Research Article

Journal of Innovative Research in Teacher Education, *4*(1), 31-50,
ISSN: 2757-6116
http://www.jirte.org
DOI: 10.29329/jirte.2023.531.3
Received: 03/01/2023
Revised: 05/03/2023
Accepted: 07/03/2023

Online teaching practice experience: an evaluation from the perspectives of newly graduated preschool teachers *

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Abstract

Courses in teaching practice, crucial in the teaching profession, were taught through distance learning when face-to-face education was suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This case study analyzed newly graduated preschool teachers' thoughts on teaching practice courses through distance education due to Covid-19. Thus, the study group comprised 24 preschool teachers who had taken the teaching practice course online and had just graduated from university. The research data were collected with the "Distance Education Interview Form," which contained open-ended questions and was developed by the researchers. The data were put to content analysis. The findings obtained in this study showed that the participants considered distance-learning applications rather negatively despite their several positive aspects, that they had challenges in many respects in the teaching practice course that they had been taught online during the pandemic, that they had various problems and that the course had made limited contributions to their academic development.

Keywords: Covid-19, distance education, online teaching practice, teaching practice, preschool teachers.

Cite: Kurtulmuş, Z., Kaynak-Ekici, K. B., & Özkan-Kunduracı, H. K. (2023). Online teaching practice: An evaluation from the perspectives of graduated preschool teachers. *Journal of Innovative Research in Teacher Education, 4*(1), 31-50. https://doi.org/10.29329/jirte.2023.531.3

* This research was approved by Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee (Meeting Date: 06.01.2022/ Decision No: 36/Study No: 606).

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INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 was declared by World Health Organization a pandemic (an epidemic that affects the whole world) on March 11, 2020, because it was in all continents except for Antarctica (Er, 2021), 520.134.084 people suffered from it, and 6.360.449 people died of it across the world on May 13, 2022, according to data coming from the Coronavirus Research Center of John Hopkins University. On the other hand, 15050227 people suffered from the virus, killing 98867 people in the same period in Turkey. The pandemic not only caused losses of life but also influenced educational systems all over the world (Mailizar, Almanthari, Maulina & Bruce, 2020). Education was disrupted in a way that had never occurred before due to schools that remained closed for a long time and the sudden changes in educational and instructional processes (Meinck, Fraillon & Strietholt, 2022). The results obtained by the "Research on Educational Disruption Survey (REDS)" conducted by UNESCO between December 2020 and July 2021 with the participation of 21063 students, 15004 teachers, and 1581 school directors from the United Arab Emirates, Burkina Faso, Denmark, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Russia, Rwanda, Slovenia, Uruguay, and Uzbekistan demonstrated how the pandemic influenced educational and instructional activities and how stakeholders in education responded to disruptions in educational services in countries and between countries. According to the results obtained in the research, 50% of the teachers stated that students could not make the progress they made in a regular period of education and instruction during the Covid-19 pandemic (Meinck, Fraillon & Strietholt, 2022).

Various precautions concerning the source, the transmission mode, and uninfected individuals were taken to be protected from the pandemic and control it (Turkish Academy of Sciences, 2020). One of the precautions taken to the transmission mode and uninfected individuals is to offer educational and instructional services part-time or full-time. In this context, the Covid-19 pandemic has influenced the educational system of several countries considerably with their change to distance education (Akpınar & Akpınar, 2021). Crawford et al. (2020) investigated the types of educational systems that 20 developing and developed countries in Africa, America, Europe, the Western Pacific, the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, and South Asia chose to use in their higher education institutions when they faced the Covid-19 pandemic. It was found in the study that all the 20 countries except for three (i.e., the USA, Brazil, and Singapore) had to close their university campuses, that all the universities in eight of the countries (Germany, Australia, Brazil, China, Hong Kong, England, Ireland, and Italy) chose to use full-time online education and that 11 of them chose to use online education in part. Of the countries included in the study mentioned above, only Malaysia did not use online education.

Turkey also went through the same processes in higher education institutes parallel to worldwide events. According to the report prepared by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) on 3 May 2020 to demonstrate the current situation in distance education showed that 187 (98.8%) of the 189 universities in Turkey began to use distance education on 6 April 2020 and that 91.2% of the graduate level courses were offered online. The report also showed that approximately 89% of the universities in the country offered the theoretical parts of the applied courses online and that 75% of the universities taught online the applied courses that could be taught through distance education (CoHE, 2020). One of the online courses was the teaching practice course. Teaching practice, which was crucial in the teaching profession, was obligatorily taught online in many faculties of education when face-to-face education in schools was suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Aslan-Altan, 2021). "The course is available in all graduate teacher training programs of higher education in Turkey. Teacher candidates must take the seventh and eighth semesters during their graduate education (CoHE, 2018a). The course content consists of observations related to methods and techniques specific to the candidates' domain, individual micro-teaching and micro-teaching in groups, developing activities and materials, preparing educational-instructional environments, classroom management, measurement and evaluation, and reflection (CoHE, 2018b). Teacher candidates implement what they have learned in the teaching practice course in state and private schools, which are subordinate to the Turkish Ministry of National Education. The courses are taught jointly by faculties of education and by provincial directorates of the Ministry of

National Education. These courses enable teacher candidates to be better prepared for the profession and to use the knowledge they have learned and the skills, behaviors, and attitudes they have acquired throughout their training in schools of the ministry of national education (MoNE, 2021). While teacher candidates monitor the methods, tactics, and strategies used by the teacher in the school of teaching practice, they also shape their teaching approaches and beliefs (Işık, Çiltaş & Baş, 2010). Thus, they need to take the course of good quality regarding their professional development (Baran, Yaşar & Maskan, 2015) because they put their knowledge, skills, and attitudes together and reflect them into practice using teaching practice courses (Işıkoğlu, İvrendi & Şahin, 2007). Karasu-Avcı and İbret (2016) analyzed 68 preschool teachers' views on a teaching course and found that prospective teachers emphasized that the teaching practice courses allowed them to practice and recognize children and helped them to gain teaching experience and to gain skills in communicating with children. The participants also said that they should be given more opportunities to practice. However, their demands for more practice were unmet during the Covid-19 pandemic. They participated in online teaching practice and tried to do what they were expected to do (Aslan-Altan, 2021). In this context, it is necessary to perform an in-depth evaluation of distant teaching practice besides distance education practice available during the pandemic and eliminate the deficiencies- if there are any- related to the implementation.

