participant's statements are as follows:

"Breastfeeding was already the biggest problem for me because my baby was born prematurely, so he wasn't breastfeeding well, and when the earthquake happened, and we were stuck outside, it became even more difficult for me" (K7).

Four participants expressed that they had difficulty accessing complementary food. In this code, one participant's statements are as follows:

"In the beginning, we had trouble finding food for both me and my baby. Then, when aid started coming in, I began to give my baby complementary food; otherwise, it seemed impossible with just my milk" (K8).

Some mothers mentioned that they had to start using formula milk because their breastmilk decreased or stopped due to the fear experienced by mothers after the earthquake. One participant's statements are as follows:

"I didn't have much milk, and the child didn't want to breastfeed. I had no choice but to use formula milk. It was hard for him to consume the formula too. I gave him complementary food and managed somehow" (K5).

Except for one participant, all others mentioned that their breastmilk decreased or stopped. Some participants' statements are as follows:

"My milk stopped during the earthquake, and of course, I had a lot of trouble until my milk came back. I could feel that my baby wasn't satisfied, and it made me really sad" (K5).

"I used to breastfeed. But then, one breast stopped producing milk. Now, I'm breastfeeding from one breast. At that time, one breast stopped producing milk, and the other one reduced. I thought about starting formula and then solved it with complementary food later, improving my own nutrition, etc., but it was never the same as before" (K9).

In the code "decrease or stop in weight gain", some participants' statements are as follows:

"My baby's weight gain stopped, and it even started to drop because, previously, I was giving complementary food alongside breastfeeding. During the earthquake, my milk stopped, and my baby wasn't taking the complementary food well either. He was already born with low weight, and this earthquake made our lives even more difficult" (K5).

"I take him to the health center now, and he hasn't gained even a kilo in 2 months. Unfortunately, his weight gain and development are not going well" (K7).

Table 3.

The long-term effects of the earthquake fall under the category

Theme	Code	Participants
Psychological Effects	Earthquake anxiety	K1, K2, K4, K5, K6, K7, K8, K9, K10
	Sleep problems	K2, K5, K6, K7, K8, K9, K10
	Fear of not being able to protect her baby	K1, K6, K9, K10
Social Solidarity	Solidarity	K1, K3, K6, K7
	Psychosocial support	K1, K2, K3, K4, K5, K7, K8, K9, K10

Category 3. "Long-Term Effects of Earthquakes" (Table 3): The long-term effects after the earthquake include the participants' psychological effects and social solidarity.

Psychological Effects

Experiencing an earthquake triggered concerns among most participants that another earthquake might occur. Some participants expressed their thoughts as follows:

> "In the beginning, it felt like chandeliers were swaying at night, and I couldn't get rid of the fear that there might be another earthquake" (K5).
> "I still can't get rid of the feeling that another earthquake might happen at any moment. When something shakes, it feels like an earthquake is happening to me" (K8).

Seven participants mentioned experiencing sleep problems for an extended period after the earthquake. They had difficulty falling asleep or frequently woke up during the night. The statements of one participant are as follows:

> "I had sleep problems for a long time. I can say it's still ongoing. For example, at night, when it becomes very quiet, when it rains, it reminds me of that night. I can't help but feel anxious, unwilling to sleep, I mean, there's a fear, whether I want it or not" (K2).
> In the code "fear of not being able to protect the baby", one participant's statement is as follows: "I kept thinking that something would happen constantly, aftershocks would come, and if I had to take the child" (K9).

Social Solidarity

Some participants emphasized the importance of solidarity during this period. One participant's statement is as follows:

> "Right now, we are staying at a benefactor's house. Our in-laws brought us here; we came together. We are currently residing here" (K1).

Almost all participants expressed the need for professional psychosocial support during this period. But, unfortunately, none of them received any support for various reasons. One participant statements are as follows:

> "I didn't receive psychosocial support. I wish I could have received it, especially help with solving my baby's breastfeeding problem. I was really desperate; it would have been so nice if someone had reached out to me. I don't know where or how I could have reached out. So, I didn't get any support, I mean any kind of support" (K7).

Figure 1.

Problems women experience after the earthquake
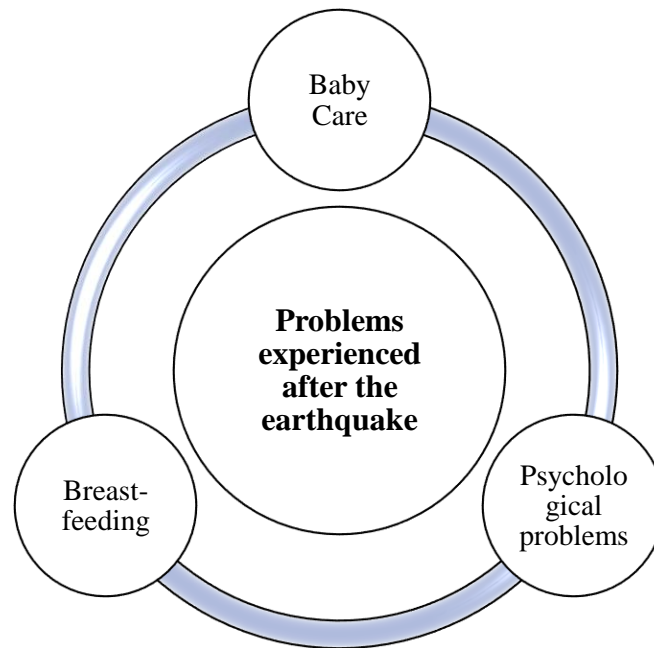
Discussion

Even though the basic needs of pregnant and breastfeeding women largely overlap with the needs of the general population, they also have specific requirements that need to be considered during emergency interventions (Giusti et al., 2022). Women, children, and infants are the most at-risk and affected groups in any disaster or emergency (Gerçek Öter et al., 2021).

In the present study, carried out by aiming to determine the emotional experiences of women and their attitudes toward breastfeeding during the centered in Kahramanmaraş earthquake in Turkey, participants reported experiencing fear, shock, indecision, and helplessness during the earthquake. Immediately after the earthquake, they made efforts to meet their basic needs and protect their babies and mentioned that environmental factors such as rain and cold made people's lives even more challenging. Many studies have reported the adverse effects of natural disasters on the physical and psychological health of women (Fatema et al., 2019; Hawkins et al., 2019; Kipay, 2023). One of the individuals interviewed in this study expressed her fear and said "The earthquake lasted quite a long time. It started slowly. I thought it would stop, I thought it would stop, but it didn't; it kept getting stronger. We already know the rest. It's hard to even talk about it. I was really scared even while telling it" (K8). As the present research findings indicate, early-stage mental health problems are characterized by shock, anxiety, and sleep disorders (Fatema et al., 2019; Kipay, 2023; Ren et al., 2014).

Other primary concerns, supported by the present study's results, involve individuals losing their homes, being displaced, and moving to other temporary housing solutions (Brunson, 2017). One participant expressed, "They said our house had minor damage, but for us, it's too damaged, so we can't

enter our house. The stairs collapsed. We can't stay in the container. The container is made of iron, so it's too hot. During the day, I go to the mall or somewhere cool, and in the evenings, we come back to the container to sleep, you know" (K3). In such situations, particularly the pregnant and breastfeeding women face challenges related to their circumstances. Consistent with the literature, families that were not provided with temporary shelter or tents in a timely manner had to live in limited safe spaces. This increased the vulnerability of displaced mothers and posed difficulties in breastfeeding. Previous studies showed that disasters increase women's vulnerability and negatively affect their preparedness and capacity to fulfill childcare responsibilities, including breastfeeding (Grown et al., 2016; Hirani et al., 2021). While the earthquake itself is the most significant source of stress, the aftershocks, poor sanitation, lack of access to healthcare, and inadequate care, together with an increase in inappropriate health behaviors, injuries, and housing problems, are additional sources of intense psychosocial stress (Fatema et al., 2019; Kipay, 2023; Ren et al., 2014).

The endangerment of children's health is one of the severe consequences of natural disasters. Child diseases and deaths increase due to displacement and inadequate nutrition caused by disasters. As can be seen in the literature, it is inevitable that the prevalence of breastfeeding decreases during disasters and it leads to increased childhood malnutrition (Grubesic & Durbin, 2022; Hirani & Kenner, 2011; Hirani et al., 2019). During natural disasters, breastfeeding-related challenges are observed anywhere around the world, but they are particularly problematic in low- and middle-income countries. A study carried out after the 2010 earthquake disaster in Haiti reported malnutrition and developmental delays due to the use of alternative foods instead of breast milk; participants described their babies' weight gain as slowing down, stopping, and declining, saying, "My baby's weight gain stopped, and it even started to drop" (K5). "I now take him to the health center, but he didn't gain even 1 kilogram in two months. Unfortunately, their weight gain and development are not good" (K7). "The child's weight gain suddenly stopped. The child became very thin" (K8). Since breast milk contains many beneficial bioactive substances, it is the preferred and safest way to feed babies during disasters and displacement (Branca & Schultink, 2016; WHO 2016). Despite the benefits of breastfeeding, inappropriate infant feeding practices are reported during disasters, displacement, and the placement of displaced communities in disaster relief camps (Branca & Schultink, 2016).

Examining the literature, it was reported that mothers who have been displaced in disaster relief camps are at risk of discontinuing breastfeeding (Carothers & Gribble, 2014; Eidelman, 2013; Hirani & Kenner, 2011). Conditions directly and indirectly affecting the breastfeeding practices of these women include inadequate and unfair distribution of free infant formula, irregular distribution of baby supplies, lack of safe spaces for breastfeeding, lack of breastfeeding counseling facilities or difficulties in access, misconceptions about breastfeeding, gender-based restrictions, and maternal health risks. The lack of privacy or an environment unsuitable for breastfeeding, limited fluid and food intake for mothers in an environment without privacy or an environment unsuitable for breastfeeding, as well as other factors such as stress, fatigue, and often time constraints due to constant movement, have also limited

breastfeeding capabilities (Bukhari et al., 2017; Codjia et al., 2018). Participants in this regard have expressed similar statements. Some of these are as follows: "I tried to breastfeed in the car (K1). "It was very difficult to breastfeed in the tent, in the car. There were moments when I couldn't breastfeed" (K8).

Mothers, who choose to breastfeed during disasters, realized that displacement creates additional challenges. Finding comfortable, private spaces and time for breastfeeding was difficult. Stress and disruption of daily routines created new challenges for breastfeeding women. Displacement, along with the loss of health and social infrastructure, often led to the breakdown of family and friend networks that typically support breastfeeding mothers (Hwang et al., 2021). During disasters, mothers' breastfeeding problems include the inability to produce sufficient and quality breast milk due to stress, food insecurity, and disrupted nutrition. While stress and mild to moderate maternal malnutrition might not significantly change the quality or quantity of breast milk (Gribble, 2011; WHO 2007), many mothers stop breastfeeding or begin to provide alternative foods instead of breastmilk in humanitarian emergencies because they perceive their breastmilk as unsafe or inadequate for their children. In addition, many of them perceived that breastmilk was insufficient to satisfy their babies (Dörnemann & Kelly, 2013; Gribble et al., 2011; Sulaiman et al., 2015). Participants' perception of insufficient milk was quite clear, and most of them made similar expressions. Some of these include: "I couldn't eat food, couldn't drink water, so we couldn't do anything, my milk decreased inevitably. I mean, I felt that my baby wasn't satisfied. I also didn't feel the milk flowing from my breasts" (K2). "My milk wasn't enough for my baby, because of fear and panic, my milk had decreased, but I still continued to breastfeed, but I started supplementing with formula because I realized he wasn't satisfied" (K7). The availability of individuals, who can support breastfeeding during disasters and displacement, plays an essential role. Displaced mothers often lack access to social support, breastfeeding counseling services, and trained healthcare professionals or peer counselors in disaster relief camps. The absence of necessary support prevents mothers in these camps from continuing their breastfeeding practices or choosing the option of relactation when alternative feeding products are not available (Abney, 2010; Sulaiman et al., 2014). Restarting breastfeeding after not breastfeeding for a few weeks during a crisis such as a disaster. Although breastfeeding is possible with proper breastfeeding counseling, support, skin-to-skin contact, and frequent breastfeeding, breastfeeding myths lead to its discontinuation or the use of breast milk substitutes, especially formula (Dörnemann & Kelly, 2013; WHO 2007). The results achieved in the present study are consistent with these findings.

Disasters disrupt normal living conditions and lead to emergencies that exceed the adaptive capacity of the affected community. Simultaneously, they also create short and long-term effects from ecological, political, economic, developmental, social, physical, and psychological aspects (Adhikari Baral & Bhagawati, 2019; WHO, 2002). Women are affected differently from men during disasters and displacements, partly due to biological differences. It was also emphasized in the literature that displaced mothers require sensitive care and breastfeeding support for pre-existing health issues or any newly developed psychiatric conditions (Gribble et al. 2011; Hirani et al. 2019). The literature highlights that

the arrangements in disaster relief camps are often not suitable for women (WHO, 2002; Hirani et al. 2019). Despite providing basic first aid, food, and shelter to families affected by disasters, the needs and rights of women with young children are often overlooked. Especially in countries with limited resources, displaced women, who make up the majority of the displaced community, face malnutrition and relevant conditions due to insufficient nutrition (Bukhari et al. 2015; Hirani et al. 2019). One participant stated, "We had a shortage of food in the beginning, and I struggled to find anything to feed myself and my baby. Then, when aid arrived, I started giving supplementary food to my baby; otherwise, it was impossible with just my breast milk" (K8). "We experienced a shortage of supplies. Yes, for example, we needed bread and water. Believe me, even dirty water was not available to us. Even bread was not reaching us" (K5).

Breastfeeding support is defined as the lack of sufficient resources to overcome obstetric emergencies and gender role expectations in caring for sick and injured family members, including small children. Many women encounter problems such as physical trauma/injury, death of a close family member, and separation from their social networks during disasters and subsequent displacements (Brunson, 2017). Some participants expressed, "Some of my family members were trapped under the wreckage, but fortunately, they were rescued safely. Unfortunately, many of our neighbors and relatives died" (K2).

Homeless and displaced women with young children in disaster relief camps are often dependent on donated necessities such as clothing and food. They typically live in small spaces that are not suitable for women and experience trauma related to displacement. Traumatized mothers with young children often suffer from depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), making it difficult for them to meet their babies' nutritional needs (Karakaya et al. 2004; Salcıoğlu et al. 2003). "I couldn't get psychosocial support. I didn't see anyone here who could help me by listening to my problems and finding solutions. I was very worried about my baby's nutritional condition during that time. If someone could have helped and supported me in this matter, maybe my milk wouldn't have dried up, or it would have happened sooner" (K5).

Trauma developing after the earthquake is experienced by more than two-thirds of the general population at some point in their lives, leading to a wide range of mental and physical health outcomes (Kar & Bastia 2006). "I still can't get rid of the feeling that there might be another earthquake at any moment. Whenever something shakes, it feels like an earthquake to me" (K8).

Previous studies claimed that more than 50% of victims can develop chronic depression, generalized anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This can lead to long-term suffering, disabilities, and income loss (Karakaya et al. 2004; WHO, 2002). The majority of participants in the present study reported a significant decline in their income after the earthquake.

Psychopathologies that significantly distinguish cases from non-cases were a combination of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress symptoms. Cases exhibited significantly more PTSD

symptoms: nightmares, flashbacks, avoidance, difficulty recalling certain aspects of the disaster, lack of strong emotions about certain things, feeling life will be cut short and impending death, sleep problems, difficulty concentrating, irritability, and continued sadness due to these symptoms (Karakaya et al. 2003; Neria et al. 2008; Tempesta et al. 2013). Participant statements include, "I still can't be alone, for example, my sleep problems have decreased compared to the early days, but rainy nights still scare me, I used to have nightmares and couldn't get any sleep at all" (K7).

Conclusion

This study has revealed the challenges and psychosocial impacts experienced by women during the breastfeeding process in the aftermath of the Kahramanmaraş earthquake. During the earthquake, emotional responses such as fear, panic, helplessness, and destruction were observed, leading to issues such as reduced or halted milk production, difficulties in children's access to supplementary food, and decreased weight gain. Furthermore, housing and hygiene problems, sleep disturbances, and anxiety related to the earthquake posed significant barriers. Women struggled to access psychosocial support during the post-earthquake period, which negatively affected baby care. Due to a lack of research in this field, the social, political, cultural, and economic factors that shape these mothers' breastfeeding experiences are overlooked at this moment. It is critically important to address the knowledge gaps identified in order to examine the facilitators of and barriers to breastfeeding practices among mothers living in disaster relief camps.

In this process, solidarity and social support have played a crucial role. The findings of the study emphasize that baby care was affected following emotional trauma, and that solidarity and social support are of vital importance in emergencies. Moreover, it highlights the need to strengthen psychosocial support mechanisms tailored to women's needs during such crisis situations. Future research should focus on developing strategies to provide more support for women's breastfeeding processes after disasters. Clinical practices should prioritize psychosocial support and logistical assistance for breastfeeding mothers during and after disasters. These findings could serve as an important guide for both healthcare professionals and policymakers.

Limitations

This research was conducted using qualitative design and employed the snowball sampling method. Snowball sampling is a method based on starting with a specific group of individuals and selecting participants through referrals from these individuals. Since this approach forms the sample from a limited group, the generalizability of the findings is restricted. Additionally, as this method relies on participants' social networks and accessibility, it may not reflect diverse perspectives from a larger population. Moreover, due to the nature of qualitative research, as the data are based on participants' subjective experiences, the results reflect individual experiences, and it is difficult to make broad generalizations. The limitations of the study also stem from the fact that it was conducted only with women affected by a specific event (the earthquake), meaning that it may not encompass the experiences

of individuals living in different regions or affected by other types of disasters. Finally, this research is limited to data collected during a specific period and does not account for the impact of factors that may change over time.

Contribution Statement/ Araştırmacıların Katkı Oranı

All researchers contributed equally to the study. / Çalışmaya tüm araştırmacılar eşit oranda katkı sağlamıştır.

Declaration of Competing Interest / Çatışma Beyanı

There is no conflict of interest. / Çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

Ethics Committee Approval / Etik Onay

Ethics committee approval was obtained for this study. / Etik kurul onayı alınmıştır.

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Appendix-1

T.C.
KARABÜK ÜNİVERSİTESİ REKTÖRLÜĞÜ
Girişimsel Olmayan Klinik Araştırmalar Etik Kurulu

Sayı   : E-77192459-050.99-243093   16.05.2023
Konu   : 2023/1407 Nolu Karar

Sayın Dr. Öğr.Üyesi Ayşe ÇUVADAR

Girişimsel Olmayan Klinik Araştırmalar Etik Kurulumuza sunmuş olduğunuz **"Emzirme Ve Doğal Afetler: Türkiye Kahramanmaraş Depreminde Kadınların Emzirmeye Yönelik Tutumları"** başlıklı araştırma projeniz amaç, gerekçe, yaklaşım ve yöntemle ilgili açıklamaları açısından Girişimsel Olmayan Klinik Araştırmalar Etik Kurul yönergesine göre incelenmiş olup etik açıdan uygun olduğuna oy birliği ile karar verilmiştir.

