

Toplum ve Sosyal Hizmet

ISSN: 2147-3374 / E-ISSN: 2602-280X

Nitel Araştırma Makalesi / Qualitative Research Article

The Experience of Distance Social Work Education: A SWOT Analysis

Uzaktan Sosyal Hizmet Eğitimi Deneyimi: Bir SWOT Analizi

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Başvuru: 13.10.2025

Kabul: 30.06.2026

Atıf: Kırlioğlu, M., Akarçay Ulutaş,
D. & Ustabası Gündüz, D. (2026). The
experience of distance social work
education: A SWOT analysis. *Toplum
ve Sosyal Hizmet*, 37(3), 1023-1048.
DOI: 10.33417/ tsh.1802956

ABSTRACT

Distance education in social work offers numerous benefits and diverse experiences, particularly regarding the profession's development and inclusivity. Despite these advantages, significant challenges are also associated with this mode of education. While existing research has predominantly examined distance education experiences during the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic from students' perspectives, this study provides a post-crisis, decision-maker-centered analysis spanning both mandatory and voluntary remote education periods (2021–2024). The study explores the strengths and weaknesses of distance social work education and raises awareness of the opportunities and threats (SWOT) related to this educational model. Conducted through qualitative research procedures, the study involved in-depth interviews with 12 academics serving as department chairs or vice-chairs in social work departments, who were involved in decision-making and organizing processes during mandatory remote education periods. The data analysis revealed that the main strengths of distance social work education include accessibility, advanced teaching techniques, and flexibility. In contrast, its weaknesses include the digital divide, technical and copyright issues, and challenges in interpersonal skills development. The opportunities of this educational model encompass global solidarity and justice, access to practice examples, and the promotion of a hybrid model. At the same time, threats include the high cost of technology, concerns about educational quality, and security and ethical issues. Crucial recommendations are provided to improve distance social work education practices, such as reducing the digital divide, enhancing technological access, developing interaction and relationship skills, establishing a clear framework for record security and confidentiality, and devising strategies to impart practical skills in an online environment.

Keywords: Distance Education, Social Work Education, SWOT Analysis

ÖZ

Sosyal hizmet alanında uzaktan eğitim, özellikle mesleğin gelişimi ve kapsayıcılığı açısından çok sayıda fayda ve farklı deneyimler sunmaktadır. Bu avantajlara rağmen, bu eğitim şekliyle ilgili önemli zorluklar da bulunmaktadır. Mevcut araştırmalar uzaktan eğitim deneyimlerini ağırlıklı olarak COVID-19 pandemisinin akut döneminde ve öğrenci perspektifinden incelemiş olmasına karşın, bu çalışma hem zorunlu hem de gönüllü uzaktan eğitim dönemlerini kapsayan (2021–2024), kriz sonrası sürece odaklanan ve karar alıcı konumundaki akademisyenlerin deneyimlerini merkeze alan bir analiz sunmaktadır. Bu çalışma, uzaktan sosyal hizmet eğitiminin güçlü ve zayıf yönlerini araştırmakta ve bu eğitim modeliyle ilgili fırsatlar ve tehditler (SWOT) hakkında farkındalık yaratmaktadır. Nitel araştırma prosedürleriyle yürütülen bu çalışmada, sosyal hizmet bölümlerinde bölüm başkanı veya başkan yardımcısı olarak görev yapan 12 akademisyenle derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Bu akademisyenler, zorunlu uzaktan eğitim dönemlerinde karar alma ve organizasyon süreçlerinde yer almışlardır. Veri analizi, uzaktan sosyal hizmet

eğitiminin temel güçlü yönlerinin erişilebilirlik, gelişmiş öğretim teknikleri ve esneklik olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Buna karşılık, zayıf yönleri arasında dijital uçurum, teknik ve telif hakkı sorunları ve kişiler arası becerilerin geliştirilmesindeki zorluklar yer almaktadır. Bu eğitim modelinin fırsatları arasında küresel dayanışma ve adalet, uygulama örneklerine erişim ve hibrit bir modelin teşvik edilmesi yer almaktadır. Aynı zamanda, tehditler arasında teknolojinin yüksek maliyeti, eğitim kalitesiyle ilgili endişeler, güvenlik ve etik konuları yer almaktadır. Uzaktan sosyal hizmet eğitimi uygulamalarını iyileştirmek için dijital uçurumun azaltılması, teknolojik erişimin artırılması, etkileşim ve ilişki becerilerinin geliştirilmesi, kayıt güvenliği ve gizliliği için net bir çerçeve oluşturulması ve çevrimiçi ortamda pratik becerilerin kazandırılması için stratejiler geliştirilmesi gibi önemli tavsiyelerde bulunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Uzaktan Eğitim, Sosyal Hizmet Eğitimi, SWOT Analizi

INTRODUCTION

The distance education process has been ongoing for many years around the world. Over the years, studies on the structure of distance education have focused on the skills expected from students and instructors (Dinh & Nguyen, 2020). These skills include using digital tools and applications; accessing technical infrastructure such as hardware and software; individualized study and planning, organizing human relations independently of time and space, autonomy, and inter-institutional (public, private, and non-governmental organizations) cooperation.

Distance education is considered as a method of open education (Saumya & Singh, 2020) and when the data of a study comparing the distance education models of 12 countries including Türkiye, Germany, the United Kingdom and India (Qayyum & Zawacki-Richter, 2019) are examined, it is noteworthy that the number of students enrolled in distance education in Germany is approximately 154,000, while in Türkiye this number is almost ten times higher.

Social work education is based on a competency-based curriculum design that focuses on the student's critical thinking, emotional responses, and decision-making abilities related to practice areas, including knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and emotional processes (Council on Social Work Education 2022a). The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) (2020) structures the standards of social work education around creating an education system that upholds the values and principles of the profession, such as respect, equality, and inclusivity. In social work education, where professional practice is crucial, distance education curricula must be based on structured guidelines for the ethical use of technology. In the United States, while 57% of doctoral programs in social work and 24% of master's programs offer an online option for most courses, it is seen that only about 10% of undergraduate programs offer such an option, and about 16% apply a hybrid model (Council on Social Work Education, 2022b). It is understood that practice courses are not offered online to any degree, and as the level of education increases, online courses in social work education are viewed as more acceptable.