Several studies concerning distance education were performed during Covid-19. For instance, Demir and Özdaş (2020) analyzed elementary school teachers' views on distance education, while Demir and Kale (2020) analyzed preschool, elementary school, secondary school, and special education teachers' views on distance education. In another study, Dere and Akkaya (2022) examined the social studies teachers' views on distance education. On the other hand, some studies examined the views of prospective teachers and university students about some courses conducted with distance education instead the views of teachers (Öztaş & Kılınç, 2017). In addition, Altınpulluk (2021) analyzed Turkish university lecturers' views on distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic. Pürsün, Yapar, Arslantaş and Taşkesen (2021) examined the views of prospective teachers from different branches about distance education through metaphors. Altun-Yalçın, Özturan-Sağırlı and Akar (2021), on the other hand, investigated educational faculty students' attitudes towards distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic and they investigated their perceptions of good lecturers and found that the students did not have good attitudes towards distance education. Another qualitative research study found that 127 teacher candidates who attended Atatürk Teacher Academy- which trained preschool and classroom teachers in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus- found distance education moderately successful (Uysal & Karagöz, 2021). Düzgün and Sulak (2020) found that candidates of classroom teachers and mathematics teachers thought that applications of distance education were instructive but ineffective.

The participants who were preschool teachers in another study said that they did not consider distance education applicable in preschool education even though it was an obligation to use distance education during the pandemic (Bartan, 2022). However, the studies mentioned above generally look at distance education from a broader perspective. There are only a limited number of studies concerning the views of participants who were teacher candidates during the pandemic and who would later see the reflections of the process when they graduate from university. Eti and Karaduman (2020) considered the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on prospective teachers' professional competency. They found that 20.5% of the participants considered themselves incompetent, and they thought that offering the online teaching practice course online mostly had adverse effects on their professional competency. Another study by Pıştav-Akmeşe and Kayhan (2020) investigated the experiences of nine students attending the department of special education, six of whom took the school and institution experience course and three of whom took the teaching practice course online, and they pointed out that the students needed informing at the beginning of teaching practice. Besides, the participants also emphasized the need for developing software by including the ministry of national education teachers who functioned as teaching practice coordinators in schools in distance education systems and academic staff. In another study, Aslan-Altan (2021) evaluated online teaching practice with the participation of 12 teacher candidates

and two teachers who were available in distant teaching practice and found that the participants encountered challenges in online processes. All the studies mentioned above dealt with applied courses in distance education, but they were found to have a broader perspective on the issue. However, having taken the teaching practice course online during the pandemic is a serious issue to address. The report entitled "Education Monitoring Report 2021: Teachers," published by Educational Reform Enterprise (Aktaş-Salman, Düşkün & Arık, 2021) based on the significance of the issue considers teacher candidates' experience of distance teaching practice under a separate heading. The report calls attention to the fact that having taken the course through distance education- not having worked with children face to face- causes teacher candidates to have anxiety.

This study aims to analyze newly graduated preschool teachers' views on the teaching practice course they had to take online during the Covid-19 pandemic. In this context, this study seeks answers to the two questions formulated below:

- What views do newly graduated preschool teachers hold about distance education applications during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- What views do newly graduated preschool teachers hold about the online teaching practice course during the Covid-19 pandemic?

METHOD

Research Design

This study was conducted using the design of a case study, one of the qualitative study approaches. Case studies enable researchers to collect detailed data through multiple sources of information in restricted cases in real life, starting with determining a specific case (Creswell, 2014). This study considers having taken the teaching practice course online during the pandemic as a case.

Participants

The study group comprised 24 preschool teachers who had taken the teaching practice course online and had just graduated from university. The criterion sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used in forming the study group (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2019). Accordingly, taking the Teaching Practice I and II courses online and having graduated in the Spring Semester of the 2020-2021 academic year- when distance education was terminated- was set as the criterion for the participants. In this context, four of the participants were men, and 20 of them were women. Their average age was 23.4 (±0.3). Besides, all the teachers included in the present study were not actively working.

Data Collection Tool

The research data were collected using the "Distance Education Interview Form," which contained open-ended questions through face-to-face interviews. The 10-item form consisted of two parts. While part one consisted of questions on general thoughts on distance education, part two included questions on the teaching practice course in distance education. Four experts, three of whom were experts in preschool and one of whom was an expert in computer and instructional technologies, were consulted for their opinions in developing the interview form. Then, the final shape was given to the form. The pilot practice was performed with two preschool teachers using the developed form. Thus, the functionality of the form was tested.

Data Collection Process

The research data were collected through semi-structured interviews with preschool teachers. The stages followed are described below:

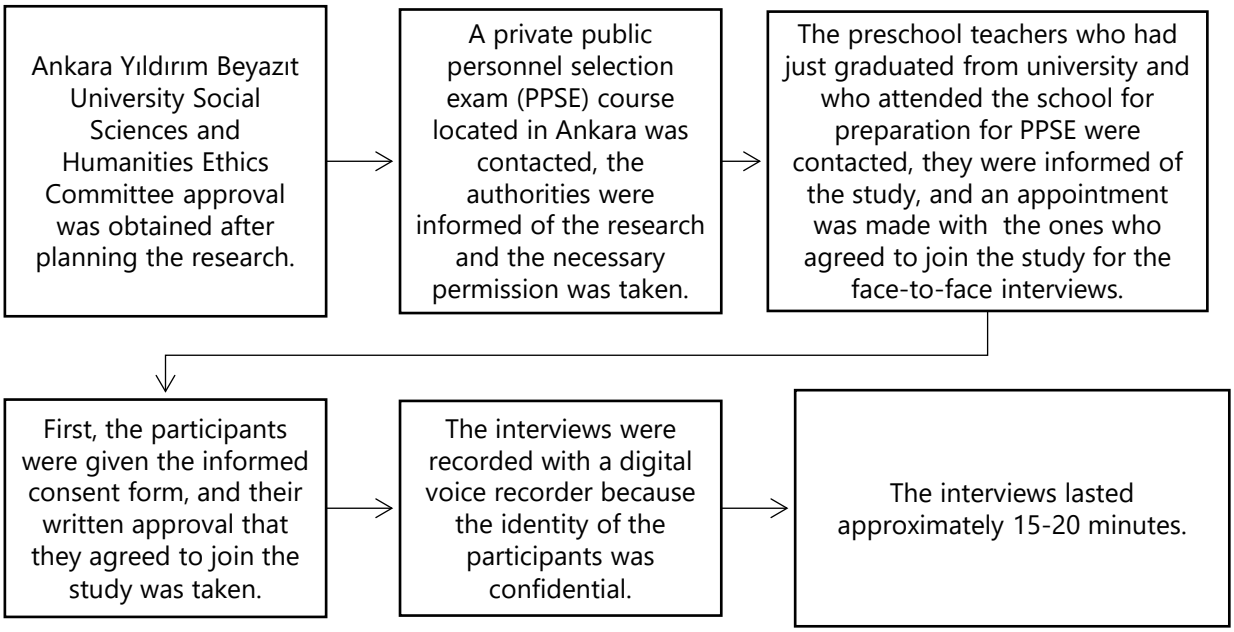

Figure 1. The data collection process.

Data Analysis

The research data were put into the content analysis (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2015). To begin with, the voice recordings of the interviews with the teachers were put into writing, and the interviews were ordered by giving numbers to them. The teachers were coded as T1, T2, T3, etc., to represent teacher 1, teacher 2, teacher 3, and so on in the data analysis. Having completed the codes, the researchers read all the data carefully, a framework was created for the data analysis, and categories were distinguished by looking at the semantic relations of the codes. The findings were considered under the headings of "general views on distance education" and "views on the teaching practice course in distance education" to be systematic in the analyses.

Validity and Reliability

All research studies make efforts to generate valid and reliable information. In this context, qualitative research studies' validity and reliability parameters can differ from those of quantitative research studies. Patton's (2014) analyst triangulation, described as the analysis of the qualitative data sources separately by more than one person, was used in this study to attain validity and reliability. Thus, the two researchers analyzed the whole data separately. Then, the two researchers compared their codes individually to check their accuracy and reached a consensus.

Ethical Considerations

This research was approved by Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee (Meeting Date: 06.01.2022/ Decision No: 36/Study No: 606).

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings obtained from data analysis. Thus, the findings are presented under "general views on distance education" and "views on online teaching practice."

General Views on Distance Education

The findings obtained from answers to the question about newly graduated preschool teachers' opinions on distance education are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Preschool Teachers' Views on Distance Education

Categories	Codes	Participants	Samples for views stated
Negative Views (30)	Inefficiency (17)	T2, T3, T4, T6, T8, T9, T10, T12, T15, T16, Ö17, T18, T19, T20, T21, T22, T23	"Class time is shorter than normal classes- which causes more superficial teaching." (T10)
	Insufficient interaction (7)	T2, T5, T10, T19, T22, T23, T24	"… there are classes in which we need to have face-to-face communication and interaction with the teacher and with classmates …" (T20)
	Inequality of opportunity (4)	T1, T13, T14, T18	"Considering the infrastructure, connection, and access in our country, distance education should be supported." (T14)
	Technical faults (2)	T12, T13	"Occasionally having bad internet connection made it difficult for us to log in to classes, to make our presentation and to do teaching practice. It sometimes caused technical faults…" (T13)
Positive Views (11)	Continuity of education (6)	T5, T8, T13, T14, T19, T20	"Even though distance education could not fully replace face-to-face education, it made education continuous." (T5)
	Flexibility and convenience (3)	T1, T12, T24	"Online education also provided flexibility and convenience in education. Ability to access to various training sessions and joining easily at home was the best side of it…" (T13)
	Effectiveness (2)	T12, T17	"…I think it will be more beneficial than face-to-face education if students join the classes on time if they watch later the classes that they cannot attend, and if they do their homework and do not cheat in exams. "(T17)

As shown in Table 1, the participants had both negative and positive views on distance education. While they stated 30 negative views, they stated 11 positive ones. The opposing sides were inefficiency (7), insufficient interaction (7), inequality of opportunity (4), and technical faults (2). The positive sides stated by the preschool teachers were as follows: the continuity of education (6), flexibility and convenience (3), and effectiveness (2). Thus, the participants prioritized the opposing sides of distance education. The data concerning the problems that preschool teachers had in distance education are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The Problems that the Preschool Teachers Encounter in Distance Education

Categories	Codes	Participants
Technical problems (30)	Internet connection problems (17)	T5, T7, T8, T9, T10, T11, T12, T13, T15, T16, T17, T19, T20, T21, T22, T23, T24
	Computer view and sound problems (8)	T3, T7, T10, T13, T19, T20, T23, T24
	Limited use of mobile internet package due to lack of internet infrastructure (3)	T1, T13, T17
	Lack of devices (2)	T16, T17
Problems stemming from individuals themselves (7)	Lack of motivation and failure to focus on classes (3)	T11, T13, T14
	Conditions at home (2)	T16, T24
	Low level of technological literacy (1)	T15
	Immobility (1)	T10
	Courses that require an application (4)	T4, T8, T17, T23

Problems stemming from the nature of the course (6)	Limitation of time in classes (2)	T15, T23
Problems stemming from lecturers (5)	Attitudes towards students (2)	T1, T19
	The number and quality of assignments (2)	T11, T18
	Low level of technological literacy (1)	T10

As shown in Table 2, the participants encountered technical problems the most frequently (30), which was followed by problems stemming from individuals themselves (7), problems stemming from the nature of the course (6), and problems stemming from lecturers (5). The technical problems the participants most frequently faced were internet connection problems, computer viewing and sound problems, limited use of mobile internet packages due to lack of internet infrastructure, and lack of devices. The problems stemming from individuals were reported as lack of motivation, conditions at home, low level of technological literacy, and immobility. On the other hand, problems stemming from the nature of the course were listed as courses that required application and limitation of time in classes. The problems stemming from lecturers were stated as negative attitudes towards students, the number and quality of assignments given, and a low level of technological literacy. The data concerning the participants' preference for online and face-to-face classes are shown in Figure 2.