Bilgilerinize rica ederim.

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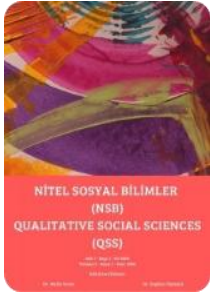
Friendly Hospital for Nursing Students Requirements and Motivating Factors in a Hospital

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Abstract

This study aimed to evaluate the learning-friendly environment for nursing students and the motivating factors within the hospital from the students' perspective, using a qualitative phenomenological approach. Phenomenological research design, a qualitative research approach, was employed in this study. This qualitative research was conducted with 60 volunteer nursing students. Interviews were conducted individually and face-to-face. Data was analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological analysis method. Data analysis revealed three categories (potential motivating factors in a learning friendly hospital, behaviors of faculty members and nurses in the hospital to increase students' motivation, and expectations from a learning-friendly hospital) and seven sub-themes (communication, knowledge, skills, people, environment, physical aspects, and psychological aspects). Nursing students expect learning-friendly hospital environments to be instructive, encouraging, anxiety-free and well-equipped in all aspects. It was determined that effective communication with nurses and other team members, receiving positive feedback from patients, and instructive and supportive approaches of instructors increased the motivation of nursing students. In addition, it was found that students want to contribute to the improvement of the quality of care by practicing as a part of the team in learning-friendly hospitals.

Keywords: Learning-friendly hospital, motivation, nursing student, qualitative study

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Hemşirelik Öğrencileri İçin Öğrenme Dostu Hastanede Olması Gerekenler ve Hastanede Motive Edici Faktörler

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, hemşirelik öğrencileri için öğrenme dostu hastanede olması gerekenler ve hastanede motive edici faktörleri öğrencilerin gözünden niteliksel fenomenolojik bir yaklaşım kullanarak değerlendirmektir. Bu araştırmada nitel araştırma deseni olan fenomenolojik araştırma tasarımı kullanılmıştır. Bu nitel araştırma 60 gönüllü hemşirelik öğrencisi ile yapılmıştır. Görüşmeler bireysel olarak ve yüz yüze gerçekleştirilmiştir. Veriler, Colaizzi'nin fenomenolojik analiz yöntemi kullanılarak yapılmıştır. Verilerin analizinde üç kategori (öğrenme dostu hastanede potansiyel motive edici faktörler, öğretim elemanları ve hastanedeki hemşirelerin öğrencilerin motivasyonunun artırılmasına yönelik davranışları ve öğrenme destekli hastaneden beklentiler) yedi alt tema (iletişim, bilgi, beceri, kişiler, ortam, fiziksel açıdan ve psikolojik açıdan) saptanmıştır. Hemşirelik öğrencileri öğrenme dostu hastane ortamlarının öğretici, öğrenmeye teşvik edici, kendilerinde anksiyete yaratmayan ve her açıdan donanımlı alanlar olmasını beklemektedir. Hemşirelik öğrencilerinin hemşirelerle ve diğer ekip üyeleri etkin iletişimin, hastalardan olumlu geri bildirim alınmasının, öğretim elemanlarının öğretici ve destekleyici yaklaşımlarının öğrencilerin motivasyonunu artırdığı belirlenmiştir. Ayrıca öğrenciler öğrenme dostu hastanelerde ekibin bir parçası olarak uygulama yaparak bakım kalitesinin artmasına katkıda bulunmak istedikleri sonucu bulunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Öğrenme dostu hastane, motivasyon, hemşirelik öğrencisi, nitel çalışma

Introduction

There is a strong relationship between the theoretical basis of nursing education in societies and experience-based learning (Admi et al., 2018; Günay & Kılınç, 2018). The primary purpose of nursing education is to integrate theory and clinical practice, reflecting theoretical knowledge learned in the real-world environment (Jack et al., 2018). The aim of undergraduate nursing education programs in our country is to train professionals who understand, know how to share, take responsibility for, and evaluate their practices, and provide qualified health services (Erkal İlhan, 2018). Today, the theoretical knowledge given in nursing programs in faculties of health sciences and schools of health in universities is integrated into practices in various clinical settings (Özkütük et al., 2018),

Spence Laschinger (1992) demonstrated that Kolb's theory and methodology provide encouraging support for measuring nursing learning environments in undergraduate education. Therefore, it is thought that Kolb's theory can provide useful suggestions for clarifying the structures of learning-supported environments from cognitive and socio-emotional perspectives of the learning process (Hisamatsu et al., 2006). Benner et al. (1996) stated that nursing practice knowledge is relational and contextual and therefore, it is not possible to learn participation skills without experiencing them (Benner et al., 1996). Although nursing students need to engage in clinical practice, it is considered as an indispensable component of nursing education (Tanner, 2006).

In addition, as a legal obligation for nursing, it is a requirement for nursing students to perform clinical practice and to ensure their suitability to work as nurses. In terms of education, clinical practice has an important place as the area where the skills, knowledge, and attitudes developed in the theoretical part of the curriculum are applied, developed, and integrated (Bjørk et al., 2014; Newton et al., 2010). Regardless of the perspective on clinical practice, many studies have reported that clinical practice experiences can positively affect nursing students' attitudes towards the clinical environment in question (Abbey et al., 2006; Fagerberg et al., 2000; Happel & Gaskin, 2013; Happel & Platania-Phung, 2012). In line with Kolb's theory, it can be said that student-friendly hospitals are very important for nursing students and in this context, it can be said that nursing students, who are future health professionals, provide a good basis for situations that will improve the quality of patient care.

Graduate nurses stated that they were more likely to work in environments where they had positive experiences during undergraduate clinical practice and that more permanent learning was provided in a learning-friendly hospital (Courtney et al. 2002, Edwards et al. 2004). Therefore, it is very important to provide good learning environments in all hospitals and clinical settings used in nursing education. Nursing instructors and nursing students may experience different problems. These situations include a low number of educators, ineffective communication between nurse-student-educators, inadequate hospital conditions, etc. These situations may negatively affect the quality of clinical practice experience. In the literature, there are no studies on student-friendly hospitals. In this context, this research is expected to contribute to the literature by filling the gap in the literature. This study is

important in terms of evaluating the motivating factors for nursing students' interest and participation and their perception of learning-friendly hospitals using a qualitative phenomenological approach and providing guidance to instructors. This study was conducted to evaluate what should be in a friendly learning hospital for nursing students and the motivating factors in the hospital from the students' perspective using a qualitative phenomenological approach.

Method

Research Design

Phenomenological research design, which is a qualitative research design, was used to evaluate what should be in a learning-friendly hospital for nursing students and motivating factors in the hospital from the students' perspective using a qualitative phenomenological approach. This design was chosen because it offers a high degree of freedom in describing a new phenomenon (event or experience) from the participants' perspective, providing rich data and detailing their experiences (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). This approach is about uncovering the essence of the phenomenon under investigation and presenting the experience 'exactly as it presents itself, neither adding to nor subtracting from it' (Merriam, 2019; Morrow, Rodriguez, & King, 2015; Willing, 2013).

Participants

Criterion sampling method, which is one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used to determine the study group of the research. Criterion sampling is the creation of a sample from people, events, objects, or situations with the qualities determined for the problem (Altunay, Oral, & Yalçınkaya, 2014; Başkaya & Demir, 2023). The sample of the study consisted of nursing students. The inclusion criteria were to be a second, third- and fourth-year nursing student, to have practiced in the hospital, and nursing students who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. The exclusion criteria were not being an undergraduate student and not accepting to participate in the study.

In addition, the study was reported in accordance with the Consolidated Criteria for Qualitative Research Reporting (COREQ) guidelines (Başkaya & Demir, 2023; Tong, Sainsbury, & Craig, 2007).

Data Collection

The research was conducted between November 15 and December 15, 2023, at a university in a province in northern Turkey. All students who met the criteria were invited to be interviewed. All interviews were conducted by the second author, and audio recordings were made by two authors. All interview times were determined by the students themselves. Ethics committee and institutional permissions were obtained before starting the interview. In addition, verbal and written consent was obtained from the students. Study data were collected voluntarily. The interviews were held in an empty classroom of the faculty when the students were not having classes. In order for the participants not to feel under pressure, it was reported that the study would be conducted on a completely voluntary basis and that the information would remain confidential, and only statements such as participant 1 and

participant 2 would be included. Data saturation is very important in a study, and in our study, a total of 60 participants from the second, third, and fourth grades were interviewed in total, and when the data were repeated, the interviews were terminated considering saturation (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In the interviews with nursing students, a voice recorder was used in a suitable environment. The interviews were conducted with a semi-structured interview form prepared by the qualitative research method and created by the researchers based on the literature and revised in line with the opinions of three experts. The interviews in the study lasted between 35 and 45 minutes.

Data Collection Process

Seven main questions and sub-questions regarding students' perception and experiences of the learning-supported hospital environment were used in the interviews

Questions in the interview form;

1. How do you think a learning-friendly hospital environment should be?

2. How should a learning-supported environment be in a hospital environment? Do you think that the hospital where you practice is sufficient in this respect?

3. Do you think that the lecturers and nurses at the university encourage you to learn? Can you tell us how they do this?

4. Are there motivating factors in the hospital?

5. What would you like to have in the hospital for interest and participation? What would you like to see improved and what would you like to see improved?

6. Do you consider your sources of support sufficient? In which area would you like to be supported?

7. What do you think should be done to improve the quality of teaching?

Data Analysis

The 7-step analysis method developed by Colaizzi (1978) for phenomenological studies was used to analyze the data (Morrow, Rodriguez, & King, 2015). In this context, the interview texts were first read independently and repeatedly by three researchers. Thus, it was tried to understand what was explained in the data. Important statements in the interview texts were selected, reorganized and expressed in general terms. Then, the data that were tried to be explained in the statements were identified and analyzed. The researchers formulated and validated the meanings by discussing them until they reached a consensus. The researchers then identified and organized the themes into main and sub-themes. The themes and sub- themes of the study were developed through clear articulation. In addition, participants' statements were included so that the reader could verify the interpretation and analysis of the data (Ulutaşdemir, Ay, Göçmen, Uzun, & Kulakaç, 2023; Yıldırım, Aydoğan, & Bulut, 2021).

Ethical Statement

This study was approved by Gümüşhane University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (E-95674917-108.99-149362) (see **Appendix-1**). Informed consent was obtained from the participants before starting the interview. Recordings and transcripts were stored on a password-protected device. The study was conducted by the Declaration of Helsinki and the ethical standards of the National Research Committee.

Findings

Thirty-five of the participants were female, and their mean age was calculated as 19.27 ± 3.44 (minimum age 18, maximum age 27). As a result of the analysis of the data obtained from the interviews, categories, themes, and sub-themes were identified (Table 1).

Table 1.

Requirements of a Learning Friendly Hospital for Nursing Students and Motivating Factors in the Hospital

Categories	Themes	Sub-themes
1. Potential motivating factors in a learning-friendly hospital	A. Persons	A1. The teaching staff must be sincere and genuine, A2. Team members should be respectful and accepting towards students in clinical practices. A3. Obtaining positive feedback from patients A4. Providing spiritual satisfaction and appreciation of patients,
	B. Environment	B1. Working in team collaboration in clinical practices, B2. The patient population trusts the students and allows them to practice, B3. The presence of an educational environment and effective visits by teaching staff. B4. Instructors should empathize with students and listen to them, B5. Instructors should encourage students for scientific studies. B6. Medical supplies are sufficient, B7. More applications in specific environments such as operating rooms
2. Behaviors of teaching staff and hospital nurses to increase students' motivation	A. Communication/environment	A1. Establishing effective communication with teaching staff, A2. The number of teaching staff is sufficient, A3. Taking actions to increase students' motivation, A4. Demonstrating supportive attitudes towards students
	B. Information	B1. Using effective presentation techniques (case study, concept map), B 2. Teaching staff should teach courses in which they are experts in their fields.
	C. Skill	C1. In clinical practice, faculty members must be present one-on-one with students. C2. Nurses supporting students in skills
3. Expectations from a learning-supported hospital	A. Physically	A1. Adequate medical supplies A2. The number of patients is high A3. Presence of guide nurses,

B. Psychologically	A4. Instructors should spend more time with students in clinical practice.
	A5. A hospital environment with low work accident rates
	A6. Being a hospital that follows innovations and developments in technology
	B1. Encouraging and motivating health personnel to learn
	B2. Team members who do not create anxiety
	B3. Empathic nurses
	B4. Creating an environment where they can express themselves comfortably
	B5. Team members who can communicate effectively
	B6. Hearing words of appreciation and gratitude from patients and feeling spiritually happy
	B6. Students are seen as part of the team
	B7. Having a reward system

Category 1. Potential motivating factors in a learning-friendly hospital

Theme 1. Persons

Nursing students stated that the factors that motivated them in a learning-friendly hospital were the sincerity and respect of the lecturers, the respectfulness of other team members, positive feedback from patients, and spiritual satisfaction.

> "The hospital environment should be an open, friendly environment where people can mingle. There should not be too much distance between the staff, and conversations should be based on practice rather than theory in terms of sincerity." (P7).

> "University lecturers encourage us to learn, but due to the small number of nurses and the high number of students, even though nurses encourage us to learn, it is not enough. The way they encourage us to learn is usually through verbal conversation (P19).

Theme 2. Environment

Nursing students stated that the factors that motivated them in the learning-supported hospital were working in team collaboration, the patient population trusting the students and allowing the practices, having an instructive environment, effective rounds by the instructors and the instructors' empathy towards them.

> "The fact that the environment is instructive and that the lecturers come and make rounds is a motivation for me, I learn more, and even if some of my friends do not like it very much, I like this situation. " (P47).

> "In a learning-friendly hospital environment, it is an environment where the logic of the work can be grasped rather than the workload being imposed on trainees and beginners. Therefore, learning is as important as the therapeutic relationship between patients and professionals in a way that encourages and facilitates learning, as well as the instructive and even educational role of experienced professionals towards other colleagues and prospective colleagues. Therefore, hospital management, hospital staff and teaching staff should encourage and strive to teach in cooperation, and more importantly, the learner should be determined and willing to do so (P3).

Category 2. Behavior of instructors and nurses in the hospital towards increasing the motivation of students

Theme 1. Communication/environment

As a result of the interviews with the nursing students, it was determined that the instructors of the students and the nurses in the hospital should establish effective communication with the instructors to increase the motivation of the students, the number of instructors should be sufficient, actions should be taken to increase the motivation of the students and supportive attitudes should be exhibited.

> "My only source of motivation in the hospital is the patients and relatives who thank us and pray for us." (P2)

> "Collaborations with our colleagues, the support of lecturers and professionals who give positive feedback in some wards motivate us, while the general functioning of the ward, positive communication between professionals and between doctors and nurses also contribute to motivation." (P11).

Theme 2. Knowledge

As a result of the interviews with the nursing students, it was determined that the lecturers and the nurses in the hospital used effective presentation techniques (case study, concept map) in the lessons to increase the motivation of the students, and that the lecturers attended the lessons in which they were experts in their fields.

> "Each academic should teach the courses in his/her area of specialization and other professors should not teach the courses that are not in his/her area of specialization. Generally, expert lecturers do, but there are one or two courses where expert lecturers are very good... (P33).

Theme 3. Skills

As a result of the interviews with nursing students, situations such as increasing the duration of clinical practice in the skill area and increasing the duration of laboratory practice in order to increase the motivation of the students were determined by the instructors and nurses in the hospital.

> "They encourage us to strengthen our weaknesses by doing extra laboratory lessons to overcome our deficiencies as much as they can (P19).

Category 3. Expectations from a learning-supported hospital

Theme 1. Physical aspect

According to the data obtained from the interviews, students stated that they expected learning-supported hospital environments to be equipped.

> "Each ward has its specific characteristics in a learning supported environment. In this direction, the frequently used drugs, methods, tools and equipment in the wards and how they are used and the things to be considered for the patients hospitalized in these wards should be supported in the form of books, brochures and posters. For students with little experience or intern students, they should be carefully analyzed one by one and try to complete the missing parts, and in addition to this, detailed feedback should be given to the lecturers for the intern group. In the hospital where we practice, we have many deficiencies in this regard, I do not think that professionals are sensitive enough on this issue and I think that the necessary feedback to the lecturers is quite insufficient (P21).

Theme 2. Psychologically

According to the data obtained from the interviews, students stated that they expected learning-supported hospital environments to be instructive, encouraging to learn, and a space that does not create anxiety for them.

> "In a learning-friendly hospital environment, it is actually an environment where the logic of the work can be grasped rather than the workload being imposed on trainees and beginners. Therefore, learning is as important as the therapeutic relationship between patients and professionals in a way that encourages and facilitates learning, as well as the instructive and even educational role of experienced professionals towards other colleagues and prospective colleagues. Therefore, hospital management, hospital staff and teaching staff should encourage and strive to teach in cooperation, and more importantly, the learner should be determined and willing to do so (P58).

Discussion

This study aims to evaluate what should be in a learning-friendly hospital for nursing students and the motivating factors in the hospital from the students' perspective using a qualitative phenomenological approach. Nursing students' perceptions and thoughts about the learning-supported hospital environment were addressed in three categories.

Potential motivating factors in a learning-friendly hospital

Nurse-friendly hospitals offer opportunities for orientation of nurses in health care services and professionalization of nurses through in-service training opportunities (Er, 2013; Meraviglia et al., 2008). For quality patient care standards, orientation is not only a desirable feature for a suitable working environment but also important for patient care practices (Er, 2013). In addition, the motivation of nurses and nursing students is also very important in hospitals. Motivation is the possibility for a person to engage in, sustain, and adhere to specific change strategies. Motivation is not a characteristic but a state, and it is the readiness or willingness to change, and it varies according to the situation/time (Ögel, 2009).

Motivational processes, in connection with cognitive processes, affect the attitudes of individuals in the face of problems faced by individuals and determine the performance of individuals (Bozbaş, 2015). The problems experienced by students in the hospital environment can negatively affect students' motivation (Bayır, 2020). In the study conducted by Mikkonen et al. (2020), it was determined that the personality traits of the instructors that are flexible, patient, fair, supportive, adopt a pedagogical approach and increase motivation positively affect students' clinical practice experiences (Özsaban & Bayram, 2020). In this study, it was determined that students were positively affected by the factors of nurse, patient, and instructor and that these situations increased their motivation.

In a systematic study, the physical environment of the hospital increased the expansion stress (Taşdelen & Zaybak, 2013), anxiety increased (Arabacı et al., 2015), the clinic was formed (Bilgin et al., 2016), and the clinical environments of the diseases were found to be inadequate, thus increasing academic motivation and clinical learning (Aktaş & Karabulut, 2016) customize. However, the absence of special rooms such as the dining hall, dressing room, study room, seminar room for promotion and

the lack of private rooms such as the dining room, dressing room, study room, seminar room are the features that show what the ideas in the books and magazines that people in the clinic can benefit from (Özsaban & Bayram, 2020).