Constructivist theory is an invaluable tool for clarifying the assumptions of distance education and creating effective instructional designs (Garrison, 1993). This theory highlights the importance of critical thinking and encourages students to develop skills that will help them succeed in a complex and uncertain world through active and collaborative learning (Mattar, 2018). It also explains how social work students embrace the values and ethical principles of the field while developing crucial intervention skills through real-life experiences in field practice (Lischer et al., 2021). According to Chung (1991), a constructivist learning environment is one where knowledge, authority, and responsibility are shared between teachers and students, with the teacher serving as a guide and organizing students into diverse small groups. Additionally, distance education empowers social work professionals to stay updated with technologies that facilitate virtual communication and practice (Dash, 2019), while allowing students to easily access online materials and videos, thus

facilitating information processing through technology (Aqda et al., 2011). The shift toward distance education presents major challenges, including student isolation, cultural differences, limited self-expression, and marginalization (Fox, 2017). To overcome these obstacles, it is critical to establish constructivist tools and learning environments that empower students to create their understanding and engage with course material (Tam, 2000). Research has shown that traditional education's interactive and collaborative aspects align with distance education. Additionally, constructivist learning theory promotes cognitive skill development and emphasizes the educator's role as a facilitator. The widespread adoption of distance education in the field has drawn attention to its impact on the essence and quality of social work education. Distance education in social work opens a world of benefits and diverse experiences, shaping the development and inclusivity of the profession.

A review of the existing literature reveals that distance education offers both specific contributions and notable limitations for social work education. On the contribution side, studies have reported that online platforms can enhance accessibility for students in geographically underserved areas, support the integration of diverse multimedia resources into teaching, and facilitate exposure to international perspectives and cross-cultural learning experiences (Freddolino & Knaggs, 2005; Saumya & Singh, 2020). Furthermore, technology-mediated education has been associated with the development of digital literacy skills that are increasingly relevant to contemporary social work practice, including virtual case management, telehealth interventions, and simulation-based competency training (Huttar & BrintzenhofeSzoc, 2020; Baker & Jenney, 2022). Recent studies have demonstrated that virtual simulations can effectively enhance students' clinical abilities, such as assessment, intervention, and digital communication skills, under structured mentorship (Heinsch et al., 2023), while broader frameworks increasingly call for the systematic integration of digital competencies into social work curricula rather than treating them as optional additions (Fjeldheim et al., 2024; Taylor-Beswick, 2022). On the limitations side, however, the literature consistently identifies significant concerns about the adequacy of distance education in meeting the profession's distinctive pedagogical requirements. Field practice, widely regarded as the cornerstone of social work education, remains particularly challenging to deliver in online formats, as it relies on direct client contact, supervised relationship-building, and real-time emotional processing (Alston et al., 2017; Jun et al., 2021). Although emerging educational models have attempted to recreate field-like experiences through video conferencing, remote supervision, and simulation-based alternatives (Heinsch et al., 2023; McInroy, 2019), research consistently indicates that wholly online formats still struggle to replicate the core experiential elements of in-person field practice, and that significant digital knowledge gaps persist between social work education and frontline practice expectations (Fjeldheim et al., 2024; Zhu & Andersen, 2021). Studies have also documented that distance education environments constrain the development of core professional competencies such as empathic communication, nonverbal observation skills, and the capacity to manage emotionally

charged interactions (Janigová & Zdráhalová, 2022; Zhukova et al., 2024). The absence of full eye contact, gestures, and body language in online formats slows emotional responses and increases the risk of misinterpreting emotional states, while group-based activities essential for building teamwork, negotiation, and interpersonal skills are significantly diminished in digital environments (Georgiou, 2026; Pesha & Kamarova, 2020). Additionally, concerns have been raised regarding the ethical dimensions of online social work education, including the security of recorded sessions, the confidentiality of sensitive case discussions, and the difficulty of maintaining professional boundaries in virtual settings (Reamer, 2013; Rodríguez-Martínez et al., 2024). Technology-mediated environments introduce uncertainties about the reliability and confidentiality of online tools (Afrouz & Lucas, 2023), while the blurring of personal and professional boundaries in digital spaces creates risks of dual relationships that remain insufficiently addressed by existing guidelines (Duncan-Daston et al., 2013; Barsky, 2019). Despite this growing body of evidence, few studies have systematically assessed both the contributions and limitations of distance social work education within a unified analytical framework that also accounts for the perspectives of academic decision-makers in specific national contexts.

Although a growing body of literature has examined distance education experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, these studies predominantly captured immediate crisis-driven reactions under mandatory remote education conditions (Dinh & Nguyen, 2020; Lischer et al., 2021; Drašler et al., 2021). Moreover, the majority of pandemic-era research has focused on student perspectives, leaving a significant gap in understanding the experiences and strategic evaluations of academic decision-makers who organized and managed department-level distance education processes. The present study addresses these gaps in several ways. First, the data collection period spanning from 2021 to 2024 captures not only the mandatory remote education phase but also the voluntary and hybrid transition period that followed, providing a longitudinal window into how perceptions and practices evolved beyond the initial crisis response. Second, by specifically targeting department chairs and vice-chairs in social work departments, this study foregrounds the managerial and organizational dimensions of distance education, perspectives that remain underrepresented in the existing literature. Third, applying a SWOT analysis framework moves beyond the conventional advantage-disadvantage dichotomy commonly used in pandemic studies, offering a four-dimensional strategic assessment that identifies not only current strengths and weaknesses but also future-oriented opportunities and threats. Finally, situating this research within the Turkish context, where the number of distance education students is approximately ten times that of countries like Germany (Qayyum & Zawacki-Richter, 2019) and where social work departments have rapidly proliferated, adds contextual specificity that enriches the broader international discourse. This study seeks to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of distance social work education, shedding light on the opportunities and threats (SWOT) encountered in this model. Through this approach, we aim to illuminate the genuine effects of this experience and promote its progress.

METHOD

Study Design and Procedure

In the study designed by the qualitative research procedure, a descriptive phenomenological approach was used to uncover the discovered meanings created by the experienced realities in the participants (Creswell, 2020). Phenomenology, based on Husserl's works explaining the synthesis created by experiences and the process of meaning-making, points to the meanings and emotional transitions found in people through the cognitive processing of symbols offered by real life (Husserl, 1999). This approach is consistent with the aim of this study, which is to deeply understand the experiences and observations of social work academics in managerial roles regarding distance education practices in social work departments. The interviews aimed to answer the following questions, in line with the research objective:

What are the observations regarding social work education conducted through distance education?

How are the strengths and weaknesses of the distance education experience defined?

What shapes the threats and opportunities posed by distance education practices in social work education?

Interviews were conducted between January 2021 and June 2024. The study used the snowball sampling technique, one of the purposive sampling methods. Since phenomenological design was used, interviews were conducted with heads of social work departments and deputy heads who directly taught during the distance education process and experienced the organization of the distance education process within the department. The data collection process in the study began with academics involved in shaping social work education in Turkey. Subsequently, connected experts helped us reach other academics willing to participate in the study. The data collection process was relatively extended over time. The rationale behind this extended data collection period was methodologically deliberate. Unlike studies conducted during the acute phase of the pandemic that captured participants' immediate and often crisis-driven responses, this study aimed to document how academic decision-makers' perceptions, evaluations, and institutional practices evolved as distance education transitioned from a mandatory emergency measure to a voluntary or hybrid pedagogical choice. This temporal breadth allowed the researchers to obtain reflective, experience-based perspectives instead of merely reactive evaluations. Participants interviewed in the later phases of data collection were able to compare the mandatory and post-mandatory periods, articulate lessons learned over time and provide more nuanced evaluations of the long-term viability of distance education in social work. This design choice constitutes a methodological distinction from many pandemic-era studies, which were cross-sectional snapshots of a rapidly evolving situation. The interviews were concluded when the participants' statements reached saturation (repeating responses) (Liehr et al., 2005). Before the interviews began, participants were informed about the focus of the study and issues related to confidentiality and privacy, and they were asked to approve

the voluntary participation form. The personal information of the participants was kept confidential, and their names were anonymized (P1, P2, etc.). All interviews were conducted by the research team using an online communication program (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams). Each interview lasted an average of one hour, was recorded using online tools (Microsoft Teams, MAXQDA), and was transcribed for qualitative data analysis stages.

