Perspectives of Preschool Children's Parents on Early Childhood Education During COVID-19 Pandemic*

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Abstract

This study examines the parents' perspectives on the adaptability and suitability of distance education for preschool children, distance education experiences at earlier ages and child-parent interaction during the COVID-19 pandemic. As for the data collection tool, the study used the questionnaire titled The perceptions of Parents regarding their Preschool Children's Adaptation to the Pandemic and Distance Education Practices during COVID-19 Crisis. A total of 146 parents replied to the questionnaire, which consists of three parts and 49 items. This descriptive study was conducted through quantitative data analysis. The results of the study showed that parents believe distance education practices are not efficient enough regarding improvement in children's learning processes and development areas. In addition, they believe that, despite the presence of various activities, the contribution of distance education to their children's development is quite limited when compared to face-to-face education in old normal. Also, parents opine that increasing amount of screen watching time, insufficient interaction and communication in distance education trigger some behavioral and emotional reactions in children. The findings highlight the re-examination of the functionality of distance education approaches and implementations in early childhood and the determination of their content and target audience intently.

COVID-19 Pandemi Döneminde Okul Öncesi Çocukların Ebeveynlerinin Erken Çocukluk Eğitimine Bakış Açıları*

Öz

Bu çalışma, COVID-19 pandemi döneminde çocuğu okul öncesi eğitim kurumuna devam eden ebeveynlerin uzaktan eğitim deneyimlerine, uzaktan eğitimin okul öncesi dönem çocukları için uygulanabilirliği ile uygunluğuna ve çocuk-ebeveyn etkileşimi konularına ilişkin bakış açılarını incelemektedir. Araştırmada, COVID-19 Sürecinde Okul Öncesi Dönem Çocuklarının Pandemi ve Uzaktan Eğitim Sürecine Adaptasyonuna İlişkin Ebeveyn Görüşleri anketi kullanılmıştır. Bu anket, üç bölümden, 49 maddeden oluşmuştur ve 146 veli tarafından doldurulmuştur. Betimsel nitelikteki bu araştırma, nicel veri analizi yapılarak desteklenmiştir. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre ailelerin çoğu, uzaktan eğitim süreçlerinin çocukların öğrenme süreçleri ve gelişimleri açısından yeterince verimli olmadığını düşünmektedirler. Aileler aynı zamanda yüz yüze eğitimin yerini alan uzaktan eğitimde, farklı türde etkinlikler yapılmasına rağmen bunların çocuklara katkısının eski normale kıyasla sınırlı düzeyde olduğunu düşünmektedirler. Ek olarak, ekran zamanının zorunlu olarak artmasının ve uzaktan eğitimde etkileşimin ve iletişimin yeterli düzeyde olmamasının çocukta birtakım davranışsal ve duygusal tepkilere neden olduğunu da düşünmektedirler. Eski normalde dahi okul öncesi eğitime erişim oranının düşük olduğu ülkemizde, uzaktan eğitim uygulamalarının fırsat eşitliğini daha da bozduğu aileler tarafından belirtilmiştir. Bu çalışmanın, erken çocukluk döneminde uzaktan eğitim yaklaşımlarının işlevselliğinin ve etkililiğinin gözden geçirilmesinde, içerik ve hedef kitlesinin belirlenmesinde katkısı olacağı düşünülmektedir.

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Genişletilmiş Özet
Giriş

Bu araştırma; okul öncesi eğitimi alan çocukların uzaktan eğitim deneyimlerini, süreçte yaşadıkları zorlukları, aileleri ile olan iletişimlerini ve genel anlamda uzaktan eğitimin erken çocuklukta uygulanabilirliğini, ebeveynlerinin perspektifinden incelemektedir. Dijital teknolojiler, daha erişilebilir ve mobil hâle geldikçe evde, okulda, iş yerinde kısacası toplumsal her alanda sosyal ve eğitsel pek çok olanaklar sunmaya başlamıştır. Erken çocukluk döneminde ve okul öncesi eğitimde dijital oyun ve öğrenmeye ilişkin tartışmalar son dönemlerde artış göstermiştir (Peirce, 2013). Okul öncesi dönemde dijital teknolojilerin başarılı bir şekilde kullanılması için iki kritik nokta önemlidir. İlki, teknolojinin okul öncesi eğitiminin amaçları ve programın kazanımları ile çok iyi bütünleştirilmesi; diğeri ise öğretmenlerin iyi eğitilmiş olması gerekliliğidir. Tahmin edileceği üzere pandemi süreci, bu maddelerin üzerinde düşünmeye dahi fırsat vermeden bir anda ortaya çıkmış ve uzaktan eğitimde teknoloji kullanımını zorunlu hâle getirmiştir. Bununla birlikte, okul öncesi dönem çocukları diğer yaş gruplarından farklı gelişimsel özelliklere ve ihtiyaçlara sahip olduğundan, onlara yönelik uzaktan eğitim uygulamalarının planlanması ve pandemi öncesi ile sonrası çocuklarda uyum stratejilerinin geliştirilmesi, eğitimciler ve eğitim politikası belirleyicileri tarafından öncelikli olarak ele alınması gereken konulardan biri olmalıdır. Uzaktan eğitim uygulamaları ile çocukların evde öğrenme deneyimlerinin niteliği ve niceliği, ebeveynlerin küçük çocukların uzaktan eğitim ile öğrenme süreçlerine ilişkin tutumları ve inançları ile ilişkilidir (Isikoglu Erdogan, Johnson, Dong ve Qiu, 2019).

Uzaktan eğitim televizyonda bir çizgi film izlemeye benzememektedir. Çocuğun, teknoloji kullanımını ve öğretmenin yönlendirmelerini beraber yürütmesi gerektiği için, küçük çocukların uzaktan öğrenme sürecine bağımsız olarak katılmaları mümkün değildir. Çocuk bu süreçte ebeveyninin ya da ilgili bir yetişkinin yardımına ve desteğine ihtiyaç duymaktadır. Yapılan araştırmalar göstermiştir ki veliler ile iş birliği yapmadan okul öncesi dönemde uzaktan eğitimin başarılması pek olası değildir (Kuzu, 2020; Tulum ve Öztürk, 2021). Okul öncesi dönemde uzaktan eğitim uygulamaları, çocukların yaş ve gelişimsel özelliklerine bağlı olarak çocukları ve ailelerini birtakım zorluklarla yüz yüze bırakmıştır. Bu zorluklar internet bağlantısında yaşanan problemlerden ve çocukların yetersiz destekten kaynaklı uzaktan eğitimde gereken verimi alamaması olarak belirtilmiştir (Altın ve Gündoğdu, 2021). Bununla birlikte, Nargiza Fatkhullaevna ve Nafosat Radjabovna (2021) uzaktan eğitim uygulamalarında karşılaşılan sorunların başında teknolojik araç-gereç/alt yapı eksikliği olduğunu öne sürmüşlerdir. Bazı araştırmalar ise okul öncesi dönem çocuklarının teknolojiyi uzun süre kullanımının ancak bir yetişkin rehberliğinde olması gerektiğinden evde öğrenme deneyimlerinin yeterince verimli ve anlamlı olamayacağını savunmaktadır (Gür ve Filiz, 2022). Annelik statüsüne bağlı rol beklentilerinin çeşitlenerek arttığı pandemi dönemine (Zeybekoğlu Akbaş ve Dursun, 2020) uyum sürecinde önemli rol oynayan ebeveynlerin bakış açıları ve değerlendirmeleri, üzerinde durulması gereken önemli konulardır. Buna göre, mevcut çalışma aşağıdaki araştırma sorularını ele almayı amaçlamaktadır:

1. Ebeveynlerin uzaktan eğitimin okul öncesi dönem çocuklarına uyarlanabilirliği ve uygunluğuna ilişkin görüşleri nelerdir?
2. Ebeveynler okul öncesi dönem çocuklarının uzaktan eğitim süresince hangi tür etkinliklere katıldıklarını düşünüyorlar?
3. Okul öncesi dönemde uzaktan eğitim uygulamalarında hangi eğitim yazılımları kullanılmıştır?
4. Ebeveynlerin, COVID-19 salgını süresince çocuklarının uzaktan eğitim deneyimlerine ilişkin görüşleri nelerdir?
5. Pandemi döneminde ebeveynlerin çocukları ile etkileşimlerine ilişkin görüşleri nelerdir?