Behaviors of lecturers and nurses in the hospital towards increasing students' motivation

In the studies, it was stated that the concept of vision in education is to take many steps to improve, regulate, and develop education in order to increase the quality of education (Şendağ & Gedik, 2015). Nursing students may experience feelings of anxiety and fear due to the absence of role models and problems in terms of professionalism (Alshowkan & Kamel, 2016; Demir & Ercan, 2018). In their study, Günaydın and Arguvanlı Çoban (2021) stated that students had difficulties in issues such as insufficient theoretical knowledge and practice time (Günaydın & Arguvanlı Çoban, 2021). In the study, situations such as effective communication with lecturers, a sufficient number of lecturers, actions to increase the motivation of students, and supportive attitudes towards students were determined to improve the quality of teaching. It is seen that the number of studies on increasing the quality of education and training is limited, and in this context, it is thought that it would be useful to increase the number of studies.

Expectations from a learning-supported hospital

Nurse-friendly hospital programs and a learning-supported hospital environment are important to improve the quality of institutional quality and patient care by examining and improving the working environment of nurses and students (Meraviglia et al., 2008; Meraviglia et al., 2009). Nurse-friendly hospital criteria reveal what the workplace policies should be in providing the working environment necessary for quality nursing practices. With these criteria, it is expected to provide a positive working environment in the institution, nurse satisfaction, retention of nurses in the institution, increase the quality of patient care, and improve patient outcomes (Meraviglia et al., 2009). In a study conducted by Mikkonen et al. (2020) in five European countries, it was determined that the individual characteristics of educators who are flexible, patient, fair, supportive, and adopt a pedagogical approach and increase motivation affect the clinical experiences of students. In this context, it can be said that the educator's display of a professional attitude and positive communication characteristics and providing feedback will strengthen the relationship of trust with students, reduce stress, and support learning.

In the study conducted by Bayır et al. (2020), when the expectations of nursing students from the practices were questioned, it was determined that the majority of the students expected active participation in the practices applied to the patient, they wanted the health team members to treat them well, and the instructors to be supportive and understanding. Students also stated that they wanted to have sufficient medical equipment, to improve the physical conditions of the hospital, and to provide opportunities to conduct research in the clinic (Bayır, Özdemir, & Palaz, 2020). In this study, it is seen that students mentioned similar expectations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides preliminary evidence on the motivating factors for nursing students' interest and participation, and their perception of a learning-friendly hospital environment. Nursing students expect learning-friendly hospital environments to be instructive, encouraging, anxiety-free, and well-equipped in all aspects. It was determined that effective communication with nurses and other team members, receiving positive feedback from patients, and instructive and supportive approaches of instructors increased the motivation of nursing students. In addition, it was found that students want to contribute to the improvement of the quality of care by practicing as a part of the team in learning-friendly hospitals.

In line with these findings, it is necessary to develop strategies to adapt educational models compatible with the national health system and to eliminate the affecting variables at institutional and national levels in the planning of education and training. It is recommended to identify individual characteristics affecting students' experiences, to adopt pedagogical approaches and individualized collaboration in relations with them, to increase the competence of educators, to increase the number of learning-friendly hospitals, to create a supportive clinical environment, and to implement technology-supported laboratory applications in the clinical preparation processes.

Limitations

One of the limitations of the study is that all participants were second, third-, and fourth-year nursing students at a university in a city in northern Turkey. The results depend on the participants and the setting in which the research was conducted. The small group of participants is not representative of the nursing student population.

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Appendix-1

T.C.
GÜMÜŞHANE ÜNİVERSİTESİ REKTÖRLÜĞÜ
BİLİMSEL ARAŞTIRMA VE YAYIN ETİĞİ KURULU

Sayı : E-95674917-108.99-149362
Konu : Etik Onay

Sayın Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Sevda UZUN

"HEMŞİRELİK ÖĞRENCİLERİ İÇİN ÖĞRENME DOSTU HASTANEDE OLMASI GEREKENLER VE HASTANEDE MOTİVE EDİCİ FAKTÖRLER"

konulu etik kurul başvurunuz, Üniversitemiz Bilimsel araştırma ve Yayın etiği Kurulunun 27/12/2022 tarih ve 2022/7 sayılı toplantısında görüşülmüş olup, projenin yürürlükteki mevzuata uygun olduğuna oy birliği ile karar verilmiştir.

Bilgilerinize rica ederim.

Prof. Dr. Bayram NAZIR
Kurul Başkanı V.

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Sürdürülebilir Akreditasyon Yönetimi: Otoetnografik Yansımalar

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Öz

Yükseköğretim kurumlarında kalite güvence sistemi son yıllarda gittikçe önem kazanmıştır. Bu sistemin bir parçası olan akreditasyon ise yükseköğretim programlarının, bağımsız bir kuruluş tarafından belirlenen ölçütler ışığında değerlendirilmesini içeren bir süreçtir. Bu çalışmada akredite sosyal hizmet bölümlerinden birinde farklı rollerde sürece dahil olan araştırmacılar olarak deneyimlerimiz, nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden otoetnografi tekniği kullanılarak aktarılmıştır. Motivasyon kaynaklarımız, sürece olan inancımız, kırılma noktalarımız ve değerlendirici dernekler ile temasımız, rol ve kimliklerimiz üzerinden bir öznel anlatı ile sunulmuştur. Sürecin, motivasyonu daima canlı tutmayı gerektirdiği, hazırlık ve destek konusunda üniversite yönetimi ile bölüm arasında iş birliğinin önemli olduğu, akademik, idari kadro ve paydaşlar arasında dengeli iş yükü dağılımının rol ve sınır belirsizliğini önleyebileceği, sosyal hizmet alanının özgünlüğünü dikkate alan nitelikte bir değerlendirme yapılmasının daha etkin olabileceği sonuçlarına ulaşılmıştır. Tüm bu noktalarda önlem alınması ve sürekli iyileştirme yaklaşımının benimsenmesi, akreditasyonun hem kurumsal hem de program düzeyinde sürdürülebilir bir şekilde yönetilmesini sağlayacaktır. Deneyimlerimizin içe dönük bir bakış açısıyla özgün bir yöntemle ortaya konması ile de akreditasyona yeni başvuracak sosyal hizmet programlarına doğrudan fayda sağlanması beklenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Akreditasyon, sosyal hizmet akreditasyonu, otoetnografi, sürdürülebilirlik

Sustainable Accreditation Management: Autoethnographic Reflections

Extended Summary

In recent years, sustainability has gained a central position in various sectors, including higher education, where the need for quality assurance systems and accreditation processes has become increasingly significant. The growing number of programs and internationalization of higher education institutions have necessitated the monitoring and assurance of educational quality. In this context, quality assurance systems have emerged as strategic tools that not only enhance institutional performance but also support sustainable development efforts. These systems ensure that institutions conduct their educational, research, and administrative activities in line with specific standards, fostering a structure of continuous improvement.

Accreditation, in this framework, has become a key instrument for achieving universal quality standards in higher education. Program-level accreditation, in particular, involves a cyclical process through which institutions continuously review their educational activities through internal self-assessments and external evaluations conducted by authorized bodies. In Türkiye, although accreditation in social work education is still in its developmental phase, significant structural steps have already been taken. These processes are carried out in accordance with criteria developed by national and international bodies and aim to strike a balance between standardization and flexibility by recognizing the unique structure of social work programs.

In this study, our experiences as researchers involved in the process in different roles in one of the accredited social work departments were conveyed using the autoethnography technique from qualitative research methods. Our different roles in the process allowed for a multidimensional reflection of subjective experiences. Our sources of motivation, our belief in the process, our breaking points, and our contact with evaluator associations are presented through a subjective narrative through our roles and identities. This narrative not only conveys personal insights but also aims to shed light on the structural and cultural dynamics of the accreditation process in social work education.

The findings indicate that the sustainability of the accreditation process depends on maintaining continuous motivation, fostering collaboration between university administration and academic departments, and establishing balanced workload distribution among academic and administrative staff and stakeholders. Such distribution helps to reduce role ambiguity and enhances the overall effectiveness of the process. Incorporating criteria specific to the discipline of social work into evaluation procedures strengthens the recognition of the field's unique characteristics and supports the development of relevant assessment standards.

In conclusion, by presenting our experiences through an autoethnographic lens, this study not only documents the accreditation process but also aims to offer a practical guide for social work programs preparing for accreditation. Adopting preventive measures at all relevant points and embracing a continuous improvement approach will enable the sustainable management of accreditation processes at both the institutional and program levels. Furthermore, this study is expected to make a meaningful contribution to programs in the field of social work that are about to embark on their accreditation journey.

Keywords: Accreditation, social work accreditation, autoethnography, sustainability

Giriş

Sürdürülebilirliğin yaşamın her alanında başat bir konum elde ettiği son yıllarda, ürün ve hizmet sunumunda evrensel standartların yakalanması, kurum ve kuruluşların faaliyet gösterdiği alanda öne çıkabilmesi adına önemlidir. Öyle ki evrensel standartlara uygunluk, çağdaş eğitim sisteminde de başarı sağlamanın bir koşulu haline gelmiştir (Parlıyan, 2022). Yükseköğretim kurumlarının giderek sayısının artması, özelleşmesi ve uluslararasılaşması, bu kurumlardaki eğitim kalitesinin güvence altına alınması ihtiyacını doğurmaktadır (Kumar vd., 2020). Bu kapsamda kurumların genel performanslarının iyileştirilmesi adına stratejik bir adım olarak kabul edilen kalite yönetim sistemi uygulamaları, aynı zamanda sürdürülebilir kalkınma çabalarına da sağlam bir temel oluşturmaktadır (Türk Standartları Enstitüsü, 2005). Yükseköğretim kurumlarının, evrensel ve ulusal düzeyde kalite standartlarına uygun adımlar atması, söz konusu kurumların eğitim-öğretim faaliyetleri, bilim üretme, araştırma yapma ve yayma amaçlarıyla da birebir örtüşmektedir.

Üniversitelerde kalite güvence sistemi, eğitim-öğretim faaliyetlerinin belirli standartlar çerçevesinde yürütülmesini, faaliyetlerin iç tetkikler yoluyla sürekli gözden geçirilmesini ve koşulların standartlara uygun biçimde gerekirse iyileştirilmesini sağlayan faaliyetler bütünüdür. Söz konusu sistem, yükseköğretim kurumlarının kalite standartlarını sağladıklarına dair güvence veren, sistemli bir şekilde sürdürülen işlemler olarak tanımlanırken; "öz değerlendirme", "dış değerlendirme" ve "değerlendiricilerin onayı ve sürecin izlenmesi" şeklinde üç aşamadan oluşmaktadır (Ayvaz vd., 2016). İşletilen bu aşamalar yoluyla yükseköğretim kurumlarının hizmet kalitelerini sürekli ileriye taşıyan bir sistemin canlı tutulması sağlanmaktadır.

Yükseköğretimde kalite güvencesinin bir parçası olan akreditasyon ise eğitim kurumu veya programın evrensel standartlara uygunluğunun belirli göstergeler yoluyla kanıtlanarak ortaya konmasını ifade etmektedir (Aktan ve Gencel, 2010). İlk olarak 1910 yılında tıp alanında (Kılıçaslan, 2020, s. 13), 1950'lerde ise sosyal hizmet alanında Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde uygulanmaya başlanan akreditasyon (Yiğit, 2017, s. 162), kurumsal ve programa yönelik olmak üzere ikiye ayrılmaktadır. Kurumsal akreditasyon, bir yükseköğretim kurumunun; program akreditasyonu ise bir yükseköğretim programının bağımsız bir kuruluş tarafından akademik ve yönetimsel açıdan belirli kriterlere göre değerlendirilmesi (Yiğit, 2017) olarak ifade edilmektedir.

Program bazında akreditasyon, bir eğitim kurumunun parçası olan programların kendi öz değerlendirmelerini yaparak bunu yetkilendirilmiş akreditasyon kuruluşlarına sunması ve kuruluşun dışarıdan bir gözle programı değerlendirmesi ile devam eden bir süreç ve sürekli gelişmenin sağlandığı bir sistemdir. Bu değerlendirme sürecinin ardından ilgili programın yeterliğini belgeleyen sertifika alınmakta; ancak süreç bununla bitmemektedir. Bir eğitim kurumu veya program akredite olduktan sonra da belirli aralıklarla yapılan izleme süreci ile belgelenen kalitenin sürdürülebilirliğine katkı sunulmaktadır. Eğitim sisteminde karşılaşılan ulusal ve uluslararası düzeydeki farklılıklar bir bakıma akreditasyon ile standardize edilmekte ve olası karışıklıkların önüne geçilebilmektedir. Şeffaflık ve hesap verebilirlik noktasında da güçlü yanları bulunan yapısı sayesinde yükseköğretimde akreditasyon,

standartlara dair oluşabilecek sorunları çözümleyebilme fırsatı sunmaktadır (Aktan ve Gencel, 2010). Burada istenen programların tek tipleşmesi değil öğrenci merkezli bir yaklaşımla iyileştirme ve sürdürülebilirliği sağlamaktır.

Türkiye'de üniversite sayısı gün geçtikçe artarken, bu sayı yalnızca İstanbul'da 11 devlet, 44 vakıf üniversitesi ve 3 vakıf meslek yüksekokulu ile 58'e ulaşmıştır (Yükseköğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi [YBYS], 2025). Sayının bu denli fazla olması ise kurumların kendilerini öne çıkaracak ve tercih edilebilirliği arttıracak hamleler yapmalarını teşvik etmektedir. Hem öğrenci profili hem de akademik kadronun niteliğini arttırmada, yükseköğretim kurumlarının eğitim-öğretim ve araştırma süreçleri ile yönetimsel anlamda kaliteyi sağlaması ve bunu ilgili paydaşlara sunması önemli hale gelmektedir (Özer vd., 2010). Bu kapsamda akreditasyon da özellikle vakıf üniversiteleri arasında "kurumsal rekabet" aracı olarak görülmeye başlanmıştır.

Sosyal Hizmet Eğitiminde Akreditasyon

Sosyal hizmet programları açısından akreditasyon, eğitim faaliyetlerinin niteliğinin uluslararası standartlara ulaşmasında önemli bir adım olarak nitelendirilmektedir. Uluslararası düzeyde akreditasyon süreçlerine bakıldığında, ABD ve eyaletlerinde CSWE (Sosyal Hizmet Eğitimi Konseyi), COA (Akreditasyon Komisyonu), sosyal hizmet eğitiminde lisans ve yüksek lisans programlarını akredite etmek üzere CHEA (Yükseköğretim Akreditasyon Konseyi) tarafından yetkilendirilmektedir. Akreditasyon süreci COA tarafından oluşturulan EPAS (Eğitim Politikası ve Akreditasyon Standartları)'a dayanmaktadır (CSWE, 2022). Avustralya'da ise sosyal hizmet program akreditasyonu, AASW (Avustralya Sosyal Hizmet Uzmanları Derneği) tarafından belirlenen ASWEAS (Avustralya Sosyal Hizmet Eğitim ve Akreditasyon Standartları) çerçevesinde gerçekleştirilmektedir (AASW, 2024). Avrupa'da da Bologna süreci ile yaygınlaşan kalite güvencesi ve akreditasyon çalışmaları kapsamında ENQA (Avrupa Yükseköğretimde Kalite Güvencesi Birliği) yükseköğretimde standartları belirleyen bir kuruluştur (ENQA, 2024). Ancak Avrupa'da sosyal hizmet eğitimi özelinde ortak bir zemin oluşturulmadığı, ülkeler bazında sosyal hizmet eğitiminde görece çok parçalı bir yapılanma olduğu söylenebilir (Ayyıldız, 2021, s. 79). Bologna sürecinin bir parçası olan Türkiye'de de sosyal hizmet eğitiminde akreditasyon süreçlerinin benzer şekilde farklı kuruluşlar tarafından gerçekleştirildiği görülmektedir. Bu kuruluşlar arasında FEDEK (Fen, Edebiyat, Fen-Edebiyat, Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakülteleri Öğretim Programları Değerlendirme ve Akreditasyon Derneği), SABAK (Sağlık Bilimleri Eğitim Programları Değerlendirme ve Akreditasyon Derneği) gibi ulusal kuruluşların yanı sıra AHPGS (Sağlık ve Sosyal Bilimlerde Akreditasyon Derneği) gibi uluslararası kuruluşlar da yer almaktadır.

Türkiye'de sosyal hizmet akreditasyonuna dair yakın süreçteki gelişmelere bakıldığında, 2019 yılının başında SHOD (Sosyal Hizmet Okulları Derneği) tarafından yürütülen kalite güvencesi ve akreditasyon temalı çalışmaların ön plana çıktığı görülmektedir. Bu konuda sağlık bilimleri programlarını değerlendirme görevini üstlenen SABAK ile SHOD arasında gerçekleştirilen görüşmeler sosyal hizmet eğitiminde akreditasyon süreçlerini hızlandırmıştır. Sonuç olarak iki derneğin anlaşmaya varmasının ardından çeşitli eğitimler sonucu SHOD'un 5 üyesi akreditasyon değerlendiricisi ünvanını

almış ve bugün bu sayı 14'e yükselmiştir (SABAK, 2025). SABAK'ın talebi üzerine sosyal hizmete özgü ölçütler geliştirilmiş ve 24 akademisyenin bir araya gelmesi ile bu ölçütler 13 maddede toplanmıştır (Alptekin ve Türkeri, 2023). Sosyal hizmete özgü ölçütlerin eklenmesiyle birlikte, sağlık bilimleri fakülteleri içerisinde yer alan sosyal hizmet programlarının farklılaşan yönlerini değerlendirmede önemli bir adım atıldığını söylemek mümkündür.

Türkiye'de sosyal hizmet programlarında akreditasyon faaliyetlerinin yaygınlaşmaya başladığı günümüzde, sosyal hizmet eğitimi açısından akreditasyonun niteliğine ve boyutlarına dair akademik çalışmalar da yapılmaya başlanmıştır. Ancak bu çalışmalar Yiğit (2017), Ayyıldız (2021), Alptekin ve diğerleri (2017) ile Alptekin ve Türkeri (2023)'nin çalışmalarıyla sınırlıdır. Bu çalışma ise, Türkiye'de sosyal hizmet akreditasyonun güncel durumunu ve akreditasyonun yürütücüsü ve paydaşları tarafından algılanma biçimini, birincil kaynaklardan doğrudan aktararak sosyal hizmet alan yazınına katkı sağlamayı hedeflemektedir.