Design of the Interview Guide

For the semi-structured form used during the in-depth interviews, a pool of questions was initially created by examining studies obtained through the DergiPark, Google Scholar, and Web of Science national and international databases based on the results of the searches conducted. In the second step, using the bricolage technique as expressed by Neuman (2012), the process of bringing together questions related to the subject was carried out to narrow down the question pool. In the created question pool, statements that were alike, incomprehensible, potentially leading for the participant, or that had expression issues were corrected, and questions suitable for the research were selected to reach the final version of the interview guide. The interview guide was evaluated by three social work academics with expertise in the field and a doctoral degree. Based on their feedback, the interview guide was revised into its final form.

The interview guide consists of four sections, excluding the section in which sociodemographic information is collected. The first section gathers information about participants' profiles based on their experiences with distance education. The second section gathers opinions on comparing distance social work education with on-campus education. The third section collects information on structural experiences related to assessment, evaluation, and the format of classes during the distance education process. The final section gathers participants' recommendations based on their experiences. In total, the interview form comprises 23 questions. Each section includes introductory questions (e.g., "Could you share some information about the initial stage of your experience with distance education?") and probing questions (e.g., "What tools and techniques did you use during this process referred to as off-campus education?").

Data Analysis

This study followed the six stages of Collaizzi's descriptive phenomenological data analysis process. Firstly, the transcripts were examined. The identified statements were formulated and compiled to create coherence in terms of meaning. This process helped to the identification of categories and themes. After integrating all emerging ideas and providing a comprehensive description based on the themes, the fundamental structure of the phenomenon was established by narrowing down this detailed description. The final stage of Collaizzi's approach involves returning to the participants to ensure the validity of the phenomenon's detailed and narrowed structure. To ensure the study's credibility, the collected data were summarized and presented to the participants for their approval to determine whether they reflected the participants' thoughts. Researchers triangulated the data

and reviewed it separately to enhance reliability and confirmability. To ensure transferability, purposive sampling was used, and detailed inclusion criteria and the study group were provided. Additionally, an independent expert reviewed the processes from the study's design to data collection, analysis, and results writing, providing feedback to the researchers.

Transcripts from 12 interviews were analyzed using MAXQDA 2022 (version 22.4.1), and 190 codes were applied. After the initial coding, the codes and memos were reviewed and reduced to 86 codes with similar meanings for further analysis. The concepts with the most coding were "The importance of interaction in social work education," "skill acquisition," and "the risk of devaluation of education". The Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) checklist (Tong et al., 2007) was used as a guide throughout the process of creating the qualitative research procedure, obtaining data, and reporting.

Participants

In the scope of the study, in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 social work academicians who serve as department chairs or vice-chairs in social work departments. They were involved in decision-making and organizing the processes during periods of mandatory remote education due to social issues such as the pandemic or earthquakes. The inclusion criteria for participants were holding the position of department chair or vice-chair in their department and having obtained at least two of the following degrees in the field of social work: bachelor's, master's, doctoral degree, or associate professorship. Five participants serve as department chairs, while the others serve as vice chairs. Four hold at least two degrees in social work, while the rest hold more than two degrees.

FINDINGS

An important contextual note should accompany the findings presented below. Distance education became a nationwide experience in Turkey not only during the COVID-19 pandemic but also during subsequent crisis periods, such as the devastating earthquakes of 2023. While the broader distance education experience has been extensively documented across various disciplines, the present findings specifically capture the distance education experience as it pertains to social work education—a discipline in which interpersonal skills, emotional awareness, field practice, ethical sensitivity, and relationship-based intervention constitute core educational components. The participants' evaluations, therefore, reflect not a general assessment of distance education technology or logistics, but rather a discipline-specific analysis of how distance education interacts with the distinctive pedagogical demands and professional values of social work. This disciplinary lens constitutes the study's primary analytical distinction.

Strengths

The Fants emphasizes the Role of Distance Education Regarding Course Materials

Participated issues facilitating the process in distance education, such as recording, re-watching, ubiquity, ease of access, and time management.

After video recording the online lectures... It provided us with material that we could use to improve our course materials or our teaching techniques.... More visual materials, then we had the opportunity to master some different techniques such as preparing more graphics, presentations, etc. (P1)

First, this process created an opportunity for space and time, which can be considered a strength. On the other hand, ease of access... It gives students the chance to watch it afterward. (P2)

Supporting Role of Distance Education for Traditional Education

Participants adopt a perspective of integrating social work education with distance education and see distance education tools as supportive tools in addition to strengthening traditional education.

...We could make the lessons more effective using multiple tools, but it would not replace traditional education. It will support traditional education. (P1)

...Introductory courses from different disciplines such as an introduction to sociology, and philosophy; these courses can be done with the distance education model. ... I think the other courses that we see as necessary can be done face-to-face. (P3)

Weaknesses

Existence of the Digital Divide

Academics emphasize the disadvantages of distance education, such as the difficulty of access for students living in rural areas, the inequality of opportunity to access education for students without means and resources, and the lack of technological infrastructure.

Even in some villages connected to the city center, we are faced with a situation where they cannot set up infrastructure in that village for months... because there are three or five users. Now, when I consider that distance education cannot reach everyone, this is a severe weakness. (P4)

We could have taught the children to interview the individual through Zoom; that is, we could have made them watch these videos during that interview, the children could have watched them, or we could have done sample interviews; we could not do that... (P5)

Copyright Issues

Regarding third parties, academics stated that they are careful about the images they share, their resources, and the many things they will use in online courses. They are concerned that someone else or an institution may claim copyright.

For example, I used to use a lot of visual cartoons, and then, I do not know, a piece from a comic book or a metaphor while explaining a situation from a website. I have withdrawn them all, and I do not use them... (P6)

Now, let us say I can put my book chapter on my website, but I signed a contract there as an author; that is, I give the entire book chapter to the student, just like I put an article there voluntarily... However, I cannot put it there now because I have a contract. After all, it will not stay only with that student; it may not. (P7)

Measurement and Evaluation Problem

Participants stated that they had an ethical dilemma about whether to use multiple-choice questions in measurement and evaluation. However, they tried to increase the efficiency of the education and training process that the students' needs.