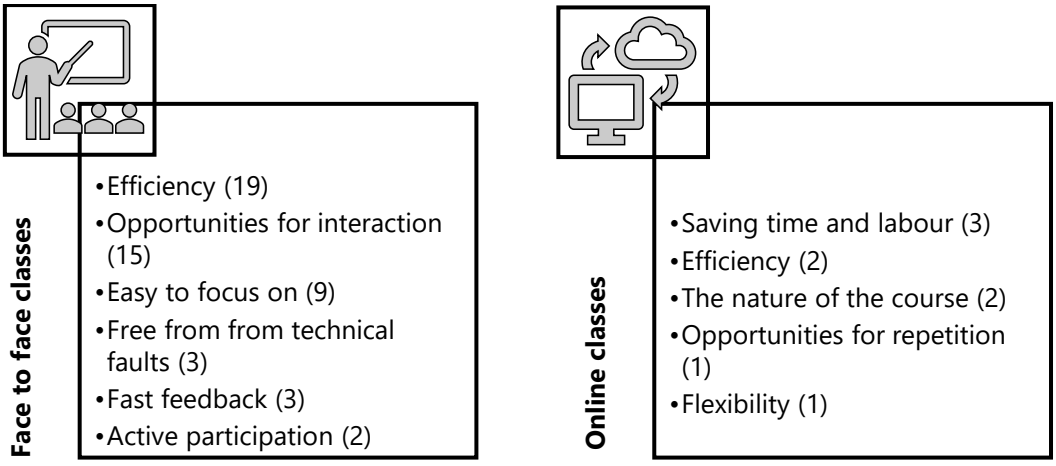

Figure 2. The types of classes the preschool teachers prefer.

On examining the participants' preference for the types of classes, they mostly preferred to attend face-to-face classes. Thus, while the participants stated 51 views in favor of face-to-face, they stated ten in favor of online classes. The ones who were for face-to-face classes mentioned such reasons as efficiency (19), providing opportunities for interaction (15), ease in focusing on (9), having no technological faults (3), and active participation (2). A few opinions are given below as an example:

"I prefer face-to-face training. Because I can focus better..." (T3)

"I think face-to-face training is more efficient." (T8)

"We interact one by one in face-to-face education." (T9)

Teachers who favored online classes, on the other hand, explained their reasons as saving time and labor (3), efficiency (2), the nature of the course (2), opportunities for repetition (1), intensive content (1), and flexibility (1). A few opinions are given below as an example:

"Online education is more efficient. We can watch the replays of the lessons we missed or did not understand." (T11)

"Since the time is limited between 40-60 minutes in online education, every minute of the lesson is valuable and full of information." (T18)

Views on Online Teaching Practice

The data concerning the problems that preschool teachers have in online teaching practice classes are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The Problems Experienced in Online Teaching Practice

Categories	Codes	Participants
Technical problems (46)	Problems in connecting to the network (18)	T1, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9, T10, T11, T12, T13, T15, T17, T18, T19, T20, T21, T23
	Problems in viewing and sound (14)	T1, T2, T5, T6, T7, T10, T12, T13, T15, T17, T18, T19, T20, T22
	Problems in communication (9)	T2, T4, T5, T9, T14, T16, T18, T22, T23
	Hardware problems stemming from the place where children are (5)	T5, T10, T13, T19, T22
Problems in the application process (24)	Challenges in managing the process of activity (10)	T1, T3, T11, T12, T13, T17, T18, T19, T20, T23
	Inadequacy in classroom management (8)	T3, T6, T11, T13, T16, T17, T18, T23
	Limitation in activities used (2)	T8, T24
	Limitation in the length of time in the application (2)	T2, T8
	Noise in children's home environment and parents' pressure (2)	T7, T22
Problems related to children (6)	Short attention span (4)	T4, T10, T13, T15
	Reluctance in participation in activities (2)	T4, T7

According to Table 3, the most frequent problems that preschool teachers face in online teaching practice classes are technical problems (46) which are followed by problems in the application process (24) and problems related to children (6), respectively. Accordingly, the primary technical problems they encountered included connecting to the network, followed by problems in viewing and sound, problems in communication, and hardware problems stemming from the place where the children were. The process-related problems included problems such as challenges in managing the process, inadequacy in classroom management, limitations in the types of activities used, limitations in the length of time in application and noise in children's home environment, and parents' pressure. The participants said that they had the least frequent problems with children. The cause of the preschool teachers' problems with children was the children's short attention span and reluctance to join the activities. Figure 3 shows the methods and techniques that the participants use in classroom management- the issue they say they face is the second most frequent problem in the category of problems in the application process.

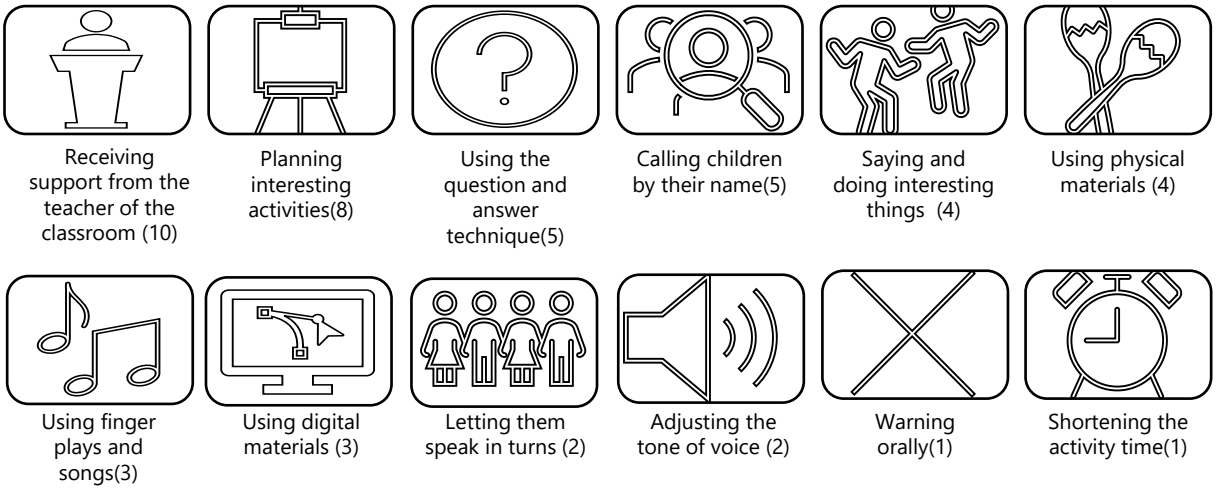

Figure 3. The methods and techniques used in classroom management.