Yöntem

Betimsel nitelikteki bu araştırma, nicel veri analizi yapılarak desteklenmiştir. Bu araştırmanın katılımcıları, İstanbul, Ankara ve Balıkesir il merkezlerindeki okul öncesi eğitim kurumlarına devam ederken salgın ile birlikte eğitimine ara veren 4-6 yaş arası çocukların gönüllü anne-babalarından oluşmaktadır. Araştırmada amaçsal örneklem yaklaşımlarından kartopu örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmıştır (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç-Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz ve Demirel, 2020; Creswell, 2012). Buna göre, araştırmacı çalışmanın amacına uygun olarak farklı okulların velilerinin bir kısmına ulaşmakta ve bu katılımcıların yardımıyla ve önermeleriyle farklı okullardaki velilere de ulaşıp katılımcı sayısını arttırmaktadır. Çalışmanın katılımcıları, pandemi sürecinde okul öncesi dönemde çocuğu olup uzaktan eğitim ile öğrenme süreçlerine devam eden ve çalışmaya gönüllü olarak katılmayı kabul eden 146 kişiden oluşmaktadır. Bu anne babalar, altısı özel yedisi devlet olmak üzere toplam 13 anaokulunun velisinden oluşmaktadır. Araştırmada, COVID-19 Sürecinde Okul Öncesi Dönem Çocuklarının Pandemiye ve Uzaktan Eğitim Sürecine Adaptasyonuna İlişkin Ebeveyn Görüşleri anketi kullanılmıştır. Bu anket üç bölümden oluşmaktadır. Bunlar sırayla; demografik bilgiler, ebeveynlerin COVID-19 sırasında çocuklarında meydana gelen değişiklikler ve dönüşümler hakkındaki görüşleri ile ebeveynlerin okul öncesi dönemde uzaktan eğitime yönelik tutumlarının ele alındığı bölümlerdir. Pandemi sürecinden dolayı, çalışmaya katılan velilerin tamamı anketi

çevrimiçi olarak doldurmuşlardır. Elde edilen nicel veriler istatistik programı kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar grafik, frekans ve yüzde tablosu olarak betimsel biçimde sunulmuştur.

Bulgular

Sonuçlar, uzaktan eğitim uygulamalarına çocukların %44.9'unun ($n = 66$) cep telefonundan, %63.9'unun ($n = 94$) dizüstü bilgisayarlarından, %15.6'sının ($n = 23$) ise masaüstü bilgisayar ve %27.9 ($n = 41$) tablet bilgisayar aracılığıyla katıldığını göstermiştir. Katılımcıların 34'ü (%23.4) kriz süreci bitip normal eğitime devam edilmeye başlandığında uzaktan eğitimin yüz yüze eğitime ek ve destek olarak okul öncesi dönemde devam etmesi gerektiğini belirtirken 77 katılımcı (%53.1) çocukların yaşına ve gelişimlerine dayanarak uzaktan eğitimin çocuklara uygun olmadığını düşünmektedir. Araştırmanın diğer bulguları, çevrimiçi öğrenmede çocukların öğretmenleri ile sırayla en çok sanat etkinliği (%76.2, $n = 112$), hikâye okuma (%68, $n = 100$), matematik (%63.3, $n = 93$), Türkçe (%44.9, $n = 66$), okuma-yazma (%45.6, $n = 67$), fen (%31.3, $n = 46$), drama etkinlikleri (%27.9, $n = 41$) ve diğer etkinlikleri (%17.7) yaptığını göstermektedir. Katılımcıların çoğu, uzaktan eğitim aracılığı ile çocukların fiziksel, zihinsel, dilsel, sosyal ve duygusal gelişim alanlarındaki kazanımlara oldukça sınırlı düzeyde ulaşabildiklerine inanmaktadır. Diğer yandan, katılımcı ebeveynlerin %29.7'si ($n = 43$) uzaktan eğitimin okul öncesi eğitimde hiçbir amaçla kullanılmaması gerektiğine inanmakla birlikte %27.6'sı bu konuda kararsız ve %42.8'i ($n = 71$) uzaktan eğitimin çocukların öğrenme süreçlerine ve gelişimlerine sınırlı da olsa katkı sağladığı için okul öncesi dönemde kullanılabileceğine inanıyor. Son olarak katılımcıların yaklaşık yarısı (%48.9, $n = 71$), çocukların öğrenmelerini çevrimiçi evde sürdürdükleri dönemde yaratıcılıklarının ve yaratıcı düşünme becerilerinin gelişmediğini düşünmektedir.

Ebeveynlerin %59.6'sı, uzaktan eğitim uygulamalarında dış çeldiriciler nedeniyle çocuklarının konsantrasyon sorunları yaşadığını bildirdi. Uzaktan eğitimin çocukla öğretmeni, arkadaşları ve öğrenme süreci arasına engeller koyup etkileşimi sınırlandırdığı için, katılımcıların büyük bir çoğunluğu (%75.2, $n = 109$) uzaktan eğitimin çocuğa sınırlı düzeyde katkı sağladığını düşünmektedir. Anne babaların %67.1'i ($n = 98$) çocuklarının okulsuz hayata uyum sağlamada zorlandığını ifade ederken %19.9'u ($n = 29$) ise çocuklarının okula gitmediği zamanlarda evdeki rutine rahatça adapte olduklarını belirtmişlerdir. Aileler, çocuklarda görülen olumsuz değişiklikleri; %63.7 ($n = 93$) uyku düzenlerinin bozulması, %34.2 ($n = 50$) saldırgan ve dürtüsel davranışlarının artması, %40.4 ($n = 59$) konuşma ve sohbet içeriklerinin değişmesi olarak sıralamışlardır.

Katılımcıların %67.1'i ($n = 98$) çocuklarının pandemiye ve uzaktan eğitim süreçlerine uyum stratejileri geliştirmekte zorlandıklarını ifade etmiştir. Diğer yandan ebeveynlerin çoğu (%66.4, $n = 97$) pandemi süresince yüz yüze eğitime devam edemeyen çocukları ile boş zamanlarını değerlendirmek için daha fazla etkinlik yaptıklarını bildirdi. Katılımcı ebeveynlerin %79.4'ü ($n = 116$) pandemiden ötürü okula gidemedikleri dönem çocuklarının televizyon ekranı karşısında geçirdiği sürenin arttığını belirtmiştir. Diğer yandan ebeveynlerin %77.4'ü ($n = 113$) çocuklarının interneti daha fazla kullanmaya başladığını, %68'i ($n = 119$) ise çocuklarının teknoloji kullanımının (cep telefonu, tablet bilgisayar, iPad, iPhone vb.) arttığını belirtmiştir. Katılımcılar, uzaktan eğitim uygulamaları nedeniyle çocukların sanal ortamlarda çok fazla zaman geçirmeye başlamaları ve çocuklarının uyku düzeninin bozulması gibi çocuklarının günlük rutinlerindeki değişiklikleri de vurgulamışlardır. Sonuç olarak ailelerin, çocuklarının ekran karşısında geçirdikleri süre, çocuklarının çevrimiçi ortamda karşılaştığı riskler, yaşadıkları sosyal izolasyon, ortaya çıkan sağlık ve davranış sorunları ile ilgili endişelerine ilişkin çalışma bulguları, COVID-19 pandemi sürecinde yapılan bazı çalışmalarla paraleldir.

Sonuç ve Tartışma

Uzaktan eğitime uyum sürecinde çocukların yaşına ve gelişimsel özelliklerine göre yetişkin desteğinin miktarı ve yoğunluğu değişmektedir. Okul öncesi dönemde çocuğu olan ailelerin, uzaktan eğitim sürecinde çocuklarının fiziksel, ruhsal ve zihinsel sağlığını koruma ve çocuklarının dilsel, motor, sosyal-duygusal ve bilişsel gelişimlerini destekleme konularında sorumlulukları daha da artmıştır. Evde çocuklarının gelişimsel ihtiyaçlarını fark etme ve karşılama, çocuklarına eğitsel destek sağlama sorumluluğu, beraberinde ebeveynlere aile eğitim desteği konusunu gündeme taşımıştır (Gür ve Filiz, 2022; Sonnenschein ve Stites, 2021). Anne ve babalardan çocuklarını desteklemeleri bekleniyorsa öncelikle eğitimcilerin, anne babaları desteklemeye istekli olmaları ve alternatif yollar bulmaya kararlı olmaları gerekmektedir. Bu nedenle uzaktan eğitim uygulamalarında okul-aile veya öğretmen-aile iş birliği önemli bir rol oynamaktadır.