I did all the exams classically. I never took a test online. It is not easy to read it. On the one hand, if I take a test, it will be over immediately. I went back and forth between that ethical problem and that ethical dilemma. (P5)

Some instructors argue that cheating during exams and students prioritizing efficiency over creativity undermines the quality and reliability of learning. This raises concerns about student performance and ethics in distance education and its impact on both students' and instructors' pedagogical approaches, productivity, and psychology.

...for example, they copy and paste the same thing from the lecture note to the dot and comma and send it to me. I feel worthless, so why am I taking that exam? Why am I wasting my time? (P6)

I am absolutely against online education because my productivity and the students' productivity have decreased. It is not only the students; maybe we always think about the students in our studies, but the psychology of the instructors is also critical. That efficiency is critical. (P8)

The Difficulty of Monitoring Students' Skill Acquisition in Social Work Education

Participants emphasized that social work education has a feature that develops and enriches the individual's personality. The view that distance education cannot achieve these unique qualities reflects that social work education is a skill-oriented process that prioritizes emotional intelligence.

... social work requires the development of specific personal characteristics such as awareness, wholehearted dedication, and psychological resilience... Therefore, it is not possible to experience these through distance education. We supervise the students during the lessons. (P1)

For me, social work education is not just an undergraduate education; it is an education process in which a person changes and develops. (P9)

It is stated that the issue of absenteeism in distance education is more flexible than in classroom education. Students are more tolerant of absenteeism for reasons such as suitability for home and health conditions. This situation makes it more challenging to assess students' attendance and can become a problem that can affect students' professional skills.

Absentee students do not attend; they do not need to follow up. How do we do that? For example, I would not trust someone who receives online education. (P5)

For example, yesterday, a friend said that a student did not attend any meetings; one of the internship students attended 1-2 times in the beginning and did not attend anymore. (P6)

The Importance of Interaction in Social Work Education

Participants stated that voice, word, and body language in communication could be better in distance education and that this situation negatively affects student interaction and course efficiency. Emphasizing the necessity of face-to-face education, academics emphasize the value of interaction and contact.

We cannot use body language online. Interaction is incomplete, and the efficiency decreases because we cannot actively use this pedagogical side of the course, communication with the student, and body language. (P10)

Our field is something that touches people, I mean sometimes physical contact. (P4)

The instant feedback offered by face-to-face education, the opportunity to make students feel their physical and emotional presence, and the ability of academics to enrich the course content by establishing a special bond with students stand out as deficiencies in distance education.

We were highly fed up with the feedback from the students; we renewed ourselves, changed our style of expression, and made things that needed to be understood more understandable. We have yet to have the opportunity to receive feedback. (P1)

Our education is something that should be done interactively together because it is something that we also learn from the students. The student tells me many things, and I learn most from them. (P5)

Threats

Technology Cost

The impact of considering a technology-based distance education model without solving the problem of income inequality in developing countries like Turkey is emphasized.

Access to technology and technological infrastructure is needed in society. It has a cost, and unfortunately, this cost is increasing, so cost growth is a threat... (P11)

An academic stated that access to technology is insufficient in society and that the cost of this situation is increasing. The academics saw the high cost of even having a computer or internet connection as a threat, especially in countries where poverty is increasing and income inequality is deepening.

The Risk of Devaluation of Social Work Education

Existing problems in social work education and uncertainties regarding their solutions make it challenging to implement distance education practices effectively. Pointing out that the problems experienced in current practices negatively affect student experience and quality in social work fields, it is emphasized that transitioning to distance education may be risky without solving these problems.

Our studies on distance education and open education faculties are very different from ours in the distance education operation abroad... We currently need help with the practices. (P11)

The participant emphasizes the idea that the easily accessible feature of the distance education model may devalue social work education and cause it to lose its seriousness. This view points to the concern that the value of education may decrease with easy accessibility.

I believe that easily accessible things like distance education create a feeling of worthlessness. (P9)

In an age when information is so easily accessible, the view is that only accessing information poses a threat. In other words, an education model that focuses on the result rather than the process will eviscerate social work education.

What is the impact of the ecosystem approach I give in class with the client? I do not do it by explaining it, a student comes to my room, and that student is worried about something... he/she comes and tells me about it. I say something to him/her there, and how I say something is passed on to him/her. (P11)

Participants state that the implementation dimension requires more time and development. They think this model still needs to solve the field of practice fully.

This application area of social work education cannot be solved by distance education, and if it is done remotely, it must be practiced... (P10)

Risk of Reuse of Records

Clarify ethical issues like how records in distance education are stored, when they are destroyed, and how they are shared. For example, the question of what will happen to the records kept in the distance education process regarding third parties can make academics uneasy.

...for example, where will these records go? It can be shared in any way. How will it be stored, and why? None of these are under my control. (P11)

The fact that the recordings can be watched again and are open to being cut into pieces and shared may interrupt what the participants have to say and tell.

On the one hand, there is something you believe in, and you want to say it, but on the other hand, there are some possibilities that your good intentions may be misused. (P12)

... Nowadays, the slightest criticism and comment can be immediately stigmatized. In such an environment, you cannot say everything in a virtual environment. (P9)

Risk of Tracking Records by Different Persons

In distance education, students attending classes at home with family members or other people can blur the boundaries between the student and the instructor. Being watched by family members while attending classes in the home environment may make it difficult for students to feel comfortable and cause them to avoid discussing course-specific issues. This situation brings ethical issues to the forefront and points to the need for instructors to develop skills to cope with these situations.

I ask the students about their participation; for example, one of them says, "I watch all your lessons with my mom. Everyone at home knows you, teacher...(P4)

Opportunities

Adaptation to Global Development

It was emphasized that offering social work education on online platforms or remotely can strengthen global solidarity and global justice by making universal values shareable and defensible. In the interviews, they stated that it is essential that the social work education process is carried out with a hybrid model and that online education and practice-based courses are essential.

Social work education will be more global, and the field of practice in developing or underdeveloped countries will be able to develop itself or become an action from global developments quickly. (P12)

It can be hybrid, so how are we going to do it? We need to determine the standards, e-resources, thinking about how we can do the application with technology, conducting experimental studies, in other words, can provide opportunities in this sense. (P5)

Easy Access to Successful Application Examples

By designing the courses according to the distance education model, lecturers or social workers working in different cities, universities, and institutions are included in the training program of universities outside the city, university, or institution where you are located.

It was impossible for my students to do internships in these fields or see those organizations in the region we are in. However, now we have tried to turn this negative situation into a positive one by inviting field experts to the classroom environment. (P4)

A group of our students are learning Arabic, for example, through different online certificates or training programs. They take this as an opportunity to work, especially with migrants in the future... (P3)

DISCUSSION

In this study, which addresses the views of social work academics on social work education offered through distance education tools, the strengths and weaknesses of this model, as well as the threats and opportunities foreseen for social work education, were explored. The model's strengths are listed as the role of distance education in facilitating access to course materials and supporting traditional education. Academics shared in detail the advantages they gained from video recordings of online courses. One of these advantages is the improvement of course materials and teaching techniques. The quality of teaching improves when online education makes better use of visual aids, graphics, and presentation techniques. In their study on traditional and distance social work and pedagogy higher education in Brazil, Vaz Vaez Gomes and Maciel (2015) concluded that distance education is a step towards democratization and contributes to the expansion of higher education by enabling the institutionalization and expansion of education.

