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Üniversite öğrencilerinin çevrim içi eğitimle ilgili görüşleri

Undergraduates' perspectives on online education

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ÖZ

COVID-19 salgınının aniden ortaya çıkmasıyla birlikte, yükseköğretimle ilgili tüm paydaşlar uzaktan ve çevrim içi eğitime hazırlıksız yakalandı. Bu çalışma, lisans öğrencilerinin COVID-19 salgını sırasında ortaya çıkan sorunlar hakkındaki düşüncelerine odaklanmaktadır. Araştırma sorusunu cevaplamak için hem nicel hem de nitel veriler toplanmıştır. Nicel boyutta veri toplamak amacıyla Türkiye'de bir devlet üniversitesinde öğrenim gören 154 lisans öğrencisine çevrim içi anket uygulanmış ve sonuçlar betimsel olarak analiz edilmiştir. Nitel verileri toplamak içinse aynı gruptan sekiz öğrenci ile odak grup görüşmesi yapılmıştır. Nicel analiz sonuçları, ilgili yazında yakın zamanda yapılmış çalışmalarla benzer sonuçlar ortaya koymuştur. Sonuçlar, katılımcılar arasında uzaktan ve çevrim içi eğitimden genel bir memnuniyet olsa da altyapı sorunlarının bu çerçevede en büyük sorun olduğunu ve salgının başlangıcından bu yana katılımcıların iş yüklerinin arttığını ortaya koymuştur. Buna ek olarak, nitel veri analizleri, salgının başlangıcından bu yana katılımcılar arasında öğrenmeye ilişkin önemli miktarda motivasyon kaybı olduğunu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Katılımcıların çevrim içi eğitimin hiçbir şekilde yüz yüze eğitimin yerini alamayacağına dair ortak bir görüşü paylaştığı anlaşılmıştır. Katılımcılar ayrıca uzaktan ve çevrim içi eğitim boyunca ölçme ve değerlendirme süreçlerinde ciddi sorunlar olduğunu düşünmekte ve salgın sırasında en az düzeyde öğrenci çabasının en üst düzeyde değerlendirildiği ve ödüllendirildiği inancını paylaşmaktadırlar. Bu bulgu, nicel verilerin analizinden sonra ortaya çıkan sonuçlarla, kısmen de olsa, çelişmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: COVID-19, yükseköğretim, çevrim içi eğitim, öğrenci görüşleri

ABSTRACT

With the abrupt emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, all the parties involved in higher education were caught unprepared for online education. The current study focuses on undergraduate students' ideas about the problems that have emerged during the pandemic. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected with a mixed-method research paradigm to answer the related research question. In the quantitative dimension, an online survey was applied to 154 undergraduate students at a state university in Turkey, and the results were analyzed descriptively. To collect qualitative data, a focus group interview was carried out with eight students from the same group. The quantitative analysis results revealed similar results with the recent related literature. The results revealed that, while a general satisfaction with online education resides among the participants, infrastructure problems were the major impediment in online education, and the workloads of the participants seem to have increased since the beginning of the pandemic. In addition to this, qualitative data analyses revealed a significant amount of demotivation about learning among the participants since the beginning of the pandemic. The participants shared a common notion that online education could not replace face-to-face education in any way. The participants also felt that there were serious problems in the testing and assessment processes; they believed that during the pandemic minimal student work has been overprized. This finding, to an extent, contradicts with the quantitative findings of the current study.

Keywords: COVID-19, higher education, online education, undergraduates' perspectives

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 has seriously affected social life all around the world. People have found themselves in a world that they did not experience before. Daily routines from eating and drinking habits to working conditions have dramatically changed, and each institution closely associated with society has taken its share of this unexpected outbreak. It is clear that education has been at the top of the relevant institutions. Since the beginning of the pandemic, education has been reshaped, and several factors such as student groups, the number of students, teachers, the course of the pandemic, and their technological infrastructure have shaped the solutions. Online education seems to have saved the situation since it is the quickest and most practical way to maintain educational activities under the threat of Covid-19. However, the fact that the virus has turned into a pandemic and it has lasted much longer than expected has brought about various problems related to online education (UNESCO, 2020).

Online education is not a new concept or method because its early practices are related to distance education originated in the United States in the 1800s. The updated terminology for distance education is actually Emergency Remote Education (ERE). Although there are some differences between ERE and online education (Hodges et al., 2020), in our context we have preferred to use online education as the main terminology. In near future, online education is very likely to replace face-to-face education to certain extents. The way we see it, while ERE refers to temporary solutions to crisis that interfere with face-to-face education, online education has become one of the permanent attributes of education in general.

Several practical factors, such as reaching more learners, providing easy access for students, and economic considerations paved the way for distance education. In addition, the innovation and expansion of technological tools made visual instruction possible, and online practices accordingly accelerated in time. The advent of the World Wide Web is considered a milestone in the rapid expansion and growth of online teaching and learning (Sun & Chen, 2016). However, the sudden and enforced transition from face-to-face education to online due to Covid-19 should be distinctly separated from previous distance education practices. Educational institutions that offer online courses are preferred by students who cannot attend face-to-face education because of compelling reasons or physical and financial problems. Online education, hence, is like a remedy for them.

On the other hand, Covid-19 related online education is not a preferable option neither for teachers nor for learners. It is the only way to sustain educational practices and make students keep their interest and motivation alive during the pandemic. Regarding this point, online education can be evaluated as only a tool to meet the learners' needs at a minimum level. As Bozkurt and Sharma (2020) emphasize, it is a temporary solution to a burning issue. Accordingly, it is unexceptional that it may lead to several drawbacks.

The most distinct features of online learning are the physical distance between teachers and students, mutual digital interaction, and the effective use of technology. Cojocariu et al. (2014) clarify online education as the ability to use a computer connected to a network that offers the possibility to learn from anywhere, anytime, in any rhythm, with any means. To meet students' academic needs on an online platform, Basilaia (2020) features the following significant criteria:

1. Student number: The lectures should allow at least 50 students at the same time with video interactive conference.
2. Teaching process: It should be as realistic as possible with the use of discussions.
3. Asynchronous opportunity: The streams should be recorded and uploaded for the students who do not have high-speed internet connections.
4. Easy access: online lectures should be accessible both by computers and mobile phones.
5. Online tasks: Students should be able to participate in online homework, quizzes, and tests.

Related Literature

Online education during pandemic has met with teachers and students as an emergency recipe, including each grade of the whole education process. As Dhawan (2020) remarks, an overnight shift of normal classrooms to e-classrooms obliges educators to change their pedagogical approaches to tackle new and unexpected conditions and changing situations. Bozkurt and Sharma (2020) suggest, because online education is a learning process that provides learners agency, responsibility, flexibility, and choice with careful planning, designing, and determination to create an effective learning ecology, rather than simply uploading educational content. From students' perspectives, they have abruptly found themselves in virtual classes without any technical or mental readiness. According to UNESCO's report in April 2020, 1.598 billion learners from 194 countries had to follow their education at their homes because of the closure of their educational institution. Agormedah et al. (2020) reveal in their study that students have had difficulties in accommodating themselves to online learning due to lack of formal orientation, lack of regular access to the Internet and technological devices, along with financial unpreparedness.