Yöntem

Bu çalışma, akredite sosyal hizmet bölümlerinden birinde akreditasyon sürecinde görev almış üç kişinin deneyimlerini otoetnografik bakış açısıyla aktarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu aktarımda, süreci farklı rollerde deneyimlemiş olan E., A. ve M. olarak bizler, sürecin hem etkileyen hem etkileneni olma halimizi, süreçteki his ve düşüncelerimizi en güçlü biçimde yansıtabileceğini düşündüğümüz otoetnografi yöntemini tercih ettik. Hem araştırmacı hem araştırılan olmamız itibariyle, benliğimize has birden fazla rol ve kişilik özelliğimizin, bu tecrübemiz içerisinde birbiriyle etkileşim halinde olduğu (Sparkes, 2003, s. 67) noktaları bir araya getirdiğimiz bu çalışmada, otoetnografinin özdüşünümsel niteliğinin desteğini alarak okuyucunun da süreçte kendi sesini duyabileceği (Yavuz, 2019, s. 473) ve aktif bir figür olarak yer alabileceği (Sparkes, 2003) bir anlatı oluşturmayı amaçladık.

Araştırmanın Deseni

1970'li yıllarda Karl Gustav Heider, Walter Goldschmidt ve David M. Hayano tarafından ilk kez kullanılmaya başlanan otoetnografi kavramı, postmodern dönemde otobiyografik tarzdan çıkarak nitel araştırma teknikleri arasında yerini almıştır. Geleneksel yöntemlerin aksine araştırma tasarımı, veri toplama ve analiz süreçlerine eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla yaklaşarak yeni bir boyut kazandırmıştır (Wall, 2006, s. 147-148).

Sosyal ve kültürel bağlam içine "kendi"nin konumlandırıldığı bir yöntem olan otoetnografi (Reed-Danahay, 1997), bir bakıma araştırmacının kendini araştırmasıdır (Çelik, 2013). Otoetnografide araştırma yapmaya dair bir anlatıdan ziyade, araştırmayı yaşama hikâyesini aktarmaya odaklanılır (Adams vd., 2014, s. 5). Bizler de akreditasyon deneyimimizin yaşam akışlarımız içinde kapladığı alanı düşündüğümüzde tam da bu noktadan hareketle deneyimlerimizi, duygu ve düşüncelerimizi bilimsel sınırlar içinde ifade etmenin işlevsel bir yolu olması nedeniyle otoetnografi yöntemini tercih ettik. Sürecin hem fiziksel hem duygusal emek bakımından yoğun halini tüm detaylarıyla yansıtarak akreditasyonu yaşama hikayemizi kaleme aldık.

Araştırmacının hem bir "özne" hem de bir "nesne" konumunda araştırmanın merkezinde yer aldığı otoetnografinin "kendine odaklı" bir bakış açısı vardır. Bununla birlikte "bağlam bilincine" sahip yapısı itibariyle de öze dair anlatıyı başkalarıyla, sosyal olanla ve bir bağlam içerisinde ilişkilendirmeler yaparak sunar (Gant vd., 2019; Ngunjiri vd., 2010, s. 2). Kişisel anlatıya dayanması bakımından öznel olmakla eleştirilse de veri toplama, analiz ve yorumlama aşamalarında "nitel" araştırma yönteminin sistematik yaklaşımını benimser (Ngunjiri vd., 2010, s. 2). Tüm bu açılardan otoetnografi hem bir süreç hem de bir ürün olarak nitelendirilmektedir (Ellis vd., 2011).

Bizlerin bu çalışmada kendi benliklerimizi merkeze aldığımız ve analizlerimiz yoluyla okuyucunun da sürece katılabileceği 'düşünümsel bir dünyanın' kapılarını açtığımız gibi (Grant vd., 2013), otoetnografide araştırmacının kendisi veri kaynağını oluşturur. Otoetnografik yöntemin sağladığı düşünümsellik, çok kültürlü dünya içinde aynı zamanda bizlerin de kendimizi daha iyi anlamamıza katkı sağlayan araç işlevi görürken (Chang, 2016a; Eisner, 1991), diğer bir ifadeyle kendi deneyimlerimiz üzerine bu denli yoğun biçimde odaklanmamız, süreçteki misyonumuzu, iletişim örüntülerimizi yeniden gözden geçirme olanağını da bizlere sundu. Dolayısıyla araştırmacı olarak bizler bu çalışmada Gant ve arkadaşları (2019, s. 710)'nın tanımlamasıyla hem veri toplayıcı hem veri üreticisi veya hem araştırmacı hem araştırmanın katılımcısı konumumuzu ortaya koyduk.

Otoetnografinin alt türlerinden biri olan kolektif/iş birlikçi otoetnografi (collaborative autoethnography) seçimi ile de birden fazla araştırmacı etkileşiminin sağlayacağı bakış açısı zenginliğinden yararlanmayı ve araştırmacılar olarak kendi özlerimize fazla odaklanmanın önüne geçmeyi hedefledik (Ngunjiri vd., 2010, s. 6). Akreditasyonla tanışmamızdan belgelendirme sürecine kadar olan tüm serüvenimizi üç ayrı perspektiften ele aldık. Bu sayede Chang ve diğerleri (2012, s. 24)'nin söylemiyle birer yazar/araştırmacı, aynı zamanda birer katılımcı olarak kendi bağımsız sesimizi "kolektif bir ses" olarak bir araya getirdik. Böylece akreditasyon deneyimimizin çeşitli boyutlarını, her birimizin birbirimizden bağımsız olduğunda yapamayacağı ölçüde güçlü bir şekilde sorgulama imkânı elde ettik (Chang vd., 2012, s. 24). İş birlikçi/kolektif otoetnografinin sunduğu bu olanak sayesinde Türkiye'de sosyal hizmet eğitiminde akreditasyon süreçlerini, en başından sonuna kadar bizim deneyimlediğimiz biçimiyle şeffaf bir biçimde yansıtmaya çalıştık.

Akreditasyon kavramı ile süreç başladığı anda her birimizin bir tanışıklığı vardı. Ancak üzerine düşündüğümüz bir noktada değildi ya da akreditasyona hazırlık bağlamında bir faaliyetimiz yoktu. Süreç üniversite yönetiminden gelen 'Akreditasyona başvurulacak!' talebi ile hiç de hazır olmadığımız bir anda başladı. Dolayısıyla biz bu süreci yolda öğrendik. Bu yolculukta, çalıştığımız kadar süreci anlamak adına da sürekli birbirimizle konuşuyor ve birbirimize destek olmaya çalışıyorduk. Konuşmalarımız bazen çalışmalarımızın o kadar önüne geçiyordu ki tecrübelerimizi paylaşmanın süreci ilk defa deneyimleyecek olanlara 'yol gösterici'(Taşçı ve Kenan, 2021) olması açısından anlamlı olacağına karar verdik.

E., akreditasyon kavramı ile ilk kez araştırma görevlisi olarak çalışmaya başladığı vakıf üniversitesi bünyesinde uygulanan sınav dosyaları hazırlığı ile tanışmıştı. A., bölümün ilk

mezunlarındandı ve akreditasyon sürecinde bir huzurevinde sosyal hizmet uzmanı/kalite birim sorumlusu olarak görev yapıyordu. M. ise o dönemde bir dernekte stajına devam eden sosyal hizmet son sınıf ve aynı zamanda psikoloji bölümü üçüncü sınıf öğrencisiydi. E.'nin artık akreditasyon sürecini tamamlayan bir bölümün öğretim üyesi olarak geldiği noktayı ileri taşıma isteği ve A. ve M.'nin süreçte daha sınırlı rol alsalar da akreditasyona ve otoetnografi yöntemine dair deneyimlerinin bir araya gelmesiyle bu çalışma ortaya çıktı.

Süreci ölçütler bağlamında didaktik olarak yansıtmaktan ziyade hisler ve düşünceler bağlamında anlatmanın akreditasyon çalışmalarını içselleştirmeyi sağlayabileceğine olan inancımız bizi otoetnografi yöntemine götürdü. Kişisel anlatılardan yararlanmamız sayesinde kendi araştırma yolculuğumuzun döngüselleşmesini sağladık. Böylece kendi benliklerimizdeki değişimi ve gelişimi görme olanağı (Ellis vd., 2011) elde ettik. Farklı deneyimleri ve bakış açılarını yansıtarak, otoetnografinin bireylere ve topluma ışık tutma nosyonunu (Ellis, 1999, s. 672-674) sosyal hizmetin bireysel ve toplumsal fayda sağlamayı hedefleyen yapısıyla bir araya getirdik. Bu sayede akreditasyon ve kalite süreçlerine dair teorik bilgiyi deneyimsel anlatılarla desteklemekle, sürece yeni başlayacak bölümlere fayda sağlamayı amaçladık. Bu amaca uygun olarak belirlediğimiz alt amaçlar ise aşağıdaki gibidir:

1. Akreditasyon sürecinin yürütülmesinde temel motivasyon kaynaklarımız ve kırılma noktalarımız nelerdi?
2. Sahip olduğumuz rollerin akreditasyon sürecine uyum ve olası çatışmalara etkisi nasıldı?
3. Akreditasyon algımız ve süreci kişisel olarak yorumlayışımız nasıldı?

Verilerin Toplanması ve Analizi

Bu çalışmanın özneleri aynı zamanda araştırmanın yürütücüleridir. Akreditasyon sürecimiz akademik ve idari kadro ile sürecin tüm paydaşlarının rol aldığı bir ekip çalışması ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Ancak bu otoetnografik çalışma, ekibin üyesi olan bir öğretim elemanı, bir mezun ve bir öğrencinin görüşlerini yansıtmaktadır.

Bu çalışmada E., A. ve M. olarak deneyimlerimizden yola çıkan otoetnografik içeriğin oluşturulmasında, kişisel ve grup mesajlarımız, resmi evrak ve yazışmalar, kişisel gözlem ve alan notlarımız, süreci somutlaştıran fotoğraflar ve oluşturduğumuz çevrim içi dokümanlardan yararlanılmıştır. 2020 yılı temmuz ayından 2021 yılı aralık ayına kadar elde ettiğimiz tüm bu verilere ek olarak kişisel özelliklerimizin sürece etkisini görmek adına kişilik özelliklerimiz ile ilgili öz değerlendirmelerimizi bir diğer veri kaynağı olarak kullandık. Verilerimizin içeriğine dair açıklamalar Tablo 1'de yer almaktadır.

Tablo 1.

Veri Kaynakları

Veri Kaynağı	Verinin Kapsamı
Mesajlar	Üniversite içerisinde fakülte ve bölüm özelinde kurulan iletişim ağları ve yazışmalar, kişisel ve grup mesajları (Fakülte grupları, bölüm grubu, araştırma görevlisi grubu, öğrenci grubu, uzaktan eğitim grubu, erişilebilirlik grubu)
Resmî Belge ve Yazışmalar	Kurumsal e-mailler, öğretim üyeleri, öğrenciler, dış paydaşlar arasında gerçekleşen yazışmalar, toplantı davet yazıları, toplantı tutanakları
Kişisel Gözlem ve Notlar	Araştırmacıların kendi akreditasyon deneyimlerine dair aldıkları saha ve gözlem notları, birbirleriyle yaptıkları paylaşımlar
Fotoğraflar	Yapılan toplantılar, etkinlikler, geç saatlere kadar kalınan mesailerden arta kalan anı fotoğrafları
Çevrim içi Dokümanlar	Pandemi nedeniyle çevrim içi platforma taşınan belgeler/kayıtlar (WhatsApp grupları, Zoom toplantı kayıtları, Google Drive belgeleri)

Otoetnografide veriler, "hatırlama", "eser ve belge toplama", "başkalarıyla görüşme", "kendini analiz etme", "kendini gözlemleme" ve "araştırma konusuyla ilgili meseleler üzerine düşünme" yoluyla toplanabilir (Chang, 2016a). Her birimiz için yeni bir süreç olan akreditasyon serüvenimizin en başında, akreditasyonun ne olduğunu ve amacını tam anlamıyla kavramaya çalıştığımız bir sürenin ardından, kalite, akreditasyon, sosyal hizmet eğitimi gibi konularda akademik çalışma yapma istek ve düşüncemizin kesiştiği noktada bu çalışmayı kolektif bir şekilde yapmaya karar verdik. Ardından "Hep Akademik" isimli bir WhatsApp grubu oluşturduk ve süreçte elde ettiğimiz tüm deneyimlerimiz bir anda bu grubun içinde akmaya başladı, konuştukça çoğaldık.

Bir yandan da süreci kendi perspektifimizden değerlendirerek bireysel notlar tutmaya ve geçmişin 'anlık görüntülerini' yakalamamıza yardımcı olacak (Muncey, 2010, s. 55) fotoğraf ve belgeler gibi somut kanıtları da toplamaya başladık. Birbirimizin düşüncelerinden etkilenmeden gözlemlerimizi yansıttığımız alan notlarımızı bireysel olarak defalarca okuyarak düşünümsel anlatılara dönüştürdük. 2023 yılı Eylül-Kasım ayları arasında haftalık olarak planladığımız toplantılarda bu anlatılarımızı analiz etmeye başladık. Daha sonra birbirimizden aldığımız geri bildirimlerle hatırlamakta zorlandığımız noktaları da ekleyerek son şeklini verdiğimiz en önemli veri setimiz ortaya çıktı (Oswald vd., 2020). Araştırmamızın öznel boyutunu, özdüşünümsel anlatılarımız oluştururken, nesnel boyutu ise kalite, akreditasyon ve sosyal hizmet eğitimi ile ilgili literatür taraması sonuçlarına dayanmaktadır (Watts, 2015).

Gerçekleştirdiğimiz toplantılarda analiz ve yorumlarımız doğrultusunda deneyimlerimizin ortaklaşan ya da farklılık barındıran yönlerini listeledik ve akreditasyon deneyimimizi etkilediği noktasında fikir birliğine vardığımız 'kritik noktaları' ortaya çıkardık (Chang, 2016b). Öz anlatılarımız ve diğer veri kaynaklarımız üzerine yaptığımız değerlendirmeler, akreditasyonun her birimiz için ifade ettiği 'anlamları' derinlemesine tartışmamızı sağladı (Chang, 2016b) ve bizi iki ana temaya ulaştırdı. Bu temalar "Motivasyon ve Kırılmalar" ve "Roller, Sınırlar ve Belirsizlikler" olarak şekillendi.

Bizden Yansıyanlar

Motivasyon ve Kırılmalar

Akreditasyon gibi kapsamlı, çok boyutlu ve uzun süreli emek gerektiren bir süreçte motivasyonun her daim canlı tutulması kritik öneme sahiptir. Akreditasyon sürecini yürütebilmek için üst yönetimin size verdiği görevlerden biri ya da işinizin bir parçası olduğu kabulü dışında başka motivasyon kaynaklarına da ihtiyacınız var. Çünkü akreditasyon sürecini başarıyla, kalite standartlarını içselleştirmiş olarak yürütmenin ve kalite açısından sürdürülebilirliği sağlamanın ön koşullarından biri de yapılan çalışmaları sadece bir iş yükü olarak nitelendirmenin ötesine geçmektir. Birbirinden farklı rollerde bulunduğumuz akreditasyon sürecinde bizler, yapılan çalışmaları ve akreditasyonun gerekliliklerini salt iş yükü olarak nitelendirmeyen, motivasyonunu canlı tutmayı başarabilenler arasında olduğumuzu söyleyebiliriz.

Sürecin uzunluğunu göz önüne aldığımızda E. içsel motivasyonunu, *"Teknik olarak "Biz akredite olduk." demek için yapılabilecek ya da üniversite yönetimi "Bunu yapacaksınız." dediği için emek harcanabilecek bir şey değildi. Bu yolu yürürken kişisel özelliklerimiz, alanımıza duyduğumuz ilgi, bölümümüz için daha iyisini yapabilmek, meslektaşlarımızı daha yetkin kılmak, akademinin sağlayabileceği her şeyi en iyi halinde sunmak adımlarımızı güçlendiren noktalardı."* şeklinde ifade ediyor. O dönem hemen her aşamasını karmaşık ve kaygılarla dolu bir süreç olarak algıladığımız akreditasyonda, A. ve M.'yi motive eden ve süreçte daha fazla sorumluluk almaya teşvik eden noktalar ise aidiyet ve bağlılık ekseninde ortaklaşıyordu. Akreditasyon sürecinde öğrenci temsilcisi olarak yer alan M., süreçte aktif yer almasını *'bölümü ve hocalarıyla kurduğu olumlu bağın sonucu'* olarak *'bir yandan öğrenim gördüğü bölüme değer katacak bir şeyi yapması, bir yandan da hocalarının bir talebini yerine getirmiş olmanın verdiği olumlu hisse'* dayandırıyor. A. ise bölümün ilk mezunlarından biri olması dolayısıyla *'her şeyin yeni olduğu, sistemin oturmadığı dönemleri yaşamasına, türlü karmaşıklığa rağmen aldığı eğitimin bakış açısını ne kadar geliştirdiğini görmesi'* ve üniversite eğitimi boyunca hocaları ile güçlü iletişiminin, sürece katılımında etkili olduğunu ifade ediyor.

Akreditasyon sürecinde motivasyonumuzun kırıldığı noktalar, özellikle sürecin iş yükü olarak görüldüğü anlarda ortaya çıkıyordu. İzin hakkı, maaş kesintilerinin kaldırılması (üniversite yönetimimizin zaman zaman uyguladığı kesinti politikası), ödüllendirme veya motivasyonel aktiviteler gibi üst yönetimden gelebilecek teşvik unsurlarının eksik kaldığı noktada, E.'nin meslektaşlarıyla diyaloğu *'maaşla çelişen iş yükü'* söylemleri etrafında dolaşıyordu. Üniversite yönetimleri nezdinde önemi gittikçe artan akreditasyona başvuru kararları çoğunlukla programların/bölümlerin bilgisi ve isteği dışında alındığında, bizdeki gibi sürecin dirençle karşılanması (Kaygusuz, 2023) olasıdır. Benzer şekilde Fidan, Bıyıklı ve Özkara (2022) da sürecin özellikle yeni olmasından kaynaklı tecrübesizlikle beraber (İri ve Bayraktar, 2023; Van Kemenade ve Hardjono, 2009) öğretim elemanlarınca tepki ve dirençle karşılandığını ifade etmişlerdir. Böylesi bir başvuru sürecinin ardından akreditasyon, kimilerince yeni kimilerince sınırlı bilgi ile girilen bir maceraya dönüşmektedir.

