The Problems Encountered by the Individuals with Autism Attending Higher Education During the Distance Education Process

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	Coronavirus disease which broke out in Wuhan/China in December 2019, identified as the Covid-19 Pandemic in a short time by the WHO (World Health Organization) (WHO,2020). Countries took many precautions as the virus spread to the whole world. After the rise in the numbers of the positive cases and deaths, distance education process started on 23rd of May 2020 as it started all around the world in order not to hinder the right to access education. Education carried out through distance education in higher education institutes and in schools of Ministry of National Education. After the problems encountered in the distance education process, lots of studies have been done on this subject. When the studies in the literature examined, no studies can be found on the problems of individuals with autism attending higher education. This study uses a qualitative approach and conducted through semi-structured interviews done with the parents of three higher education students with autism who studies in Konya. The results show that these students have problems in access to education, social interaction and the support that families need. Results also reveals that the teaching methods and homework aren't suitable for these students and these make them reluctant and indifferent to the lessons. Participants stated that they need to be informed about the process and they need psychological and social support. Suggestions for the implementation and further researches are made in light of the results of the study.

Yükseköğretime Devam Eden Otizmli Bireylerin Uzaktan Eğitim Sürecinde Karşılaştıkları Sorunlar

Makale Bilgileri	ÖZ
	1 Aralık 2019 tarihinde Çin'in Wuhan şehrinde ortaya çıkan koronavirüs hastalığı çok geçmeden Dünya Sağlık Örgütü (WHO) tarafından Covid-19 Pandemisi olarak tanımlanmıştır (WHO, 2020). Virüsün tüm dünyaya yayılması ile birlikte ülkeler birçok tedbirler almıştır. Vaka sayılarındaki artış ve ölüm haberlerinin üzerine eğitim sürecinin aksamaması için tüm dünyada olduğu gibi ülkemizde de uzaktan eğitim uygulamalarına 23 Mart 2020 tarihinden itibaren başlanmıştır. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı'na bağlı tüm okullarda olduğu gibi yüksek öğretim kurumlarında da öğretim faaliyetleri uzaktan eğitim yoluyla yürütülmüştür. Uzaktan eğitim faaliyetlerinde yaşanan sorunlar üzerine araştırmacılar tarafından birçok çalışma yapılmıştır. Alanyazında yer alan çalışmalar incelendiğinde yüksek öğretime devam eden otizmli bireylerin uzaktan eğitim sürecinde karşılaştıkları sorunları inceleyen bir araştırmaya rastlanılmamaktadır. Bu çalışma yükseköğretime devam eden otizmli bireylerin uzaktan eğitim sürecinde karşılaştıkları sorunların incelenmesi amacıyla Konya ilinde yüksek öğretime devam eden 3 otizmli bireyin ebeveynleri ile görüşülerek yürütülmüştür. Araştırma yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılarak nitel araştırma yöntemi ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Toplanan veriler betimsel analiz tekniğiyle çözümlenmiştir. Araştırma bulgularına göre, otizmli öğrencilerin erişim, sosyal etkileşim ve ailenin ihtiyaç duyduğu destek konularında isteksizlik, ilgisizlik; ders anlatımı ve ödevlerin bu öğrencilere uygun olmadığı; bilgilendirme, psikolojik ve sosyal desteğe ihtiyaç şeklinde katılımcıların benzer görüşleri ifade ettikleri görülmektedir. Araştırma bulguları ışığında uygulamaya ve ileri araştırmalara yönelik öneriler sunulmuştur.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout human history, there have been cases of pandemics that have affected a critical mass of people, and even the whole world. The Coronavirus disease that originated in Wuhan city of China on December 1, 2019, was labeled as 'Covid-19 Pandemic' by the World Health Organization (WHO) (WHO,2020). As a result of the fact that the virus has spread around the world, countries have adopted several measures. One of those measures is that distance education programs were implemented after face-to-face education was suspended. Following the official declaration related to the first confirmed case in our country on March 11, 2020, face-to-face classes were suspended in all schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education and in higher education institutions on March 14, 2020. Following the increase in the number of cases and reports of death, distance education programs have been implemented in our country as of March 23, 2020, as in the whole world to ensure that the education process might not be interrupted.