Furthermore, Rodríguez-Planas (2021) shows that Covid-19 has also led to increased inequalities between lower and higher-income students, and their academic expectations have been more adversely affected than higher-income peers. Relatedly, they are more likely to experience online learning challenges, consider dropping classes, and delaying graduation. In parallel to such issues, this unprecedented shift has also resulted in more stress, frustration, cybersecurity, cyberbullying or online violence among the students (Heng & Sol, 2020).

Researchers have not ignored the effects of the pandemic on students since educational institutions are considered among the fundamental bedrocks of any society. Especially higher education institutions have started to look for ways to manage the pandemic process in the most penetrative way. Several studies have focused on the effects of Covid-19 on higher education students who are expected to be a significant part of both professional business life and economic stability and social order in a society. For example, After the first wave of the COVID 19 crisis swept the world in early 2020, Aristovnik et al. (2020) carried out one of the most comprehensive and large-scale studies of how students perceive the effects of this crisis on a global level. A total of 30,383 university students from 62 countries participated in the study, where they responded to a questionnaire consisting of seven sections about students' thoughts and attitudes related to online education. The questions in the survey cover very different aspects of students' lives during the pandemic like socio-demographic, geographical features, academic online work and life, social life, emotional life, personal circumstances, change in habits, as well as personal thoughts about COVID-19.

The Global Student Survey (GSS) tool that Aristovnik et al. (2020) used is divided into seven parts. The first part consists of questions about the socio-demographic and academic characteristics of the students. These questions mainly focus on the citizenship, age and gender of the participants. In the second part, students are asked questions about their academic life. This part consists of questions about how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their experience with teaching, assessment, administrative support, and their own performance and expectations. The second part is followed by a section covering the infrastructure and skills of receiving education from home. The fourth section on social life deals with the students' support network during the COVID-19 pandemic. The next part is about the emotional life of the students. The sixth part consists of questions about students' concerns, financial conditions, and behavior. The last section of the survey is an open-ended question and it elicits reflections from the participants on the COVID-19 pandemic.

As far as students' academic life is concerned, there are two essential highlights of Aristovnik and his team. These issues are: (1) the availability of different home infrastructure needed to ensure effective work and (2) the computer skills reported by students. The proportion of students who could access certain equipment such as laptops, pens (80.4%), and computers

(75.2%) was found to be relatively high. Furthermore, according to the results, the students who chose computers as the most frequently used electronic equipment are listed according to continents as follows; Oceania (96.0%), North America (93.6%) and Europe (86.2%).

The study revealed that students did not have regular access to printers (33.0%) and study materials (51.8%), respectively, while African students had the lowest printer availability (14.9%) compared to Asian (26.2%) and South American colleagues (37,6%). A good Internet connection is essential for online learning; and 59.9% of students from Africa, 58.2% from Asia, 58.5% from South America, 68.3% from Europe, 70.0% from Oceania, and 70.5% of students from North America were reported to have internet connection.

In the next step, students were asked about their confidence in computer skills. On average, they were most confident in using online communication platforms such as email and messaging, followed by skills to surf online for information and skills to share digital content. When comparing confidence in these skills across continents, as expected, the lowest levels were found for Africa (3.05) and the highest for North America (4.14) and Oceania (4.38). In the study, male students had a higher assessment of their confidence in computer skills than female students.

In this short period since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, other studies have found similar findings with Aristovnik et al. (2020). For example, Feldman (2020) highlights that students' academic performance is negatively affected due to pandemic-related anxiety; racial, economic, and resource differences may play unfavorable roles on students, and most instructors have not been ready enough to deliver high-quality instruction remotely. Cao et al. (2020) analyzed the psychological effects of Covid-19 on college students in China, and they found that pandemic has played an influential role in increasing the anxiety of college students. More than that, their study indicates that economic effects, relevant effects on daily routine, and delays in academic studies were positively associated with students' anxiety. Similarly, Browning et al. (2021) reveal in their study that in the United States, mental health hotlines witnessed a 1,000% increase during April since most people were under lockdown due to the pandemic. They also stress that Covid-19 considerably affects college students because of uncertainty regarding academic success, future careers, and social life.

The first Covid-19 case was reported in the first week of March 2020 in Turkey. Subsequently, all institutions started to take emergency precautions, including Higher Education Institution. The rapid spread of the virus resulted in a complete shift to online education by the end of March 2020. Since then, higher education has moved to online platforms, and a new period with its pros and cons has started for university students. With relation to these compelling changes and continual adjustments for better education, online learning practices have reached their zenith in campus life.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19, global and large-scale studies have been carried out. However, since every context is unique, it looks like what we also need is more context-focused studies. In order to fill this gap, with the current study, we aim to analyze online education from undergraduate students' standpoints in the Turkish higher education context, and the primary goal of this paper is to report on the results of a partly replication of the global survey mentioned earlier and a focus-group interview.

By taking the related literature into account, the current study tries to answer the following research question:

From students' perspectives, what are the problematic aspects of online education in higher education?

METHOD

As the current study was carried out with a mixed-method research paradigm, quantitative and qualitative data collection tools were used to collect data related to the research question. This approach is also known as the concurrent triangulation method. In the concurrent triangulation

method, the researchers collect qualitative and quantitative data concurrently and then compare the convergences and differences (Creswell, 2009). The rationale behind this approach is to ensure reliability and validity as much as possible (Erzberger & Kelle, 2003).

Participants

In total, 154 students participated in the current study. Convenience sampling method was used as the sampling method. Other than obvious reasons, this method was preferred because Aristovnik et al. (2020) have already discussed the issue from an extensive perspective; the researchers of the current study wanted to apply this global perspective in a more focused context.

The participants were students at a state university in Turkey, and by the time the data collection procedure was over, the participants had been taking their courses online for over a year. Their ages ranged from 18 to 34 with an average of 21, and they were dominantly females (N= 117, %76). Their English proficiency levels varied from B1 to B2, as was measured via the Oxford Placement Test (Allen, 1992).

Research Ethics

In the whole process from the planning of this research to its implementation, from the collection of data to its analysis, all the regulations specified in the "Ethics Directive of Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication" were followed. No action contrary to the specifications under the second part of the heading "Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics" was taken.

Scientific, ethical and citation rules were followed in the writing process of this study; the participants officially agreed to participate in the current study, no modifications were made on the collected data and this study was not sent to any other academic publication medium for evaluation.