The digital divide, one of the model's weaknesses, points out that the lack of technological infrastructure creates an inequality of opportunity and resources. Difficulty accessing tools such as the Internet and computers is a barrier, especially for students living in rural areas (Dinh & Nguyen, 2020). Since the welfare level of all societies and their view of education is not on the same plane, it is thought that distance education, considered an indicator of equal opportunity in participation in education, may turn into an indicator of the digital divide. Second, lack of technical skills and copyright issues. In addition, copyright issues may arise when using resources for educational purposes such as multiple reproduction, digitization, and online publishing (Ncube, 2011). The third refers to adequate access to the learning outcomes of the courses. Factors such as lack of in-class interaction and communication, limitation of student-lecturer relationships, lack of student feedback, loss of spontaneity in classroom interaction, and decreased discussion environments were

weaknesses of distance education. In a study conducted with Vietnamese social work students who experienced distance education during the pandemic, students stated that they could not get the same excitement and motivation when they switched from live discussion to online discussion (Dinh & Nguyen, 2020). Since social work education is built on interaction, this is a matter of concern in distance education (Janigova & Zdrahalova, 2022). Special qualities such as practical skills and empathy may not be fully developed through distance education. Tracking absenteeism and evaluating student participation may become difficult. McCarthy et al. (2022) mentioned that if faculty members are sensitive about the feedback they give to students in distance social work education, they can encourage meaningful development for the student. It is emphasized that providing immediate feedback to students in online education positively affects their participation in the learning process (Blondeel et al., 2022). In distance education, educators and students agree that the inability to practice online, the limitation of social interactions, and knowledge assessment are the biggest disadvantages of this educational model (Drašler et al., 2021). Academics emphasize the importance of face-to-face interaction and using body language to increase students' motivation, especially those who are shy or hesitant to speak. While in traditional education, it is possible to understand student reactions and evaluate the effects of the course, the lack of these dynamics in distance education may negatively affect the teaching process. These views reflect the commitment to the traditional education model, emphasizing the importance of an effective pedagogical experience in social work education. Concerns about educational standards in the distance education process, which virtual platforms can support, continue (Dash, 2019). In terms of field practice, conducting relationship-based social work practices with the client and not meeting with supervisors (Al Lily et al., 2020) are interpreted as contradicting the essence of the social work profession even in processes that make distance education compulsory, such as the pandemic. In the face of unethical situations encountered in the evaluation process in distance education, such as cheating and having someone else take the exam, some researchers state that they are working on a face recognition system to solve the problem and increase the efficiency and reliability of the system (Ozdamli et al., 2022). The need for different strategies to increase honesty in online assessment exams (Sevnarayan & Maphoto, 2024) and to raise awareness about information security risks (Saeed, 2023) is emphasized.

The threats foreseen in the provision of social work education through distance education tools are categorized as the high cost of access to technology, the weakening of the link between the content and quality of education by easy access to information, and the uncertainty about the archiving and re-sharing of records taken during distance education and the number of participants in the courses. In addition to the positive aspects of the distance education process, it is also argued that it carries the risk of disconnection and related learning delays and causes commercialization in higher education and digital education inequality (Matczak et al., 2023). The difficulty of providing training with important practical components, such as interview skills and field experience, which correspond

to an essential place in social work education in a digital environment, stands out (Lischer et al., 2021). The security and management of the records kept during the distance education process cause concern among academics. It is also emphasized that security and ethical issues such as the uncertainty of the management of the records, who can access the records, unauthorized sharing of the records, and how they will be archived should be clarified. Zeng and Luo (2022) highlight that universities that switched to online education, especially during the pandemic, carry out this work alone without creating a system. It is stated that those working in the field of social work experience dilemmas with the idea of records being open to everyone while defending ethical values. Students and lecturers worry about the potential misuse of their words online. Thus, it is emphasized that distance education can increase the level of stress (Drašler et al., 2021). It seems more valuable to evaluate the standards and framework of distance social work education, the specific areas and dynamics of this form of education, and ensure complete suitability for accreditation, competence, and professional employment (Kurzman, 2019). Therefore, higher education institutions and academics should develop appropriate procedures to solve the ethical problems encountered in distance education, ensure the security of records, and increase the efficiency of education.

The opportunities envisaged in distance social work education are ensuring global solidarity and justice, providing easy access to practice examples, enriching social work resources, and making them open access. There is no single model for the future of social work education, where applied education is of central importance (Lischer et al., 2021), and the hybrid model is highlighted by the necessity of field practice (Dash, 2019). Although professional practices are exemplified through role-plays, guest professionals, or different interactions in skills-based education, the difficulty of providing a level of reality and emotional transfer to the student in the online environment is still thought-provoking (Alston et al., 2017). On the other hand, the results of studies (Dash, 2019; Dinh & Nguyen, 2023; Secret et al., 2016) report that distance social work education is more facilitating in learning different perspectives in interaction and relationships according to student experiences should be examined.

It is important to acknowledge that several findings of this study—such as the digital divide, challenges in skill acquisition, and the importance of face-to-face interaction—are consistent with the results reported in studies conducted during the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic (Dinh & Nguyen, 2020; Lischer et al., 2021; Drašler et al., 2021). However, this convergence should be interpreted not as a limitation but as an empirical confirmation that these challenges are structural and persistent rather than temporary crisis-related phenomena. The fact that academic decision-makers continued to identify the same core issues years after the initial emergency transition suggests that these problems have not been adequately addressed through institutional or policy-level interventions.

Moreover, several dimensions of the present findings extend beyond what pandemic-era studies have documented. First, the threat category in the SWOT analysis—particularly concerns about the

reuse of records, third-party tracking, and the long-term ethical implications of archived educational content—reflects a level of strategic and forward-looking concern that was largely absent from early pandemic research, which understandably prioritized immediate adaptation challenges. Second, the opportunities identified by participants, such as the potential for global solidarity, easy access to successful practice examples from other institutions, and the deliberate adoption of hybrid models, represent a post-crisis maturation of perspective. During the pandemic, these were expressed as hopes; in the present data, they appear as emerging institutional realities being actively shaped by departmental decision-makers. Third, the Turkish context introduces unique structural factors—including the rapid expansion of social work departments, the scale of distance education enrollment, and ongoing debates about accreditation and professional recognition—that are not captured by studies conducted in other national contexts.