Distance education is defined as the ability to participate in an internet-based education system through the use of Internet technologies and computers (Keskin & Özer-Kaya, 2020). Implementation of distance education methods is applied in two ways: as synchronous and asynchronous. During the synchronous class sessions, students and instructors could communicate in a virtual learning environment by using either audio or video chat, or even both at the same time. Asynchronous learning is a method that allows students to access materials online, such as videos and audio recordings, that have been previously submitted to the system (Serçemeli & Kurnaz, 2020). Turkey has provided synchronous and asynchronous online courses for students in pre-school, primary, secondary, and high school institutions, as well as kids with special needs through TRT channels and the EBA internet platform during the distance learning process, whereas courses in universities have been carried out via UZEM (Distance Education Application and Research Center) (Gökbulut, 2021; Keskin & Özer-Kaya, 2020; Eken et all., 2020). Studies conducted on distance learning courses indicate that there have been several challenges faced such as technology, environment, insufficiencies in measurement and evaluation, affective disorders and lack of interaction, inequality of opportunity, and systemic issues. They also show that students who could not manage to create their learning plan experienced poor time management, and couldn't receive appropriate feedback, and couldn't express themselves adequately; teachers and academicians who had no experience of online teaching faced difficulty during those processes. (Kim & Padilla, 2020; Smalley, 2020; Gökbulut, 2021; Eken et all., 2020; Keskin & Özer-Kaya, 2020; Özdoğan & Berkant, 2020; Serçemeli & Kurnaz, 2020; Telli-Yamamoto & Altun, 2020). Further studies to be carried out to overcome the challenges addressed in the research reports will increase the efficiency of distance education.

Autism spectrum disorder is defined as a lifelong disability characterized by deficits in social communication and interaction; delayed language skills and repetitive patterns of behavior. Recently obtained findings suggest that the way autism spectrum disorders are defined has changed as a result of the new concepts. However, it does not seem possible to say for certain that characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have become different. ASD symptoms involve challenges with communication and social skills and compulsive-repetitive behaviors. These difficulties may adversely impact the quality of life in individuals with ASD. (Kaymak,2016; Güleç-Aslan,2016; Genç-Tosun & Kurt,2014, Nation & Penny,2008; Özdemir,2007; Özlü-Fazlıoğlu,2004). In other words, ASD-related challenges can cause the individual himself and his family members to have the most trouble in social situations.

Education is the key to minimizing the adverse impacts of ASD and maximizing independent living skills in terms of individual and social aspects. The goal of education for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder is to help them develop self-care skills, and daily and social life skills as well as academic skills, as guaranteed by legal bases such as Article 42 of the Constitution, Legislative Decree No. 573, and the Regulation on Special Education Services. What is targeted for also people with ASD, like all individuals, is to sustain their lives by adapting to social norms (Sucuoğlu, 2009; Turhan, 2015; NAC, 2009). The goal of education, in the simplest terms, is to help people with ASD become self-sufficient in their daily and social life.

In our country, education programs related to persons with ASD are implemented in accordance with the provisions of the Regulation on Special Education Services. Individuals with ASD are provided with educational practices in pre-school classes, general education classes at general education schools, special education application centers, special education job practice centers, and special education and rehabilitation centers for the purpose of resource rooms. Individuals with ASD are placed in the most appropriate educational environment based on the amount of support services they require according to the principle that ranges from the least restrictive setting to the most restrictive ones and it is ensured that these individuals are provided with education and training services through programs tailored to their learning characteristics and evidence-based practices (MEB, 2018; The Report of the Committee of Parliamentary Investigation, 2020; National Action Plan, 2016; Birkan, 2013). High priority is attached to ensuring that they are educated in the same educational environment with their typically developing peers as much as possible.

In 2010, the Higher Education Institutions' Advisory and Coordination Legislation for Handicapped (under law no: 5378) was released, and subsequently, disabled student units were established as a department affiliated with Vice-Chancellor in universities. This center operates to help disabled students benefit from educational services. Individuals with ASD who have completed their educational process within the scope of inclusive education in secondary education can continue their education after gaining the right to enroll in higher education institutions through exams organized by the Student Selection and Placement Centre (ÖSYM) or opportunities for transfer without exam (Özbey, 2018; Çıkılı & Karaca, 2017; Kalyon, 2012). YÖK (2020). According to data from 195 higher education institutions collected through a survey prepared by Working Group for Students with Disabilities, among 51647 students with disabilities, 27,782 of them receive education at associate degree level, 23,581at undergraduate level, 236 at Master's degree level, and 48 at the doctoral level, while there are 64 undergraduates with autism, accounting for 13 % of the total considering the distribution based on types of disabilities.

As in the education of all individuals, teaching activities for students with ASD are also offered via face-to-face and distance education methods. Distance education is defined as the delivery of learning to students without requiring them to attend school physically through the use of the Internet and technological tools (Akkuş & Kapıdere, 2015) The advantages of distance education have been emphasized in the analyzed studies, such as being learner-centered, contributing to the continuity of the learning process of students at all ages, providing time and space flexibility for students, allowing individuals to continue their social lives and fulfill their responsibilities on the one hand, while continuing their personal development on the other (Usta, 2018; Bozkurt, 2017; Gümüş & Fırat, 2016; Akkuş & Kapıdere, 2015). In short, it may be considered as a teaching activity that facilitates the process of student learning.