As shown in Figure 3, the participants mostly received support from the classroom teacher in managing the classroom during the online teaching practice applications (10). It was followed by planning enjoyable activities (8), using the question and answer technique (5), calling children by their name (5), saying interesting things and doing interesting things (4), using physical materials (4), using finger plays and songs (3), using digital materials (3), letting them speak in turns (2), adjusting the tone of voice (2), warning orally (1) and shortening the activity time (1).

"… It almost took me ten weeks to learn to plan a fully online activity." (T10)

The data concerning the challenges the participants faced in using their activities in teaching practice in distance education are shown in the Table below.

Table 4. Challenges Encountered in Adapting/Planning Activities for Use in Distance Education

Categories	Codes	Participants	Samples for views stated
Challenges stemming from the system (11)	Having time limitation (6)	T6, T13, T15, T16, T18, T22	"It was necessary to shorten the time while doing the activity. I had difficulty in trying to finish the activity in a shorter time." (T18)
	Problems in connection (3)	T3, T4, T11	"Connection affects it very much. When the internet connection is weak, children quickly lose their interest." (T11)
	Problems in sound (2)	T4, T8	"… We had challenges stemming from not being heard." (T8)
Challenges stemming from educators (11)	Planning limited types of activities (9)	T5, T6, T8, T9, T11, T19, T22, T23, T24	"We could not include even the simplest art activities" (T19)
	Failure to manage the classroom (2)	T2, T22	"…I was constantly tense with fear to do something wrong or to say something wrong because I was always in front of the screen." (T22)
Challenges stemming from the nature of the pandemic (9)	Using limited materials (8)	T8, T9, T14, T17, T19, T21, T23, T24	"…I wanted to teach a subject, but only materials that could be used in face-to-face education came to my mind." (T17)
	Being obliged to make changes in planning (1)	T20	"…children were sometimes at home and sometimes at school. So, continuously changes were made in planning." (T20)
Challenges stemming from institutions or homes (8)	Not providing materials (7)	T2, T4, T7, T8, T13, T19, T22	"We had challenges in using and bringing materials." (T8)
	The classroom teacher's unnecessary interventions (1)	T6	"We tried to plan activities which would not require the classroom teacher to make interventions." (T6)
Challenges stemming from children (4)	Limited attention span (3)	T2, T5, T15	"We could not do activities like the ones they used to do at school because they had short attention spans…"(T5)
	Incomprehensible instructions (1)	T3	"Children could not understand the instructions exactly…" (T3)
Having no challenges (5)	Preparing plans by considering the possibilities offered by distance education (3)	T1, T12, T21	"We had planned our activities consistently with distance education at the very beginning, so I did not have problems." (T21)
	Using technology actively (1)	T12	"I attracted children's attention by using technology in various ways…" (T12)
	Using materials easy to provide (1)	T10	"…I made plans with materials easy to access and available in any home…" (T10)

The preschool teachers' statements made it clear that they most frequently encountered challenges stemming from the system (11) and challenges stemming from educators (11) in adapting their activities into distance education which was followed by challenges stemming from the nature of the pandemic (9), challenges stemming from institutions or homes (9) and challenges stemming from children (4), respectively. In addition, some participants stated that they did not encounter any challenges since they prepared plans by considering the possibilities offered by distance education, actively used technology, and used materials that were easy to find (5). Those who said they had problems stemming from the system mainly emphasized time limitation, whereas the ones who said they had problems stemming from educators emphasized planning limited activities. The ones who said they had problems stemming from the nature of the pandemic emphasized using limited materials, those who said that they had problems stemming from institutions or homes emphasized refusal to provide materials, and the participants who said that they had problems stemming from children emphasized limited attention span. The participants were asked what types of materials they preferred using while planning activities in online teaching practice classes to investigate more deeply the "materials" issue- which gained a place in two different categories of difficulty in Table 4. The data on the types of materials that the teachers chose to use in distance education and the positive and negative sides of the materials are shown in Figure 4.

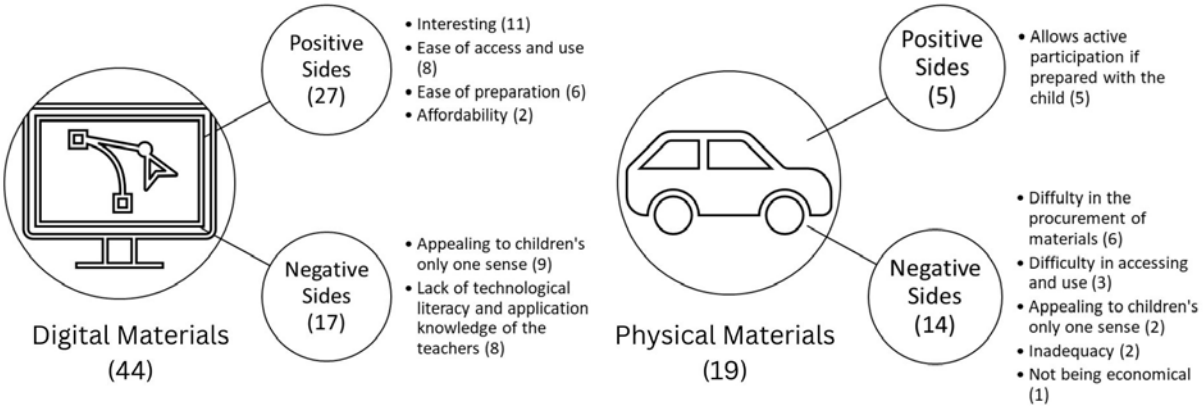

Figure 4. The preferred materials and the reasons for preferring them.

The findings showed that the teachers preferred distance education and used digital (44) and physical materials (19). Accordingly, most views for digital materials prioritized the positive sides of those materials while the views for physical materials prioritized the opposing sides. The participants described digital materials as enjoyable, easy to access and use, easy to prepare, and economical. As to the opposing sides of digital materials stated by the teachers, they were described as appealing to children's one sense and preparers' low level of technological literacy and application knowledge. Thus, the teacher coded as T14 said, *"… I sometimes have a challenge in the sense of using technology,"* and T17 said, *"… I sometimes had a challenge in finding an application consistent with what is in my mind because I did not have adequate knowledge of all sites and application while preparing the materials. Sometimes, I even changed my plans completely"* and stressed the importance of technological literacy in using and preparing digital materials. On the other hand, the teachers who stated that they chose to use physical materials in distance education claimed that children's active participation was secured when the materials were prepared with children. On the negative side of physical materials, the participants argued that those materials were challenging to find, difficult to access and use, appealed to only one sense of children, and were inadequate and not economical.