Research ethics committee approval information

Ethical Board: Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University Ethical Board

Decision date: 16 March 2021

Decision number: 2021.04.105

Data Collecting Tools and Procedures

Quantitative data

Quantitative data were collected through the use of the GSS developed by Aristovnik et al. (2020). The survey was developed to measure the effects of the COVID-19 on students at higher education level. The original survey is comprised of seven main sections, which contain 39 questions in total. The survey questions measure the claimed effects of the COVID-19 in seven sections, namely, (1) socio-demographic and academic characteristics, (2) academic life, (3) infrastructure and skills for studying from home, (4) social life, (5) emotional life, (6) general circumstances, and (7) general reflections.

In the current study, however, to focus on the academic aspects of the claimed effects, only the questions in the academic section of the survey were used. The questions in this section were extracted from the set and were converted into an online Google survey form without any modifications. The form was composed of three main parts: The first part collected demographic data from the participants. The second part was taken from the GSS and contained lectures, testing and assessment, workload, problematic areas of online education, and overall satisfaction as the thematic topics. The first six items in the second section of the survey compose a Likert type item set, and it includes the following statements (Aristovnik et al., 2020):

1. My performance as a student has improved since face-to-face classes were canceled.
2. I have adapted well to the new teaching and learning experience.
3. I can master the skills taught in class this year even face-to-face classes were canceled.
4. I can figure out how to do the most difficult classwork since face-to-face classes were canceled.

The next set of items in the survey is related to the performance of the teachers who are delivering the lectures and contains the following statements as a separate set:

1. My teachers have provided course assignments (e.g., readings, homework, quizzes) on a regular basis.
2. My teachers have provided feedback on my performance on given assignments.
3. My teachers have responded to my questions in a timely manner.
4. My teachers have been open to students' suggestions and adjustments of online classes.
5. My teachers have informed me on what exams will look like in this new situation.

The next item is directly related to the testing and assessment process during online education and includes the following statement: "The testing and assessment process was objective and effective." This item was added to the main set of items in the GSS by the researchers because although testing and assessment is an integral part of education, the original GSS did not have any items related to this aspect of online education.

The following item in the survey is about students' workload during the pandemic, and the following statement is given to the participants as the input: "On average, compared to the workload before face-to-face classes were canceled, would you say that your study workload over the last weeks has been…", and the participants are asked to complete this sentence with a scale from "significantly smaller" to "significantly larger."

The next item in the set tries to elicit from the participants their opinions about the most problematic areas of online education, and the general areas are listed as (1) testing and assessment, (2) technical aspects, (3) lesson materials, and (4) lecture delivery. Again, this part of the survey was added by the researchers.

The following set of questions in the survey is about the overall satisfaction levels of the participants concerning online education, and the prompt is "How satisfied are you with the following aspects of online education?" The first aspect is about the testing and assessment process, the second one is about the teaching process, and the last one is about the technical aspects of online education. The participants are asked to rate these statements on a scale of one (very dissatisfied) to five (very satisfied).

The last section of the survey includes an open-ended question asking the participants to mention any other aspects of online education that they think might be relevant. Quantitative sections of the survey, the first and the second parts, were analyzed at a descriptive level only; no inferential analyses were performed.

The quantitative data were gathered using the tool mentioned above, and descriptive statistical techniques were used for analysis. The reliability of the survey was analyzed, and the results revealed a relatively high reliability level (Cronbach-alpha= .83). In the next step, the results were compared to the related literature.

Qualitative data

The main aim during the analysis of the qualitative data was first to make sense of the data at hand and then "reach an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data" (Creswell, 2009, p. 183), and these interpretations were compared with the quantitative results of the current study. Most of the time, in qualitative data analysis, an inductive approach is taken. In other words, by reading and re-reading the transcriptions, researchers try to arrive at categories that are not predetermined; they are derived inductively from the text (Dörnyei, 2010). Accordingly, the current study follows an inductive approach in terms of content analysis.

Qualitative data were collected through a focus-group interview session. In focus-group interviews,

> …the researcher conducts face-to-face interviews with participants, interviews participants by telephone, or engages in focus group interviews, with six to eight interviewees in each group. These interviews involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants. (Creswell, 2009, p. 181).

Eight students participated in the focus group interview, which was held through a Zoom meeting. To make the participants feel in their comfort zone, the interview was carried out in Turkish, the native language of the participants. In the interview, which was carried out by one of the researchers, the researcher asked the participants semi-structured open-ended questions about their learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questions were structured by using the related literature mentioned previously. However, to promote a link with the quantitative dimension of the study, the questions were all in line with but not limited to the questions in the GSS tool mentioned earlier. During the interview, the researcher made the students feel free to express their feelings and ideas about the pandemic and its effects on their education. Once the interview was completed, it was transcribed and analyzed.

During the data analysis stage for the qualitative data, conventional steps were followed, which are "(a) transcribing the data, (b) pre-coding and coding, (c) growing ideas-memos, vignettes, profiles, and other forms of data display, and (d) interpreting the data and drawing conclusions." (Dörnyei, 2010). By taking into account Dörnyei's (2010) framework in qualitative data analysis, the following steps were followed during the quantitative analysis process:

Step 1: Research team discussions

Step 2: Planning

Step 3: Sampling of the participants

Step 4: Administering the interview

Step 5: Transcription

Step 6: Pre-coding and coding the data

Step 7: Research team discussions about the themes that emerged

Step 8: Interpreting and drawing conclusions

During the pre-coding and coding stages, a systematic approach was taken. According to (Miles & Huberman, 1994), there are three types of codes. The first type of codes is called descriptive, which entails little interpretation. An example of this type of coding is the process where the researcher takes abbreviated notes into the margins of the documents. The next type of coding is called interpretative coding, and this process results from the deeper analysis of the data where connections among descriptive codes begin to emerge. Finally, the following type of coding, pattern coding, is even more inferential and explanatory. At this stage, as patterns in the dataset emerge, the researcher attributes new codes to these patterns as a result of interpretations. These codes, naturally, are used at the later stages of the study.

RESULTS

Quantitative Results

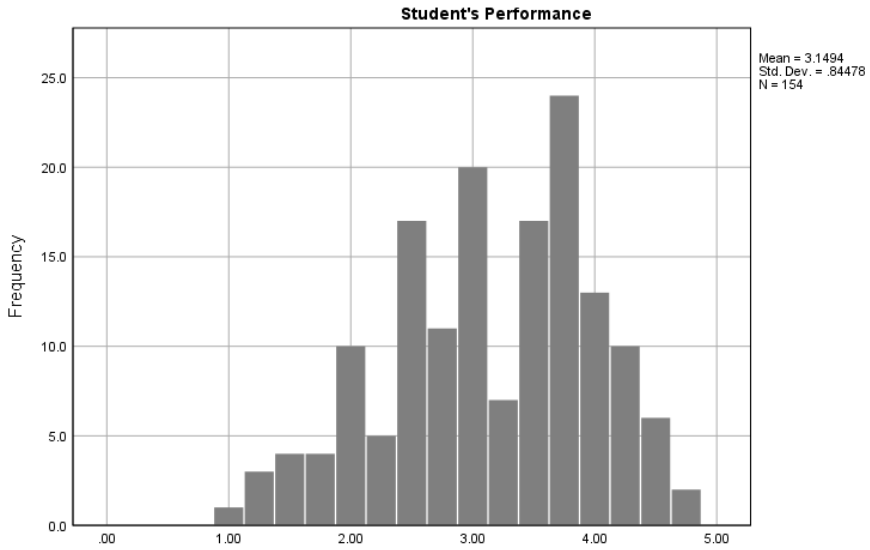
As was mentioned in the previous section, the first part of the second section of the survey is related to participants' own performance during online education. In total, six items were used as prompts, and their mean score is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Results Related to Student Performance During Online Education

	N	M	SD
Students' Performance	154	3.15	.845

As Table 1 suggests, the mean score related to students' performance is 3.15 out of 5.00 with a standard deviation of .845. These scores suggest that the participants are generally satisfied with their performance as students. The following bar chart is a visual representation of these results.