"Akreditasyon almaya değiyor mu?" cümlesi, E.'nin süreci anlamaya çalışırken yine evrak işleriyle boğulduğu bir günde yaptığı işi sorgulamasının bir ifadesiydi. Akreditasyonun önemi ve gerekliliğine dair güçlü bir inancınız yoksa sürecin külfet olarak gelebileceğini biliyorduk. Bu noktada başvuru öncesinde veya akabinde akreditasyona dair kapsamlı bir bilgilendirmenin yapılmasının, belirsizlikleri yok ederek akredite olmaya yüklediğimiz anlamları değiştireceğini söyleyebiliriz. Alan notlarımızı tartışırken fark ettik ki ekip arkadaşlarımızla mesajlaşmalarımızda söylemlerimiz *"Hocam bu akreditasyon çok karışık."* cümlesinden, *"Akreditasyon bizim ana görevimiz şu an."* ifadesine dönüşmeye başlamıştı. Çünkü bilmediğimiz ya da uzak olduğumuz bir sürece kaygıyla yaklaşıyorduk. E.'nin kaygıları *"Ekip olarak aynı heyecanı duyacak mıydık, aynı sorumluluğu alacak mıydık, dosyalarımız yeterli miydi, kendimizi ifade edebilecek miydik?"* soruları üzerinde yoğunlaşırken; A. ve M.'nin kaygıları, paydaş olarak yer aldıkları değerlendirme toplantılarında bölümü doğru temsil etmeye dair sorumluluk duygusundan geliyordu. Açıkçası yabancısı olduğumuz bir deneyimin içerisine dahil olunca, kaygılarımız süreci öğrendikçe içselleştirme ile azaldı.

Sürecin en başında bilinmezliklerin içerisindeyken motivasyonumuzu sağlamada kendi içsel kaynaklarımızı harekete geçirmiştik. Bu kaynaklar sosyal hizmet mesleğine bağlılığımızla yakından ilişkiliydi. Süreçte ise dış paydaşlarla kurduğumuz güçlü ilişkilerin eğitim kalitesini arttırdığını ortaya koymak ve bu noktada dernek tarafından olumlu geri bildirimler almak bizleri motive eden noktalar arasındaydı. Bunun yanı sıra akreditasyonun bölüm imkanlarının iyileştirilmesinde üst yönetime karşı bir güç unsuru olduğunu, fiziksel koşullarda da iyileştirmelere vesile olduğunu görmüştük. Tüm bunlar da bize akreditasyonun program faaliyetlerinin iyileştirilmesine yaptığı katkıyı doğrudan deneyimleme fırsatı veriyordu.

> "Akademik kadromuzdaki eksikliğin süreçte dernek tarafından bize ifade edilmesi, kadromuzu güçlendirme konusunda geçmiş yıllarda da yaptığımız taleplerin o dönem yönetim tarafından dikkate alınmasını sağladı. Örneğin müfredat değişiklikleri, ders seçimlerinde birtakım karışıklıklara neden olabildiği için yönetim tarafından çok desteklenmezken ölçütlere uygun hareket etme amacıyla taleplerimiz o dönem olumlu karşılanmıştı. Ayrıca uygulama dersleri için aynalı bir sınıf tahsis edilmesi talebimiz de yerine getirilmişti." (E.)

Neticede akreditasyon gibi karmaşık bir yolculukta motivasyonumuzun asıl kaynağının, aidiyet duygusu, sistemin içinde var olma/varlığını kanıtlama çabası ve bölümü sahiplenmekten geldiği noktasında fikir birliğine vardık. Sürecin içselleştirilmesi gerekiyordu ama kurumsal dayatmalar, kısıtlı zaman, geçmiş deneyimin olmayışı, akreditasyona dair çalışmaların rutin işlere eklemlenmesi gibi iç içe geçmiş zorluklar motivasyonu kıran etkenler haline geliyordu.

Bunun yanında sürekli aramızda dönüp dolaşan bir inanç vardı, kalite ve akreditasyon süreçlerinin akademinin (İri ve Bayraktar, 2023) ve özellikle sosyal bilimlerin ruhuna uygun olmadığı, akademisyenlerin özerkliğine müdahale edildiği (Hahn ve Wagner, 2016), akreditasyonun formalite olduğu (Hamutoğlu vd., 2020), bölümlerin birbirine tıpatıp benzeyerek akademide tek tipleşme riski yarattığı (Kaygusuz, 2023) ki bu inançlar da bazı akademisyenlerin geri çekilmesine neden olurken; elini taşın altına koyanlar için sorumluluk daha da artıyordu.

Akreditasyon hazırlıklarının ekibin tamamına yaygınlaşması kalitenin bir şartıdır. Ancak bu koşul sağlanamadığında, ekip üyelerinden bazıları fiziksel ve zihinsel emeğin yanı sıra daha fazla duygusal emek sarf etmek zorunda kalırlar. Bizim sürecimizde ise *"Sürecin tüm ekip tarafından eşit derecede yürütülmesi zordu. Başta herkesin bu deneyimi yaşamakla ilgili endişeleri giderilmemişti. Akışta ekip üyelerinden bazıları bu işin içinde olmaktan keyif alırken bazıları arka planda kalmayı tercih ediyorlardı. Çalışan ekibin bu noktada sürdürülebilirliği sağlamak için kişisel motivasyonlarını arttırmaları çok daha fazla gerekliydi."* (E.) Aramıza yeni katılan araştırma görevlisinin işe başlamasıyla birlikte kendisini akreditasyon sürecinin içerisinde bulması ile E.'ye gönderdiği *"Her şey iyi güzel hoş ama akreditasyon işini sevemedim hocam."* WhatsApp mesajı, süreçte tecrübesizliğinin yanı sıra iş yükünün eşitsiz dağılımından kaynaklı isyanının bir parçasıydı.

Kişisel alan notlarımız ve gözlemlerimiz üzerinden 'Nelerin daha farklı olmasını isterdik?' ya da 'Biz neyi, daha farklı yapsaydık akreditasyon sürecimiz daha kolay geçerdi?' sorularına yanıt aradığımız toplantılarda ortaya çıkan sonuç, sürece başlamadan önce ve süreçte bize düzenli hizmet içi eğitimler verilmesi, toplantılar düzenlenmesi, sürecin katkılarıyla ilgili bilgilendirmeler yapılması ve süreci yönetirken açık bir iletişim (Fidan vd., 2022) kurabilmekti.

Roller, Sınırlar ve Belirsizlikler

Akreditasyon sürecinde farklı kimliklere sahip, süreci farklı rollerde karşılayan ve bazen de mevcut rol ve kimlikleri arasında kendi karmaşalarını yaşayan bir ekip olarak deneyimlerimizi yansıttığımız bu başlık altında, rol ve kimliklerimizin akreditasyon sürecimizle temas eden noktalarını, akreditasyon algımızı ve kendimizi ifade etme şeklimizi tartıştık.

E., akreditasyonda çoklu rollere sahip olduğu için kendisini tek bir şey üzerinden tanımlayamadığını, çünkü bölümde en uzun süredir çalışan kişi olduğu için sürecin her anında aktif olmasının önemli olduğunu belirtiyor. Bir yandan da derslere girmek, idari görevlerini sürdürmek, öğrenci danışmanlığı yapmak, doktora öğrencisi olmak gibi çoklu rollerini akreditasyon deneyimiyle beraber sürdürüyordu. "Akademisyen" olmanın getirisi olan sürekli yoğun olma durumunu, aile ve arkadaşlarına anlatmada zorlanırken, akreditasyon süreciyle birlikte artık sosyal çevresiyle bir araya gelmek için vakti dahi kalmamıştı. Pandemi süreci ile de işlerin daha fazla eve taşındığı yeni bir çalışma kurgusuna uyum sağlamaya çalışıyordu.

Süreçte rol ve görev dağılımının düzenlenmesi, kanıtların toplanması, değerlendirme ölçütlerinin anlaşılması gibi iş ve işlemler zaman zaman belirsizlikler yaratıyordu. Bu noktada kendisini "Bölümün Hafızası" olarak tanımlayan E.'ye her zamankinden daha fazla ihtiyaç duyuluyordu. Bölüm başkanının sınav dosyaları üzerinden tanımladığı "akreditasyon" kavramıyla tanışıklığı ile başlayan süreç genişliyordu. Yapılan her şeyi dosyalar halinde ofisinde saklıyordu ki düzenli bir arşiv sistemi olmasının önemini (Ataman ve Adıgüzel, 2020; İri ve Bayraktar, 2023; Kaygusuz, 2023) sürecin içinde görecekti. Tek tek her birini ilgili ölçütlerin başlıklarına yerleştirmek, somut adımları göstermek gerekiyordu. Tüm bunları yaparken süreç kişisel olarak E. için bir yandan da keyifliydi. Düzeni, sınırları, verilen emeğin görünür olmasını ve karşılık bulmasını seven biri olması, süreçteki evrak işleriyle

ilgilenirken onu adeta bir kaosun içinden kurtarıyordu. Sonuçta somut bir kanıt dosyası elinizin altında olduğunda hem hesap verebilir oluyorsunuz hem de süreci sağlıklı yürütmenizi sağlayan materyaller oluşturuyorsunuz.

Benzer şekilde M. de dokümantasyon, tasnif, raporlama gibi iş ve işlemlere olan ilgisinin, süreçte daha aktif yer almasında etkili olduğunu düşünüyor. Eğitim süreçlerinin en önemli parçalarından biri olan öğrencilerin akreditasyon çalışmalarına dahil edilmesinin önemine dair düşüncelerini anlatılarında dile getiriyordu:

> "Belki öğrencilerin akreditasyon sürecine benim kadar dahil olmasına gerek olmadığı düşünülüyor. Ancak uluslararasılaşma, standardizasyon, eğitimde öğrenci odaklılık gibi noktaları düşününce, dahil edilmemiz kesinlikle yararlı bence. Akreditasyonu en azından program amaçları, öğrenme çıktıları seviyesinde dahi olsa öğrencilerin bilmesi gerekiyor ki akreditasyonun katkı sunmaya çalıştığı planlama, sistematik ilerleme, izleme gibi noktaları kavranabilsin. Çünkü akreditasyon sürecinin sonunda kalite süreçleri ile ilgili edindiğim bilgilerin daha planlı çalışmama katkı sağladığını, bakış açımı genişlettiğini fazlasıyla hissetmiştim." (M.)

Buradan hareketle söyleyebiliriz ki akreditasyon, bölümde öğrenim görmekte olan öğrencilerin ulusal ve uluslararası kalite standartlarına uygunluk kriterlerini öğrenmesine de katkı sağlamaktadır. Öğrenciler bir yandan da akredite bölümlerde aldıkları eğitim vesilesiyle sosyal hizmetin etik kodları ışığında mesleki bilgi ve beceriyle donanmış olarak mezun olmaktadırlar (Yiğit, 2017, s. 162). Öğrencilerin yalnızca akreditasyon hazırlıklarında değil tüm eğitim süreçlerinde aktif yer almaları, kalite kültürünün öğrencilerden başlayarak bölümün tüm aktörleri tarafından benimsenmesi adına da yararlıdır.

Akreditasyon sürecinde her birimizin öne çıkan bazı kişisel özellikleri de görev dağılımını etkiliyordu. Neyi iyi biliyorsanız o sizin sorumluluğunuz oluyor, hatta üzerinize yapışıyordu. Ancak herkesin Drive kullanımı, arşivleme, dosyalama, raporlama gibi yetkinliklere sahip olması gerekirken; hazırlıklar ekibin bir parçasının sorumluluğuna bırakılmamalıydı, herkes elini taşın altına koymalıydı.

M., öğrenci temsilcisi olarak yer aldığı akreditasyon süreci öncesinde de kalite yönetimi, akreditasyon gibi konulara ilgi duyuyordu, kalite süreçleri ile ilgili dersler almıştı, Kaizen tekniği uygulamalarını içeren çalışma deneyimi vardı. Edindiği tecrübelerin ve hocalarıyla olan güçlü iletişiminin etkisiyle sürece dahil olmuştu. Hazırlık sürecinde yazılan raporlarda özellikle öğrenciler üzerinden temin edilecek verileri toplamada, geri bildirim anketlerinin hazırlanması ve sonuçlarının raporlanması gibi bazı konularda öğretim üyelerinden gelen talep doğrultusunda görev alıyordu. Bir yandan da kendisinin ve öğrenci arkadaşlarının talep ve düşüncelerini yönetime ve komisyona daha rahat iletebileceği bir konumdaydı. Pandeminin en yoğun dönemine denk gelen periyotta öğrencilik deneyimi ise online derslere, yeni sınav sistemine uyum sağlamaya çalışmak ile pandeminin getirdiği riskler sürerken staj yapma zorunluluğu arasında sıkışıp kalmıştı.

Süreçte dış paydaş olarak yer alan A., yapılan paydaş toplantılarında ve faaliyet planlama aşamalarında her koşulda sorumluluk almaktan ve uzmanlık bilgi ve becerilerini paylaşmaktan çekinmiyordu. A.'nın akreditasyon sürecindeki kişisel yaşamı, işi ve yüksek lisansını yapmakta olduğu okulu arasında, alanda çalışan idealist bir sosyal hizmet uzmanı olarak bir yandan görev ve

sorumluluklarını yerine getirmeye, işten arta kalan zamanlarında yüksek lisans tezine vakit ayırmaya çalıştığı bir dönemi kapsıyordu. Başvuru esnasında akreditasyona dair düşünceleri kendi ifadeleriyle şu şekildeydi: *"Çalıştığım kurumda kalite süreçleriyle ilgilenince akreditasyon sürecindeki bazı benzerlikleri daha iyi anlamaya başlamıştım. Bazen çok yakın bazen de çok uzaklaştığım bir şey olduğundan karmaşıktı bir hayli benim için."*

Bizim akreditasyon serüvenimizde çoklu rollerimizin etkileşimini, özellikle pandeminin etkisiyle daha fazla deneyimlediğimiz süreçler bulunuyor. Süreç pandemi ile iç içe olduğumuz bir dönemde başladığından istenen belge ve raporları çevrim içi ortamda hazırlıyorduk. Bu süreçte araştırma görevliliğinden öğretim görevliliğine yeni geçmiş olan E., bir yandan eğitim-öğretim sürecini yönetirken, bir yandan da akreditasyon sürecini pandemi ile iç içe ve pandemiye rağmen yönetmeye çalışıyordu. Çevrim içi yürütülen derslerin yanı sıra akademisyenlerin dönüşümlü de olsa üniversitede bulunma zorunluluğu arasında bir yerde E., Koronavirüs hastalığına da yakalanmıştı. Böylesi bir çıkmazın içindeyken, akreditasyon toplantılarının birinde defterine karaladığı *"Hayatta kalmak mı, akreditasyon almak mı?"* sorusu artık tükenme noktasına geldiğini gösteriyordu. Bu cümle, çoğunlukla kişisel olarak yükselttiği motivasyonunun, üniversiteye gitmek, rapor hazırlamak, hastalığa yakalan(ma)mak üçgeninde kaybolmak üzere olduğunun bir göstergesiydi.

Bir bilinmezliğin içinde, bilgisayarlara taşınan iş yaşamı, mesai kavramından uzak, belirgin olmayan görev tanımlarına da zemin hazırlamıştı. Sürecin paydaşları olan üniversite yönetimi ve idari kadronun sorumluluğunda olan noktalarda kimi zaman yaşanan belirsizlikler sürece en yoğun haliyle maruz kalan E.'nin akreditasyondaki rolü ile çatışmasına neden oluyordu. Bu durumda iç ve dış paydaşların tamamının akreditasyon sürecinde aktif rol almasının, öğretim görevlilerinin sorumluluğunda olmayan noktalarda üniversite yönetiminin harekete geçmesinin, rol belirsizliğini önleme ve sürecin, üniversitenin tüm aktörleri tarafından benimsenmesi açısından önemini tecrübe ediyorduk. Öyle ki E.'nin aktardığı üzere üniversite yönetiminin sorumluluğunda olan eksikliklerin giderilmemesi halinde akreditasyon değerlendirme sürecinin olumsuz etkilendiği görülüyor:

> "Bölümün yetkisi dahilinde tahsis edilemeyecek fiziksel ortamların değerlendirilmesinde muhatap üniversite yönetimidir. Ancak bölümün üniversiteden bağımsız değerlendirilmesi mümkün olmadığından bu sürecin de yönetilmesinde bölüm olarak aktif rol aldık. Var olan fiziksel eksiklikler (İri ve Bayraktar, 2023) de yine bölümün değerlendirmesini olumsuz etkileyen unsurlardan biriydi." (E.)

Akreditasyon sürecini olumsuz etkileyen noktalardan biri de ölçütler ve ölçütleri karşılayacak kanıtları sunmada bizden beklenenin ne olduğunu anlamak, yorumlamaktı. Dernek tarafından atanan mentöre yazdığımız e-postalara ya da yaptığımız aramalara gelen cevapları anlamak için bir kez daha kendi aramızda istenenin ne olduğuna dair tartışıyorduk. Sizden somut kanıtlar istenirken kanıtları nasıl somutlaştıracağınıza dair söylemler oldukça soyut kalıyordu. Dernek tarafından belirlenen ölçütlerin, standardizasyonu sağlamak adına etkin bir işlevi olmasına karşın; bu ölçütlere bizim sunduğumuz kanıtlarda sağlık bilimleri fakülteleri bünyesinde yer alan fakat sosyal bilim niteliği de taşıyan sosyal hizmet bölümü için göstergeler değerlendiricilerin beklentilerini karşılamada zorlanmamıza neden oluyordu, *"Bir mühendislik kafası gerekiyordu sanki. Her şey somut ve sınırları keskin, net bir şekilde*

açıklanmalıydı. Ancak sosyal bilimler bu formata çok da uygun değil gibi görünüyordu." (E.). Bu zorluğun bir sebebi de değerlendirme takımında yalnızca bir sosyal hizmet akademisyeni bulunması ve bize derneğin atadığı mentör ve diğer iki değerlendiricinin de sağlık bilimlerinden olmasıydı. Bizim için farklı disiplinlerden değerlendiricilere zaman zaman kendimizi ifade etmek bu nedenle zorlaşıyordu.

Tartışma ve Sonuç

Bugün sürdürülebilirlik sosyal, ekolojik ve ekonomik açıdan gıda endüstrisinden, tarımdan, tekstile, ekonomik ve sosyal kalkınmaya kadar birçok alanda tartışılmaktadır. İçinde bulunduğumuz değişim ve dönüşüm çağında sürdürülebilirliğin eğitimde bulduğu karşılıklardan biri olan akreditasyonu, sosyal hizmet programları açısından ele aldığımız bu çalışmada akreditasyonun sürdürülebilir biçimde yönetilmesinin önemi vurgulanmakta ve bu sürecin yalnızca belirli dönemlerde yapılan başvuru hazırlıkları ile sınırlı kalmaması gerektiği savunulmaktadır. Akreditasyon, kurumun tüm birimlerine yayılması gereken ve sistematik biçimde yürütülen faaliyetleri kapsayan bütüncül bir süreç olarak ele alınmalı, kurumsal kültürün bir parçası haline gelmeli ve kurum yönetiminden başlayarak programlar düzeyinde de benimsenmelidir. Böylece akreditasyon, ulaşılması gereken bir amaç değil, sürekli gelişimi ve kaliteyi önceleyen dinamik bir süreç olarak sürdürülebilirlik kazanacaktır.