Erken çocukluk döneminde, ailelerle iş birliği yaparak yaşanan teknolojik gelişmeler karşısında onların sorumluluk almalarına destek olmak ve eğitimde teknolojinin doğru ve etkili bir şekilde kullanılmasında rehberlik yapmak son derece önemlidir (Danby, Fleer, Davidson ve Hatzigianni, 2018). Küçük çocukların eğitimlerini sekteye uğratan kriz dönemlerinde ve sonrasında gelişimlerini ve öğrenmelerini iyileştirmek için hem erken çocukluk döneminin özellikleri hem de uzaktan eğitim uygulamalarının temel ilkeleri dikkate alınarak aşağıdaki öneriler sıralanabilir:

1. Çocuklarının eğitim hayatlarını ve sosyal-duygusal, dilsel, bilişsel ve fiziksel gelişimlerini bütüncül olarak destekleyebilmeleri için ebevenylerin işlevsel bilgi, beceri ve motivasyon kazanmalarına yardımcı olacak bazı eğitim programlarının düzenlenmesi önerilebilir. Böyle bir destek, kriz dönemlerinden sonra yüz yüze eğitim yeniden başladığında da çevrimiçi olarak devam etmelidir.

2. Uzaktan aile eğitimi programlarının temel amacı ailenin sağlıklı işleyişini teşvik etmek olmakla birlikte bu programların, erken çocukluk döneminin tüm gelişim alanlarını destekleyici etkinlik ve uygulamaları da içermesi gerekmektedir. Bunun yanı sıra, eğitimler iletişim ve ebeveynlik becerilerini desteklemelidir.

3. Pandemi ile birlikte değişen, evrilen ve gelişen uzaktan eğitim uygulamaları sadece ulusal düzeyde değil aynı zamanda okul düzeyinde de oldukça etkin bir şekilde planlanmalı; bilgi, içerik ve kaynaklar paylaşılmalı; yöntem ve materyaller özenle seçilerek velilere teknik destek, danışmanlık ve rehberlik hizmetleri verilmelidir.

Introduction

While the issue of how to incorporate digital technologies into practice and home life is a concern for practitioners and parents (Hatzigianni & Kalaitzidis, 2018; Huber, Highfield, & Kaufman, 2018), distance education practices, which have been presented by using various digital technologies with different durations, have functioned as a substitute to continue educational practices during COVID-19 crisis. This sudden shift to distance education has brought up the integration of digital technologies into the learning processes of young children which has also been a long-debated issue (Plowman, McPake, & Stephen, 2012). In this regard, some scholars and educators have rejected distance education for preschoolers because they have asserted that it gives harm to preschool children's social and emotional development and their process to get ready to primary school education (House, 2012; Zalaznick, 2019). Contrary to this, others have emphasized the benefits of digital learning such as understanding abstract concepts and incorporating them into collaborative learning and problem-solving activities (Clements & Sarama, 2019; Yelland, 2006). The recent discussions have mostly focused on building on contemporary work which shifts arguments away from a moral panic around time usage of new technologies, most particularly in the discussions around the 'screen time' (see Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2020; Hiniker, Radesky, Livingstone, & Blum-Ross, 2019) and the binary positioning of traditional play materials and new technologies at the opposite end of a continuum. They have also focused on how new technologies, which continue to evolve and emerge, as artefacts of the 21st century can enhance children's learning when used together with three dimensional materials that encompass various and complex explorations and forms of meaning making.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of students affected by the interruption of education in Turkey has reached approximately 25 million (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2020a). In the principle that education is targeted as a fundamental right (United Nations [UN], 1984), the establishment of distance education platforms around the world has accelerated. COVID-19 has affected life and forced life in many ways, resulting in a new regulation and evaluation of today's view of education (Bozkurt and Sharma, 2020). In this regard, different digital learning platforms have been created and typical education practices and models have been integrated for different educational levels in Turkey. Within this scope, the implementation of distance education has caused some concerns and discussions about the appropriate use of new technologies at lower education levels (Muñoz-Najar, Gilberto, Hasan, Cobo, Azevedo, & Akmal, 2021) and the risk of screen time overuse during class suspension, which can be harmful to their development (Bruni, Sette, Fontanesi, Baiocco, Laghi, & Baumgartner 2015; de Jong, Visscher, HiraSing, Heymans, Seidell, & Renders, 2013; Zeybekoğlu Akbaş & Dursun, 2020). In this context, early childhood educators and education policy makers should pay more attention to design distance education in early childhood contexts effectively and incorporate the activities that make use of digital technologies in early childhood curricula and policy agendas specifically. In attempting this, it is crucial to examine the parents' perceptions about the distance learning experiences of young children who continue their education online at home (Isikoglu Erdogan, Johnson, Dong, & Qiu, 2019). Although the effects of COVID-19 on families have started to become an increasingly popular research area (Jones, 2020; Kim, Araya, Hailu, Rose, & Woldehanna, 2021), we need to extend that research to Turkish families of preschool children and focus on distance education. In this regard, the current study focuses on the adaptability and suitability of distance education for preschool children, preschool children's distance learning experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, the parents' interaction with children during school closures in Turkey from the perspectives of parents.

Distance Education Practices in Early Childhood Education

As is well known, distance education, also known by different names such as mobile learning, e-learning, online learning, has been used as an alternative form of education all over the world following school closures due to COVID-19 pandemic. At first, distance education seems unusual in early childhood education (ECE), but after some period of time it has become more and more common at the K-12 level even in ECE. In Turkey, the implementation of distance education in early childhood settings started on March 30, 2020 with the decision of Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE) to switch to both the Education Informatics Network (EIN) (Eğitim Bilişim Ağı [EBA], 2020) and TRT-EIN TV (Özer, 2020). The distance education in the 2019–2020 academic year was implemented exclusively through e-content provided on EIN for kindergartners and preschoolers. Thus, the pandemic led to some changes in the educational policy decisions in the 2020-2021 academic year. In this context, different approaches to learning, such as hybrid, a combination of face-to-face and online learning, have started to be discussed in the educational process. Singh and Thurman (2019) defined distance education as the learning experience taken place over the internet either in the synchronous or asynchronous environment. Due to the pandemic, distance education has replaced formal education provided for children from different age groups both in Turkey and the world. In this respect, the educational practices which were carried out through traditional methods at all levels (including universities and vocational courses) were suspended on March 16th, 2020, and distance education practices have replaced face-to-face education despite some differences in practice.

With regard to *distance education*, Aldhafeeri and Khan (2016) asserted that distance education can provide a rich learning environment with the progress of new communication technologies. On the other hand, many researchers have indicated their concerns about the appropriateness and quality of distance education (O'Doherty et al., 2018) and emphasized the harmful effects on young children's social, emotional, and cognitive development (House, 2012; Lindahl & Folkesson, 2012). In addition to this, Kaufman and Khurana (2016) highlighted lack of participation and interactivity and increase of unsociability as the major problems of distance education. However, the view of digital technology use by young children being problematic has increasingly been replaced by the view that the appropriate and effective use of new technologies in early years settings can enhance children's early learning (Isikoglu Erdogan et al., 2019; Kumpulainen & Gillen, 2019). Similarly, Papert (1980) indicate that an important shift from a childhood in which children learn by doing and making new discoveries to *digital childhood* can be observable. Fantozzi (2022) explained in her book how to use technologies to promote learning in developmentally appropriate ways such as fostering children's storytelling skills, early coding skills, etc. Although distance education has long been discussed to be used in education (Leung, 2012; Yelland, 2018), this is the first time that it has been promoted and used for such a long period and on a mass scale.

In fact although how technology can be used to develop a digital culture that supports the ECE program's goals optionally had been discussed before the pandemic, making use of technology effectively for educational purposes in the distance education process became compulsory for educators, children, and parents during the pandemic. Digital platforms has been started to be used as an alternative way for all stakeholders of ECE to sustain socio-emotional and cognitive connection (Kanekar & Sharma, 2020). The implementation of distance education especially in early childhood causes some challenges and obstacles for educators, parents, and children (Altın & Gündoğdu, 2021) because distance education is quite different from watching a cartoon. These challenges are summarized as early childhood educators' lack of technological competencies (Nargiza Fatkhullaevna & Nafosat Radjabovna, 2021), lack of knowledge about interactive resources, user-friendly platforms on education, the ways of child-family interaction and ensuring children's psychological well-being (Alan, 2021). On the other hand, it seems difficult for young children to participate in distance education practices alone without the guidance of their teachers about technology and related content. For this reason, the child needs help and support from his/her parents or another adult during this process (Asmawati & Hidayet, 2020; Dong, Cao, & Li, 2020; Kim, Araya, Hailu, Rose, & Woldehanna, 2021).