Therefore, while the overlap with existing literature validates the robustness of the present findings, the study's contributions lie in (a) demonstrating the persistence of these challenges beyond the crisis period, (b) capturing the evolved and strategic perspectives of academic leaders, (c) applying a comprehensive SWOT framework that reveals future-oriented threats and opportunities, and (d) grounding these findings in the specific structural dynamics of Turkish social work education.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

This study explores distance social work education experiences, but it's important to address several limitations. (1) While the study used snowball sampling to reach academics from different regions, we must closely examine regional experiences. By including representation from various geographical areas and different types of universities, such as public, private, or foundation institutions, we can gain a richer understanding of these experiences. (2) While qualitative research is valuable for exploring experiences, a mixed-methods approach could provide more concrete insights into course learning outcomes and student-instructor interaction levels. (3) The study is currently limited to academic experiences and would greatly benefit from including perspectives from students, field social workers, and policymakers to offer a more holistic view. (4) It's important to note that the study lacks a long-term monitoring aspect. Given the ever-evolving technological landscape and the ongoing pandemic, evaluating long-term effects is crucial. (5) Ethical issues were a primary focus for participants, and it's essential to ensure that these are fully reflected in the interview format to align with the study's purpose. Future studies should strongly emphasize the ethical dimensions of distance education practices, particularly concerning student data security and privacy.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive review of distance social work education. The research examined this educational model's strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities. Among the model's strengths, facilitating access to course materials and supporting traditional education stand

out. In particular, the advantages of online courses with video recording allow for the development of materials and teaching techniques. Moreover, eliminating space and time boundaries in distance education facilitates access to students and allows them to watch the course materials later. However, the weaknesses of the model should be addressed. Factors such as the digital divide and lack of technical skills indicate that technological infrastructure deficiencies create inequality of opportunity.

Furthermore, there is a need to emphasize the necessary training and knowledge of digital technology to implement distance education effectively. To summarize, this study has brought essential clarity about distance social work education. We have thoroughly examined its strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities, establishing a foundation for future studies in this field. By capturing the perspectives of academic decision-makers across both mandatory and voluntary distance education periods and by employing a SWOT framework that extends beyond the conventional advantage-disadvantage analysis, this study offers a temporally and analytically distinct contribution to a field predominantly shaped by cross-sectional, student-centered, pandemic-era research. These findings may contribute to developing a more effective and inclusive approach to distance education.

Practical Implications

The practical implications of this study include some crucial recommendations for improving distance social work education practices. To reduce the effects of the digital divide, it is essential to assist students in accessing technology and to support them in developing their technical skills. This can be done by providing access to computers, internet connection, and other necessary tools. Interaction and relationship skills, essential in social work, must also be developed online. It is essential to increase student-faculty interaction and encourage student collaboration and discussions. A clear framework for the security and confidentiality of records in distance education should be established. Ethical standards should be set to protect student data and prevent unauthorized sharing. Various strategies should be developed to develop practical skills in an online environment, such as field experience. For example, virtual simulations or interactive learning tools can be used.

ETHICAL INFORMATION ON RESEARCH

All materials used and study procedures followed in the qualitative research conducted in this study were approved by KTO Karatay University Human Research Ethics Committee with the ethical committee decision numbered 2020/03/05 dated 15.06.2020

CONTRIBUTION OF RESEARCHERS

The contribution of the authors to the study is equal.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest. This research study complies with research publishing ethics.

GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Sosyal hizmet eğitimi, bilgi, beceri, değer ve etik ilkelerin bütüncül biçimde kazandırılmasını amaçlayan, uygulama temelli yapısıyla diğer birçok yükseköğretim programından ayrılan disiplinlerden biridir. Mesleğin temelinde yer alan müracaatçı ile ilişki kurma, iletişim becerileri geliştirme, etik karar verme, saha uygulamalarını deneyimleme ve mesleki refleksiyon süreçleri büyük ölçüde yüz yüze etkileşim gerektirmektedir. Bununla birlikte, son yıllarda bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerindeki hızlı gelişmeler, yükseköğretimde dijitalleşmenin yaygınlaşması ve özellikle COVID-19 pandemisiyle birlikte yaşanan zorunlu uzaktan eğitim süreci, sosyal hizmet eğitiminde de önemli dönüşümlerin yaşanmasına neden olmuştur. Pandemi sürecinde dünyanın birçok ülkesinde olduğu gibi Türkiye'de de sosyal hizmet lisans programları kısa süre içerisinde çevrim içi eğitime geçmiş; derslerin yürütülmesi, ölçme-değerlendirme süreçleri ve uygulama derslerinin organizasyonu yeniden yapılandırılmıştır. Daha sonraki dönemde ise hibrit eğitim modelleri ve isteğe bağlı uzaktan öğretim uygulamaları yükseköğretim sisteminin önemli tartışma alanlarından biri hâline gelmiştir.

Uluslararası literatür incelendiğinde, uzaktan sosyal hizmet eğitiminin erişilebilirliği artırması, farklı coğrafyalardaki öğrencilere eğitim olanağı sunması, dijital okuryazarlık becerilerini geliştirmesi ve öğretim materyallerinin çeşitlendirilmesini kolaylaştırması gibi önemli avantajlara sahip olduğu görülmektedir. Buna karşın uygulama temelli becerilerin kazandırılması, empatik iletişimin geliştirilmesi, sözel olmayan iletişim unsurlarının gözlemlenebilmesi, etik sınırların korunması ve saha uygulamalarının yürütülmesi gibi konularda önemli sınırlılıklar bulunduğu da ifade edilmektedir. Bununla birlikte, mevcut çalışmaların büyük çoğunluğu pandeminin ilk döneminde gerçekleştirilmiş; öğrencilerin deneyimlerine odaklanmış ve uzaktan eğitimin avantajlarını ve dezavantajlarını karşılaştırmıştır. Buna karşılık uzaktan eğitim sürecini yöneten, bölüm düzeyinde karar alan ve eğitim organizasyonunu planlayan akademik yöneticilerin deneyimlerini bütüncül biçimde değerlendiren araştırmalar oldukça sınırlıdır. Ayrıca pandemi sonrasında uzaktan eğitime ilişkin algının nasıl değiştiği, zorunlu uzaktan eğitimden isteğe bağlı ve hibrit modellere geçiş sürecinin nasıl değerlendirildiği konusunda da önemli bir bilgi boşluğu bulunmaktadır. Bu araştırma söz konusu boşluğu doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Araştırmanın temel amacı, sosyal hizmet bölümlerinde yönetim sorumluluğu üstlenen akademisyenlerin deneyimlerinden hareketle uzaktan sosyal hizmet eğitiminin güçlü ve zayıf yönlerini, geleceğe yönelik fırsatlarını ve karşı karşıya olduğu tehditleri SWOT analizi çerçevesinde ortaya koymaktır. Böylece uzaktan sosyal hizmet eğitiminin mevcut durumunun değerlendirilmesine ek olarak, gelecekte geliştirilebilecek politika ve uygulamalara ilişkin stratejik bir çerçeve oluşturulması hedeflenmiştir. Araştırmanın özgün yönlerinden biri, verilerin yalnızca pandemi

dönemini değil, 2021–2024 yılları arasındaki zorunlu uzaktan eğitim ile hibrit ve gönüllü uzaktan eğitim süreçlerini birlikte kapsamaktadır. Bu yönüyle çalışma, kriz dönemindeki ani tepkiler yerine zaman içinde oluşan kurumsal deneyimleri ve yönetsel değerlendirmeleri ortaya koymaktadır.