Kalite güvencesi bağlamında belirlenen standartlar, hesap verebilirlik ve şeffaflık sağlayarak sürdürülebilirliğe katkı sunmakta ve potansiyel risklerin belirlenmesini kolaylaştırmaktadır. Standartları kullanan ve/veya standartlardan etkilenen taraflardan biri de bu çalışmanın konusu olan yükseköğretim kurumları ve eğitim programlarıdır (Gökmen-Kavak, 2018). Kalite güvencesinin bir parçası olarak akreditasyon çalışmaları, kurumları geliştiren, yenilenmeye fırsat sağlayan, aksaklıkları giderme imkânı yaratan, fırsatları çoğaltan (Kaygusuz, 2023) bir süreçtir. Bu çalışmanın bulguları da öğretim üyesi alınması, sınıf tahsisi, müfredat değişikliği gibi taleplerin akreditasyonla karşılık bulduğunu göstermektedir. Akreditasyon, hesap verebilirlik, öğrenci odaklılık (İri ve Bayraktar, 2023), öğrenme ve öğretme sürecinde iyileştirme, kalite kültürünü yaygınlaştırma ve sürekli gelişim anlayışı (Alpaydın ve Topal, 2022; Ataman ve Adıgüzel, 2020) açısından da bizde olduğu gibi öğrenci ve mezunların da paydaş olarak sürecin bir parçası olmasını sağlamış, çalışmalarımızı görünür kıldığından sürecin sürdürülebilirliğine katkı sağlayan ve bölümümüzü güçlendiren bir işleve sahip olmuştur.

Bu çalışmanın bulguları, akreditasyon sürecine doğrudan yönetim talebiyle başlanmasının, süreci içselleştirememe problemi yarattığını; hatta dirençle karşılandığını ortaya koymaktadır. Alpaydın ve Topal (2022)'ın çalışmasında da akreditasyon sürecinde eğitim fakültelerinde en çok yaşanan sorunun ilk kez uygulama yapılmasıyla ilgili olduğu görülmüştür. Benzer şekilde, yapılan araştırmalar (Fidan vd., 2022; İri ve Bayraktar, 2023; Kaygusuz, 2023; Van Kemenade ve Hardjono, 2009) da sürecin özellikle yeni olmasından kaynaklı tecrübesizlikle beraber soruna dönüştüğünü ifade etmektedir. Yürütülen çalışmalara dair öğretim elemanlarına çalışmaların görünürlüğü ve bilinirliği açısından düzenli bilgilendirmeler yapılması (Aküzüm ve Saraçoğlu, 2022) hatta süreci daha önce deneyimlemiş olan bir kurum ile görüşme ya da yerinde izleme (Alpaydın ve Topal, 2022; İri ve Bayraktar, 2023) gibi

önlemler sürecin içselleştirilmesine katkı sağlayabilir. Bizler için de süreçte yapılan bilgilendirmeler, başvuru öncesinde yapılmış olsaydı akreditasyon yönetimimiz çok daha etkin olabilirdi. Çünkü bilgilendirmeler, akreditasyonun sadece bazı öğretim elemanlarının işi olmadığını, kurumsal bir ekip işi olduğunu gösterebilir ve birlikte hareket edilmesini sağlama noktasında farkındalık yaratabilir.

Sürecin dışında kalanlar olduğunda ek bir zaman maliyeti, iş yükü ve ekstra evrak (Alpaydın ve Topal, 2022; Fidan, vd., 2022; Hamutoğlu vd., 2020; İri ve Bayraktar, 2023) nedeniyle yürütülen çalışmaların benimsenmesi istenen düzeyde olmamaktadır. E. için de özellikle bölüm içinde adil dağılmayan görevler ve alınmayan sorumluluklar akademik çalışmalarını yürütmede, tezini tamamlamada, derslerini sürdürmede motivasyonunu kırdığı gibi akreditasyonu öncelemek durumunda kalmasından kaynaklı diğer rollerinde aksamalara neden olmuştur.

Fidan ve diğerleri (2022) akreditasyon süreçlerinde aktif olarak yer alan öğretim elemanlarının sürece dair bilgi ve farkındalıklarının yüksek olduğunu tespit ederken, sorumluluk verilmeyenlerin ise sürece olan inanç ve sahiplenmelerinin düşük olduğunu söylemektedir. Bu çalışmada da benzer bir sonuç elde edilmiştir. Biz bu işin bir parçası olduğumuzdan süreç hem yorucu hem öğretici olmuştu. Ancak bu zaman zaman bölüm ya da üniversite içerisinde yalnız kaldığımız gerçeğini de değiştirmemişti. Akreditasyon süreci bölümün tüm aktörleri tarafından içselleşmediğinde, iş birliği ve görev dağılımı konusunda zaman zaman sorunlar yaşamıştık. Bilgili ve diğerleri (2019)'nin yürüttüğü çalışmada öğretim üyeleri arasında sağlanan iş birliği sayesinde iş yükünün azaldığı ve motivasyonun arttığı görülmüştür. Ataman ve Adıgüzel (2020) de yapılan çalışmaların personelin tamamına yayılmasının, planlı ve dengeli iş bölümünün önemine vurgu yapmıştır. Bizim de süreçten beklentimiz adil bir iş bölümü ile motivasyon ve inancın güçlendirilmesine yönelik izin hakkı, maaş kesintilerinin kaldırılması, ödüllendirme veya motivasyonel aktiviteler gibi destek mekanizmalarının oluşturulmasıydı.

Sosyal hizmet alanında ise Alptekin ve arkadaşları (2020)'nın SHUÇEP'te vurguladığı gibi öğrenmenin, öğrenci-öğretim elemanı arasında yatay hiyerarşik bir ilişki içerisinde, öğrenci merkezli bir bakış açısıyla, bireysel farklılıklara duyarlı ve özerkliği destekleyen bir ortamda gerçekleşmesi gerekmektedir. Akreditasyon çalışmaları da bu amacın gerçekleştirilmesinde aracı bir rolde değerlendirilmelidir. Nitekim M. ve A.'nın deneyimleri de akreditasyon süreçlerinde öğrenci katılımının, öğrencilerin bakış açılarının gelişimine katkı sağladığını ve bölüm içerisinde gerçekleştirilen tüm faaliyetleri anlamlandırmada önemli bir rol oynadığını göstermektedir. Akreditasyon sürecinde yapılan çalışmalara öğrencilerin de dahil edilmesi, kalite kültürünün bölümün tüm unsurları tarafından benimsenmesine, başta öğretim elemanı ve öğrenciler olmak üzere bölümde gerçekleştirilen faaliyetlerde ekip ruhu oluşturulmasına olanak sağlamaktadır. Öğrencilerin akreditasyon sürecinde önerilerinin dikkate alınması hem öğrenci kitlesini güçlendirici hem de öğrenci katılımını arttırıcı bir etken olmaktadır.

Akreditasyon kapsamında belirlenen ölçütler, bir programın sahip olması gereken özellikleri belirler ki bu da o programın yeterliğine karar verilebilmesi için çerçeve sunmaktadır. Ancak bu ölçütler

her bir programın kendi standartlarını oluşturamayacağı anlamına gelmemektedir (Alptekin vd., 2020). Bu noktada sosyal hizmet eğitim programlarının niteliğinin arttırılması amacıyla çalışmalar yürüten SHOD'un kalite güvencesi ve akreditasyon sürecinde aktif olarak rol alması, bölümler için sürecin daha anlaşılır ve kolaylaştırıcı olmasını sağlayacağından kritik öneme sahiptir. Programa özgü ölçütlerin belirlenmesine ek olarak değerlendirici derneklerin sosyal hizmet akreditasyonunda, önceliği sosyal hizmet akademisyenlerine vermesi ve bu alanda değerlendirici sayısının arttırılmasını teşvik etmesi önemlidir. Bizim deneyimimizde de değerlendiriciler ve ölçütler noktasında belirlenen kişi ve kriterlerin sosyal hizmet alanına uygun nitelikte olması gerekliliği, süreci anlamlandıran ve sürdürülebilirliği sağlayan noktalardan biriydi. Ölçütleri karşılayacak kanıtları sosyal hizmetin yapısına uygun biçimde sunduğumuzda anlaşılır olmasını bekledik. Burada ifade etmek istediğimiz, değerlendiriciler alan dışından olduğunda, değerlendiricilerin kendi öznelliklerinden ayrı olarak sağlık bilimcisinin bakış açısının katılığı ile sosyal bilimcinin esnekliğinin çatışmasından kaynaklı sorunlardı. Kaygusuz (2023) da akreditasyon ölçütlerini akademisyenlerin fazlaca katı bulduğunu ve bölümler, fakülteler hatta şehirler özelinde koşulların dikkate alınarak kriterlerde esneme payı olmasını savunduklarını belirtmiştir.

İnsanla doğrudan çalışan bir meslek ve akademik disiplin olan sosyal hizmetin, ölçütlere karşılık sunacağı kanıtların sağlık bilimleri programları içinde her bir bölümden aynı şekilde talep edilmesi, sosyal hizmetin kendi özgünlüğünü dışarıda bırakma riskini taşıyabilir. Bu noktada değerlendiricinin alandan olması ve sosyal hizmetin mesleki etik ilkelerine dayalı bir temel üzerinden değerlendirilmesi, sosyal hizmet mesleğini herkesin yapabildiği, sosyal hizmet eğitimini de herkesin verebildiği bir konuma dönüşmekten çıkarabileceği düşüncesindeyiz. Bu noktada Derneğin yapılanmasının nispeten yeni olduğu düşünüldüğünde, ilgili eksiklerin dernek tarafından da zamanla fark edilerek değerlendirme kriterlerinde değişikliklere gidildiği ve değerlendirici havuzlarının genişletildiği de görülmektedir.

Önemli olan sosyal hizmet eğitimindeki kontrolsüz büyüme gibi kontrolsüz bir akreditasyon sürecinin yaşanmasını önlemektir. 2025 yılı itibariyle plansız bölüm açma süreçleri ile açık öğretim bölümleri ile de sosyal hizmet eğitimi veren bölüm sayısı 119'a ulaşmıştır. Üstelik sosyal hizmet bölümleri açılırken söz konusu süreç 10 ayrı fakülte/yüksekokul bünyesinde yer alan kompozisyonları beraberinde getirmiştir (YBYS, 2025). Bu noktada akreditasyon başvurusu yapacak bölümler sosyal hizmet akreditasyonu açısından fakülteler bazında yetkilendirilmiş birden fazla derneğe başvurabileceklerdir. Bu durumun standardizasyon açısından da değerlendirilmesi önemlidir.

Sosyal hizmet eğitiminde, alan dışı akademik personel fazlalığı, yüksek öğrenci kontenjanı, istihdam edil(me)me durumu, dikey geçiş alanlarının çeşitliliği, açık öğretim programlarının varlığı gibi (Alptekin, 2021) birçok sorun söz konusudur. Akreditasyon süreçleri, sorunları çözmede YÖK (Yükseköğretim Kurulu)'e taleplerin iletilmesi ve üniversite yönetimlerinden destek alınmasında etkin olarak kullanılabilecek bir araç iken; arzu edilen eğitim niteliğine kavuşmada tek tipleşme riski (Erdoğan, 2014) barındırması ile de çift yönlü bir süreçtir.

Sonuçta, bizim akreditasyon deneyimimiz belirsizliklerle başlamış, inanç ve emekle yoğrulmuş ve üçümüz için de öğretici bir süreç olarak tamamlanmıştı. Sürecin öğretileri, bu ekibin sosyal hizmet eğitimi ve akreditasyon konularıyla daha fazla ilgilenmesinin kapılarını da açtı. E., SABAK üyesi olmaya karar verdi ve değerlendirici eğitimi aldı, çeşitli programların değerlendirme ekibinde dernek üyesi olarak yer aldı. M., akademik çalışmalarında kalite ve akreditasyon konularına yoğunlaştı. A. ise bu süreçten öğrendikleriyle çalıştığı kurumda sorumlu olduğu kalite denetimini çok daha kolay atlattı. Sürdürülebilir akreditasyon yönetimi açısından, bizim deneyimimiz sürecin iyileştirici, geliştirici ve sahiplenilen bir çalışma ruhu ile yürütülmesinde etkin olabilecek birtakım kritik noktalara da dikkatimizi çekti. Örneğin kalite ve akreditasyon konularında hizmet içi eğitimin arttırılması, sürecin iş yükü olarak görülmesini engelleyecek motivasyon arttırıcı faaliyet ve destek mekanizmalarının oluşturulması, akademisyenlerin kalite ve akreditasyon süreçlerinde gönüllü olmalarının teşvik edilmesi, iş yükü dağılımının dengelenmesi; bu sayede rol ve görev belirsizliğinin önlenmesi, bölümlere özgü değerlendirici akademisyen sayısının arttırılması, ölçütlerde programa yönelik esnekliklerin yaratılması gibi öneriler sunabiliriz. Tüm bu gerçekliklerin içinde mevcut belirsizlikleri akademik ve idari kadro, iç ve dış paydaşların aktif çalışması ve böylece sürecin bütüncül yönetimini sağlayarak aşmak mümkün hale gelecektir.

Araştırmacıların Katkı Oranı/ Contribution Statement

Çalışmaya tüm araştırmacılar eşit oranda katkı sağlamıştır. / All researchers contributed equally to the study.

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Gender And Sexuality as a Labor Control Regime in the Garment Industry

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Abstract

This study examines how women workers experience despotic market conditions and local patriarchal structures within the context of garment production. It specifically discusses the dynamics that render women's labor temporary, obedient, and disciplined in the workplace. The study focuses on women garment workers in the Free Trade Zone in Mersin, Turkey, and is based on qualitative data derived from in-depth interviews with 19 women garment workers, three employers, one union delegate, and one employer representative. The findings reveal how patriarchal patterns are reproduced in daily workshop practices and how gender roles, sexualized meanings, and harassment serve as tools of power, control, and discipline in the workplace, reinforcing patriarchal hegemony. The study identifies that women are considered "ideal workers" in the garment industry due to being perceived as "loyal," "disciplined," and "docile." Furthermore, patriarchal discourses surrounding femininity and heterosexual relationships (whether marital or sexual) are used to control and discipline women workers throughout the production process as a labor control regime. The competition among female workers is shaped by patriarchal femininity roles rather than by the qualifications required for the job. These mechanisms contribute to the creation of a gendered workplace, reinforcing production politics that undermine solidarity among women workers and foster distinctions based on gender and sexuality.

Keywords: Gender, hegemonic-despotism, labor, patriarchy, labor control regimes, women's subjectivity

Konfeksiyon Sektöründe Emek Kontrol Rejimi Olarak Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Cinsellik

Öz

Bu çalışma, kadın işçilerin despotik piyasa koşullarını ve yerel patriyarkal yapıları konfeksiyon üretimi bağlamında nasıl deneyimlediklerini incelemektedir. Özellikle, atölye içerisinde kadın emeğini geçici, itaatkâr ve disiplinli hale getiren dinamikleri ele almaktadır. Çalışma, Türkiye'nin Mersin Serbest Bölgesi'nde çalışan kadın konfeksiyon işçilerine odaklanmakta olup, 19 kadın konfeksiyon işçisi, üç işveren, bir sendika temsilcisi ve bir işveren temsilcisi ile gerçekleştirilen derinlemesine görüşmelere dayanmaktadır. Bulgular, patriyarkal kalıpların günlük atölye pratiklerinde nasıl yeniden üretildiğini ve toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri, cinselleştirilmiş anlamlar ve tacizin işyerinde güç, kontrol ve disiplin araçları olarak nasıl kullanılarak patriyarkal hegemonyayı pekiştirdiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma, kadınların konfeksiyon sektöründe "ideal işçiler" olarak kabul edilmelerinin, onların "sadık", "disiplinli" ve "uysal" olarak algılanmalarına dayandığını göstermektedir. Ayrıca, kadınlık ve heteroseksüel ilişkiler (evlilik ya da cinsellik) etrafında şekillenen patriyarkal söylemler, üretim sürecinde kadın işçileri kontrol etme ve disipline etme aracı olarak kullanılmaktadır. Kadın işçiler arasındaki rekabet, işin gerektirdiği niteliklerden ziyade patriyarkal kadınlık rolleri tarafından belirlenmektedir. Bu mekanizmalar, toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı bir işyeri yapısının oluşmasına katkıda bulunarak, kadın işçiler arasındaki dayanışmayı zayıflatmakta ve toplumsal cinsiyet ve cinselliğe dayalı ayrımları pekiştiren bir üretim politikası yaratmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toplumsal cinsiyet, hegemonic despotizm, emek, ataerki, emek kontrol rejimleri, kadın öznelliği

Introduction

Export-based garment production is crucial for developing economies that rely heavily on women's labor. Studies highlight global supply chains, precarious work conditions, and subcontracting systems, women workers are often depicted as "cheap," "submissive," and "essential" for capitalist accumulation (Bair, 2010; Dedeoğlu, 2007; D'Ambrogio, 2014; Freeman, 2001; Korinek, 2005; Mills, 2003; Unni & Bali, 2002).

Since the 1970s, developing countries with low labor costs and low levels of unionization have become "preferred geographies" for transnational companies aiming to reduce production costs. This period saw a revival of liberal economic policies and shifting capital flows, leading to a new proletariat of young and female workers in free trade zones (Radice, 2015, p. 46). Labor market theories attribute women's disadvantage to the sexual division of labor or structural market conditions. Primary sectors serve producers, while secondary sectors employ low-paid, precarious workers, mainly women (Eraydın & Erendil, 1999, pp. 259-260). The economic restructuring process collaborates with local patriarchal systems, integrating patriarchal norms into daily work practices.

Earlier studies suggest women are preferred in the garment industry due to their "docility" and "discipline," but how these qualities are produced remains unexplored. Patriarchal femininity discourses shape female workers' subjectivity. This study examines women's experiences in Mersin (Turkey) FTZ's garment industry, analyzing patriarchal stereotypes in labor relations. This study's data was collected through in-depth interviews with 24 participants, including women workers, three employers, one union member, and one employer representative, with snowball sampling.

The sample of this study possesses specific characteristics worth noting. For example, due to the limited job opportunities in the local labor market, the number of working women and men in the Free Trade Zone (FTZ) garment industry, where data was collected, is roughly equal. However, women are consistently viewed as the "ideal garment workers" by the employers interviewed.

The concept of the "ideal worker" is largely constructed within masculine norms, defined in ways that reflect male bodies and lifestyles, thereby excluding female workers from its scope (Williams, 2001, p. 64). According to Williams et al. (2012, p. 550), employers tend to favor workers who prioritize the workplace more than anything else and demonstrate unwavering loyalty to their job. This preference systematically marginalizes women, who are often assumed to bear primary responsibility for home and family life. However, in export-oriented sectors, young female workers are often considered a preferred labor force due to their so-called natural skills, such as manual dexterity. In developing countries like Mexico and Indonesia, factories integrated into global markets typically employ female-intensive, low-wage labor forces. At the same time, male workers predominantly occupy supervisory and managerial positions within similar organizational models. The hegemony of patriarchal norms, which not only define women's labor as cheap but also socially and economically devalue it, produces a gendered workforce that is vital for the global capitalist accumulation regime (Mills, 2003, p. 43).