In today's conditions, however, the Covid-19 pandemic which has also affected our country as well as the whole world caused distance education to become a necessity rather than a choice. All educational activities in our country are conducted through distance education within the scope of health measures. With regard to this context, individuals with ASD who attend higher education can also pursue their studies through distance education. It is thus important to determine and analyze the experiences individuals with ASD have gained during the distance learning period in terms of their educational process.

In their research within the literature review discussing the education process of children with ASD during the pandemic process, Atlı&Yılmaz and Atlı (2020) suggest teaching the rules required in COVID-19 pandemic in individuals with autism spectrum disorder by video modeling. Smalley (2020) reported in his research that very few of the higher education institutions they analyzed during the pandemic process provided disability/accessibility facilities, underlining the importance of practices to provide educational opportunities to more disabled students. Distance education practices during the pandemic process have been discussed in terms of individuals with disabilities in the book titled as 'The Status of Students with Disabilities , Problems and Solution Suggestions in the Process of Distance Education within the framework for the Covid-19 struggle, which has been penned by Kalaç, Telli and Erönal (2020). Another study, which analysed post-graduate theses conducted in Turkey about distance education of the disabled individuals, emphasizes that the number of studies relating to distance education of disabled students was low (Karabey et all., 2020). According to the study conducted by Tekin (2019), it was revealed based on the interviews conducted with disabled students attending two different universities that they experienced challenges arising from physical, architectural structural, transportation, and housing facilities during their university education. In her study, Piştav-Akmeşe (2018) examined the opinions of disabled students enrolled in higher education institutions and disabled personnel. A similar study was also conducted by Sevinç and Çay (2017), which examined the problems facing individuals with physical disabilities in higher education. A similar study was conducted by Sevinç and Çay (2017) and the problems faced by individuals with physical disabilities in the process of higher education were examined. Çıkılı and Karaca (2017) concluded in their research as a result of the interviews with parents of individuals with ASD enrolled in higher education that the staff working in higher education institutions do not have sufficient information regarding ASD and academic adjustments for those people and that the arrangements are unsatisfactory. Emiroğlu (2008) suggests that some changes and settings should be made in computer technologies and internet services for visually disabled students attending institutions of higher education.

In conclusion, it is expected that the present study, which examines distance education for individuals with ASD pursuing postsecondary education could make a contribution to the literature. In this context, the purpose of this study is to investigate challenges faced by individuals with autism pursuing higher education in the distance education process.

METHOD

The present study is a descriptive study based on the analysis of the problems faced by individuals with autism pursuing higher education in the distance education process. The study was conducted using a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is a type of research in which data collection methods such as observation, interview, and document analysis are used and a process in which realistic and holistic presentation of events in the natural environment is followed (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018 .41). Qualitative research provides more

in-depth information about the topic being studied and allows to seek answers to questions that are difficult to define using traditional research methods (Buyukozturk, et all., 2010.254).

Participants

The participants of the study consisted of parents of three students with ASD pursuing in a higher education institution in Konya province in the 2020-2021 academic year.

Data Collection Tools

Research data are available on participants' views regarding the distance education process. The researchers have first combed through the literature and generated questions regarding views about the challenges faced by students with ASD who pursue higher education during the distance education period. After that, expert opinions were obtained by three faculty members working in the field of special education. Questions were embedded within a semi-structured interview form in line with the suggestions and corrections offered by experts.

The following questions were used in the interviews:

1. What difficulties has your child faced while logging into the system?
2. What difficulties has your child faced accessing courses?
3. What difficulties has your child faced related to keeping track of course records?
4. What difficulties has your child faced accessing exams?
5. What difficulties has your child faced regarding resources for courses?
6. What difficulties has your child faced with homework-related issues?
7. What difficulties has your child faced keeping in touch with his/her friends and sharing with them?

The interview technique was employed as a data-gathering method in this study. An interview, a way of communication that takes place verbally between at least two people, is defined as gathering data from the participants through the questions that need answering (Büyüköztürk et al., 2010 .161). In the interview technique that seems easy to conduct, the researcher needs to pay attention that errors such as lack of listening and prejudices do not occur for an effective interview (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018 .129; Öztürk et al., 2010 .161). The interviews began with one of those individuals with ASD. However, since the participant did not provide sufficient feedback and the other parents responded negatively to the interview with their kids because of the pandemic, the interviews were conducted with the parents themselves. One parent was questioned online using the Zoom program, while the other two parents were interviewed face-to-face by following the pandemic orders. The interviews lasted approximately 35 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded after the participants provided consent.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using descriptive analysis. In the descriptive analysis, the collected data summarized and interpreted within the framework of predetermined themes (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018). Audio recordings were collected in order to prevent data loss during the interviews. Afterward, these recordings were meticulously transcribed. The data were analyzed through the transcripts. The data were grouped under four major headings as difficulties relating to access, challenges faced in social interaction, and

support parents needed. The collected data were analyzed independently by two experts, and the final results were obtained by comparing the similarities and differences. The reliability of the study was calculated using the formula 'Consensus = (Consensus + difference of opinion)x100. During the interviews conducted with participants, the intercoder reliability was measured as 91 %.