Figure 1
Participants Opinions on Their Own Performance During Online Education



From Figure 1, it can be seen that, although there seem to be some outliers, the participants' overall satisfaction about their own performance during online education is generally positive.

The next part of the survey is related to the general performance of the teachers during online education. In this part, the participants are asked to evaluate their teachers' performance on a scale of one (1) to five (5). The related descriptive results are presented in Table 2.

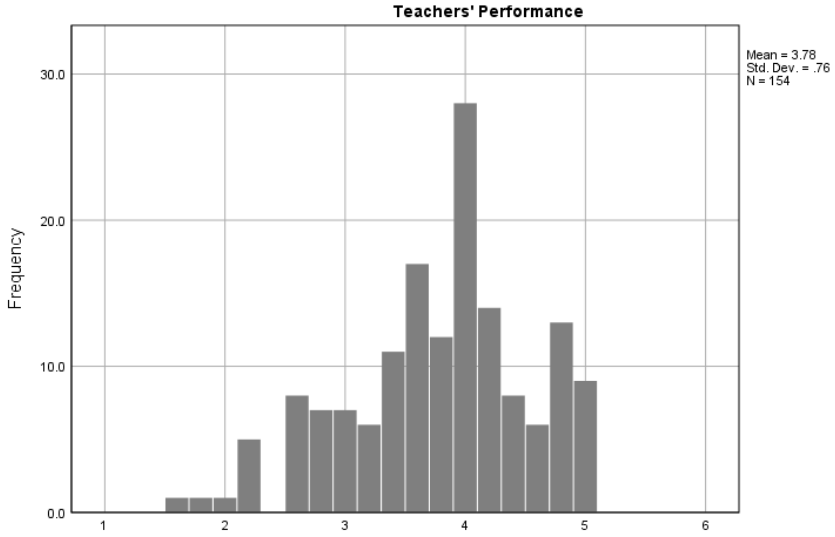
Table 2
Descriptive Results Related to Teacher Performance During Online Education

	N	M	SD
Teachers' Performance	154	3.78	.760

The descriptive results presented in Table 2 reveal a clear satisfaction of the participants related to their teachers during online education. The mean score calculated by taking into account the five questions that were mentioned earlier is 3.78 with a standard deviation of .760. The following figure shows the visual representations of these results.

Figure 2 illustrates the participants' overall satisfaction level of the participants related to the lecturers delivering the courses during online education. A quick analysis of the figure will reveal that, again, with a small portion of outliers, the participants are also satisfied with the teachers' performance.

Figure 2
Participants Opinions on Teacher Performance During Online Education



The next item in the survey was a prompt stating that the testing and assessment during online education were objective and effective. The participants' responses can be analyzed in Table 3.

Table 3
The Objectivity and Efficiency of the Testing and Assessment Procedures During Online Education

	N	%
Strongly disagree	11	7.1
Disagree	11	7.1
Neutral	43	27.9
Agree	68	44.2
Strongly agree	21	13.6
Total	154	100

Table 3 shows the participants' responses to the item related to the testing and assessment process during online education. It is clear from the table that 57.8% of the participants agree or strongly agree that the testing and assessment process was objective and effective. While 14.2% of them think otherwise; 27.9% of the participants are indecisive about the process.

In the next item, participants' workload about their courses during online education was evaluated. The participants were asked to complete the following sentence: "*On average, compared to the workload before face-to-face classes were canceled, would you say that your study workload over the last weeks has been…"*

Table 4
Participants' Responses to the Item Stating, "On average, compared to the workload before face-to-face classes were canceled, would you say that your study workload over the last weeks has been…"

	N	%
Significantly smaller	6	3.9
Smaller	15	9.7
The same	37	24.0
Larger	53	34.4
Significantly larger	43	27.9
Total	154	100.0

As can be seen in Table 4, 62.3% of the participants believe that their workload during online education has been larger or significantly larger. In total 13.6% of the participants think their

workload has been smaller or significantly smaller, and a 24% see no difference between online education and face-to-face education in terms of workload.

In the following item, the participants were asked to think about the problematic areas of online education. They were asked to rate the most problematic area of online education, and among the options there were testing and assessment, technical aspects, lesson materials, and lecture delivery. Related results are presented in Table 5

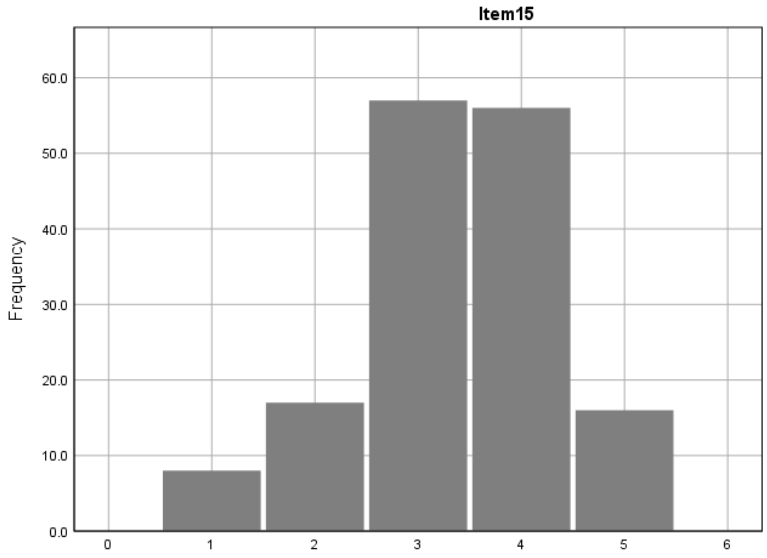
Table 5
Participants' Responses to the Item Stating, "In Your Opinion, Which of the Following Was the Most Problematic Area of Online Education?"