It was observed that various "compensatory masculinity mechanisms," such as sexual jokes or harassment, are prevalent in the workplace, stemming from the perception of women as an ideal labor force for garment manufacturing. These mechanisms are rooted in local patriarchal patterns and contribute to the creation of sexualized workplaces.

These practices serve not only as tools of oppression but also as patriarchal practices in which women. Despite the garment industry being female-dominated and women being seen as "ideal garment workers" due to characteristics attributed to their "nature," this study found that women's status in factories by engaging in patriarchal relationships—such as romantic, sexual, or marital ties—with male managers, employers, or foremen. These mechanisms create sexualized workplaces where women sometimes participate in patriarchal practices via patriarchal bargaining. In this sense, women's presence in the workplace is defined by gender roles rather than by identity as workers. This situation fosters patriarchal divisions among women in the workplace and undermines organized class consciousness. Therefore, analyzing how unequal structural organization of gender reveals and is reproduced in daily workplace practices provides valuable insights for increasing women's awareness of their class and gender identities.

This study discusses market and hegemonic despotisms as labor control regimes, analyzing how patriarchal structures shape these mechanisms and begins with theoretical discussions, followed by research methodology and findings.

Market and Hegemonic Despotisms as a Labor Control Regime

Production relationships include conflicts of interest between employer and workers and control of workers in the workplace. Labor control is a complex phenomenon therefore labor power is constantly embodied in people who have their own needs and interests and the ability to refuse to be treated as commodities unlike the other commodities used in production. In this sense, control means the capacity of capitalists to obtain desired work behavior from workers (Edwards 1979, pp. 12-18).

Research on labor control builds upon Karl Marx's historical materialism and Antonio Gramsci's theory of ideological hegemony. Marx recognized that the willingness to sell labor power was historically contingent, even though he argued that wage labor under capitalism was more of a social necessity than a natural condition. This raises the question of how capitalists successfully integrate workers into the manufacturing process, given their inherent tendency to resist as a class (Jonas, 2009, p. 60).

Labor control regimes emerge from employers' need to integrate labor into the capitalist production system. This necessity stems from the conditions specific to capitalism, where workers are legally free to sell their labor power to any employer but lack ownership of the means of production. Control is exercised through the detailed organization of workplace practices, which regulate the quality and quantity of labor available in the market and utilized in production (Jonas, 2009, p. 59)

Labor control regimes include various disciplinary methods used to maintain work continuity. Edwards (1979) identified three mechanisms: simple, technical, and bureaucratic. In the 19th century, simple control involved direct employer intervention, with workers facing arbitrary treatment and limited means of resistance due to small workforce sizes. As production more complex and large-scale, simple control became inadequate, requiring more structured oversight. The growing workforce led to the rise of supervisors and formalized management, while labor movements and strikes gained strength with socialist ideas. In response, firms adopted technical and bureaucratic control methods to regulate labor more systematically.

The labor-management systems of the industrial era relied on formal and bureaucratic regulations reinforced by various pressures. In recent years, labor management practices have shifted as businesses adopt less hierarchical organizational structures. Firms have effectively implemented modern labor control methods that emphasize voluntary organizational commitment and directly influence worker behavior (Degiuli & Kollmeyer, 2007, p. 498). Historical periodization has primarily focused on labor control within the production process, often overlooking the role of social and political institutions beyond the workplace. In this context, Burawoy developed the concepts of despotic and hegemonic labor control regimes, drawing inspiration from Gramsci's writings on hegemony.

In Americanism and Fordism, Gramsci argued that securing workers' consent to production regimes cannot rely solely on coercion; various ideological mechanisms must be integrated into the production process. This represents a new form of coercion exercised by the elite classes, incorporating self-coercion and self-discipline. External coercion mechanisms, implemented through industrial methods, fostered discipline and order in production while aligning workers' customs with labor requirements. Through this process, an "ideological hegemony" was established to shape a new type of worker suited to the Fordist industry (Hoare, 1999).

Burawoy (1985) conceptualizes the despotic labor regime as a system in which workers' dependence on wages is reinforced through "the economic whip of the market." The balance between wages and profits is sustained by optimizing labor efficiency and upheld through mechanisms of oppression and market despotism. Over time, this form of control has evolved into "hegemonic despotism," wherein domination is maintained not solely through coercion but also through ideological consent (Burawoy, 1985, pp. 126–150). Within the capitalist pursuit of profit, the labor process must be examined through the dialectical relationship between coercion and consent (Burawoy, 1979, pp. 27–30).

The organization of work, labor, and the production process encompasses political and ideological mechanisms that regulate production relations. The production process has both objective and subjective dimensions. In this context, the capitalist production process is not merely an external force exerted on workers; it also involves a process of naturalization and subjectification in which workers actively participate. Workers may develop strategies to negotiate their allegiance or become

complicit in their own exploitation. Thus, while workers continue to produce commodities, capitalism not only generates cooperation and domination but also cultivates "consent" for these relations (Burawoy, 1985).

The extraction of surplus value in capitalist production necessitates various workplace strategies, including the mystification of unpaid labor and decentralization of control. Workers negotiate with lower-level managers instead of employers, and a hierarchical division of qualifications fosters individualization over collective consciousness (Burawoy, 1985, pp. 32–33). This process creates atomized workers suited to the production system and establishes an "internal labor market" based on "competitive individualism." As a managerial construct, the internal labor market regulates labor allocation and planning, masking surplus value extraction. Consequently, external and internal labor markets share key characteristics (Burawoy, 1979). Hegemonic labor regimes vary by country due to differences in state regulations, skills, technology, inter-firm competition, and worker resistance (Burawoy, 1983, p. 590).

The capitalist mode of production is based on an abstract subjective potential, expressed as "anyone can perform any type of work." Capitalism develops this potential through discipline and cooperation while simultaneously regulating it through various disciplinary and subjectivity techniques. Thus, subjectivity functions as both a cause and an effect within capitalism (Read, 2003, p. 10). Burawoy (1985, p. 9) places class at the core of his analysis, considering it a fundamental element in the organization of modern society. However, his labor theory fails to incorporate a gender perspective or address the specific labor experiences of women.

Alongside class, gender plays a crucial role in labor market dynamics and production politics. Women's workforce control operates through local patriarchal systems and micropolitical strategies, reinforced both externally and through daily practices. Workplaces, as microcosms of society, play a significant role in this reproduction process.

Patriarchal Hegemony and Production of Sexual Subjects

Burawoy (1979, 1983, 1985) conceptualizes production politics within a despotic-hegemonic regime but overlooks the role of gender in securing consent to these policies. Women's labor market disadvantages, patriarchal management discourses, and gendered subjectivity in the workplace are also critical components of labor regulation.

Men and women undergo distinct socialization processes, leading to differentiated expectations and positions within the labor market. Factors such as domestic responsibilities, cultural norms surrounding employment, and family obligations shape their orientations toward work. Even when labor contributions are quantitatively similar, qualitative differences persist, influencing labor power delivery, workplace dynamics, time management, task performance, and the impact of parenthood on job

involvement. Consequently, due to gendered socialization and their relationship to the domestic sphere, men and women experience paid employment in fundamentally different ways (Davies, 1990, p. 395).

Burawoy's conceptualization of shopfloor culture predominantly reflects male experiences. However, shopfloor cultures vary and are shaped by mixed-gender dynamics. Due to occupational segregation, distinct work environments, and domestic responsibilities, women often develop their own workplace cultures, fostering unique forms of relative satisfaction. Furthermore, the labor process itself is frequently structured along gendered lines (Davies, 1990).

Gender, body, and sexuality function as mechanisms of control within the labor process. Despite increasing female labor market participation, women remain structurally disadvantaged across all levels of the employment hierarchy (Williams et al., 2012, pp. 550–551). Mills (2003, p. 43) argues that this hierarchy manifests in different ways, with married women with children often perceived as cheap labor, while single women assume a similar role as dependent "daughters." Additionally, disciplinary strategies can construct women workers as sexualized bodies, reinforcing subordination through erotic teasing or sexual harassment. As the workplace has traditionally been a male-dominated public sphere, masculine culture and hegemony persist in various forms.

Hegemonic masculinity places men in dominant roles across various spheres, including the labor market, state, public sphere, streets, civil society, and family, thus ensuring that men hold primary positions while women occupy secondary ones (Connell, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity differs from other masculinities, particularly subordinate masculinities. It should not be assumed that hegemonic masculinity is normal in a statistical sense; it may only be enacted by a minority of men. However, it is certainly normative. It represents the most honored way of being a man in contemporary society, demanding that all other men align with it. Moreover, it serves as the ideological legitimization of the global subordination of women to men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). In this sense, hegemonic masculinity is a culturally idealized form that functions both as a personal and a collective project, embodying the common-sense notions of breadwinning and manhood. It is exclusive, anxiety-inducing, internally differentiated, hierarchical, brutal, and violent. It is pseudonatural, rigid, contradictory, crisis-prone, affluent, and socially sustained. Although not practiced by all men, most men benefit from it, and it is centrally connected to the institutions of male dominance. While it transcends class boundaries, it often excludes working-class and Black men. Hegemonic masculinity is a lived experience, an economic and cultural force, and is dependent on specific social arrangements (Donaldson, 1993, p. 645).

Gender is not merely a byproduct of organizational life but an essential component that shapes and constructs it (Forbes, 2009, p. 271). Within the workplace, patriarchal hegemony results in the devaluation of women's labor, treating their wages as a mere "contribution to the family budget," while utilizing paternalistic control methods to subjugate workers. This system perpetuates women's precarious, informal, and low-wage labor, reinforcing a gendered power structure. Such dynamics

ultimately foster workers' consent for the despotic regulation of the production process, ensuring the continued dominance of patriarchal values within the labor market.

Salzinger (1997) asserts that gender patterns are reproduced and reinforced through various practices in export-based sectors that rely heavily on female labor. The process of shaping the "ideal export worker" involves both the application of local patriarchal ideologies as a form of control over workers in the factory and the creation of subjectivities grounded in traditional roles of femininity and masculinity. The discourses that construct the image of the "ideal worker" in free trade zones predominantly feature portrayals of "disciplined women workers who are less prone to boredom than men." In this context, sexist discourses rooted in local gender stereotypes and subjectivities are redefined and perpetuated through managerial practices and within the workplace itself.

Salzinger (2003) argues that labor market theorists often fail to question the "docility" attributed to women by society, ignoring both structural elements of labor control practices and the creation of gendered identities. Viewing sex as a stable structure is an essentialist mistake, as the "submissive and skilled female worker" is a discourse shaped by production relations. Gendered subjectivities influence all levels, from managerial decisions to workers' compliance and resistance. Submissive labor is constructed daily in workshops through practices and rhetoric. Thus, analyzing the gender dynamics in local contexts requires addressing "where," "when," and "how," in addition to daily activities. In this sense, "the personal is political" also implies "the personal is economic."

Patriarchy controls the workforce, with both women and men maintaining its hegemony. The creation of sexual subjectivities within labor control prevents workers from organizing against exploitation, limiting women workers from viewing themselves as "free workers." It forces them into heteronormative relationships with men and fosters hierarchies among them.

Research Method

The data collection process in this study focused on participants' experiences and perspectives on the circumstances (Creswell, 2014, pp. 185-186), using face-to-face in-depth interviews. To capture and understand gender roles, their impact on women's lives, and how social realities are constructed, women's unique experiences were assessed through their viewpoints (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 2). In the field study, 24 semi-structured interviews were conducted: 3 with employers in the Mersin FTZ garment sector, 19 with women garment workers, and 1 each with a union delegate and an employer representative. As the interviews were conducted in Turkish, no translator was needed. Each interview lasted between fifteen minutes and one hour, taking place near the factories during break times, in employers' offices, the interviewees' homes, and a union office. All employer participants were men, thus unintentionally dividing the study sample into two groups: capitalist men and worker women. Ethics committee approval was obtained from Mersin University (01-10-2018-014).

Garment production is the leading sector in export-based production in Turkey, offering significant employment opportunities. As a result of export-oriented growth policies, the garment and textile industries have grown in importance due to their contribution to Turkey's Gross National Product and integration into international markets since the 1980s. According to 2018 World Trade Organization statistics, Turkey ranked 7th in global garment exports (WTO, 2019, p. 120). Additionally, Turkey placed 4th in global garment exports, following China, India, and Vietnam, among Asia, Pacific, and Arab countries, and 8th in global garment retailing from 1995 to 2014 (ILO, 2016; RTMT, 2019).

Mersin, the field research site, hosts a free trade zone, an international port, a low-cost local workforce, and a large Syrian refugee population. The Mersin Free Trade Zone (FTZ), established in 1987, is one of Turkey's first free zones. As of 2018, the zone's foreign trade volume reached 2,962,000,000 dollars, with 75 out of 426 companies operating in the garment sector (Mesbaş, 2019a, 2019b). According to data from the Mersin Chamber of Commerce and Industry, there are 206 textile and garment manufacturers in total, three of which are located in the organized industrial zone (MTSO, 2019). Furthermore, the Mersin Chamber of Clothing Manufacturers and Sellers reports 73 workshops in the city, which predominantly rely on informal and Syrian migrant labor.

In the field of garment production, products for international companies are manufactured in the Free Trade Zone (FTZ), while small-sized workshops primarily rely on Syrian refugees for local consumption. Informal labor is widespread in the local economy, except in the FTZ and international port. Although garment production is typically associated with female labor, the gender distribution in Mersin FTZ, where data were collected, is relatively balanced due to the limited availability of secure jobs in the local market. According to interviews, female workers are employed across all manufacturing departments, including machinery, packaging, labeling, yarn cleaning, and quality control, depending on order demand. In contrast, men are mostly assigned to simpler production lines or roles as personnel chiefs and foremen.

The employer participants in the field research operate international production in the FTZ. Their ages range from 47 to 64. It was observed that all the employers are sons of Turkish workers who had previously worked as immigrant garment workers in European countries such as Germany and Denmark. They have transferred their experiences to businesses in Mersin FTZ. Employers in the FTZ employ between 170 and 1,000 people, with the number of employees varying depending on seasonal demand. The reasons cited by employers for producing in Mersin FTZ include the ability to operate year-round, due to the region's hot climate, the availability of cheap labor, and the demands of the global firms they collaborate with.

This study's field research was conducted from September 2018 to January 2019, using snowball sampling as the data collection method. The first female interviewee was contacted through a local union, and subsequently, the researcher visited the factory where she worked to reach other female workers. Additional interviewees were identified through another union related to the garment industry.

Interviewees were also approached by visiting factories within the FTZ. Employer participants were reached through a local garment shop owner.

Except for three employer interviews, where permission was not granted, all interviews were recorded using a tape recorder. These recordings were then transcribed into written texts, ranging from 6 to 15 pages. The analyses and interviews were conducted directly by the author of this study. The themes used for analysis were derived from common themes, repeated topics, and ideas that emerged during the field study. The socio-demographic profiles of the interviewed women workers are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Socio-demographic profiles of women workers

Female Workers	Number
Ages	
20-24	5
25-29	3
30-39	7
40+	4
Marital Status	
Married	8
Separated/Divorced	5
Unmarried	6
Education	
None/Illiterate	1
Elementary School	6
Secondary School	4
High School	3
University	3
Missing Data	2
Position of female workers	
Helper	4
Machine operator	12
Quality inspector	3
Total:	**19**

The female worker interviewees are employed in eight different factories within the FTZ. All but one of the interviewees have worked exclusively in the FTZ throughout their careers. Most of the interviewees began their working lives in the garment sector. The ages at which the women started working range from 12 to 30.

The interviewees primarily explained their choice to work in the FTZ garment sector as a result of the inability to find alternative employment. They stated that other jobs available in the local market offer wages that are half of the minimum wage and lack social security benefits. Therefore, the FTZ's guarantee of a minimum wage and health insurance were cited as the main reasons for choosing employment in the FTZ. Additionally, divorced interviewees mentioned that the need to support their households on their own, coupled with low wages in other sectors, influenced their decision to work in the FTZ. Working hours in the FTZ exceed 12 hours a day, and during periods of high demand, a "mandatory shifts" system is implemented. Participants reported working at night, in addition to regular

working days, and sometimes even sleeping in the workshops because they are required to return the next day. Long working hours were perceived as the "norm" for FTZ employment by the women interviewees. No salary differences were observed between men and women in the FTZ garment industry during the field study.

Women workers reported difficulties in exercising their legal rights, such as maternity and breastfeeding leave, or accessing childcare benefits. In Turkey, maternity leave is granted for a total of 16 weeks, both before and after childbirth. Despite the fact that thousands of women work in the FTZ, there is no nursery available, and women who give birth are expected to return to work much earlier than the law stipulates. As a result, many women workers leave their jobs upon marriage or childbirth. Among the women interviewed in the field study, only three were union members. Some interviewees were unaware of what a union is, while others stated that they could not join a union due to their employers' anti-union stance.

In the field study, the spatial characteristics of the garment workshops revealed that different departments, such as ironing, sewing, and packaging, were separated by small barriers and walls. Management offices were located above the production lines. Foremen and workers shared the same spaces, which were illuminated with fluorescent lamps, and music played continuously throughout the working hours. Break times were signaled by a bell. Workers were prohibited from using mobile phones or talking to one another during work periods. Additionally, machine operators were not allowed to stand, and helpers were prohibited from sitting, according to management. The workplaces were monitored by cameras, and fingerprint recognition systems were used for factory entry and exit. The research findings will be discussed in the following section.

Findings

Fragile" and "Loyal": Women as Ideal Garment Workers

The "nimble fingers" metaphor links women's labor to their bodies, with the idea that women's dexterity is central to their role in the workforce. In the field study, employers transferred this metaphor into the concepts of "fragile" and "loyal." The traditional belief that women are "fragile" and "sensitive" leads to the division of factory tasks into masculine and feminine roles. The research revealed that women are seen as a more flexible and functional workforce compared to men, which makes them preferred in the garment sector. Employers cited women's "innate ability" for sewing as the reason for this preference. Even without qualifications, all women who apply for the job are hired, while men are only considered if they have experience in garment production. Employer participants emphasized that women are more desirable than men, and that garment production is considered one of the best jobs for women. However, while employers prefer working with female workers, they also stated that there is no difference in craftsmanship between men and women. Thus, women are favored not for their technical skill, but because they are perceived as loyal, disciplined, and docile.

> If I had the opportunity, I would like 100 percent of the employees to be women, but I do not have such an opportunity. (Employer, Age: 47, Educational Background: High School).

> Clothing is one of the most favourable jobs for women. Instead of going and cleaning somewhere, they prefer the garment business. (Employer, Age: 64, Educational Background: Primary School).

