

The Analysis of Satisfaction Levels of International Students Learning Turkish as A Foreign Language Online During The Pandemic¹

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the satisfaction level of students regarding the education of Turkish as a foreign language (TFL) during the pandemic caused by Covid-19. This study which was carried out to shed light on the effect of distance education practices on teaching Turkish as a foreign language, is important in terms of providing students with the opportunity to evaluate the process and raising awareness in the organization of education programs. The participants were 50 international university students who enrolled in the Turkish preparatory classes of Bursa Uludağ University in the Turkish Teaching Application and Research Center (ULUTÖMER) during the academic years of 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. In the study, descriptive, relational and causal comparison methods from quantitative research methods were applied. The data within the scope of the research were obtained by using an attitude scale developed by the researcher, through a questionnaire applied to 50 volunteer students online via Google Docs Form. The analysis of the survey data was performed by using SPSS 26.0.0.0 and statistical methods such as Mann-Whitney 2, Independent Sample Test, Kruskal Wallis K, Independent Sample Test and Spearman Correlation Analysis were used to calculate the statistical findings. The statistical analysis of the questionnaire data showed that, the majority of participants who filled in the questionnaire stated that they were satisfied with the quality of online learning. In addition, students also stated that they were more satisfied with online teaching in comparison to face-to-face teaching. On the other hand, the statistical analysis further revealed that there was no significant relationship between the satisfaction levels of students learning Turkish and socio-demographic variables such as age and gender. Finally, no significant relationship was found between the comparative satisfaction levels of Turkish students and socio-demographic variables.

Keywords: Pandemic; student's satisfaction; online distance education; Turkish as a foreign language

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic had taken the world by surprise. During the unprecedented first months of the pandemic, when people could not come into direct contact with each other, different sectors of the economy had been forced to learn to operate with communication technologies to which they were not used to. The education sector was no exception. Within days, learners and teachers had to adapt to learning and teaching while being permanently separated from each other.

Distance education is an education system model where teachers and students do not have to be in the same place and education activities are carried out thanks to postal services and communication technologies (İşman, 2011). Distance education or distance training refers to institutionally planned learning and instruction where learners and teachers are in separate locations rather than face-to-face (Holmberg, 2005; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2016; Moore & Diehl, 2019; Simonson et al., 2015). This requires learners and teachers to communicate through electronic technologies such as television, radio, telephone, computer, tablet and the internet, or non-electronic technologies such as postal mail. Digital education refers to institutionally planned learning and instruction that takes place through electronic technologies rather than face-to-face or by postal mail (Govindasamy, 2002; Khan, 2010; Liaw et al., 2007). In other words, digital education is a form of distance education in which the medium of communication is electronic. Digital education can be synchronous online (through the internet) or offline asynchronous (through audio or video tapes, for example). In the definitions of distance and digital education above, learning and instruction are institutionally planned in the sense that they are formal and must take place through an educational organization (Holmberg, 2005 Kaplan & Haenlein, 2016; Moore & Diehl, 2019; Simonson et al., 2015). In other words, self-directed learning, incidental learning, and other forms of informal education are

¹ In this study, the findings of the master's thesis entitled "Analysis of Students' Satisfaction Learning Turkish as a Foreign Language with Online Distance Education" were used.

not considered distance or digital education. This point is emphasized because some people confuse digital education with the unplanned and informal learning that takes place through social media.

From postal correspondence in the 19th century to radio and television broadcasting in the 20th century and online courses in the 21st century, distance education has taken different forms over time (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2016; Lowenthal, 2022; Moore, 2022; see also Henri & Lundgren-Cayrol, 2001; Power, 2002; Samson & Lafleur, 2022). Although these forms are numerous, it is possible to classify them into two main categories: synchronous and asynchronous distance education. Synchronous distance learning occurs when learners and teachers participate in the course from different locations but at the same time (Davidson-Shivers et al., 2018; Davidson-Shivers & Rand, 2022; Simonson et al., 2015; see also Henri & Lundgren-Cayrol, 2001; Power, 2002; Samson, Khoi & Lafleur, 2022). On the other hand, asynchronous distance learning occurs when learners and teachers benefit from the pre-recorded course at different times at their convenience (Davidson-Shivers et al., 2018; Davidson-Shivers & Rand, 2022; Simonson et al., 2015; see also Henri & Lundgren-Cayrol, 2001; Power, 2002; Samson & Lafleur, 2022). In other words, while asynchronous distance learning involves learners choosing where and when to learn, synchronous distance learning involves learners choosing where to learn but participating in the course in real time on a schedule set by the learner's educational organization. For most of its history, distance education has been mostly asynchronous (Lowenthal, 2022).