Problematic Areas	N	%
Testing	24	15.6
Technical	102	66.2
Lesson Materials	8	5.2
Lecture Delivery	20	13.0
Total	154	100

By looking at the figures presented in Table 5, we can easily see that the technical aspect of online education is regarded as a very serious problem among the participants with a percentage of 66,2. The testing and assessment aspect of online education is regarded as the second problematic area with a percentage of 15.6, and lecture delivery (13%) and lesson materials (5.2%) are believed to be of lesser concern by the participants.

The subsequent item in the survey was also a Likert-type statement, and it elicited the overall satisfaction levels of the participants concerning the testing and assessment process during online education. Figure 3 displays the related results with a bar chart.

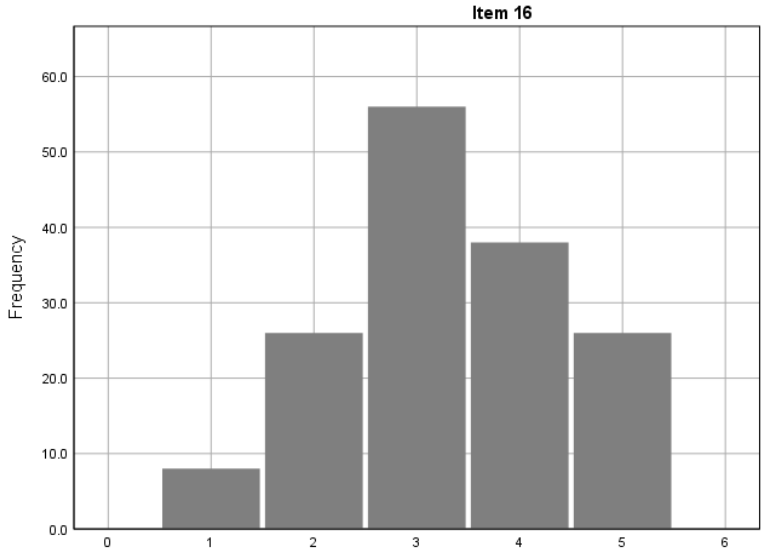
Figure 3
Overall Satisfaction about Testing and Assessment



In Figure 3, the bar chart displays participants' choices from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5). From Figure 3, it is clear that the participants are dominantly satisfied with the testing and assessment process during online courses. A very small portion of the participants, however, seems to be dissatisfied with the related procedures.

Similarly, the participants were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the teaching process during online courses. The related results are displayed in Figure 4.

Figure 4
Participants' Overall Satisfaction with the Teaching Process



Again, the numbers presented in Figure 4 represent a general satisfaction level from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5). As can be seen from the table, the participants seem to be satisfied with the teaching process during online education. At this point, participants' satisfaction levels about the teaching process can be compared with their satisfaction levels represented in Figure 3. Although the participants seem to be satisfied with both the testing and assessment and the teaching process, their overall satisfaction level seems to be in favor of the testing and assessment process.

The last item in the survey was also a Likert-type statement trying to measure the participants' overall satisfaction with the technical aspects of online education. The related results are illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5
Participants' Overall Satisfaction about Technical Aspects of Online Education

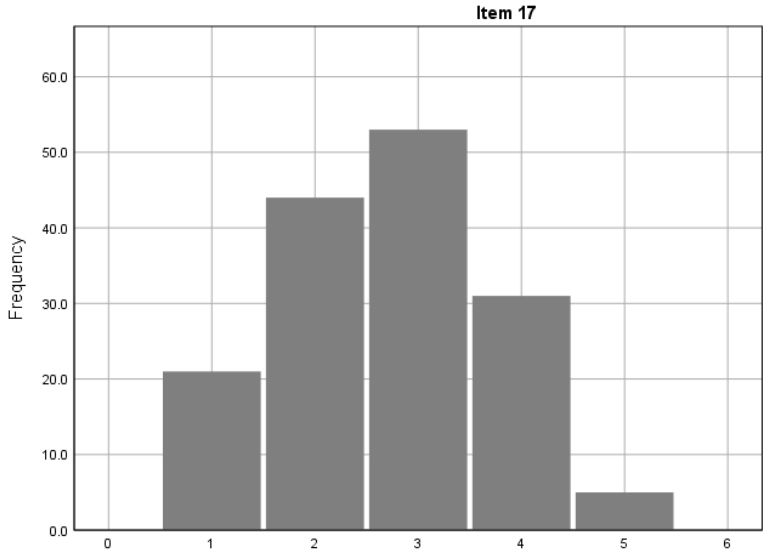


Figure 5 clearly shows that the participants are not satisfied with the technical aspects of online education as much as they are with the testing and assessment and the teaching process.

Qualitative Results

During the focus group discussion, naturally, the central theme appeared to be the comparison of online and face-to-face education. While the participants talked about online education, in comparison to face-to-face education, words such as ineffective, insufficient, cannot replace face-to-face education, difficulties, low attendance, concentration problems were common words and phrases among the participants. The following excerpts from the interview, which were translated into English by the researchers, could be regarded as a generic flow of thought among the participants concerning online education.

> Honestly, I do not think it (online education) is as effective as face-to-face education, but it has some advantages. For example, we can watch the lesson again, or we can attend the lesson another time if we are not available at that moment. Even if it has advantages like this, it certainly cannot replace face-to-face education. Learning gets a little more difficult, and the constant sitting at the computer makes things a little more difficult. [Participant 1]
>
> Online education is not as effective as face-to-face education because I think online education makes us get used to laziness. [Participant 3]
>
> The transfer is better in face-to-face training. Since there is a one-to-one communication between the teacher and the student, the transfer is better. The teacher can understand more easily if they understand the students and can give feedback. [Participant 8]

The next pattern that appeared during qualitative data analysis is about the testing and assessment process in online education. Although the quantitative analysis results show that the participants are satisfied with the testing and assessment process, the qualitative analysis results reveal concerns about the process. This aspect of online education seems to fall in the group of "what is only said only when it is asked." As the emerging patterns reveal, the dominant belief among the participants who participated in the interview is that there is something wrong with the assessment process.

> At first, I want to say this; I definitely think that there are inequalities in assessment during the pandemic. It stems from the mercy of the teachers. For example, my grade is the same as someone who mutes the microphone and never speaks in class. One of our teachers even told us that these days, because of administrative reasons, it is really hard to fail anybody from any class. [Participant 3]
>
> In terms of testing and assessment, everyone started to get higher grades. I feel like everyone's GPA is about 100. Everyone's average has also gone up because the teachers seem to be taking a little more initiative. Because it is a pandemic, teachers may think that they should give the students higher grades. [Participant 4]
>
> As my friend said, the student who attends the online courses can do well in the exams, and the students who do not attend the courses can also do well in the exam, but such a thing was not possible in face-to-face education. Those who did not attend the courses failed in those days. I think testing and assessment procedures are obviously a formality. [Participant 5]
>
> During the first term, there was a maximum of 10 active students in online courses, but the class average is always high. Everybody gets the same high grades. [Participant 8]

The qualitative findings of the current study are in line with the quantitative findings that are related to workload during online education. The following sample excerpts, chosen among many others, construct the pattern of thought among the participants concerning the workload during online education.