Researchers and educators have debated whether young children's digital learning has provided benefits or caused challenges in the past decades. Some of them has advocated that distance education in those ages had caused social isolation, addiction to screen and physical health problems (Gjelaj, Buza, Shatri, & Zabeli, 2020; Jiang & Monk, 2015; Radesky, Peacock-Chambers, Zuckerman, & Silverstein, 2016; Plowman & Stephen, 2005) some research has classified the online risks and dangers resulting from online technologies under three categories: psychological problems, health problems and educational problems (Başaran & Aksoy; 2020). Under psychological problems, behavioral problems such as increased destructive behaviors, aggressivity, stress and technology addictions can be listed. In addition to this, sleep and feeding disorders which are closely related to the increase in the children's stress situations are classified under health problems. Lastly, children's parents having difficulty in following their children's distance education programs through digital tools and using technological tools effectively and appropriately are listed under the educational problems.

The Role of Parents in Distance Education during Preschool Period

During distance education, parents themselves had to take the necessary initiatives about their children's educational development. However, the fact that the dynamics and characteristics of parents have been different from each other resulted in each child to experience the distance education process differently. The parents with limited technological infrastructure, the parents having three or more children in their family, the parents who cannot have access to distance education tools and those who cannot use these tools effectively can be given as reasons to such different experiences (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2020b).

It has been advocated in some research that desired high quality early childhood education has not been achieved yet in Turkey even prior to the pandemic (Gol-Guven, 2020; Kuzu, 2020; Yaya-Bryson, Scott-Little, Akman, & Cassidy, 2020). In addition to this undesirable situation, there occurred a *digital gap* between those who received distance education and those who could not. The non-existence or inappropriateness of parental support and guidance to preschoolers' distance education resulting from the lack of the training and preparation for online teaching have reduced the quality a little more. Regarding this, some research findings emphasized the importance of trainings for parents to support their children efficiently in the distance education process (Gür & Filiz, 2022). The findings of some research related to preschool parents' views of distance education during COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that parents believed preschool children missed critical learning during the COVID-19 crisis especially in mathematics and social emotional engagement (Stites, Sonneschein, & Galczyk, 2021). Parents from different countries such as Hong Kong, Spain, Israel (Jews and Arabs), China, and the United States also

expressed their attitudes and perceptions about the experiences young children had with distance learning during COVID-19 pandemic (Sonnenschein & Stites, 2021). One of the crucial findings of the study by Sonnenschein and Stites (2021) was about the lack of sufficient training to engage in their children's distance education learning. On the other hand, the positive predicators were listed as parents' education and income and teacher support in young children's use of technology (Sonnenschein & Stites, 2021). Parents from Hong Kong emphasized the importance of more interactive online learning and desired better learning support from schools that facilitate children's learning during class suspension (Lau & Lee, 2020). In the report (Jones, 2020) *The Impact of COVID-19 on Young Children, Families, and Teachers* published in USA, it was indicated that parents with younger children believed that distance education caused an increase in screen time, lack of social engagement, lack of engagement/ focus/interest and stated that distance education was not age-appropriate.

The findings of the articles so far have emphasized parents' involving in their children's schooling that causes children to demonstrate better mental and educational health outcomes (Jeynes, 2003; Smith, Sheridan, Kim, Park, & Beretvas, 2020). Regarding this issue, some parental mediation types such as restrictive mediation that refers to setting and enforcing rules, instructive mediation that refers to discussing the content in the media, co-viewing that refers to consuming media with children were suggested because they increase the benefits of media use and lower the potential risks associated with media use among children (Lau & Lee, 2020). Considering the young children's developmental features and distance education requirements have discussed so far, it can be said that parental involvement is a major factor for an effective distance education process in ECE.

The Significance and Purpose of the Study

The studies, as mentioned above, have expressed that parents are not only the determinant of a children's development and learning, but they are the most important determinant during the pandemic. However, they have been unsure about their role and responsibilities in supporting young children's technological engagements (Hatzigianni & Margartts, 2014; Plowman, McPake, & Stephen., 2012). Parents have also limited abilities in providing distance education facilities for children (Herliandry, Nurhasanah, Suban, & Kuswanto, 2020). In this regard, Gromada, Richardson and Reese (2020) indicated that in addition to their responsibilities for their children's nutrition, care, and wellbeing, the families' responsibilities about distance education and their actions in supporting their children's studies at home put considerable burden on families. Keeping all these in mind, it is of great importance to examine parents' views of distance learning experiences of children in ECE during the COVID-19 pandemic which has offered new opportunities and unforeseen obstacles to the affected young children and their parents (Danby, Fleer, Davidson, & Hatzigianni, 2018).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the MoNE carried out various studies to transform the Education Information Network (EBA) which serves as a digital education platform into a distance education system that can be used by all students and teachers. Besides, three new television channels were established in cooperation with the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) within two weeks following the closure of the schools and *live lessons* were filmed (Özer, 2020). Akkaş Baysal, Ocak, and Ocak (2020) also indicated EBA and other distance education activities that have some positive features such as content, material type, organization, teacher, and timing have also some negative aspects that cause malfunctions in functioning and need to be improved. The digitalized education process has also affected families significantly as they take on new educational roles during the pandemic period (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). In the study carried out by Başaran and Aksoy (2020), the views of mothers and fathers on family life in the home environment during the COVID-19 epidemic were examined. The findings of the research related to parent-child relationships and behavioral problems in children indicated that the pandemic period had negative effects on children's behavior such as hyperactivity, stubbornness, disobeying the rules at home (Öngören, 2021; Topçu Bilir & Sop, 2021). Moreover, previous research findings revealed that parents of preschoolers stated their children experienced problems such as lack of material support, motivation, and concentration in the distance education process (Tulum & Öztürk, 2021).

Moreover, it is thought that developing a well-designed and sustainable distance education system in early childhood settings after the pandemic by adopting such an approach is possible only by collecting opinions of education shareholders - families, teachers, and school administrations - that have experienced and analyzed the distance education period. In addition to this, examining the opinions and experiences of parents in the distance education process carried out in order not to disrupt the educational activities is an important situation in determining what should be done in similar situations that may occur in the future and in responding adequately to any future crises. The results can be inspiring for educators in the creation of new education models designed such as remote synchronous or hybrid in the upcoming period. Considering all these issues, the research generally focuses on obtaining an overview of parents' perception about their children's distance learning experiences and readiness in conducting distance education. Accordingly, the current study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What kinds of distance learning activities did parents view that preschool children engage in during distance education?
2. Which educational software was used at preschool level for distance education practices?
3. What were the parents' perceptions about the adaptability and suitability of distance education for preschool children?
4. What were the perceptions and experiences of preschool children's parents in Turkey regarding the difficulties they experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. What were Turkish parents' views of their interaction with children during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Methodology

Research Design

In this research, the data was collected through an online questionnaire, and it was analyzed quantitatively, using frequencies and percentages. In other words, this was a descriptive study, and it was conducted through quantitative data analysis.

Participants

The participants of the current study are parents of 4-6 years-old children who were deprived of face-to-face education due to the pandemic while attending preschoolers in İstanbul, Ankara and Balıkesir city centers. In order to determine a representative sampling, an analysis was carried out according to school types and the researcher reached 146 parents by using snowball sampling, which is one of the purposive sampling approaches (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç-Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2020). These are the parents of children attending 13 kindergartens: six private and seven public. Out of a total of 146 parents, 139 (95.2%) of them are mothers and only seven (4.8%) of them are fathers. The majority of the parents are between the ages of 25-35 (see Table 1). In this study, it was paid attention to the fact the number of questionnaires sent to parents whose children were in public and private kindergartens was close to each other. Table 1 below displays demographic information about the participant parents and their children.