Araştırma nitel araştırma yaklaşımı kapsamında betimleyici fenomenoloji desenine göre yürütülmüştür. Fenomenolojik yaklaşım, bireylerin yaşadıkları deneyimlere yükledikleri anlamların ayrıntılı biçimde ortaya çıkarılmasını amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu Türkiye'de sosyal hizmet bölümlerinde bölüm başkanı veya bölüm başkan yardımcısı olarak görev yapan ve uzaktan eğitim sürecinin planlanması ile yürütülmesinde aktif rol üstlenen 12 akademisyen oluşturmaktadır. Katılımcılar amaçlı örnekleme yöntemlerinden kartopu örnekleme tekniği ile belirlenmiştir. Görüşmeler Ocak 2021 ile Haziran 2024 tarihleri arasında çevrim içi platformlar aracılığıyla gerçekleştirilmiş; her görüşme yaklaşık bir saat sürmüş ve katılımcıların izinleri doğrultusunda kayıt altına alınmıştır. Verilerin analizinde Colaizzi'nin betimleyici fenomenolojik analiz yöntemi kullanılmış; MAXQDA programı yardımıyla gerçekleştirilen analizlerde başlangıçta elde edilen 190 kod, benzer içerikler birleştirilerek 86 koda indirgenmiş ve bunlardan araştırmanın ana temaları ile alt temaları oluşturulmuştur. Araştırmanın güvenilirliğini artırmak amacıyla katılımcı doğrulaması yapılmış, araştırmacılar arasında veri üçgenlemesi uygulanmış ve COREQ raporlama ölçütleri dikkate alınmıştır.

Araştırmanın bulguları SWOT analizi doğrultusunda dört temel başlık altında incelenmiştir. Güçlü yönler incelendiğinde, katılımcılar öncelikle uzaktan eğitimin ders materyallerine erişimi önemli ölçüde kolaylaştırdığını belirtmişlerdir. Ders kayıtlarının tekrar izlenebilmesi, zaman ve mekân sınırlılığının ortadan kalkması, öğrencilerin ders içeriklerine istedikleri zaman ulaşabilmeleri ve öğretim elemanlarının daha zengin görsel materyaller kullanabilmeleri önemli avantajlar olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Ayrıca çevrim içi eğitim süreci öğretim elemanlarının dijital öğretim tekniklerini geliştirmelerine katkı sağlamıştır. Grafikler, videolar, sunum teknikleri ve farklı dijital araçların kullanımı öğretim süreçlerini zenginleştirmiştir. Katılımcılar uzaktan eğitimin yüz yüze eğitimin yerine geçebilecek bir model olmadığını; ancak özellikle kuramsal derslerde geleneksel eğitimi destekleyen tamamlayıcı bir araç olarak önemli katkılar sağlayabileceğini ifade etmişlerdir. Bu nedenle gelecekte tamamen uzaktan eğitime dayalı bir model yerine, derslerin niteliğine göre planlanan hibrit bir eğitim yaklaşımının daha uygun olacağı değerlendirilmiştir. Buna karşılık, araştırmada uzaktan sosyal hizmet eğitiminin önemli zayıf yönleri de ortaya konmuştur. Katılımcılar özellikle dijital uçurumun önemli bir eşitsizlik kaynağı olduğunu vurgulamış; internet erişimi, bilgisayar sahipliği ve teknolojik altyapıdaki farklılıkların eğitimde fırsat eşitliğini olumsuz etkilediğini belirtmişlerdir. Bunun yanında telif hakları, çevrim içi materyallerin paylaşımı, ölçme ve değerlendirme süreçlerinde akademik dürüstlüğü sağlanması ve öğrencilerin mesleki becerilerinin izlenmesi önemli sorun alanları olarak ifade edilmiştir. Özellikle sosyal hizmet eğitiminin temelinde yer alan empati kurma, görüşme becerisi geliştirme, beden dilini kullanma, mesleki ilişki kurma ve saha uygulamalarına ilişkin deneyimlerin çevrim içi ortamda yeterince geliştirilemediği yönünde güçlü bir görüş birliği bulunmaktadır.

Katılımcılar, uzaktan eğitimin bilgi aktarımında etkili olmasına rağmen mesleki kimlik gelişimi ve uygulama becerilerinin kazandırılması açısından önemli sınırlılıklar taşıdığını vurgulamışlardır.

Araştırmanın SWOT analizinin üçüncü boyutunu oluşturan fırsatlar teması, uzaktan sosyal hizmet eğitiminin gelecekteki gelişim potansiyeli bakımından da önemli olanaklar sunduğunu göstermektedir. Katılımcılar öncelikle uzaktan eğitimin sosyal hizmet eğitimini uluslararası düzeye taşıyabilecek güçlü bir araç olduğunu ifade etmişlerdir. Dijital platformlar aracılığıyla farklı ülkelerde görev yapan akademisyenlerin, uygulayıcı sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının ve farklı disiplinlerden uzmanların derslere kolaylıkla katılabilmesi, öğrencilerin farklı uygulama örnekleriyle tanışmasına ve mesleki bakış açılarını geliştirmelerine katkı sağlayabilecek önemli bir avantaj olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Özellikle sosyal hizmet uygulamalarının ülkeler arasında farklılaşan yapısı düşünüldüğünde, öğrencilerin uluslararası deneyimlerden yararlanabilmesi ve küresel sosyal politika uygulamalarını tanıyabilmesi mesleki gelişim açısından önemli bir fırsat oluşturmaktadır. Bunun yanında, çevrim içi sertifika programlarına, yabancı dil eğitimlerine ve uluslararası eğitim faaliyetlerine erişimin kolaylaşması da öğrencilerin mesleki yeterliliklerini geliştirebilecek destekleyici unsurlar arasında yer almaktadır. Katılımcılar, geleceğin sosyal hizmet eğitiminde tamamen yüz yüze ya da tamamen uzaktan modeller yerine, her iki yaklaşımın güçlü yönlerini bir araya getiren hibrit eğitim modelinin daha uygulanabilir ve sürdürülebilir bir seçenek olacağı görüşünü paylaşmışlardır. Bununla birlikte, araştırmada uzaktan sosyal hizmet eğitiminin geleceğine ilişkin önemli tehditler de belirlenmiştir. Katılımcılar, öncelikle teknolojik altyapının maliyetinin giderek artmasının, özellikle sosyoekonomik açıdan dezavantajlı öğrenciler için ciddi bir risk oluşturduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Bilgisayar, internet erişimi ve gerekli donanımların yüksek maliyetli olması eğitimde fırsat eşitliğini olumsuz etkileyebilmekte ve dijital uçurumun daha da derinleşmesine neden olabilmektedir. Teknolojik olanaklara erişimde yaşanan eşitsizlikler öğrencilerin derslere ve uygulama süreçlerine katılımını ve mesleki gelişimini de sınırlayabilmektedir. Bu nedenle, uzaktan eğitim uygulamalarının yaygınlaştırılmasının teknolojik erişim sorunları çözülmeden gerçekleştirilmesi durumunda mevcut eşitsizlikleri daha da görünür hâle getirebileceği değerlendirilmiştir.