Although distance education has evolved considerably in recent decades following the advent of the internet and related innovative technologies, it is only during the COVID-19 pandemic that synchronous online education has been widely adopted. With the COVID 19 epidemic, all universities in Turkey had to switch to distance education as of March 23, 2020, in online with the decisions of the Executive Board of the Turkish Higher Education Council. At that time, some universities in Turkey implemented an education model consisting of synchronous, some asynchronous, and some combination of these two (Tüzün, 2021). Hence, like all other learners, international students who learned Turkish as a foreign language had been forced to continue their studies online.

This study analyzes the level of satisfaction of students learning Turkish as a foreign language with online education as well as their comparative level of satisfaction with online and face-to-face education. The subsections below present the research problem, importance of the study, assumptions behind the research questions, delimitations, methodology, findings of the data analysis and conclusions.

Research Problem

The use of computer technologies in education offers many advantages in the field of distance education and especially in the field of foreign language teaching, but in practice, it is inevitable that distance education will bring some disadvantages. In this context, the main problem of the study which is namely *"What is the level of satisfaction of students learning Turkish as a foreign language regarding distance online education compared to face-to-face education?"* is the main concern of the study.

The research questions that the study aspires to find out answers to are:

1. What is the satisfaction level of international students learning Turkish as a foreign language regarding distance online education?
2. What are the comparative satisfaction levels of international students learning Turkish as a foreign language regarding distance online and face-to-face education?
3. The satisfaction levels of international students learning Turkish as a foreign language and their gender, age, region of origin, education level, education level of their parents, family income status, the programs they started to study after completing their Turkish language education, the number of foreign languages they know, the number of hours they are connected to the internet per day, their electronic devices. Is there a relationship between ability to use skills and online education experiences before the COVID-19 outbreak?
4. Comparative satisfaction levels of international students learning Turkish as a foreign language, as well as their gender, age, region of origin, education level, education level of their parents, family income status, the programs they started to study after completing their Turkish language education, the number of foreign languages they know, the number of hours they are connected to the Internet per day, Is there a relationship between skill levels to use devices and online education experiences before the COVID-19 outbreak?

The Importance of the Present Study

The study analyses the satisfaction levels of international students learning Turkish as a foreign language regarding distance online education using a quantitative empirical research method. In the study, survey model, which is one of the quantitative research methods, was used. The survey model is a research approach that aims to describe a past or present situation as it is (Karasar, 2002, p. 77). However, most of the existing studies adopt a descriptive perspective with the qualitative analysis method and question the place of new technologies in language learning (Acar&Peker, 2022; Kiliç and Beldag (2021); Bakioglu&Çevik, 2020; Bayburtlu, 2020; Duman, 2020;

Çakır&Yıldırım, 2009; Akkuş&Acar, 2017) . According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), 'traditional theories' always see facts with the same eye and therefore fall short of explaining social phenomena that are in constant change. In this sense, this study is important in terms of presenting data with a quantitative perspective on the subject.

The Assumptions of the Study

In this study,

1. It was assumed that the sample in which the questionnaire was applied reflects the universe.
2. It was assumed that the students forming the sample gave sincere and objective answers to the questions.
3. It was assumed that the data collection tool was capable of revealing the views of the students.

Limitations of the Study

The findings obtained from this study are limited to the international students who enrolled at Uludağ University Turkish Teaching Application and Research Center (ULUTÖMER) during the academic years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021.

Methodology Of The Study

This section presents information about the research design, universe and sample, data collection tools and statistical analysis techniques used to process the collected questionnaire data.

Research design

The research model of the study was determined as a survey research. Survey research is a research approach which aims at representing a situation which existed or still exists as it was or is (Karasar, 2008, p.77). The study was shaped in two stages based on the problem statements. The first stage aimed at revealing the impact of socio-demographic characteristics of the participants. This was done with the help of a scaled demographic information questionnaire of which validity and reliability were calculated by the authors of the present study. In the second stage, a scale prepared to measure the satisfaction levels of students towards distance education was administered to the students. Because of this, descriptive, relational and causal comparison methods from quantitative research methods were applied. In the descriptive method, the situation of a certain subject is researched and aims to reveal the results. The relational method is a method that examines the existence of a relationship between two or more variables. In the causal comparison method, a certain variable is considered and groups that differ in terms of that variable are compared with each other. Causal comparison is a type of research that seeks to identify the variables that may affect the causes of an emerging situation and the consequences of the effect. In causal comparison studies, it is tried to determine what is the reason that affects the result (Büyüköztürk et al. 2010, p.238-239).