"I could not even learn the name of children in my classroom- which was an upsetting situation…" (T20)

Table 5 below shows how the participants' application with no face-to-face interaction with children affected their interest in the course.

Table 5. The Reflections of Having no Face-to-Face Interaction with Children in Classes

Categories	Codes	Participants	Samples for views stated
Negative effects (29)	Loss of motivation (9)	T2, T3, T5, T8, T10, T13, T15, T16, T20	"It lowered my motivation very much. I lost my desire for the application." (T20)
	Reduction in interest in the course (5)	T3, T8, T9, T16, T22	"It decreased my interest in the course. I did not care for the course. (T16)
	Difficulty in classroom management (4)	T6, T13, T18, T20	"...I had difficulty in instant interventions because it was online." (T18)
	Failure to organize the activities according to children's interests (4)	T5, T19, T20, T23	"Were the activities we had prepared suitable for children? ..." (T20)
	Reduction in the significance of the course (3)	T1, T14, T23	"...I only thought of passing my exams" (T23)
	Failure to set up ties with children (2)	T8, T19	"I could not even learn the names of most of the children in my class. It was very upsetting" (T19)
	Failure to gain experience (2)	T17, T19	"...it would have been better to have interaction in applied courses to gain experience." (T17)
No negative effects (8)	No different from the former situation (8)	T4, T7, T11, T12, T17, T18, T21, T24	"I felt no negative effects ..." (T17)

The participants generally stated negative views on evaluating the reflections of not having face-to-face interaction with children in teaching practice classes; of the teachers who stated negative views, nine laid emphases on the loss of motivation. In contrast, others talked of a reduction in interest in the classes (5), difficulty in classroom management (4), failure to organize activities according to children's interests (4), diminishing in the significance of the course (3), failure to set up ties with children (2) and failure to gain experience (2). The participant coded T20, who stated views about failure to organize activities according to children's interests, questioned the activities they planned without face-to-face interaction by asking, "*Were the activities we had prepared suitable for children?"* T19, on the other hand, emphasized that they could not set up ties with children in the statement, *"I could not even learn the names of most children in my class. It was very upsetting."* Eight of the participants, however, stated that having no face-to-face interaction with children in online teaching practice classes did not negatively affect them.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study, which analyzed the views of 24 newly graduated preschool teachers who were preparing for the public personnel selection exam on teaching practice courses that they were obliged to take online for two semesters due to the Covid-19 pandemic, first obtained the teachers' general views on distance education applications during the pandemic. Thus, it was found that the 24 participants stated 41 views about distance education and that 30 of them were negative. While those who stated negative views described the situation as "inefficiency," inadequate interaction," "inequality of opportunity," and "technical faults,"; they mostly stated views of the inefficiency of distance education. On the other hand, the 11 positive views on distance education during the pandemic prioritized such issues as "the continuity of education," "flexibility and convenience" and "effectiveness." It would be convenient to look at the definition of distance education to understand the teachers' views. Distance education is a system through which teachers and students in different physical locations interact with the help of communication technologies to provide large masses with educational opportunities and equal opportunities in education. Thus, they actualize learning and teaching (Yalın, 2001). However, in contrast to the above-given definition, the participants argued that distance education caused inequality of

opportunity and inadequate interaction. In this context, they stressed in terms of inequality of opportunity that the infrastructure possibilities required for distance education differed from region to region in Turkey. Toker-Gökçe (2008) argues that globalization allows individuals of economically lower classes to benefit from a university located in another city or country without exposure to the cost of living in another country. The situation essentially deepens inequality in education, although it sounds nice. The interpretation made with inequality of education was because internet possibilities were generally accessible to individuals of middle and high socioeconomic status and that the fees of universities offering distance education throughout the world were high. On the other hand, considering the year when this research was conducted, it was natural that there were differences in possibilities to access the internet. However, in today's circumstances, almost all segments of society can easily access the internet. Thus, the research entitled "Household Information Technologies" performed by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TSI, 2021) revealed that 92% of the homes in Turkey could access the internet from home. In this context, the inequality of opportunity mentioned by the participants in this current study stemmed from problems in connection to the network or from differences in the speed of access rather than the possibility of accessing the internet. Besides, they also called attention to the inadequacy of interaction in distance education and argued that some of the courses required face-to-face interaction by their nature. In the same way, Özer and Suna (2020) also claim that possibilities for distance learning remove the social environment available in learners' schools, which in turn causes some restrictions. Similar to the results obtained in the study, Aksoy, Bozkurt and Kurşun (2021), who analyzed university students' perceptions of distance education during the pandemic, revealed rather the negative sides of distance education, although it has positive sides. Pürsün et al. (2021) also found similar results in their study. Another researcher, Altınpulluk (2021), analyzed university lecturers' views on distance education during the pandemic and found that lecturers considered distance education positive in that it secured the continuity of urgent education but that they considered it negative due to deficiencies in infrastructure, being unprepared for it and due to inequality of opportunity that students were exposed to in access to education. Although the negative aspects of distance education are brought to prominence in all the studies mentioned above, it also has certain positive aspects. Thus, the participants in this current study found distance education because it secured continuity of education and was flexible, convenient, and effective. Distance education is a model of education independent of time and space and in which learners can progress according to their speed and learning style (Düzgün & Sulak, 2020). Clark (2008) highlights that distance education can also be more effective than face-to-face education since it saves time and space. Thus, the participants in this study also mentioned similar issues regarding the positive sides of distance education. Therefore, it may be stated in the light of the views stated in the present study- which was in parallel to the case in several studies- that distance education provides learners with opportunities to learn individually and independently according to their speed with its properties of securing continuity in education, flexibility, and convenience despite such negative considerations as inefficiency and lack of interaction.

The newly graduated preschool teachers included in this study said that they faced several challenges, which they described as technical challenges, challenges stemming from individuals, challenges stemming from the nature of the course, and challenges stemming from lecturers in distance education. Transitioning into distance education in Turkey due to the pandemic caused particular challenges. However, it was evident that transitioning from traditional to distance education would not be easy. It was natural to have hurdles in such a fast and obligatory change, and the situation was closely related to some challenges encountered (Crawford, Butler-Henderson, Rudolph & Glowatz, 2020).