Ethic

We hereby declare that research/publication ethics and citing principles have been considered in all the stages of the study. We take full responsibility for the content of the paper in case of dispute.

In this study, all rules stated to be followed within the scope of "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive" were followed. None of the actions stated under the title "Actions Against Scientific Research and Publication Ethics", which is the second part of the directive, were not taken.

Ethical review board name: Necmettin Erbakan University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research Ethics Committee

Date of ethics review decision: 18/06/2021

Ethics assessment document issue number: 2021/342

FINDINGS / RESULTS

The difficulties faced by individuals with ASD pursuing higher education through the distance education process were discussed in the interviews. Findings regarding the interviews have been collected under three headings :

Difficulties associated with accessing

a. Access to the System

All interviews participants (100 %) said they experienced minor issues caused by their own internet connection in the early stages of the distance education period, but it did not last much longer as the issue has been resolved.

"First of all, it is well known that there is an internet connection problem, which occurred in each house in the initial days. We attempted to resolve the connection problem, which happened between rooms in our setting. But, accessing the internet was not much of a problem for us. We just had some minor issues, that were not difficult to resolve. We did it. Since Ö. was in any case good at using the computer from the beginning, he dealt with those issues on his own, which did not pose a big challenge for us." (P1)

"We had no difficulty with technological facilities. Not in the early stages, but in the following ones, when distance education extended to the second year, E. had a lower motivation. He started not to participate in distance learning courses himself. We encountered such a problem." (P2)

"He managed to log in, but we initially had a bit of trouble. I don't know why? That's maybe because of his willingness or factors related to his psychological problems. I do not have any idea about that. There is no technical issue. He has his computer. He uses it and logs into his courses." (P3)

b. Access to the courses

Participants indicated that they had no technical difficulties with accessing to the courses, claiming that challenges facing them resulted from their children being easily distracted, their reluctance, courses that were not appropriate to the characteristics of students with ASD, and late-night classes.

"... Teachers of some classes, literature or one more course I guess, did not take the course on the planned time. Then, they sent videos after 8 p.m in the evening. So, he followed him like that. As he started to feel low in mood naturally after 8 p.m., he had a bit of difficulty, and thus he did not want to make or follow. I guess some lecturers are unaware of Ö.'s disability because they are lecturing as if he were a regular person. I personally think that lecturers should teach depending on the intellectual ability of those people or these students should be exempted from some activities. Classes are not conveniently taught for these people. Thus, it is required there be a change in the system." (P1)

"No. As I said before, it did not happen just because of impossibilities. But there were also times when E. stayed away from classes due to his preference or low motivation. He didn't actually like distance learning." (P2)

"There was a whatsapp group, in which he was getting some documents. But he lost connection when nothing was shared in the group. We then arranged it. After we had a conversation with his guidance teacher or other teachers, he actually attended classes smoothly." (P3)

c. Keeping track of course records

Participants reported that their children had no difficulty accessing course records, adding that reasons for not monitoring records were due to their inattention and unwillingness.

"Yeah, it has happened once or twice. Videos have not been uploaded on time or we encountered internet connection problems. Rest assured that we actually did not face big trouble for monitoring course records or loading videos. There were times when Ö. had thick skin as he lost his interest. I mean, Ö. became distracted about that." (P1)

"He's not following. In fact, it is great to access the course records in such a system. Nevertheless, he cannot utilize them." (P2)

"Actually, he followed courses smoothly when he managed to access, I mean, maintain courses. Then, he quit automatically. I was monitoring my son and asking 'what time is your class? or 'Which classes do you have today ?'. No problem occurred actually. It was because of his unwillingness." (P3)

d. Access to Exams

The opinions of the participants regarding access to the exams are as follows; losing internet connection, feeling panic in the exams conducted through video, facing difficulty with taking exams early in the mornings.

"There were, I mean, some moments when the connection was lost during the exams, especially in fall semester exams. But it was a problem that resulted from our internet connection. That is to say, we never faced difficulty accessing the system. Exams with camera systems, which are conducted through video, began just in the second semester. We had another laptop, by which he could access, follow and log in to the exams. However, he felt a bit more comfortable in the first exams as they were not conducted through webcams. During webcam-monitored exams, he felt a bit more anxious and got the idea that the exam should be

over quickly. He got bored since he was easily distracted." (P1)

"When we use our wifi while waiting for exams, the internet connection drops out randomly, which I guess is not related to the school, but internet environment. After we faced this trouble once or twice, we overcame this issue by using mobile data. We connect mobile internet to the computer." (P2)

"Yes, he didn't follow the course when it was early in the mornings. I regularly warned him saying Let's wake up at 8. I tried to wake him up actually but later he didn't follow. Much as I coddled him, he was thinking differently. In fact, there was no problem as he could easily access everything both classes and exams. He should have followed them." (P3)

e. Course-related Resources

The interviewed participants stated they had no difficulty with the course-related resources, and provided the resources, which the instructors recommended as a course resource, the problem originated from their children's unwillingness and inattention.