> I feel really tired during online education. [Participant 1]

> I don't know why but I still feel like I'm in a rush. My workload is certainly not less. [Participant 3]
>
> I feel like we have become asocial, and we are doing way too many lectures and way too much homework. [Participant 6]
>
> I am constantly in a state of mental tiredness. [Participant 7]

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

Quantitative and qualitative analysis results presented so far make certain points clear about undergraduate students' perspectives on online education and cast doubt on some others. First of all, the participants are satisfied with their own performance during online education compared to face-to-face education ($\overline{x}$= 3,15). A small proportion of them believe otherwise; they are not satisfied with their own performance. In addition to this, in terms of lecturers' performance, the participants also believe that their teachers' performance was satisfactory ($\overline{x}$= 3,78). This finding is in line with the results of the GSS, where "on the global level, the students' satisfaction with the organization of three segments of the teaching process was quite high and nearly the same. For lectures ($\overline{x}$ = 3.30), tutorials and seminars ($\overline{x}$ = 3.12), and mentorships ($\overline{x}$ = 3.20) (Aristovnik et al., 2020: p. 8).

As was mentioned before, the main components of the survey are made up of subcomponents. For convenience, the tables related to subcomponents of the survey are not presented here. However, when the subcomponents of the main components in the survey were analyzed, it also became clear that a stable 30% of the participants are hesitant about their satisfaction with online education.

The qualitative results confirm the findings mentioned above to a certain extent. Among the patterns that emerged during the focus group interviews, there is a dominant positive attitude towards their own performance as students and their lecturers as teachers. The participants all have negative ideas to express concerning online education, but only a small part of these negative ideas is related to student or teacher performance.

Quantitative results of the current study revealed that more than half of the participants ($\overline{x}$= 57,8) believe that the testing and assessment process during online education was satisfactory, and 27,9% of the participants are indecisive about the process. Seemingly, a small portion (14,2%) of them are not satisfied with the process. In addition to this, when the participants were asked about their overall satisfaction with the testing and assessment process during online education, their responses were mostly positive (see Figure 3). However, one of the main problems with the quantitative research paradigm is that it is usually difficult to see deep into the problems that are related to people, and "real meaning lies in individual cases who make up our world" (Dörnyei, 2010: p. 27).

In the current study, the quantitative findings related to testing and assessment during online education do not match with the findings in the qualitative part of the study. As was presented before, one of the emerging patterns in the qualitative data is that there is a certain level of injustice in grading students' success; in the context of the current study, online testing and assessment do not seem to be functioning well.

It goes without saying that, although they are complementary to each other, the teaching process precedes testing and assessment (Brown, 2018). It sounds natural to believe that in a certain context, the teaching process is more than satisfactory than the testing process. However, a context where testing and assessment is much better than the teaching process is not as acceptable as vice versa. In what kind of a context can testing and assessment be much better than the teaching process when both are carried out by the same teaching staff? Is it even possible? The qualitative results of the current study reveal that, even though the participants seem to be satisfied with the testing and assessment process, this satisfaction does not seem to

be stemming from the effectiveness of the process; most of the participants are satisfied with the process very likely because grades are high and they are not a matter of concern.

From the very first day of the pandemic, the researchers involved in the current study have been discussing the issues in online education. In addition to this, just out of mere curiosity, the researchers carried out one-to-one, "off-the-record" Zoom meetings with several of the students from the sample population. These interviews were not recorded or transcribed in any way; however, the common point in these meetings is that undergraduate students are sure that, one way or another, they will be officially successful in all their responsibilities with minimum effort. Obviously, this is a failure of some kind, and when we reward failure, maybe unknowingly, we are punishing success.

When it comes to the issue of workload, both quantitative and qualitative findings confirm the findings of Aristovnik et al. (2020). The majority of the participants in the current study (62.3%) believe that their workload has increased larger or significantly larger during online education. This finding is similar to the findings from the GSS, which reports that 42.59% of the global participants in the study believe that their workload in online education has increased larger or significantly larger compared to face-to-face education, and the researchers link this finding "with an underdeveloped Internet network" (Aristovnik et al., 2020, p. 9). The related qualitative results are also in line with these findings. One of the common patterns that emerged during the interview is related to the repeated concept of mental tiredness among the participants. Compared to face-to-face education, the participants feel overwhelmed by the academic work that is required from them. In the related literature, such loss of daily routines and a reduction in social or physical contact with other people are linked to negative emotions such as frustration, anger, anxiety, or boredom (Brooks et al., 2020; Browning et al., 2021; Cao et al., 2020).

When the participants were asked to decide on the most problematic areas of online education, the great majority (66.2%) believed that the technical aspects of online education were the most problematic area. This finding is also in line with the findings from GSS and Agormedah et al. (2020). In addition to this, the inequality among students in terms of infrastructures and technical background, even in most advanced countries, poses a severe problem to efficient online education (United Nations, 2020). The qualitative results of the current study also confirm these insights as one of the patterns that emerged during the interviews was the technical problems in online education.

In their study, Aristovnik et al. (2020) also counted the most frequent words and phrases in participants' responses. According to the results, the most common words that the participants used in their study were "people", "covid", "life", "time", and "pandemic." Furthermore, their overall feedback was negative because words like "problem", "hard", "worried", "dangerous", "death", and "fear" frequently appeared throughout their expressions. On the other hand, some hope was also available because of the frequent words like "normal", "hope", "future", and "positive. In our study, although some positivity resides among the participants, the themes and patterns that emerged in their expressions indicate dominantly negative ideas and feelings concerning online education, and this outcome is also in line with the related literature (Aristovnik et al., 2020; Khattar et al., 2020; Wang & Zhao, 2020).

With the outbreak of the COVID-19, the notorious sentence "Things will never be the same again." which was uttered in a highly political context, now applies to every aspect of human life. As a result of the pandemic, there was a very swift global transition from face-to-face to online education at every level (Sahu, 2020). For example, in Turkey, lecturers and teachers were asked to get ready for online education in a couple of weeks because of obvious compelling reasons. In addition to this, by taking the pandemic as the basis, the authority has maximized its tolerance for students at all levels for issues like attendance to lectures and assessment.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a very recent issue, and it looks like its impacts on education will be a topic of discussion for a long time. Obviously, the related literature concerning the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education is quite limited, and the related discussions can only go

so far. Moreover, the extended effects of the pandemic in every aspect of our lives are yet to be seen. Therefore, as for now, no analysis or interpretation can be conclusive. While some studies suggest that in online courses, the amount of learning is greater than in traditional face-to-face courses (Colvin et al., 2014)**,** some others claim that online education has failed to be an effective alternative to traditional face-to-face education (Gupta et al., 2021)**.**

Moreover, the related literature also implies that online education "…faces several challenges including the emergence and rapid growth of learning needs, appropriate training delivery, and the supply adaptation to technological advances." (Wotto, 2020, p. 263). In addition to this, some forms of online education are being criticized because of a failure to adhere to sound pedagogical principles, best practices, and earlier research (Hodges et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, specific points concerning online education have become clear. First, the majority was caught unprepared without essential infrastructures. As the results of the current study and others like Aristovnik et al. (2020) confirm, the technical aspects of online education are a serious problem on the students' side; the most significant inequality among students at every level of education seems to be related to technical infrastructures.