Most participants said that connecting to the internet caused most of the challenges they had in distance education. It was reported in the research entitled "Students' views on the Efficiency of Education during the Pandemic" conducted by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE, 2021a) that only 57% of students said they had access to the internet and found it adequate but that 36% said they had access to the internet. However, they faced connection problems and economic problems. 4% of them said that they did not their internet but used an internet connection outside their home, while 3% said they did not

have access to the internet in any way. In a similar study, Mohalik and Sahoo (2020) analyzed prospective teachers' perceptions of online learning and their e-readiness during the Covid-19 pandemic. They found that 99% of the participants had e-readiness with digital devices, and 80% had e-readiness with financial support but were deprived of adequate internet connection, source of electricity, and personal areas. Having problems with internet connection during education can influence learners' attitudes towards distance education. Thus, Uysal and Karagöz (2021) found that the prospective teachers with uninterrupted internet access had more positive attitudes regarding personal suitability and instructiveness.

The significant problems stemming from individuals that the new graduate preschool teachers encountered in distance education were a lack of motivation and failure to focus on classes, followed by conditions at home and a low level of technological literacy. In a similar vein, Altun-Yalçın, Özturan-Sağırlı and Akar (2021) also found in a study they conducted with the participation of university students that students mostly did not have the necessary environment in their homes that they had problems with access to the internet and that they had lacked in communication with academic staff during the pandemic. Another study also obtained similar findings and reported that the participants had learning challenges stemming from the infrastructure and challenges due to limited internet packages and inappropriate physical environments in their homes during distance education (Piştav-Akmeşe & Kayhan, 2020). Dere and Akkaya (2022) also stated in their study that teachers had some limitations in distance education due to the lack of internet and technological tools. Another factor that caused problems from the perspective of teacher candidates and lecturers was low technological literacy. The importance of technological literacy skills-in other words, digital literacy skills- increased during the pandemic when individuals became a part of a global learning network through digital devices. Today, people can access the global learning network from their seats quickly. Considering this truth, several universities worldwide were required to adopt online learning technologies rapidly. However, it is not adequate for universities to adopt online education technologies independently. The lecturers who teach in those universities should also adopt online education technologies and use them actively (Ak, Şahin, Çiçekler & Ertürk, 2020). At this point, digital literacy skills come into play. They are the skills that university lecturers, teachers, and students should have. Bartan (2022), in a study that investigated preschool teachers' views on distance education during the pandemic, emphasized that teachers should have digital efficacy and skills in using technology. Özer and Suna (2020) called attention to differences between levels of digital literacy as one of the problems encountered during a pandemic. They claimed that the differences in adopting digital sources and the ability to use them influenced the efficiency of the learning-teaching process- a finding parallel to the one obtained in this current study.

Finally, this study investigated whether the participants preferred face-to-face or online classes to identify their general views on distance education. Thus, the findings showed that the 24 participants stated 61 views by prioritizing various properties, and 51 favored face-to-face classes. Those who argued for face-to-face classes stressed such issues as efficiency, interaction possibilities, being away from technical faults, possibilities for fast feedback, and active participation, while those who argued for online classes emphasized saving time and space, the quality of the course, the possibility for repetition, intensive content, and flexibility. It was found on reviewing the literature that studies emphasized similar points in this respect. Görgülü-Arı and Hayır-Kanat (2020), for instance, point out that online education is positive in that it saves time, it allows listening to lessons again, it costs less, and it makes students understand the value of schools but that it is negative in that it cannot replace face to face education, that it causes problems in focusing, that it diminishes socializing and that it causes technical faults. In another study, Toker-Gökçe (2008) draws attention to the fact that mobility is one of the basic features of distance education and argues that distance education provides individuals with mobility with the increase in wireless internet. Besides this current study, studies available in the literature indicate that students and teachers prefer face-to-face classes despite several advantages of online classes. Thus, in the research entitled "Students' views on the Efficiency of Education during the Pandemic" conducted

by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE, 2021a), 52% of the students said that online classes affected their learning in negative ways, whereas 23% of them said nothing changed and 25% said that such classes affected their learning in positive ways. The participants were also asked in the same research to compare the time they devoted to studying and to themselves in face-to-face education with the time they devoted to online education. In response to the question, 26% of the students said they devoted less time to themselves and studying, while 19% said they devoted more time to themselves but less to studying. In other words, it was found that 45% of the students devoted less time to studying in online education in contrast to face-to-face education. In parallel to the rates mentioned here, 52% of the students said that distance education negatively affected their lives during the pandemic.

The newly graduated preschool teachers' views on teaching practice courses taught through distance education due to the Covid-19 pandemic were analyzed in part two of this study. First, the challenges they encountered in online teaching practice classes were considered. Accordingly, it was found that the participants had problems that might be considered in three headings: technical problems, problems related to the application process, and problems related to children. They also encountered problems related to the application process and to children different from the ones they encountered in distance education. The problems they faced in the application process included challenges in managing the activities, inadequacy in classroom management, limitations in the types of activities used, limitations in the application process, and the noise in children's homes and parents' pressure. This finding demonstrated that distance education was not functional enough in courses such as teaching practice - which enabled prospective teachers to gain practice in teaching- despite its several positive aspects, such as flexibility, richness, and interactional teaching environments (Özbay, 2015). In a course such as teaching practice in particular- in which interaction with students and with the teacher of the classroom of teaching practice is essential, it is impossible to agree with Özbay (2015)- who argues that distance education creates rich and interactional environments and provides individuals with opportunities for more effective education. Hence, the teachers included in this current study listed the problems they faced in the online teaching practice classes- as seen in Table 3 and emphasized the challenges in management and inadequacy in classroom management- where interaction was prioritized. Aslan-Altan (2021), in a similar vein, reported that teacher candidates and practice teachers mostly had challenges in classroom management along with technical faults during the pandemic. Both manage the activities, and the classroom is based on interaction. Face-to-face interaction is critical to traditional classroom teaching for socializing. It also facilitates learning.