"The names of the course books recommended by instructors for the first semester were available. Ö. didn't leaf through them since he probably thought that courses conducted through videos would be sufficient for him. I guess it was because of his irresponsibility. He didn't pursue it further. I am just saying that he found what he learned from videos sufficient for himself as he was not in the school environment physically. We immediately provided the course books recommended by the instructors. Nevertheless, he never cracked them as he was not concerned. The whole problem is that he was not physically in the school environment. He is feeling like he hadn't begun higher education and was preparing for university examinations." (P1)

"No. We tried to find out on the Net somehow as much as we could when the instructors demanded us to search. Sometimes we found a resources, whereas we couldn't achieve another time. However, the instructors somehow tolerated him. They are still tolerating and never get annoyed. We have never faced such a problem because of this reason." (P2)

f. Difficulties with Assignments

The problems claimed by the participants as the difficulties with assignment-related issues are listed as follows: assignments do not fit into the characteristics of the students with ASD. On the other hand, students do not submit assignments because of their unwillingness.

"We really thank the instructors as they sent us some samples telling to prepare like that'. Based on them, we prepared assignments by searching on the Net with my support. Moreover, he had a project assignment from a business administration course. We, my wife, me, and Ö. put our heads together and prepared the assignment together through the internet. That is to say, Ö. couldn't have done this task on his own as it was too hard for him. Thus, as I said before, I think such children should take notes using different ways on these matters. Not everyone has the same perception. The child may have reached that level with a certain success but he cannot understand you easily or may not understand. Thus, a regulation may be issued perhaps for these children. That is to say, a regulation which arranges that disabled children should pass certain exams, receive those courses or be responsible for those assignments is required to be issued." (P1)

"He doesn't do so much. He just did a few of them. He doesn't do in general. I mean, he didn't as he himself was not eager. As I said before, distance education didn't work out well for him. He was doing well in face-to-face education. But he couldn't achieve as there was no

teacher or nothing that could encourage him." (P2)

There has been some trouble during the pandemic period. Normally, a book was required but he didn't know that, or he was not informed but I can't say for sure. For example, he should have provided that book for the exam beforehand, which posed a challenge as he was unaware. It was because of his own fault. If he had looked through or probably asked another instructor, he could somehow have provided that book." (P3)

Difficulties faced in Social Interaction

Regarding the problems faced in keeping in touch with friends and sharing with them during the distance education process, two of the participants said that their children do not have a friendship relation, while the other participant reported that his child couldn't keep in touch with his friends because of the pandemic.

"He does not have a friendly relationship. He has one or two friends, which means scarcely any. He scarcely ever meets up with them. The pandemic became a challenge on this matter. No, no! I mean, there is a chat box used during the online classes. I tell him to note down friends' names and have a text chat with them but he doesn't seem interested in such issues. That is to say, he doesn't have any friends at college right now." (P1)

Just because of distance education, or rather a pandemic period, he didn't have better communication with his friends. Much as I try to restrict him from using his mobile phone, I cannot manage to block him. He is calling someone. For example, he calls his favorite teachers and friends. We warn him all the time, not several times. Even though we can restrain him once, we cannot manage it another time. He is making phone calls without our knowledge. But, of course, he hasn't kept company with his friends like in a school environment. He wants to be socially active, that is to say, to keep face-to-face communication with his friends. E. felt so sad a year and a half into the pandemic. In other words, he hasn't been able to live his life to the fullest as a student." (P2)

As far as I know, he had a friend from college. Then, he stopped communication. I guess he transferred to another department. So, they have grown distant from each other. As far as I can understand from our conversation with Ö., they were friends before. In fact, I'm not telling him anymore to establish friendship with this one or that one. I told him before like that. We tried to guide him to establish friendship with our relative's son, or our neighbors, who was a few years older than mine. But it didn't work actually. He couldn't manage to get his lines crossed. In fact, he used to get along well with his high school friends, but they came apart now. Sometimes I ask him to keep in touch with his cousins on the internet. However, he feels disinclined. He grew up together with them but yet he refuses." (P3)

Support needed by parents

Answers given on the question "What kind of support did you as parents require during this period ?" are listed as support for information on the legal rights, psychological and social support.