Participants

The participants of the study was 50 volunteer international students who enrolled at Bursa Uludağ University Turkish Language Preparatory Classes (ULUTÖMER) during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years. As the medium of language at Bursa Uludağ University is Turkish, the Turkish language proficiency level of all international students is expected to be quite high so that they could follow courses which are delivered in Turkish. For this reason, the preparatory year they spend learning Turkish at the Turkish Teaching Centre (ULUTÖMER) is crucial in terms of their future academic success.

Data Collection Tools

In this study, a questionnaire consisting of 33 items was used to collect data. The first part of the questionnaire included 11 items about personal information. In the second part of the questionnaire, there were 11 items to measure the level of satisfaction with online TFL courses. The rest of the items (11 statements) in the third part of the questionnaire was prepared to elicit information about students' opinions on online learning in comparison to face-to-face education.

In order to determine the level of satisfaction, a five-point Likert-type scale consisting of 10 items was designed based on the studies of McKenna and Kear (1990), Kear et al. (2000), Kearney et al. (2020), McKenna et al. (2012), Conradi et al. (2013), Erarslan and Topkaya (2017), Tekinarslan et al. (2008), Olmes et al. (2021) and Turnic et al. (2022). In addition, to determine the comparative level of satisfaction of Turkish language students with online and face-to-face teaching, 10 additional items were added to the survey. Finally, two other items were included to directly measure the level of student satisfaction with online teaching and the comparative level of student satisfaction with online and face-to-face teaching. The direct measures obtained from these two items were to be compared to the score obtained from the other items. The questionnaire is 5-point Likert type and consists of "I totally agree (5)", "I agree (4)", "I am undecided (3)", "I do not agree (2)" and "I strongly disagree (1)".

Expert opinion was sought to measure the validity of the scale. For this reason, the questionnaire was prepared by taking the opinion of 5 field experts and before it was finalized, it was read and approved by a linguist. The applied expert group included in the lecturers who had been teaching in the Turkish and Educational Sciences Departments

of our university. After the necessary arrangements were made in line with the opinions of the expert group, the questionnaire was administered to 10 international students learning Turkish for trial purposes. At the end of this application, one of the survey items was removed on the grounds that it was not clear enough and the survey was given its final form.

For the reliability of the satisfaction scale, the Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficients were calculated separately for the items in the second and third parts of the questionnaire, and they were found to be $r=.902$ and $r=.939$, respectively.

Figure 1. Reliability of Likert Scale Items Regarding Level of Student Satisfaction

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	50	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	50	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.902	.903	10

Figure 2. Reliability of Likert Scale Items Regarding Comparative Level of Student Satisfaction

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	50	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	50	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.939	.940	10

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed with SPSS version 26.0.0.0, which is a statistical software program, and the obtained data were analyzed with various statistical calculation methods. The Mann-Whitney 2 Independent Sample Test, which is one of the only non-parametric statistical methods in the analysis of the data, was used in the analysis of the data, since the sample size was small (50) and the population distribution of all students who received online

and face-to-face education in ULUTÖMER Turkish preparatory classes in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years, Methods such as Kruskal Wallis K Independent Sample Test and Spearman Correlation Analysis were used.

Findings

The findings obtained as a result of the analyses based on the data of 50 international student participants are listed below:

1. Sociodemographic Findings

These findings were used to compare the difference in students' satisfaction perceptions in terms of qualitative and quantitative variables during the solution of the third and fourth questions in the later stages of the research.