In parallel to this, Aboagne, Yawson and Appiah (2020) have also found that social issues which contain the process of interaction were the significant predictors of learning difficulties and that they explained 29% of the difficulties. AQs shown in Table 3, the teachers included in this study said that children were disturbed by the noise in the home environment and by their parents' pressure in online teaching practice classes. In this respect, it is essential to organize the home environment in a way that does not affect children's development, especially during preschool. Özer and Suna (2020) demonstrated that children who had more possibilities in their homes and received more academic support from their families during distance education were more advantaged. Thus, the researchers stress the importance of a supportive home environment. Research has also found that online teaching practice classes resulted in various problems due to children's short attention spans and reluctance to join activities. The finding is significant in that it indicates that distance education is not suitable for preschool children.

This current study also questioned what methods preschool teachers used the most frequently in classroom management- an issue in which they said they have the most problems in online teaching practice classes. In response to the question, the participants said they mostly received support from the classroom teacher and planned activities enjoyable to children. Those methods were followed using the question-and-answer technique and calling children by name. In this context, teacher support in the classroom of teaching practice is significant. It may even be said that practice teachers have the most critical task in teaching practice classes. They should constantly contact teacher candidates, give them

social support and guide them in the discipline in the classroom (Çevik & Alat, 2012). A great majority of the preschool teachers included in this study said that they received the most significant support from the teacher of the classroom in terms of classroom management during online classes. Although the preschool teachers in this study did their best in classroom management during online classes, they had challenges stemming from the system, educators, the nature of the pandemic, institutions, or homes, and from children in adapting the planned activities into distance education. The teachers who said that they encountered problems stemming from the system mostly complained about time limitations and stressed that the length of time they did the activities was inadequate. The teachers who said they had challenges stemming from educators mostly stated that they were obliged to use limited activities.

In this context, one said they could not include even the most detailed artwork in their activities. However, the preschool curriculum prepared by MoNE (2013) expects teachers to include Turkish, art, drama, music, gestures, plays, science, mathematics, literacy preparation activities, and field visits in educational activities. Of the types of activities mentioned, field visits are not possible in distance education; but all the other types should be included in teachers' plans. However, due to the limited possibilities in distance education, minimal activities were planned in online teaching practice classes. The participants also stated that they had problems using materials due to the nature of the pandemic. The problems mentioned in this respect stemmed from the participants being more familiar with materials used in face-to-face education. In parallel to that, the participants also said that they had problems obtaining the materials they asked families to bring in the category of challenges stemming from institutions or homes. The challenges they mentioned in the materials were likely to directly affect the quality of educational and instructional process. One of the participants also stated that they had problems with the classroom teacher's unnecessary interventions. Although those teachers play vital roles in teaching practice classes, they sometimes cause problems rather than supporting teacher candidates. Thus, Karasu-Avcı and Ibret (2016) argue that the most significant problem preschool teacher candidates encounter is that the teachers in the teaching practice classrooms consider them students while the students in those classrooms consider them the authority. Although a limited number of participants said, they had no problems planning activities in teaching practice classes during online education. After all, they considered the possibilities during the pandemic because they used technology actively and used materials easy to find. Most participants said they had several problems planning activities for online education or adapting their plans to online education.

The participants were also asked questions about the types of materials they chose to use in online teaching practice classes. They were found to prefer mostly digital materials. Similar findings were also obtained in Aslan-Altan's (2021) study. Accordingly, the teacher candidates who took the teaching practice course online considered distance education positive because it made preparing digital materials easier. On the other hand, the participants in this study also stated that digital materials had negative aspects since they appeal to only one sense of children and since levels of technological literacy and application knowledge were low. Finally, the participants were asked about their reflections on not having face-to-face interaction with children in teaching practice classes. It was found that a small number of the teachers said there was no adverse effect, but the majority said they lost their motivation and their interest in the course decreased. Some of them also said that the course became less significant in their opinion, that they could not set up ties with the children in classes, and that they had problems gaining experience as a result. The results obtained in this part of the study are very striking and are similar to the ones obtained only in a limited number of studies in the literature. The "Education Monitoring Report 2021: Teachers" report published by Educational Reform Enterprise (ERG) argues that the teaching practice course taught online due to the pandemic causes teacher candidates to have anxiety.

Given the teachers' views on teaching practice, it was found that distance education secured continuity in education but that it diminished the efficiency of the teaching practice classes and hindered gaining

the necessary experience in teaching by reducing their motivation. In parallel to that, the results obtained in research entitled "University Lecturers' Views on the Efficiency of Education during the Pandemic" conducted by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE, 2021b) with the participation of 27820 university lecturers from 207 universities, 45% of whom were from the field of social sciences showed that 69% of lecturers devoted more time to online classes but that 43% of students attended classes less and attained less achievement in classes. The research conducted by the Board of Higher Education (2021a) based on students' views also found that 45% of students spent less time on online classes during the pandemic. The results mentioned in both research studies were significant in that they indicated that students had lost their motivation during distance education. The preschool teachers in this study also stated that the teaching practice course, taught online without face-to-face interaction with children, reduced their motivation. Saltürk and Güngör (2020), who evaluated distance education during the pandemic from the perspective of university students, found that the students stressed that distance education was not suitable for applied courses and that the greatest weakness of it was in contributing to students' academic development.

In conclusion, the findings in this suggest that preschool teachers perceived distance education as unfavorable during the pandemic, that they had several challenges in teaching practice courses that they were obliged to take online in that period, that they faced various problems, and that the course made limited contributions to their academic development despite several positive sides of distance education. Because the teacher candidates who had taken the course online during the pandemic may be working as teachers today, making up for the relevant deficiencies of the teachers is crucial. At this point, the teachers' lack should be eliminated on the one hand, and preparations for similar cases probable to arise in the future should be made on the other hand. Although formal education forms the foundation of traditional education, the fact that distance education is supportive of formal education in today's circumstances should be considered. Besides the habits and perspectives of today's youth, the Z generation are changing in parallel with technological developments. It is necessary to raise the quality of education while emphasizing distance education independent of time and space- because it is within reach of the new generation. The characteristics of the Z generation should be considered while planning the educational processes. Because distance education lowers educational costs, innovative technologies should be integrated into the current education system. Care should be taken to make adaptations during integrating innovative technologies following the objectives of some applied courses, which play vital roles in teacher training. Furthermore, finally, the educational capacity of universities should be strengthened so that educational services can be sustained without disruptions in cases such as COVID-19.

Statement of Researchers

Researchers' contribution rate statement: The authors equally contributed to the article.
Conflict statement: There is no conflict of interest between the authors.
Support and thanks: None.

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