"The university environment or life is an atmosphere we have never known. I myself did not study at university, while my wife is a college graduate. However, it would be better if someone had informed us by sending a note, issuing something, or texting a message, which says you have a child like this, so you have to do the following. We were quite ignorant when this period began. We didn't have any slightest idea about 'Where he would go, how he would listen to courses, which classes he would attend, or he would attend the courses in the class or

not when he began university. We have learned it all over time. More problems will still probably occur when school starts. That is to say, we have no idea. Then, someone has to tell or send e-mails to children's addresses, which explains that you should go somewhere or study there and find your instructors' classes somewhere. It would be much better if such an opportunity were provided without the need for our search." (P1)

"Yes, we did in some ways. As I said before, I really wish E. lived his university life as a student to the fullest. But eventually, the support supposed to be provided is not possible because of the ongoing process. There's nothing we can do when considered from this point of view. We jumped into the car and went somewhere and brought tea with us in an open area when the curfew was lifted in order that E. would be pleased even if all markets were shut down. Because E. doesn't like to stay inside at home for too long. On the contrary, he is keen on such activities as going out and walking outdoors. We tried to do such things. No one could have given that kind of possible support because of the pandemic. To be honest, I wish they could provide us support towards socialization. Otherwise, there are great opportunities and facilities regarding school or education system as the state or our university offers those opportunities too. But in terms of socialization, psychological support could have been provided as well. Talking therapy would be awesome since it perhaps happened to everyone. However, E's hands, for instance, turned white as a result of washing his hands constantly and he also experienced fears. He hasn't exactly managed to overcome his fears yet. He couldn't get over some of them, while we helped him overcome some others. Both psychological and social support could have been provided for E. and his parents as a family." (P2)

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS

In the present study, which aims to examine the difficulties in the distance education period faced by individuals with autism who pursue higher education, the participants' views are grouped under three major themes. Based on the participants' views in the study, which formed the themes, it has been observed that students with autism have expressed similar views regarding the support needed by the parents, access, and social interaction.

Views such as internet connection, students' unwillingness, and inattention draw attention as the difficulties faced in access, log in to the system, access to courses, tracking course records, access to exams, course-related resources, and assignments. The findings that technical problems faced during the courses cause negative perception (Kaleli-Yılmaz and Güven, 2015), web-based distance education is not effective as face-to-face education (Keskin and Özer-Kaya, 2020), issues such as not being able to reach the internet and the instructor (Serçemeli and Kurnaz, 2020); problems regarding the loss of motivation, insufficiency of resources such as internet and computers (Özdoğan and Berkant, 2020) seem to correspond with the findings of the present study. It is observed that findings which suggest that some lectures and assignments are not designed appropriately to the characteristics of the students with ASD promote the research findings showing that there are inadequacies in educational facilities and environmental regulations (Seyhan and Gültekin-Akduman, 2015), and students with disabilities experience difficulties with educational adaptations in the departments they pursue (Piştav-Akmeşe, 2018), and teaching staff members should be informed about related issues (Sevinç and Çay, 2018), and finally learning content, which may attract students' attention visually and audibly should also be developed.

It is crucial that opportunities which provide social interaction for individuals with ASD who have a lack of social interaction. The distance education process poses challenges for individuals with ASD on this issue. It is clearly seen the participants reported about the social interaction that

their children do not have any friends or they are not able to contact them. This finding is consistent with the findings which reveal a 'lack of communication, interaction and socialization (Özdoğan & Berkant, 2020), having a feeling of socially isolated (Serçemeli & Kurnaz, 2020). The findings revealed in the research conducted by Çıkılı and Karaca (2017) that undergraduate students with autism stated they got support from their friends for the difficulties they faced supports the impression conveyed in the present study that the distance education process is a disadvantage for students with ASD.

It is concluded from the participants' views about the support needed by parents that they need support in areas such as 'support for information on the legal rights, psychological and social support. In terms of being consistent with this finding, it is seen obviously that in their research Sevinç and Çay (2019) described the functions of the disabled unit as 'generating solutions to the needs of disabled students, providing necessary coordination and supporting them'. Besides, the fact Çıkılı and Karaca (2017) revealed as a result of their studies that arrangements for individuals with ASD are inadequate, is similar to the findings obtained from the present study.

Research findings reveal that students with autism who pursue higher education have experienced challenges during the distance learning process due to ASD-related reasons. Within this context, joint applications such as 'including one-to-one distance learning applications', 'providing cooperation among instructors or department/program teaching staffs, 'overcoming challenges faced together' can be developed in order for the students with ASD who pursue education in higher education institutions to utilize the distance learning in the upper level.