Araştırmada öne çıkan bir diğer tehdit ise sosyal hizmet eğitiminin niteliğinin zaman içinde zayıflayabileceğine ilişkin kaygıdır. Katılımcılar sosyal hizmet eğitiminin bilgi aktarmaya dayalı bir süreç olmadığını; mesleki değerlerin içselleştirilmesi, etik duyarlılığın geliştirilmesi, profesyonel kimlik kazanılması ve uygulama becerilerinin oluşturulmasının eğitimin ayrılmaz parçaları olduğunu vurgulamışlardır. Bu nedenle, bilgiye kolay erişimin tek başına kaliteli sosyal hizmet eğitimi anlamına gelmeyeceği; aksine, eğitim sürecinin yalnızca sonuç odaklı hâle gelmesinin mesleğin uygulama temelli yapısını zayıflatabileceği ifade edilmiştir. Özellikle saha uygulamalarının uzaktan eğitim yoluyla tam anlamıyla gerçekleştirilememesi, öğrencilerin müracaatıyla çalışma deneyimi kazanmasını güçleştirmekte ve mezuniyet sonrasında mesleki yeterlilik açısından önemli riskler

doğurmaktadır. Bu bulgu, sosyal hizmet eğitiminde uygulama deneyiminin vazgeçilmez niteliğini bir kez daha ortaya koymaktadır.

Katılımcılar ayrıca etik ve hukuki boyutun uzaktan eğitim uygulamalarında yeterince netleşmediğini ifade etmişlerdir. Ders kayıtlarının hangi koşullarda saklanacağı, kimlerin erişimine açık olacağı, ne kadar süre muhafaza edileceği ve üçüncü kişiler tarafından paylaşılması durumunda nasıl bir süreç izleneceğine ilişkin belirsizlikler önemli etik kaygılar yaratmaktadır. Özellikle sosyal hizmet eğitiminde gerçek vaka örneklerinin, kişisel deneyimlerin ve hassas konuların tartışıldığı derslerde kayıtların kontrolsüz biçimde paylaşılma ihtimali hem akademisyenlerin hem de öğrencilerin kendilerini özgür biçimde ifade etmelerini sınırlandırabilmektedir. Bunun yanında öğrencilerin ev ortamından derse katılması nedeniyle aile bireylerinin ya da üçüncü kişilerin ders içeriklerini izlemesi, mahremiyet ve mesleki etik açısından yeni tartışmaları beraberinde getirmektedir. Araştırma bulguları, uzaktan sosyal hizmet eğitiminde teknolojik altyapının geliştirilmesi kadar etik standartların ve veri güvenliğine ilişkin kurumsal politikaların da oluşturulmasının zorunlu olduğunu göstermektedir.

Araştırmada elde edilen sonuçların uluslararası literatürde özellikle pandemi döneminde gerçekleştirilen çalışmalarla büyük ölçüde örtüştüğü görülmektedir. Bununla birlikte, bu çalışmanın en önemli katkılarından biri, söz konusu sorunların pandemiye özgü geçici güçlükler olmadığını, pandemi sonrasında da devam eden yapısal sorunlar olduğunu ortaya koymasıdır. Başka bir ifadeyle, dijital eşitsizlik, uygulama becerilerinin kazandırılması, etkileşim eksikliği ve etik sorunlar kriz dönemine özgü geçici problemler olmaktan ziyade uzaktan sosyal hizmet eğitiminin doğasından kaynaklanan temel yapısal meseleler olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Bunun yanında, çalışmanın bölüm başkanları ve bölüm başkan yardımcılarının deneyimlerine dayanması, öğrenci merkezli araştırmalardan farklı olarak eğitimin yönetsel ve kurumsal boyutuna ilişkin önemli bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır. SWOT analizinin kullanılması, avantaj ve dezavantajların belirlenmesiyle sınırlı kalmayıp geleceğe yönelik stratejik planlamaya katkı sağlayabilecek fırsat ve tehditlerin de sistematik biçimde değerlendirilmesine olanak sağlamaktadır.

Araştırmanın sonuçları, sosyal hizmet eğitiminde uzaktan eğitimin tamamen reddedilmesi ya da yüz yüze eğitimin yerine geçirilmesi gereken bir model olarak görülmemesi gerektiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Elde edilen bulgular, uzaktan eğitimin özellikle kuramsal dersler, dijital materyal paylaşımı, ulusal ve uluslararası uzmanların eğitime katılımı ve yaşam boyu öğrenme olanaklarının geliştirilmesi açısından önemli avantajlar sunduğunu göstermektedir. Buna karşılık, uygulama dersleri, mesleki beceri geliştirme, saha eğitimi ve profesyonel kimlik oluşumu açısından yüz yüze eğitimin vazgeçilmez niteliğini koruduğu anlaşılmaktadır. Bu nedenle sosyal hizmet eğitiminde geleceğin eğitim modelinin, teknolojinin sağladığı olanaklardan yararlanırken uygulama temelli mesleki eğitimin temel ilkelerini koruyan planlı ve standartları belirlenmiş hibrit bir yapı üzerine inşa edilmesi daha uygun görünmektedir.

Araştırmadan elde edilen bulgular doğrultusunda çeşitli uygulama önerileri geliştirilmiştir. Öncelikle dijital eşitsizliklerin azaltılması amacıyla öğrencilerin teknolojik donanım ve internet erişimine yönelik destek mekanizmalarının güçlendirilmesi gerekmektedir. Bunun yanında hem akademisyenlerin hem de öğrencilerin dijital yeterliliklerini artıracak sürekli eğitim programlarının planlanması önem taşımaktadır. Çevrim içi eğitim ortamlarında etkileşimi artıracak yenilikçi öğretim yöntemleri, sanal simülasyonlar ve uygulama temelli dijital öğrenme araçlarının geliştirilmesi sosyal hizmet eğitiminin niteliğine katkı sağlayacaktır. Ayrıca ders kayıtlarının güvenliği, kişisel verilerin korunması, etik sınırlar ve çevrim içi eğitim süreçlerine ilişkin standartların yükseköğretim kurumları tarafından açık biçimde belirlenmesi gerekmektedir. Son olarak sosyal hizmet eğitiminde hangi derslerin uzaktan, hangilerinin yüz yüze ve hangilerinin hibrit modelle yürütülebileceğine ilişkin ulusal ölçekte ortak standartların geliştirilmesi, gelecekte daha nitelikli ve sürdürülebilir bir sosyal hizmet eğitiminin oluşturulmasına önemli katkılar sağlayacaktır.

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