Table 1

Demographic Data About the Parents and the Children Participated in the Study

Variables		*n*	*%*
Relationship with child	Mother	139	95.2
	Father	7	4.80
Parents' age	20-25	56	38.36
	25-35	71	48.63
	35-45	19	13.01
	45-55	0	0
Child's gender	Female	64	43.8
	Male	82	56.2
Child's age	4	34	23.3
	5	49	33.6
	6	63	43.2
The number of children in the family	1	50	34.2
	2	67	45.9
	3	21	14.4
	4	6	4.1
	5 and above	2	1.4
The type of kindergarten attended	Public	27	18.5
	Private	119	81.5
The frequency of children's interaction with the teacher during the pandemic	Never	18	12.3
	1-2 times a month	47	32.2
	3-4 times a month	26	17.8
	Once or more a week	55	37.7
Internet access	Yes	143	97.9
	No	3	2.1
The child's attendance in distance education	Yes	124	84.9
	No	22	15.1

According to the Table 1, 81.5% (*n* = 119) of the participant parents have children attending a private kindergarten and 18.5% (*n* = 27) a public kindergarten. As shown in Table 1, 23.3% (*n* = 34) of these children are 4 years old, 33.6% (*n* = 49) are 5 years old and 43.2% (*n* = 63) are 6 years old. 43.8% (*n* = 64) of the children are female and

56.2% (*n* = 82) are male. In addition to this, 34.2% (*n* = 50) of the parents have one child, 44.9% (*n* = 67) two children; 14.4% (*n* = 21) three children; 4.1% (*n* = 6) four children; and 1.4% (*n* = 2) 5 children. Of these parents, 97.9% (*n* = 143) reported that they have internet access at home and 2.1% (*n* = 3) do not have any internet connection. Table 1 also shows 84.9% (*n* = 124) of the children stated that they participated in distance education practices and 15.1% (*n* = 22) did not receive distance education. Moreover, 18 parents (12.3%) reported that their children have never communicated with their teachers, while the other parents' reports were as follows: 47 parents (32.2%) 1-2 times a month, 26 parents (17.8%) 3-4 times a month, and 55 parents (37.7%) more than once a week.

Data Collection Instruments

The data used in this paper were collected via online questionnaire because of high levels of accessibility and lack of an alternative due to the restrictions in the context of the pandemic. This approach to data collection can be used when face-to-face is not feasible (Etang & Himelein, 2019).

The data collection instrument developed by the researcher in this study is a questionnaire called The Opinions of Parents regarding their Preschool Children's Adaptation to the Pandemic and Distance Education Practices during COVID-19 Crisis. The questionnaire consists of three parts. Google form is used to create survey as one of the data collection techniques. Then the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

The first part of the questionnaire includes 14 questions to collect demographic data about the children such as gender, age, the type of preschool education institution, internet access and participation in distance education practices. The second part of it includes 20 questions regarding preschool children's adaptation to the pandemic and changes observed in their behavior during the pandemic period. There are 15 questions in the final part in which parents can express what they think about their children's distance education experiences and the suitability of this education system for their children.

Some items in the questionnaire (1, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18) aim to obtain data regarding parents' opinions about the suitability of distance education for preschool children and its adaptability to their learning processes while some other items (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 19, 20) aim to collect parents' ideas about their children's distance education experiences. Also, some of the items (29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35) include information about parents' interaction with their children during the pandemic and others (21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28) about children's psycho-social changes.

In order to increase the validity of the questionnaire, expert opinions were taken as suggested by Fraenkel, Wallen and Hun (2011). Therefore, the draft version was evaluated by two experts, consisting of one specialist in the field of ECE and one specialist in the field of Child Development. They checked the questionnaire in terms of the format and the order of its parts, the clarity of the items and the appropriateness of the length of the questionnaire. Then, changes were made according to the feedback received. In the next phase, the questionnaire was piloted with five parents of preschool children before the actual administration and unclear items were corrected and revised. Finally, the items were checked by Turkish language experts and the questionnaire was finalized.

Data Collection Process

The data in the research were collected online. For this, the questionnaire form was transferred to the online environment with the help of Google Forms and then the link (URL) required to access the questionnaire was sent to the people who met the criteria determined for the participants. Both at the beginning of the survey and with the survey link, instructions regarding the application process were presented and it was stated that they could contact the researcher for questions or problems they might encounter during the application.

Data Analysis

After all the participants replied to the questionnaire online due to the pandemic, the quantitative data obtained were analyzed through descriptive statistics. For analysis, the data obtained were transferred to the IBM SPSS statistics program by the researcher and percentage/frequency values were calculated for each item in the questionnaire. The results were presented descriptively in graphics and tables of frequencies and percentages.

Ethical Issues

All information in this paper has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical concerns. The author declares that this study has been conducted in accordance with research and publication ethics rules. The author further declares that they have not submitted this article to any other journal for publication before. Subjects of the research voluntary participated to the study. Name of the participants were kept anonymous.

Findings

This section presents the findings obtained through the examination of the interaction and communication between parents and their children who had to stay at home during the pandemic, distance education practices and the changes in children. The findings are presented in tables and graphics and interpreted.

Overview of Distance Education Practices in Early Childhood Period

Below are the results of the analysis to determine the devices used by preschool children for distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic.
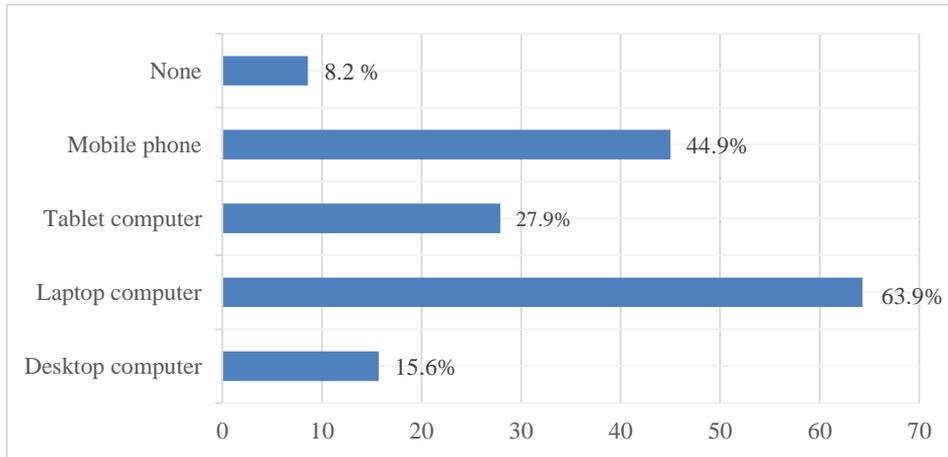

Figure 1. The devices used by children for distance education. Since some participants provided more than one answer for this question, the total number of replies is higher than the total number of participants.

Figure 1 shows that 63.9% (*n* = 94) of the children accessed distance education practices via laptops, 27.9% (*n* = 41) via tablet computers, 44.9% (*n* = 66) via mobile phones and 15.6% (*n* = 23) via desktop computers. 8.2% (*n* = 12) reported that their children did not use any technological devices. The reason for higher preference for laptop computers is that they have bigger screen size and mobile phones fail to support some modules and web-based programs (Oran & Karadeniz, 2007).
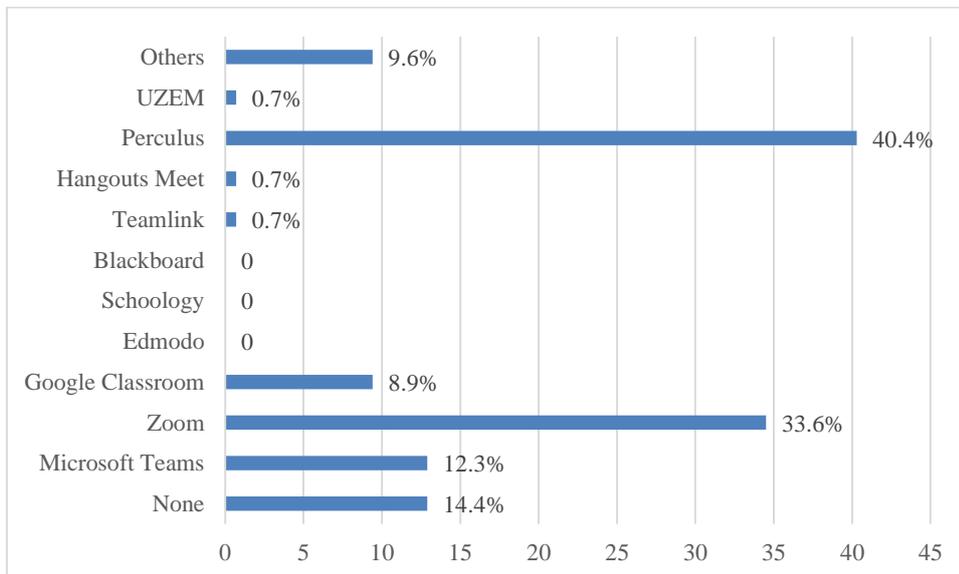

Figure 2. The educational software used by the participant teachers for distance education practices. Since some participants provided more than one answer for this question, the total number of replies is higher than the total number of participants.