However, men are preferred over women for "heavy work," such as ironing. One employer shared their view on women's "natural" ability in garment production, stating:

> Because the ladies are generally a bit more gentle… **This is something from their chemistry and cells!** But for example, there are such departments in the business that the ironing department or the packaging department, we prefer more men here… Here is a hot region, and ironing naturally produces steam, and iron is somewhat heavy… Think of a lady's wrist, we do not find it very conscientious that she constantly does the ironing for 8 hours in a day. (Employer, Age: 47, Educational Background: University).

The distinction between "women's" and "men's" jobs reflects gendered power and status in production. Men are typically assigned physically demanding, skilled roles with authority, while women are often relegated to light, unskilled, and routine tasks, such as machine operation or observation (Johnson, 1990, pp. 14-15). Additionally, women workers themselves often support the belief that women are naturally suited to garment and sewing work.

Another reason women are frequently preferred during recruitment is the belief that women are more docile and disciplined than men. Employers commonly emphasize that women work more calmly and consistently, exhibiting greater "loyalty" to their jobs, whereas men are perceived as careless and prone to swearing. Furthermore, employers reported increased difficulty in finding female workers compared to the past, leading them to hire male workers instead.

The idea of natural differences underpins a gendered social structure, where bodies are socially constructed and function as both agents and objects in social practices (Connell, 2009). Skill naturalism shapes the moral economies of work by providing frameworks and vocabularies that support gendered narratives. This paradigm devalues skill and enables the exploitation of vulnerable labor in global manufacturing (Collins, 2002).

Thus, the naturalization of discrimination through biology is an ideological practice, with the "nimble fingers" metaphor reinforcing ideas of docile, cheap, and flexible female labor.

Workshop Hierarchy and Discourses on Femininity

Sexual behavior in the workplace is not a new phenomenon; it has been a part of business life since women began entering the workforce in significant numbers (Berebitsky, 2012). Sexual relations, despite including biological and physical characteristics, do not exist in isolation within social life. Furthermore, they create a microcosm shaped by the behaviors and values that constitute the culture. Millett (2000, p. 26) argues that "sexual politics obtains consent through the 'socialization' of both sexes to basic patriarchal policies with regard to temperament, role, and status. As to status, a pervasive assent to the prejudice of male superiority guarantees superior status in the male, inferior in the female".

The belief that men are "sexually weak" in the face of women can lead particularly disadvantaged women to act within the framework of femininity images defined for them in order to

attain certain positions in social life. According to Kandiyoti, patriarchal ideology, and its social practices cause women who occupy particularly disadvantaged positions to lean on masculine power and to establish partnerships with it so that they can take a place in society. These partnerships are sometimes possible through the assurance of the "loyalty" of women to kinship and family relationships in the direction of family ideology. This includes a set of strategies women developed in and bargained with the patriarchal society. Patriarchal bargains' in any given society can vary according to class, caste, and ethnicity. These patriarchal bargains exert a powerful influence on shaping women's gendered subjectivities and determine the nature of gender ideology in different contexts. (Kandiyoti, 1988).

In the field study, it was observed that the workshop hierarchy of organizations emerged in two ways: horizontally and vertically. Vertical supervision is carried out by the foremen, while horizontal supervision is conducted through various interpersonal surveillance and inspection practices. The horizontal control mechanism involves senior workers overseeing beginner workers. Additionally, it was observed that different surveillance practices form relationships with male staff in higher hierarchical positions. These relationships reveal a structure of interaction that includes kinship, marriage, and even sexuality.

It was observed that informal relationships with senior staff, such as employers or personnel chiefs, give workers a more privileged position in the eyes of their peers. Many women reported that although the foreman's or chief's wives were employed as workers in the workshop, they had supervisory roles over others, sometimes even using violence. One divorced woman interviewee shared that she was beaten by the foreman's wife for a manufacturing defect.

> There was a mistake in the stitching of two products, I sent it incorrectly, it slipped my attention, then, he insulted badly (the foreman), his wife (foreman's wife) hit me. His wife was working with us too, his wife hit me, and then she insulted me for I was divorced, she said "get out of here, if you'd been a good wife your husband would still be with you." As she's the wife of the chief, she acts like a chief, always patronising, even more than the chief himself. For example, once she gets annoyed with you, you're finished there, so you can't work anymore. (Age:48, Marital Status: Divorced, Quality Inspector).

In the field study, it was observed that women gained privileges within the workshop through positions such as "foreman's wife" and "boss's lover." The female interviewees shared that some women entered intimate relationships with male supervisors to "feel more comfortable in the workplace." One woman stated that;

> If you don't have a relationship with the boss, and if he has a relationship with a woman, you have to praise that woman, there is always unrest when you don't… sometimes these things happen. (Age: 27, Marital Status: Single, Machine Operator).

Women's responses to male domination vary significantly depending on objective circumstances, with patriarchal bargaining being reinforced by cultural values. Patriarchal bargaining represents a complex compromise: while it allows for the possibility of agency, this agency is simultaneously constrained by the established rules and norms governing gender relations. This occurs because the framework of patriarchal bargaining is not necessarily designed to challenge or dismantle patriarchy but rather to navigate within it. Instead of portraying women solely as passive victims, this

concept highlights their active participation in utilizing existing structures to gain recognition and advantages. Thus, patriarchal bargaining is not only concerned with women's resources and constraints but also encompasses the potential benefits they may obtain within the prevailing system (Ruslin, 2022, p. 144).

Ideology encompasses dominant beliefs about what is considered normal, natural, and desirable, and is closely linked to the interests of those who hold power. Ideologies are intertwined both with the organization of production systems and with the functioning of male-dominated sex/gender relations (Ramazanoglu, 1989, p. 147). Women may utilize the status they acquire within a group through their relationships with dominant men (marriage, kinship, sexuality, etc.) as a means of exerting oppression, enacting violence, or even facilitating dismissals. This dynamic serves as a patriarchal bargaining mechanism through which the disadvantaged position of femininity is compensated by reliance on masculine power.

The Discriminatory Discourses of Patriarchal Hegemony and the Construction of Female Subjectivity in the Workplaces

In the factories where the field study was conducted, the number of male and female employees was nearly equal. This characteristic of the research setting allowed for an analysis of the attitudes and discourses of male employees and employers within a feminized sector.

It has been observed that women are subjected to mistreatment and harassment through the humiliation of their gender in the workplace. For instance, one of the female interviewees reported that an employer reprimanded female employees by saying, "Is this place a brothel?" in response to the noise they were making. The free zone garment sector constitutes a labor sphere where women are insulted, perceived as sexual objects, and sometimes physically abused by male foremen or supervisors. The devaluation of working-class women's labor operates in conjunction with workplace sexual-political discourses and disciplinary mechanisms, ultimately contributing to the formation of a cheap and obedient workforce. Moreover, the prevalence of lower-paid and precarious jobs in the local labor market significantly influences men's decisions to work in the free zone. This situation recalls the organized group of male workers in Hartmann's (1979) work, The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism, which highlights the exclusion of women from secure jobs.

According to Federici (2004, pp. 15, 96, 100), the body is central to understanding the roots of male dominance and the construction of female social identity. The historical association of women with a degraded conception of corporeal reality has played a crucial role in consolidating patriarchal power and enabling the exploitation of female labor by men. In this context, the exclusion of women from waged employment, the creation of the housewife role, and the establishment of the family as the center for the reproduction of labor power have contributed to the devaluation of women's labor. All these processes reflect a broader strategy aimed at women's exclusion from the labor market. As a result,

women who challenge these norms by working in public spaces outside the home are often portrayed as sexually aggressive shrews, "whores," or "witches." One woman stated that;

> "Hey, look over here you fucking cunt," they say, and when I tell them I find their language foul, they tell me to "shut up" and say "as if these are words you've never heard!" The foremen spoke in this language, and now the workers do as well. (Age: 36, Marital Status: Married, Machine Operator).

In the field study, it was observed that the behaviors and forms of address used by male workers toward female workers varied significantly depending on women's marital status (married, divorced, or widowed) and their position within the patriarchal social structure. Female participants reported that divorced women were treated differently in the factory, experiencing a range of interactions that spanned from flirting to humiliation.

> We, those who are separated from their spouses, are viewed differently. We are humiliated; we are unavoidably inferior in the eyes of society. In our society, there is usually such an idea. Just because I am a divorced woman, because I support a house, because I need this job, and because they know that they think they can patronize me comfortably. (Age: 31, Marital Status: Divorced, Helper).

> Because I am a divorced woman, they treat me badly, that is, as if a divorced woman is all dressed up with nowhere to go, like she needs an owner, as if, without that owner, she is available to anyone anytime. Even women behave that way. Now, if I say I'm divorced, it doesn't work, if I say my husband is dead, it's the same. They are gossiping. (Age: 48, Marital Status: Divorced, Quality Control).

The negative perception about divorced women in the workplace is also shared by other female interviewees. This perspective is sometimes internalized even by divorced women themselves. Regardless of their marital status, women's behaviors in the workplace are continuously monitored and controlled by both their peers and superiors. The statements of women on this matter are as follows:

> They want attention, they are divorced women, unfortunately, there are divorcees like us, they tarnish our name. We have our employees who wear décolleté blouse. Your mind would stop, they are provoking the men there. Nobody thinks well about them. Look, sister F., look at her clothes, for instance, men cannot do their job while looking at her. (Age: 56, Marital Status: Divorced, Machine Operator).

> Our female friend is a divorced woman, they want to take advantage of her, and when you are married and you are decent, it is a problem for them anyway, because the ladies working there are always thought to be a toy for bosses, no matter how well you work, no matter what, they think you are disposable, you go and someone else comes, maybe a playful one will come in your place. (Age: 36, Marital Status: Married, Machine Opeator).

Power relations between genders are discursively constructed in the workplace, with cultural meanings playing a significant role in the formation of workplace subjectivities. In a gendered workplace, family and sexual relations constitute a key element of the labor process, and power dynamics operate through a series of discourses rooted in family and sexual imagery. These factors profoundly influence the formation of gender-based subjectivities in the workplace (Adkins & Lury, 1996, p. 210).

Socially, marriage ensures that a man gains sexual rights over a woman, and a woman who is not visibly under a man's protection is perceived by others as an "available" sexual object. The fear of sexual violence and harassment can serve as a tool for women to police themselves and other women through a series of disciplinary practices. In this way, macro power structures intersect with micro-level practices. Gender ideology, which defines sex in phallocentric terms, positions the male as the sexual

subject and the female as the sexual object through various forms of representation and discourse (Jackson, 1996, p. 25). Moreover, as Mernissi (2000, p. 31) points out, divorced women are subjected to more patriarchal oppression than single women due to the belief that women who have experienced sexual intercourse represent the most potentially dangerous type of woman in Muslim societies. In this sense, uncontrollable female sexuality is viewed as a threat to society. As observed in the field study, female sexuality is reconstructed as a playground for men in the workplace.

Sexual Harassment in the Workplace as a Sexual Politics

The women were asked whether they had been subjected to or witnessed sexual harassment in the workplace in the field study. It was observed that the women's perceptions of sexual harassment were rather ambiguous. Sexual harassment was often conflated with extramarital affairs among the women and male staff. This confusion stems from the patriarchal, cultural belief that a man will not touch or molest a woman without her consent. Except a few women, most of the female interviewees agreed with this stereotype. Some interviewees noted that sexual harassment was sometimes used as a tool for intimidation. A crucial point to highlight is that, in cases where sexual harassment was reported in the workplace, the interviewees stated that both the women and men involved were dismissed, regardless of who the victim was. When asked about witnessing sexual harassment, the women shared the following:

> He picked me up and assigned me to the ironing department at that time. What the man did, just to frustrate me and deter me, he was locking up the toilets, the key I wanted to go to the toilet was on the chief's pocket and he spoke to me in a slightly unkind way. I was about 21 years old then and he punished me that way. He said things like "I see you in my dreams" or something, he was a married person, he assigned me to the ironing that night, at work. (Age: 56, Marital Status: Divorced, Machine Operator).

> Verbal abuse. For example, here it goes... when you pass by... your breasts... Look, just because you are like this, you hear ugly things. You have to live through such things. (Age: 27, Marital Status: Single, Machine Operator).

The opinions of women, who say that a man cannot do such a thing without the woman's permission, are generally as follows:

> I did not hear. If another man touched her body, then it means that the woman permitted him. I saw such things with my own eyes. (Age: 33, Marital Status: Divorced, Helper).

Culturally, women are often seen as the primary instigators of male sexuality, and it is considered a woman's crime to arouse of a man sexually. This belief directly impacts women's freedom, including the restriction of their self-presentation in the public sphere. Women who do not conform to these limitations are viewed as undeserving of protection (Cornell, 1993, p. 170). Furthermore, sexual harassment in the workplace reflects a worldview in which the public sphere is considered to belong to men, while the private sphere is reserved for women. According to Schultz (1999, p. 81), sexual harassment is one of how working life is reinforced as a male domain. By keeping women away from work and labeling them as "inferior," sexual harassment serves to perpetuate gender-based discrimination in the labor market

The occurrence of sexual harassment is part of an attitude that reinforces gender differences on a broader scale and views work as a male-dominated field. Salzinger (2000) argues that sexual harassment in the workplace is seen as a violation of bilateral relations in working life but is often ignored as a crucial aspect of workplace sexual politics. The disregard for sexual harassment prevents a focus on other forms of sexual exploitation in the workplace. As observed in the field study, the evaluation of female workers based on their gender rather than their labor, and the production of sexuality and sexual subjects within the workplace, constitute an essential element of the mode of production and labor control.

As a result, patriarchal gender ideology creates artificial distinctions among female workers by perceiving women as the culprits of sexual harassment, associating their dignity with passivity, and causing women to identify more with their patriarchal position in society than with their role in the labor force.

CONCLUSION

The integration of developing countries into global markets is facilitated by global supply chains, with garment production being one of the primary sectors enabling this connection. The spatial, temporal, and functional flexibility policies of the flexible production system have shaped the working and production relations in the garment industry. Furthermore, globalized manufacturing is not a gender-neutral concept. On the contrary, it reinforces gender formations and gender ideologies within local economies. As a result, this system operates in conjunction with patriarchal cultural structures in local markets.

In the local market, hegemonic and despotic labor regimes provide the necessary workforce for the flexible production system. In this context, gender relations are a crucial component of the hegemonic-despotic control system. Gender and gender-based subjectivities are integral to both the production system and the labor control regime. Hegemonic despotism collaborates with local sexist ideologies to secure workers' consent and maintain organization, thereby creating a patriarchal hegemonic control mechanism over the female workforce. These control mechanisms are reproduced in the daily relationships within the workshop.

The definition of women as "ideal garment workers" is attributed to their so-called innate talents and their portrayal as a more "loyal" and "disciplined" group of workers compared to men. The naturalization paradigm functions as an ideological apparatus in the global garment industry by reducing women's labor to the level of "talent," thereby fulfilling the system's need for docile workers who can perform temporary, routine jobs. The perception that women are a "loyal," "disciplined," and non-unionized workforce are the key factors that make them considered "ideal workers" for garment production.

It is observed that the despotic structure of the local market accelerates men's participation as workers in international garment production. This situation necessitates the activation of a series of "compensatory mechanisms for masculinity" in the relationships within workshops. These mechanisms manifest in everyday practices, including sexual discourse on the production line, curses, macho behaviors, and sexual jokes that insult female sexuality. These behaviors reflect a patriarchal labor structure in which women are pitted against one another based on gender roles. Patriarchal cultural codes, which assert that women are powerless unless under the surveillance of a man, function as an ideological practice within the workshop.

Although women are often defined as "ideal garment workers," most managerial positions in the workshops are occupied by men. This situation, in addition to being related to local stereotypes regarding the passivity of women, also serves to create distinctions among female workers based on patriarchal forms of subjectivity. Consequently, women's competition in the internal labor market of organizations is not based on the qualifications required for the job but on gendered discourses and roles. The positions of women in the workshop are not determined by their labor value but by their relationships, such as being someone's wife, lover, or daughter. The competition among women over patriarchal norms of femininity serves to reinforce masculine hegemony in the gendered workshop. In this sense, women exist not as "free laborers" who sell their labor power, but as sexual subjects on the production line.

The positive effect of this situation for the capital side is that it undermines women's potential to organize better working conditions. The fragmentation of labor in the workplace and the competition in the internal labor market are shaped by patriarchal norms in society. Additionally, the ill-treatment and harassment of women by male workers and employers, as a sexual-political mechanism in the workshop, guarantees the submissiveness and discipline of women while creating an illusion of masculine power for male workers in a feminized sector. This is one of how men's docility in the production process is ensured. In this way, the male worker feels a sense of power, if not over working conditions, at least over women.

The process of creating obedient, cheap, and disciplined workers is facilitated both by the despotic features of the market, which prevent working under better conditions, and by the patriarchal-hegemonic despotic labor regime within the workshop. The sexualization of the sphere of production is the result of a discursive policy that cheapens the value placed on labor, accompanied by a patriarchal discourse in which women do not view their wages as their primary source of income. Sexuality and gender in the workplace are integral elements of labor control and play a significant role in securing consent to the conditions of exploitation within the workshop. While "moderate sexuality" is glorified on a discursive level, the production process is structured in such a way that women can gain prestige only through their patriarchal sexual identifications within the workshop. The existence of women in

the workforce as sexualized bodies, rather than as part of an organized working class, is a product of the process of submission.

Gender distinctions are influential in production politics, and gender is one of the key elements of labor markets. In addition to the domestic roles attributed to women within the social structure, and the characteristics that extend from these roles (such as loyalty and discipline), women are also seen as responsible for managing male sexuality. Therefore, women are subject to patriarchal forms of bargaining that are based on gaining status through their sexuality, thereby creating distinctions between themselves and other women. While women play the roles and assume the statuses assigned to them in both social life and the workplace, they are also agents in the social structure, reproducing the norms and values that are imposed upon them. The important point here is that women not only have the potential to reproduce the patriarchal structure but also have the capacity to oppose the artificial distinctions between themselves and exploitative working condition

Contribution Statement/ Araştırmacıların Katkı Oranı

All researchers contributed equally to the study. / Çalışmaya tüm araştırmacılar eşit oranda katkı sağlamıştır.

Declaration of Competing Interest / Çatışma Beyanı

There is no conflict of interest. / Çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

Ethics Committee Approval / Etik Onay

Ethics committee approval was obtained for this study. / Etik kurul onayı alınmıştır.

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Appendix-1

EK 2. ETİK KURUL KARARI

MERSİN ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL VE BEŞERİ BİLİMLER ETİK KURULU
ONAY BELGESİ

Mersin Üniversitesi, Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi, Sosyoloji Bölümü doktora öğrencilerinden Sibel ERDOĞAN'ın başvuru yaptığı **"Esnek Üretim Sistemi ve Emeğin Feminizasyonu: Mersin Konfeksiyon İşçileri Örneği"** adlı çalışma kurulumuz tarafından incelenmiş ve,

Etik yönden uygun bulunmuştur. [X]

Etik yönden geliştirilmesi gerekmektedir.

Etik yönden uygun bulunmamıştır.

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Hukuk Müşaviri

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