Second, online education is very likely to become an integral part of education at every level. To some, the COVID-19 pandemic will soon become a thing of the past, but online education, at least in terms of higher education, must become a solid part of the teaching staff's skills (Hodges et al., 2020). Globally speaking, it has become clear that we need to be ready for future outbreaks of pandemics or other worldwide crises that might interfere with face-to-face education, which makes the integration of online education skills into teacher education programs one of the top priorities.

The third point that has become clear is about the testing and assessment procedures during online education. Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was already clear that one of the primary concerns for the educational system is the integrity of online assessments (Milone et al., 2017). Since the outbreak of the pandemic, we have witnessed some *radical* solutions to online testing and assessment problems. Mostly through observations, we have learned that online platforms are not effective when it comes to summative achievement tests. For example, one of the universities in Turkey provided each of its students with a mirror to be used during tests, hoping that these mirrors will somehow prevent test-takers from cheating in the exams (Sanlı, 2020). E-proctoring seems like a sound alternative to these radical solutions. Although some studies suggest that e-proctoring tools have been effective in deterring cheating in online exams (Hylton et al., 2016), the results are below expectations (Kharbat & Abu Daabes, 2021). In terms of testing and assessment in online education, it looks like the most sensible action to take is to reflect on "the centrality of formative assessment" (UNICEF, 2021, p. 37).

All the studies mentioned so far, at their core, try to answer one clear question: How can we make online education as effective as or even more effective than face-to-face education? As is usually the case, big and important questions do not have straightforward single answers. To be able to answer this question, online education needs to be analyzed and discussed from every possible angle. With the current study, we have discussed the issue from undergraduates' perspectives. There are many other angles to online education. How do the lecturers and teachers feel, and what do they think about online education? How does online education affect motivation? Does online education work for all academic fields? How about gender differences in online education? These are only some of the questions about online education whose answers will have direct effects on creating and shaping paradigms about online education.

Suggestions for Further Studies

As was mentioned previously, it is quite obvious that COVID-19 has been reshaping every aspect of our lives, and related changes are serious and permanent. We suppose that one of these changes is taking place in pre-service teachers' belief systems concerning teacher identity. In the related literature, it has been suggested that while designing teacher education programs, a

deeper understanding of teacher identity is a critical aspect that needs attention (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2007). Further studies are needed to understand this supposed change about teacher identity in pre-service language teachers. The results of such studies will help us shape foreign language teacher education programs.

Limitations of the Study

Both the quantitative and the qualitative results are of the current study have limitations. First of all, while interpreting the results, factors such as the socioeconomic situations of the participants were not taken into consideration as no related and detailed data were collected. Secondly, the researchers assumed that the participants responded honestly and freely to the questions and statements in the research tools. Another important limitation is related to the discussions of the findings. As the related literature lacks studies concerning the research question of the current study, the discussions are limited with the available research studies in the related literature.

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As the authors, we do not have any support or acknowledgment concerning the research process.

Statement of Contribution Rate

The first researcher was responsible for the general framework of the current study and issues related to methods, interpretation of the results, discussions and language related issues. The second author dealt with the data collection procedures by designing the procedures and administering the research tools. The third researcher dealt with the introduction and the literature review section of their current study.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

As the authors of the study, we hereby declare that we have no conflict of interest.

Statement of Publication Ethics

In the whole process from the planning of this research to its implementation, from the collection of data to its analysis, all the regulations specified in the "Ethics Directive of Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication" were followed. No action contrary to the specifications under the second part of the heading "Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics" was taken.

Scientific, ethical and citation rules were followed in the writing process of this study; the participants officially agreed to participate in the current study, no modifications were made on the collected data and this study was not sent to any other academic publication medium for evaluation.

Research ethics committee approval information

Ethical Board: Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University Ethical Board

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZ

Giriş

COVID-19 salgını tüm dünyada sosyal hayatı ciddi şekilde etkiledi ve insanlar kendilerini daha önce hiç deneyimlemedikleri bir dünyada buldular. Yeme-içme alışkanlıklarından çalışma koşullarına kadar günlük rutinler köklü bir şekilde değişti ve toplumla yakından ilişkili her kurum bu beklenmedik salgından nasibini aldı. Eğitimin de bu ilgili kurumların başında geldiği açıktır.

Salgının başlangıcından bu yana, eğitim süreçleri yeniden şekillendi ve birçok faktör de ortaya çıkan problemlerin çözümlerini şekillendirdi. Uzaktan eğitim, Covid-19 tehdidi altında eğitim faaliyetlerini sürdürmenin en hızlı ve pratik yolu olduğu için durumu kurtarmış gibi görünüyor. Ancak virüsün salgına dönüşmesi ve beklenenden çok daha uzun sürmesi uzaktan eğitimle ilgili çeşitli sorunları da beraberinde getirdi.

Uzaktan eğitim yeni bir kavram veya yöntem değil; ilk uygulamaları 1800'lerde Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde ortaya çıkmıştır. Daha fazla öğrenciye ulaşmak, öğrencilerin kolay erişimini sağlamak, ekonomik kaygılar gibi birçok pratik faktör uzaktan eğitimin önünü açmıştır. Ayrıca teknolojik araçların yenilenmesi ve yaygınlaşması görsel öğretimi mümkün kılmış ve buna bağlı olarak çevrim içi uygulamalar da zaman içinde hızlanmıştır. İnternetin ortaya çıkışı, çevrim içi öğretme ve öğrenmenin hızlı genişlemesi ve büyümesinde bir dönüm noktası olarak kabul edilir.

Covid-19 ile ilgili çevrim içi eğitim ne öğretmenler ne de öğrenenler için tercih edilen bir seçenek fakat salgın sırasında eğitim uygulamalarını sürdürmenin ve öğrencilerin ilgi ve motivasyonlarını canlı tutmanın tek yolu bu gibi görünüyor. Bu noktadan hareketle uzaktan ve çevrim içi eğitim, öğrencilerin ihtiyaçlarını asgari düzeyde karşılamaya yönelik geçici bir araç olarak değerlendirilebilir.

Bu çalışmada, alanda yapılan ilgili çalışmalar da dikkate alınarak şu araştırma sorusu cevaplandırılmaya çalışılmıştır: Üniversite lisans öğrencilerinin bakış açılarına göre, yükseköğretimde uzaktan eğitim boyunca karşılaşılan sorunlar nelerdir?