Table 1: Distributions of Qualitative Variables

Variables		N	%
Gender	Male	33	66
	Female	17	34
	Total	50	100
Region	Sub-Saharan Africa	8	16
	North Africa and Middle East	18	36
	Europe and Central Asia	17	34
	East Asia and the Pacific	3	6
	South Asia	2	4
	North America	1	2
	Latin America and the Caribbea	1	2
	Total	50	100
Level of Education	High school or equivalent	25	50
	License or equivalent	10	20
	Masters or equivalent	15	30
	Total	50	100
Parents Education Level	Did not go to school or complete high school	8	16
	High school or equivalent	12	24
	License or equivalent	17	34
	Masters or equivalent	10	20
	PhD or equivalent	3	6
	Total	50	100
Family Income Status	Bad	2	4
	Average	31	62
	Good	15	30
	Alright	2	4
	Total	50	100
Program after Turkish Language Study	Engineering and Agriculture Programs	12	24
	Economics and Administrative Sciences Programs	10	20
	Medicine, Veterinary Medicine and Health Sciences Programs	4	8
	Education Science Programs	5	10
	Science and Agriculture Programs	10	20
	Arts and Law Programs	5	10
	Theology Program	4	8
	Total	50	100
	Ability to Use Electronic Devices	Bad	2
Average		6	12
Good		24	48
Alright		18	36
Total		50	100
Experience with Online Teaching before Covid-19	I had no experience with online teaching	28	56
	I had completed one or more no-certified online courses	10	20
	I had completed a certified online course	8	16
	I had completed two certified online courses	2	4
	I had completed three or more	2	4

certified online courses	50	100
Total	50	100

When we examine the data in Table 1, it is seen that the majority of the respondents are male in terms of gender, students of European and Central Asian origin, as well as North African and Middle Eastern countries as the geographical region they live in. In terms of education levels, it was determined that they were educated at least at the level of high school and equivalent schools and higher. The analyses of the demographic data showed that the education level of the families of these students is at least at the level of high school and equivalent schools, university and master's level, and the income level of their families is at a medium and good level.

Table 2: Distributions of Quantitative Variables

Variable		N	%
Age	<23	26	52
	23-27	13	26
	>27	11	22
	Total	50	100
Number of foreign languages spoken	1	1	2
	2-3	36	72
	4-5	10	20
	>5	3	6
	Total	50	100
Number of hours per day connected to the Internet	<4	7	14
	4-6	35	70
	>6	8	16
	Total	50	100

According to the Table 2, it is seen that the majority of the participants are younger than 23 years old and the other half are older than 23 and 27 years old. In addition, a large percentage of the participants know at least two and at most 5 languages and are multilingual students. A significant part of the participants stated that they spend 4 to 6 hours a day on the Internet.

2. Findings Obtained from the Satisfaction Survey

The findings obtained in line with the sub-problems of the research are presented below:

1. The average satisfaction level of students regarding distance online education is approximately three and a half points out of five (3,374/5).

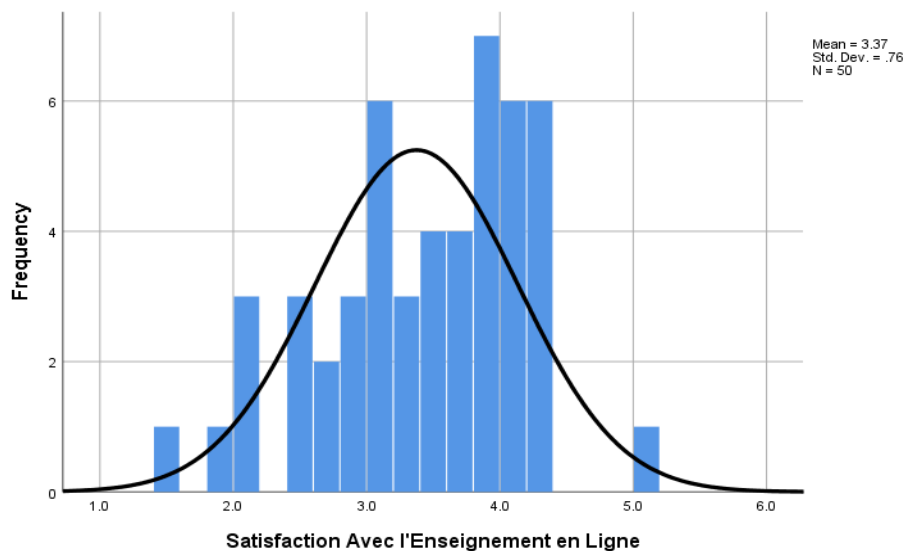


Figure 3. Satisfaction with online teaching

2. The average comparative satisfaction level of students with online and face-to-face education is about three points out of five (2,868/5).