Figure 2 provides data about which web-based systems were used by kindergartens offering distance education. Even some institutions started to provide live lessons due to intense demands of parents by using distance education systems listed in the graphics below. According to the graphics, 40.4% (*n* = 59) of the participants used Perculus, 33.6% (*n* = 49) Zoom, 12.3% (*n* = 18) Microsoft Team; 8.9% (*n* = 13) Google Classroom; 0.7% (*n* = 1) Teamlink

and 0.7% (*n* = 1) Hangouts Meet. The differences among teachers in terms of digital literacy levels and user-friendliness of each system were the determining factors for the popularity rankings mentioned above (Eğitim Reformu Girişimi [ERG], 2020).
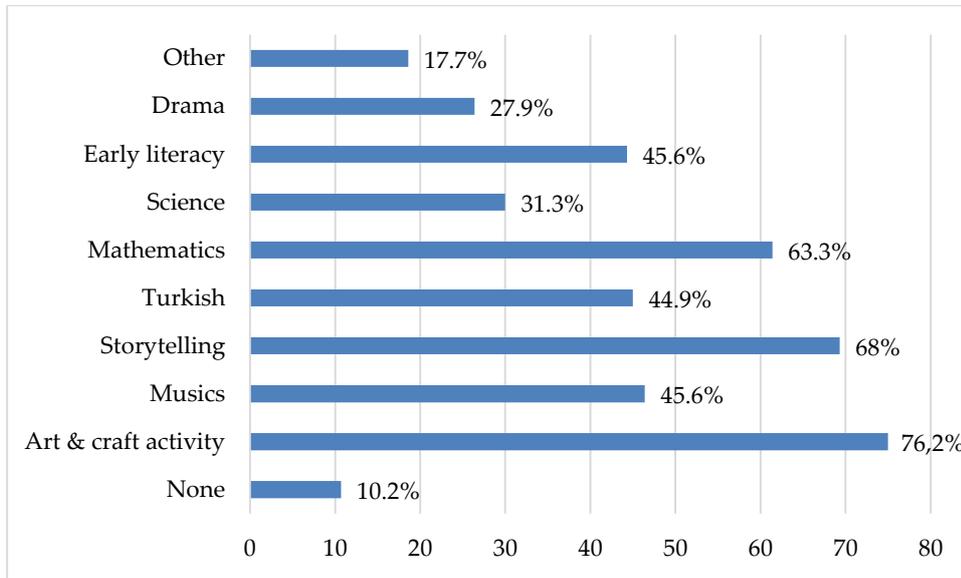

Figure 3. The activities carried out by children together with their teachers during distance education practices. Since some participants provided more than one answer for this question, the total number of replies is higher than the total number of participants.

Figure 3 shows the activities that children were engaged with their teachers in the order of frequency: art and craft activity (76.2%, *n* = 112), mathematics (63.3%, *n* = 93), story reading (68%, *n* = 100), reading writing (45.6%, *n* = 67), Turkish (44.9%, *n* = 66), drama activities (27.9%, *n* = 41); science (31.3%, *n* = 46) and other activities (17.7%, *n* = 26).
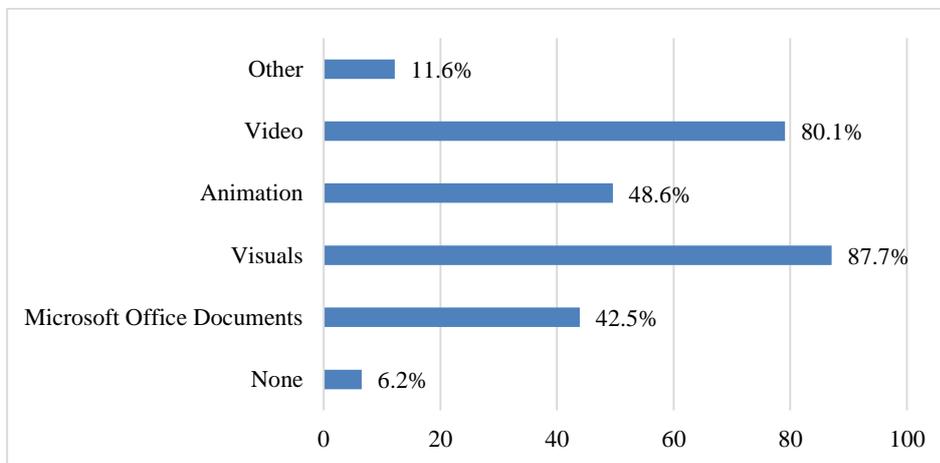

Figure 4. The educational tools used by the teachers in distance education practices. Since some participants provided more than one answer for this question, the total number of replies is higher than the total number of participants.

Figure 4 provides data about which educational tools were used by teachers in distance education practices. According to this graphics, teachers used visuals the most (87.7%, *n* = 128) in distance education, which was followed by videos (80.1%, *n* = 117), animation (80.1%, *n* = 117) and Microsoft Office documents (42.5%, *n* = 62); 9 (6.2%) of the participants reported that teachers had never used any materials.

Parents' Views on the Implementation of Distance Education for Preschool Children

The results of the analysis to determine the views of the parents on distance education given to the preschool students during the distance education process during the COVID-19 pandemic was summarized below.

Table 2

Frequency and Percentage Values Reflecting the Opinions of Parents Regarding the Adaptability and Suitability of Distance Education for Preschool Children

Items	I totally agree		I agree		Undecided		I do not agree		I do not agree at all	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
1. I find it suitable to continue preschool education through distance education practices during the pandemic period.	45	31	32	22.1	31	21.4	19	13.1	18	12.4
10. I believe that distance education practices are not efficient for preschool children.	33	22.8	42	29	28	19.3	33	22.8	9	6.2
12. I think distance education might replace face-to-face education in ECE.	1	0.7	2	1.4	10	6.9	43	29.7	89	61.4
13. The philosophy behind distance education is not appropriate for ECE.	56	38.6	35	24.1	25	17.2	20	13.8	9	6.2
14. Even after the pandemic period is over, distance education should continue only for parents to supplement and support face-to-face education	10	6.9	34	23.4	35	24.1	48	33.1	18	12.4
15. Even after the pandemic period is over, distance education should continue only for children to supplement and support face-to-face education.	5	3.4	29	20	34	23.4	51	35.2	26	17.9
16. I realized the importance of face-to-face education in ECE better during distance education practices.	98	67.6	38	26.2	3	2.1	4	2.8	2	1.4
17. Distance education should never be implemented in ECE.	29	20	14	9.7	40	27.6	52	35.9	10	6.9
18. Distance education practices disturb equality in education principle for preschool children.	34	23.4	37	25.5	33	22.8	38	26.2	3	2.1

According to Table 2, 53.1% (*n* = 77) of the parents found it meaningful to use distance education practices to continue ECE, which had to be suspended due to the pandemic, while 25.5% (*n* = 37) opined that this distance education was not efficient for young children and 21.4% (*n* = 31) were undecided about this issue. Majority of the participants (91.1%, *n* = 132) believed that distance education can never replace formal education. As for the reasons, 62.7% (*n* = 91) stated that the philosophy behind these practices was not suitable for the nature of ECE. 51.8% (*n* = 75) of the parents believed that distance education practices were not efficient for children at kindergarten level, while 19.3% (*n* = 28) were undecided about it, and 29% (*n* = 42) reported that they had benefitted from the practices.

Most of the participants (*n* = 77, 53.1%) believed that distance education was not developmentally or age-appropriate for young children so that it should not be incorporated in any learning process in early childhood settings. On the other hand, 34 (23.4%) of the participants reported that distance education should be used as a part of normal education and functioned as a supplementary and support for face-to-face education. The percentage of those who were *undecided* was 23.4% (*n* = 34). Moreover, 30.3% (*n* = 44) of the participants believed that distance education should be used for communication purposes to inform parents about their children's education and development when normal education started after the pandemic, while 24.1% (*n* = 35) were undecided and 45.5% (*n* = 66) disagreed with the idea.

Almost all the participants (93.8%, *n* = 136) stated that they realized the importance of face-to-face education due to the problems they themselves and their children faced while supporting their children during distance education practices. In addition, 29.7% (*n* = 43) of the parents believed that distance education should never be used in ECE, 27.6% (*n* = 40) were undecided and 42.8% (*n* = 71) believed that distance education can make up a substantial part of early learning. The percentage of those who thought that distance education disrupts equality for children who were in the period of ECE was 48.9% (*n* = 71). Table 2 also demonstrated that 33 parents (22.8%) were undecided about this issue and 28.3% (*n* = 41) of the participants opined that this situation did not cause any inequalities.

Parents' Views on the Distance Education Experiences in Early Childhood Period

The percentage and frequency distributions of parental opinions regarding the challenges and problems experienced in the distance education process are given in Table 3.