The present study is limited to the parents of three students with ASD who pursue a higher education institution in Konya province and their views regarding the distance education process. The present study was conducted using the qualitative research method. Various studies in which quantitative or mixed methods are used with large numbers of participants can be designed.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Giriş:1 Aralık 2019 tarihinde Çin'in Wuhan şehrinde ortaya çıkan koronavirüs hastalığı çok geçmeden Dünya Sağlık Örgütü (WHO) tarafından Covid-19 Pandemisi olarak tanımlanmıştır (WHO,

2020). Virüsün tüm dünyaya yayılması ile birlikte ülkeler birçok tedbirler almıştır. Vaka sayılarındaki artış ve ölüm haberlerinin üzerine eğitim sürecinin aksamaması için tüm dünyada olduğu gibi ülkemizde de uzaktan eğitim uygulamalarına 23 Mart 2020 tarihinden itibaren başlanmıştır. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı'na bağlı tüm okullarda olduğu gibi yüksek öğretim kurumlarında da öğretim faaliyetleri uzaktan eğitim yoluyla yürütülmüştür.

Uzaktan eğitim internet teknolojileri ve bilgisayar aracılığıyla eğitim öğretim faaliyetlerinin öğrencilere web tabanlı olarak ulaştırılması şeklinde tanımlanmaktadır (Keskin ve Özer-Kaya, 2020). Uzaktan eğitim senkron (eş zamanlı) ya da asenkron (eş zamansız) olarak iki şekilde uygulanmaktadır. Senkron şeklinde yürütülen derste öğrenciler ve eğitmen sanal sınıf ortamında sesli ya da görüntülü ya da hem sesli hem görüntülü olarak iletişim kurabilmektedirler. Asenkron ders ise daha önceden sisteme yüklenen video ve ses kaydı gibi materyallere internet üzerinden erişimin sağlanması ile gerçekleştirilmektedir (Serçemeli ve Kurnaz, 2020). Türkiye'de uzaktan eğitim ile ilgili okul öncesi, ilkokul, orta okul, lise ve özel eğitim öğrencileri için TRT yayınları ve EBA üzerinden asenkron ve senkron dersler; üniversitelerde ise UZEM (Uzaktan Eğitim Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi) üzerinden derslerin gerçekleştirilmesi şeklinde uygulamalara yer verilmiştir (Gökbulut, 2021; Keskin ve Özer-Kaya, 2020;; Eken, Tosun ve Tuzcu-Eken, 2020).

Tüm bireylerin eğitiminde olduğu gibi OSB olan bireylerin eğitiminde de öğretim faaliyetleri yüzyüze eğitim ve uzaktan eğitim şeklinde sunulmaktadır. Uzaktan eğitim internet ve teknolojik araçların kullanımıyla eğitimin öğrencilere okul ortamına gelmeden sunulması olarak tanımlanmaktadır (Akkuş ve Kapıdere, 2015). İncelenen araştırmalarda uzaktan eğitimin öğrenen merkezli olma özelliği, her yaşta bireyin öğrenme sürecinin devamlılığına sağladığı katkı, öğrencilere zaman ve mekan esnekliği sağlaması, bireylerin bir taraftan sosyal yaşamlarını devam ettirip sorumluluklarını yerine getirirken diğer taraftan da kişisel gelişimlerinin devamına olanak vermesi yönündeki avantajları vurgulanmaktadır (Usta, 2018; Bozkurt, 2017; Gümüş ve Fırat, 2016; Akkuş ve Kapıdere, 2015).

Bu araştırmanın amacı yükseköğretime devam eden otizmli bireylerin uzaktan eğitim sürecinde karşılaştıkları sorunların incelenmesidir.

Yöntem: Araştırma yükseköğretime devam eden otizmli bireylerin uzaktan eğitim sürecinde yaşadıkları sorunların analizine dayalı betimsel bir çalışmadır. Araştırma nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmanın katılımcılarını 2020-2021 eğitim öğretim yılında Konya ilinde bulunan bir yükseköğretim kurumuna devam eden 3 otizmli öğrencinin aileleri oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmada veri toplama tekniği olarak görüşme tekniği kullanılmış ve araştırmacılar tarafından hazırlanmış yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılarak katılımcılarla görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Görüşmelerden elde edilen veriler betimsel analiz ile çözümlenmiştir.