Yöntem

Bu çalışmada, karma araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır; araştırma sorusunu cevaplayabilmek için hem nicel hem de nitel veri toplanmıştır. Nicel veri için salgının başladığı tarihten itibaren üniversite öğrencilerinden veri toplamak amacıyla dünya çapında gerçekleştirilmiş olan global öğrenci anketinin adaptasyonu kullanılmıştır. Adapte edilmiş bu anket 154 üniversite öğrencisine çevrim içi araçlar kullanılarak uygulanmıştır. Nitel veri ise, aynı gruptan sekiz öğrenciyle yapılan odak grup görüşmesi aracılığıyla toplanmıştır.

Bulgular

Araştırmanın nicel sonuçları, katılımcıların uzaktan eğitim boyunca kendi performanslarını ve uzaktan eğitimi yürütmekten sorumlu eğitmenlerinin performanslarını tatmin edici seviyede gördüklerini ortaya çıkarmıştır. Nicel analizler, lisans öğrencilerinin uzaktan eğitim süresi boyunca uygulanan ölçme ve değerlendirme süreçlerinin yeterince etkili ve nesnel olduğu kanısında olduklarını da ortaya koymuştur. Katılımcıların çoğunun, yüz yüze eğitim süreciyle karşılaştırıldığında, uzaktan eğitim süresince iş yüklerinin ciddi oranda arttığını düşündükleri de ortaya çıkan sonuçlar arasındadır. Ayrıca katılımcılar, uzaktan eğitim boyunca yaşadıkları en büyük sorunun teknik sorunlar olduğunu düşünmektedirler. Katılımcıların çoğu, uzaktan eğitim boyunca derslerin işlenişinden ve ölçme ve değerlendirme süreçlerinden genel anlamda memnun görünmektedir.

Araştırmanın nitel boyutunda ortaya çıkan sonuçların bir kısmı nicel boyutta çıkan sonuçlarla örtüşmektedir. Örneğin, odak grup görüşmeleri sonucunda da öğrencilerin uzaktan eğitim süreci boyunca en çok teknik sıkıntılarla karşılaştıkları teyit edilmiştir. Nitel analizler ayrıca öğrenciler arasında uzaktan eğitim süreciyle ilgili genel bir memnuniyet olduğunu da teyit etmiştir. Fakat,

ölçme ve değerlendirme süreciyle ilgili ortaya çıkan nitel analiz sonuçları nicel analiz sonuçlarıyla çelişir durumdadır. Odak grup görüşmelerine katılan öğrenciler, uzaktan eğitim boyunca yürütülen ölçme ve değerlendirme sürecinin birçok haksızlığa ve eşitsizliğe neden olduğunu savunmaktadır; katılımcılara göre uzaktan eğitim süreci boyunca minimum öğrenci çabasına maksimum değer verilmiş ve bu da ölçme ve değerlendirme sürecini anlamsız hale getirmiştir. Nitel analizler sonucunda ortaya çıkan başka bir ortak görüş ise uzaktan eğitimin yüz yüze eğitimin yerini asla alamayacağı düşüncesidir.

Tartışma ve Sonuç

COVID-19'un bir sonucu olarak, her düzeyde yüz yüze eğitimden çevrim içi eğitime çok hızlı bir küresel geçiş yaşandı. Örneğin, Türkiye'de, bariz ve mücbir sebeplerden dolayı öğretim elemanları ve öğretmenlerden birkaç hafta içinde uzaktan eğitime hazırlanmaları istendi. Bunun yanı sıra otorite, salgını esas alarak ve haklı olarak eğitim faaliyetlerinin her aşamasında derslere katılım ve değerlendirme gibi konularda öğrencilere gösterilen toleransı en üst düzeye çıkardı.

COVID-19 henüz çok yeni bir konu ve eğitim üzerindeki etkileri uzun süre tartışılacak gibi görünüyor. Ayrıca, COVID-19 salgınının yükseköğretim üzerindeki etkileriyle ilgili alanyazın şu an oldukça sınırlı ve doğal olarak konuyla ilgili tartışmaların çok derin ve kapsamlı olması da beklenemez. Salgının hayatımızın her alanında genişleyen etkilerinin sonuçları henüz görülmedi ve tüm bu nedenlerden dolayı, konuyla ilgili hiçbir analiz veya çıkarımın nihai olması beklenemez. Zaten alanyazında da uzaktan eğitim ile ilgili birbiriyle çelişen tartışmalar mevcut. Örneğin, bazı araştırmalar çevrim içi eğitim sürecinde ortaya çıkan öğrenme miktarının geleneksel yüz yüze eğitimden daha fazla olduğunu öne sürerken, bazıları çevrim içi eğitimin geleneksel yüz yüze eğitimin alternatifi olmayacağını öne sürmekte.

Bununla birlikte, uzaktan eğitimle ilgili belirli noktaların netleştiği savunulabilir. İlk olarak, eğitim bağlamında çoğunluk salgına gerekli altyapılar olmadan, hazırlıksız yakalandı. Öğrenciler açısından, uzaktan eğitimin teknik boyutlarının çok ciddi bir sorun olduğu artık çok net ve eğitimin her kademesinde, öğrenciler arasındaki en önemli eşitsizliğin teknik altyapılarla ilgili olduğu da ortadadır.

İkincisi, yakın gelecekte uzaktan ve çevrim içi uygulamaların eğitimin ayrılmaz bir parçası olması çok muhtemel görünüyor. Bazıları için çok yakında COVID-19 salgını geçmişte kalacak, ancak çevrim içi eğitimin, en azından yükseköğretim açısından, öğretim elemanı becerilerinin bir parçası haline gelmesi gerektiği de düşünülüyor. Genel anlamda, gelecekte yüz yüze eğitimi imkânsız bir hale getirebilecek salgınlara veya dünya çapındaki diğer olası krizlere karşı hazırlıklı olmamız gerektiği açıkça ortaya çıktı ve bu durum da uzaktan eğitim becerilerinin öğretmen eğitim programlarına entegrasyonunu önemli bir öncelik haline getiriyor.

Netleşen üçüncü nokta ise uzaktan eğitim sırasında uygulanan ölçme ve değerlendirme süreçlerinde yaşanan problemlerdir. COVID-19 salgınının ortaya çıkmasından önce bile, uzaktan eğitim sistemlerinde ölçme ve değerlendirme süreçlerinin önemli problemlerden biri olduğu zaten tartışılmaktaydı. COVID-19 salgınının ortaya çıkmasından bu yana, uzaktan ölçme ve değerlendirme sorunlarına bazı radikal çözümlere tanık olduk ve çoğunlukla gözlemler yoluyla, özetleyici başarı değerlendirmeleri söz konusu olduğunda, uzaktan eğitim sistemlerinin yeterince etkili olmadığını öğrendik. Uzaktan eğitimde ölçme ve değerlendirme açısından, üzerinde düşünülmesi gereken en mantıklı seçeneğin biçimlendirici değerlendirme süreçlerine odaklanmak olduğu da ortaya çıkmış oldu.