Table 3

Frequency and Percentage Values Reflecting the Opinions of Parents Regarding their Children's Distance Education Experiences and the Problems They Faced

Items	I totally agree		I agree		Undecided		I do not agree		I do not agree at all	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
2. I believe that continuing distance education practices in ECE will harm children emotionally and socially.	9	6.2	19	13.1	39	26.9	58	40	20	13.8
3. I believe that children are getting aggressive in front of screen during distance education practices.	19	13.1	31	21.4	27	18.6	55	37.9	13	9
4. Since interaction with teachers are confined to limited amount of time, children suffer from adaptation problems and fail to express their feelings and opinions.	32	22.1	58	40	12	8.3	31	21.4	12	8.3
5. The interaction of children with their teacher contributes to their development.	22	15.2	81	55.9	15	10.3	18	12.4	9	6.2
6. I believe that distance education practices improve children's cognitive skills.	9	6.2	14	9.7	34	23.4	34	23.4	54	37.2
7. I believe that distance education practices improve children's language skills.	5	3.4	15	10.3	43	29.7	54	37.2	28	19.3
8. Distance education practices improved children in terms of social-emotional development.	7	4.8	35	24.1	14	9.7	57	39.3	32	22.1
9. I believe that distance education practices improved children's creativity.	9	6.2	31	21.4	34	23.4	54	37.2	17	11.7
11. I believe that distance education practices provided limited contribution to children's developments since interaction with teachers are confined to limited amount of time.	27	18.6	82	56.6	23	15.9	7	4.8	6	4.1
19. Internet and technology use during the pandemic period resulted in children's getting addiction to them.	32	21.9	62	42.5	18	12.3	29	19.9	5	4
20. My child is facing concentration problems due to some distractors during distance education practices.	35	24	52	35.6	19	13	34	23.3	6	4.1

According to Table 3, the majority of the participants (53.8%, *n* = 60) did not believe that continuing education at kindergarten level through distance education practices give harm to children emotionally and socially, while a significant number of the parents (61.4%, *n* = 89) think that distance education did not improve children socially and emotionally. The reasons stated for this situation are limited amount of interaction between teachers and children, adaptation problems experienced by children and their failure to express their feelings – opinions. A high percentage of parents (56.5%, *n* = 82) who participated in the study believed that the activities carried out within a limited amount of time in front of computers without giving children opportunities to experience the process did not sufficiently contribute to children's language development. The number of participants who were undecided about this issue was 43 (29.7%) and 22.7% (*n* = 33) believed that these activities contributed to their language development. The number of participants who thought that these activities were useful for mental skills was 23 (15.9%), those who were undecided were 23.4% (*n* = 34). Finally, 60.6% (*n* = 88) of the parents believed that these activities carried out in front of screen did not sufficiently improve mental skills.

Almost half of the participants (48.9%, *n* = 71) did not believe that distance education improved children's creativity. As seen in Table 3, 23.4% (*n* = 34) of the participants were undecided about the issue and 27.6% (*n* =

40) opined that creativity of children increased thanks to distance education. In addition, the participants believed that distance education can give harm to children in some ways. For instance, the number of the participants who thought that use of the internet and technology in distance education causes addiction was 94 (64.4%) and 59.6% (*n* = 87) of the parents reported that external distractors caused their children not to concentrate on learning during distance education practices. Similarly, 50 parents (34.5%) thought that their children were getting more and more aggressive in front of screen; 27 (18.6%) parents were undecided and 68 (%46,9) parents did not agree with this idea. In other words, the majority of the participants (75.2%, *n* = 109) thought that distance education provided limited contribution to children's development since interaction is limited in this type of education due to obstacles between the child and the teacher and between the friends and the learning process.

Parents' Views on Parents' Interaction with their Children

The results of the analysis to determine their interaction with their children and their support provided for children's language, social-emotional, cognitive development, and motor skills during the COVID-19 pandemic are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Frequency and Percentage Values Reflecting the Opinions of Parents Regarding their Interaction with their Children during the Pandemic Period

Items	I totally agree		I agree		Undecided		I do not agree		I do not agree at all	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
29. I believe that our family interaction is better when compared to the past.	24	16.4	71	48.6	30	20.5	18	12.3	3	2.1
30. I do more activities with my child during the day.	24	16.4	73	50	15	10.3	30	20.5	4	2.7
31. I communicated with my child better during the pandemic period.	18	12.3	68	46.6	16	11	41	28.1	3	2.1
32. I believe that the activities we did together and the time I spent with my child sufficiently supported his language development.	13	8.9	84	57.5	22	15.1	21	14.4	6	4.1
33. I believe that I cannot sufficiently support my child's cognitive development with the activities I do	14	9.6	66	45.2	41	28.1	20	13.7	5	3.4
34. I believe that I cannot sufficiently support my child's social-emotional development with the activities I do	19	13	51	34.9	48	32.9	24	16.4	4	2.7
35. I believe that I cannot sufficiently support my child's motor skills development with the activities I do	17	11.6	66	45.2	35	24	23	15.8	5	3.4

As seen in Table 4, the number of parents who believed that communication within the family (65%, *n* = 95) and direct communication with the child (58.9%, *n* = 86) was quite high. Besides, 48.6% (*n* = 30) of the parents were undecided and 14.4% (*n* = 21) disagreed with this statement. The majority of the parents (66.4%, *n* = 97) indicated that they tried to do more activities in children's free time during the closure of school due to the pandemic. This situation demonstrated that the parents put in effort to contribute to the development of their children by assuming the role of a teacher at home despite other responsibilities. However, by doing activities and spending time with their children, 66.4% (*n* = 97) of the parents did not think that they supported their children's language development; 54.8% (*n* = 80) cognitive development; 47.9% (*n* = 70) social-emotional development and 56.8% (*n* = 83) motor skills development.

Table 5

Frequency and Percentage Values Reflecting the Opinions of Parents regarding the Changes in Behaviors and Emotional States their Children Who had to Stay at Home during the Pandemic

Items	I totally agree		I agree		Undecided		I do not agree		I do not agree at all	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
21. My child started to watch TV more throughout the period he had to stay at home due to the Pandemic	45	30.8	71	48.6	5	3.4	23	15.8	2	1.4
22. The internet use of my child increased throughout the period he had to stay at home due to the Pandemic	49	33.6	64	43.8	6	4.1	26	17.8	1	0.7
23. The technology use (iPad, iPhone, tablet computer, mobile phone etc.) of my child increased throughout the period he had to stay at home due to the Pandemic.	54	37	65	44.5	6	4.1	18	12.3	3	2.1
24. My child is negatively affected by pandemics since he cannot go to the school.	43	29.5	57	39	14	9.6	29	19.9	3	2.1
25. My child find it hard to adapt to the life without school.	57	39	41	28.1	19	13	21	14.4	8	5.5
26. My child's sleep order has been worse when compared to the past.	41	28.1	52	35.6	4	2.7	34	23.3	15	10.3
27. My child started to behave more aggressively and instinctively	19	13	31	21.2	16	11	58	39.7	22	15.1
28. My child talks about the virus too much.	15	10.3	44	30.1	14	9.6	61	41.8	12	8.2

Table 5 above displays data about parents' observations regarding their preschool children's behavioral and emotional reactions during COVID-19 pandemic period. The majority of the parents (68.5%, *n* = 100) reported that the pandemic has negatively affected their children because they could not attend their schools.

Most parents (67.1%, *n* = 98) stated that their children found it difficult to adapt to the life without school and 19.9% (*n* = 29) reported that they were able to adapt to the routines at home quickly when they could not attend their schools. The parents listed the negative effects they observed in their children as follows: the disruption of sleeping order (63.7%; *n* = 93); the increase in aggressive and instinctive behaviors (34.2%; *n* = 50); the changes in the content of chats and talks (40.4%; *n* = 59). The families reported that some changes were observed in their children's daily routines. For instance, spending too much time with technology due to distance education practices has led to sleep disturbance and problems. In addition to this, 68% of the parents (*n* = 119) believed that their children's technology use (tablet computer, mobile phone, iPhone, iPad, etc.) increased. During the pandemic, 79.4% (*n* = 116) of the participant parents reported that duration of playing digital games and watching television increased during the pandemic period. In addition to this, 77.4% (*n* = 113) emphasized the increased access to the Internet at homes.