Bulgular, Tartışma, Sonuç: Bulgular üç başlık altında toplanmıştır; Erişim Konusunda Yaşanılan Güçlükler, Sosyal Etkileşim Konusunda Yaşanılan Güçlükler ve Ailenin İhtiyaç Duyduğu Destek. Görüşülen katılımcıların tamamı (%100) uzaktan eğitim sürecinin başında kendi internet bağlantılarından kaynaklı küçük çaplı sorunlar yaşadıklarını ama bu durumun çözülüp sorunun uzun süre yaşanmadığını ifade etmişlerdir. Derslere erişim konusunda katılımcılar teknik sorun yaşamadıklarını, yaşadıkları sorunların çocuklarının dikkatlerinin çabuk dağılmasından, isteksizliklerinden, ders anlatımlarının otizmli öğrencilerin özelliklerini uygun olmamasından, dersin akşam saatinde olmasından kaynaklandığını belirtmişlerdir. Katılımcılar çocuklarının ders kayıtlarını izleme konusunda erişimle ilgili sorun yaşamadıklarını, çocuklarının ders kayıtlarını izlememe nedenlerinin ilgisizlik, isteksizlik olduğunu ifade etmişlerdir. Görüşülen katılımcılar derslere yönelik kaynak konusunda sorun yaşamadıklarını, öğretim elemanlarının kitap olarak önerdikleri kaynakları temin ettiklerini bu konudaki sorunun çocuklarının isteksizliği, ilgisizliği olduğunu belirtmişlerdir.

Ödevlerle ilgili karşılaşılan sorunlar olarak katılımcılar tarafından, ödevlerin otizmli öğrencilerin özelliklerine uygun olmadığı, öğrencinin isteksizliğinden yapmadığı şeklinde sıralanmaktadır. Uzaktan eğitim sürecinde arkadaşlarına ulaşma ve paylaşımda buluma konusunda yaşanılan sorunlara katılımcılardan ikisi çocuklarının arkadaşlık ilişkisi olmadığını söylerken; diğer katılımcı çocuğunun pandemi nedeniyle arkadaşlarına ulaşamadığını ifade etmiştir. Aile olarak bu süreçte sizler ne tür desteğe ihtiyaç duydunuz sorusuna verilen yanıtlar yasal haklarla ilgili bilgilendirmeler şeklinde destek, psikolojik ve sosyal destek olarak sıralanmaktadır.

Derslerde teknik problemlerin yaşanmasının olumsuz algıya neden olması (Kaleli-Yılmaz ve Güven, 2015); internet ve eğitmene ulaşamama (Serçemeli ve Kurnaz, 2020); motivasyon kaybı, internet ve bilgisayar gibi kaynakların yetersizliği (Özdoğan ve Berkant, 2020); web tabanlı eğitimin yüz yüze eğitim kadar etkili olmadığı (Keskin ve Özer-Kaya, 2020) bulgularının bu araştırmanın bulgularıyla örtüştüğü izlenimi vermektedir. Bazı ders anlatımlarının ve ödevlerin otizmli öğrencilerin özelliklerine uygun olmadığı bulgularının, eğitim olanakları ve ortam düzenlemelerinde yetersizliğin olduğu (Seyhan ve Gültekin-Akduman, 2015); engelli öğrencilerin okudukları bölümlerde akademik uyarlamalar konusunda sıkıntı yaşadıkları (Piştav-Akmeşe, 2018); öğretim elemanlarının ilgili konular hakkında bilgilendirilmesi (Sevinç ve Çay, 2019); görsel ve işitsel olarak öğrencilerin ilgisini çekebilecek içeriklerin de geliştirilmesinin gerektiği bulgularını desteklediği görülmektedir. Sosyal etkileşim konusunda katılımcıların çocuklarının arkadaşı olmadığını, arkadaşlarına ulaşamadıklarını belirttikleri görülmektedir. Bu bulgu, iletişim, etkileşim ve sosyalleşme yetersizliği (Özdoğan ve Berkant, 2020); sosyal olarak yalıtılmış hisse kapılma (Serçemeli ve Kurnaz, 2020) bulgularıyla benzerlik göstermektedir. Çıkılı ve Karaca (2017)'nın yaptıkları araştırmada otizmli yükseköğretim öğrencilerinin karşılaştıkları sorunlarda arkadaşlarından destek aldıklarını ifade etmeleri, bu araştırmanın uzaktan eğitim sürecinin otizmli öğrenciler için dezavantaj olduğu izlenimini desteklemektedir.

Yükseköğretime devam eden otizmli bireylerin uzaktan eğitim sürecinde karşılaştıkları sorunların incelenmesinin amaçlandığı bu araştırmanın bulguları; otizmli öğrencilerin erişim, sosyal etkileşim konularında sorunlar yaşadıkları ve öğrencilerin ve ailelerin yükseköğretim faaliyetleri hakkında bilgilendirmeye, sosyal ve psikolojik desteğe ihtiyaç duydukları yönündedir.

Uzaktan eğitim ile yürütülecek eğitim içerikleri oluşturulurken engelli öğrencilerin özellikleri de göz önünde bulundurulması, engelli öğrenci birimlerinin öğrenci ve ailelere destek konusunda daha aktif olması; ileri araştırmalara yönelik benzer çalışmanın daha büyük katılımcı grubuyla gerçekleştirilmesi, farklı engel gruplarındaki yükseköğretime devam eden öğrencilerin uzaktan eğitim sürecinde yaşadıkları sorunların karşılaştırmasının yapılabileceği önerilmektedir.