Conclusion and Discussion

The success based on only using the internet technologies is not enough for distance education programs. The participant parents reported that their preschool children who received distance education did not have an efficient learning experience and effective interaction with their teachers because they could not express their emotions and opinions. Moreover, young children experienced concentration problems because the technology distracted them from the tasks and learning process. Motivation is the source of learning in early childhood learning (Theodotou, 2014). Although new generation children are familiar with technological devices such as television, computer, mobile phone and tablet computer, they do not have enough interest and information about using these devices as learning tools (Yelland, 2018). While teachers can attract their students' attention in face-to-face education environments by using their body language or interesting learning materials, by encouraging students' active participation in lessons and by giving feedback through effective questions (DiCarlo, Baumgartner, Ota, & Geary, 2016), it is quite difficult to apply these interaction channels effectively in distance education practices. Since it is not possible for preschool children to develop inner motivation automatically, guidance of teachers and school administration is essential so that children and parents will not face any problems in this issue.

Children's school life including significant routines such as spending their time in open air, moving physically and learning knowledge and skills about life interrupted by the lockdowns during the pandemic and this affects

children's various developmental areas negatively (Wang et al., 2020). In addition, families believe that they fail to develop their children's social emotional states, which is likely to occur due to financial problems, responsibilities in the family, educational support they need to provide and weak psychological endurance due to the negative feelings during the pandemic (Çaykuş & Çaykuş, 2020). International organizations listed the effects of the pandemic on children who cannot attend their schools as lack of socialization, being deprived of experiences such as games and different activities, and academic skills delay (Dong et al., 2020; Kim et. al., 2021; World Bank, 2020; World Health Organization, 2020). These findings are consistent with the findings of the current study.

It is well-known that children's learning becomes more effective when parents take part in and /or are interested in their education (Hornby, 2011). During adaptation process to the pandemic and distance education, the parents guided and supported children's development and learning more when the children's age lowered. The families assume serious responsibilities regarding this issue by taking into consideration the needs of young children and their developmental characteristics. It is possible to say that families try harder to support their children's language, motor and cognitive development although they do not believe that their efforts contribute to the development and early education of their children sufficiently. For this reason, parents also need to be supported and strengthened through distance family educations during the pandemic process so that they can give age-appropriate and meaningful support for their children. It can be said that teacher-parent or school-parent collaboration and interaction plays a crucial role in distance education practices.

In distance education, the learning environment is computer and the internet, where synchronous and asynchronous bond between young children and their teacher through technological devices has limited contribution to multiple development of the child and his/her academic learning. The main reason for this situation is that children are able to develop positive emotions towards environments reflecting relationship-based approach and cooperation and realize their learning thanks to such emotions. Relationship-based approach involves experiences through which children interact with their physical environments, teachers and society. However, the bond established in distance education practices in ECE is often of secondary importance since it focuses on teachers the most. Geldard, Geldard, and Foo (2017) emphasized that the services to be provided and the interventions to be made in case of crises should underlie certain principles. Among these principles are choosing appropriate methods and techniques according to the age and developmental stages of the child, encouraging his/her active participation in learning process and involving individuals around him/her in this process.

This study demonstrated that almost all parents believed that implementing distance education is less effective than face-to-face learning in early childhood educational environments. They reported that distance education doesn't support children's development and education in different areas sufficiently. The parent's views on distance education are parallel with many families' from China (Dong et al, 2020), Ethiopia (Kim et al., 2021), Australia (Ewing & Cooper, 2020), Spain (Otero-Mayer, González-Benito, Gutiérrez-de-Rozas, & Vélaz-de-Medrano, 2021; Martínez, Nieto, López, & García-Berbén, 2019), Indonesia (Lase, Zaluchu, Daeli & Ndraha, 2020), Latin America (Soltero-Gonzalez & Gillanders, 2021). In Kosova, although parents emphasized the use of technology improves their young children's overall development and school readiness in early years, they expressed that technology had a negative effect on children's wellbeing by resulting in physical development disorders or sleeping problems (Gjelaj et al., 2020). Along with this, parents' reports on their concerns about health and behavioral problems, screen addiction, social isolation, online risks are consistent with findings of some studies conducted during COVID-19 pandemic (Dong, Cao, & Li, 2020; Jones, 2020; Kim et al., 2021; World Bank, 2020).

It can be said that parental involvement defined as *"... parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children"* (Jeynes, 2005, p. 245) especially home-based parental involvement has gained prominence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic which has revealed an exceptional scenario in the educational field. In tandem with a growing responsibility of their children's development and growth in general, it is not surprising that educational expectations such as improving educational outcomes for their children has been of increasing burden to parents. As a result of this unexpected demand during distance education process, they felt unable to develop their children's learning with educational activities because their conventional role was not the teacher of a child (Kim et al., 2021).

A growing number of research has shown that concrete steps were taken in some countries to support parents in terms of both digital and early years pedagogies. For instance, some family programs were conducted in Spain (Martínez et al., 2019), family-school partnership and cooperation were increased through Internet and appropriate communication channels (Soltero-Gonzalez & Gillanders, 2021) and parenting e-book media (Asmawati & Hidayat, 2020) was provided to increase mothers' understanding of parenting well-being practices in early childhood. During the COVID-19 pandemic, various initiatives have been taken in Turkey to provide educational and psychological support for families. For instance, the pedagogical support programs titled *Help-Children Guide for Parents* were prepared to minimize the increasing burden on parents (MoNE, 2020c). Moreover, the learning resources titled *Distance Education, Close Interest* that involves suggestions about activities, games and daily

programs for preschool children were designed (MoNE, 2020d). When MoNE decided to implement all educational activities through distance education and to expand the content and scope of the educational implementations in the 2020-2021 academic year (MoNE, 2020a; 2020b), some precautions were taken, and these were reported to the teachers at preschool and kindergarten education level. These issues could be listed as guiding families about the child-friendly activities and having contact with children in groups at least three times a week. Furthermore, teachers are asked to get in touch with and motivate families to use the Early Childhood Educational Calendar and to design a daily plan with six activities. In addition to this, teachers are asked to use different methods to communicate with preschool children in group meetings and ensure that kindergartners and preschoolers follow the educational activity program for them on TRT-EIN Primary School TV (TRT-EIN Preschool) (MoNE, 2020a).

All these studies so far have shown that even when suspending formal education in schools to minimize the spread of COVID-19 is a necessary precaution to take, providing some assistance to parents about children's learning and family well-being minimized the hardship caused by the pandemic and distance education. To put it another way, offering meaningful supports to preschool children and their parents during the pandemic is vital in strengthening the process of the post-COVID-19 global recovery. It is worth noting that the philosophy and implementation of distance family educations during pandemic raise awareness about the alternative ways to get in touch with families and give a fresh impetus to parental involvement in early childhood. Without doubt, technology and internet access are necessary prerequisites for all parents in attempting this. Moreover, educators need to establish more contact with parents regardless of the level of training of families. For example, educators who work with parents can provide alternative activities and learning tasks with information about positive educational programming available to young children.

The parents believed that preschool children in Turkey had both technical and educational difficulties during the distance education process while some of them could not continue education at all. This study has brought opportunities to think about how to use distance education tools and new digital technologies in ECE effectively and to realize new opportunities. Accordingly, the following suggestions might be listed to improve preschool children's development and their learning during times of crisis by taking into consideration the basic principles of distance education practices as well as the characteristic of early childhood period:

1. The implementation and promotion of well-planned distance family educations for parents who have children at preschool level to support their children's education and development holistically.
2. It can be suggested to create some educational family programs that guide parents to acquire functional knowledge, skills, and motivation to support their children's academic, social, emotional, and physical development. Moreover, such support should continue online even when the children go on their face-to-face education in schools.
3. It may be suggested that trainings under distance family education should contain developmentally appropriate activities and practices supporting all development areas of early childhood period. In addition to this, parents should find opportunities to improve their communication and parenting skills with their children through these distance family educations.
4. Distance education practices should be planned quite effectively both at national and school level. Based on the parents needs and wishes, the necessary knowledge, content, and resources should be shared, technical support and counselling services should be provided for parents by deciding on effective methods and materials.

Some limitations exist in this present study. It is important to acknowledge that only a small number of participant responses were available for analysis. Therefore, the study results are unable to be generalized to all private and public preschools in Turkey because of the small sample size. However, the study potentially gives an insider perspective through parents' eyes about the needs of parents and their children during the distance education. Additionally, quantitative methods were preferred in this research. However, the quantitative findings can be complemented by qualitative information in the future studies to be able to hold a deeper and critical view. Lastly, the number of the participants from private institutions is more than the public ones which may affect the results.

Declaration of Competing Interest

I declared that there is no competing financial or non-financial interest that may affect the study.

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