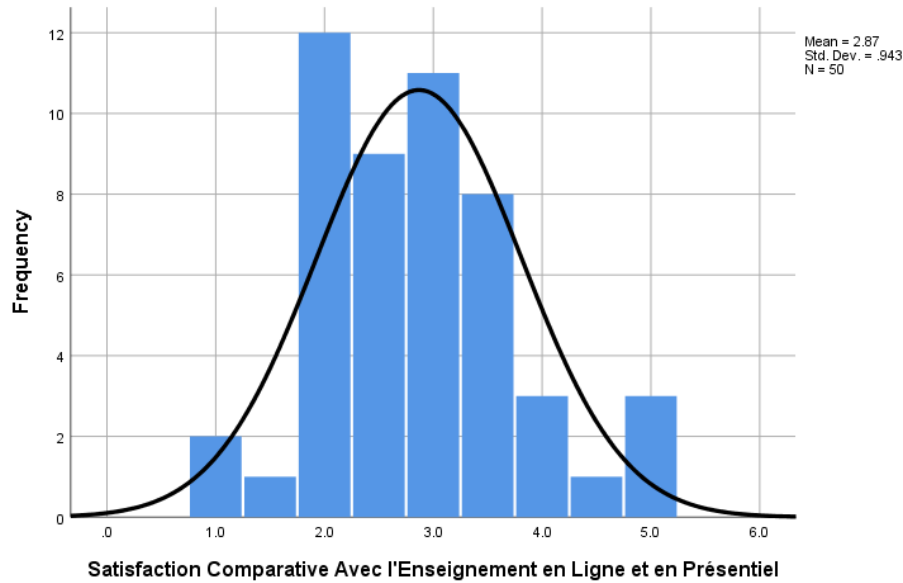


Figure 4. Comparison of satisfaction level of face-to-face education and distance education

3. There is no significant relationship between students' satisfaction levels and socio-demographic variables. In other words, students' satisfaction levels and gender, age, region of origin, education level, education level of their parents, family income status, the programs they started to study after completing their Turkish language education, the number of foreign languages they know, the number of hours they are connected to the internet per day, the ability to use electronic devices. There is no significant relationship between the participants' digital skills and their online education experiences before the COVID-19 outbreak.
4. There is no significant relationship between students' comparative satisfaction levels and socio-demographic variables. In other words, the comparative satisfaction levels of the students and their gender, age, region of origin, education level, education level of their parents, family income status, the programs they started to study after completing their Turkish language education, the number of foreign languages they know, the number of hours they are connected to the internet per day, their electronic devices. There is no significant relationship between the participants' digital skills and their online education experiences before the COVID-19 outbreak.

Discussions and Conclusions

Today, e-teaching/learning is emerging as a great modern alternative to traditional teaching/learning and has become increasingly popular in every industry. Of course, language teaching also benefits from this. The use of technology in language teaching makes it easier for both teachers and students in many areas because in distance learning the time and space barrier of traditional teaching has been removed and everyone has the possibility of receiving an education at any time and in any place. Distance education has been in use for teaching foreign language teaching. For example, Civelek & Karatepe (2021) taught speech acts successfully by using self-access course materials. The study results also indicated that students had positive feelings towards online learning.

In this study we have tried to compare the satisfaction of international students with the level of their online learning Turkish in comparison to that of face-to-face teaching, that is to say, the practices of traditional teaching. The study also looked into their online language learning motivation and the teaching/learning processes by comparing it with that of their motivation and the teaching/learning processes in face-to-face settings. The data was also analyzed by correlating these results, based students' socio-demographic factors

In order to analyze the level of satisfaction of Turkish language students with online teaching as well as their comparative level of satisfaction with online and face-to-face teaching, a questionnaire was administered to 50 volunteer international students who are among the learners who studied online and face-to-face in Bursa Uludağ University Turkish Language Preparatory Classes (ULUTÖMER) during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years.

The results indicate that the sample of 50 students of the Turkish language indicated their satisfaction with online education given that the average level of satisfaction of these students with respect to online education is about three and a half points out of five (3.374/5). Additionally, the results showed that they were slightly more satisfied with online teaching compared to face-to-face teaching given that students' average comparative level of

satisfaction with online teaching and face-to-face is about three out of five points (2.868/5) in favor of online teaching. In addition, it was found that there is no significant relationship between the level of satisfaction of Turkish language students and socio-demographic variables, due to probably the small size (50) of the sample. Finally, there is also no significant relationship between the comparative level of satisfaction of Turkish language students and socio-demographic variables, because of the same reason.

This result we reached in our study coincides with the positive results of some studies in favor of online learning (Eygü & Karaman 2013; Sapanca, 2015; Mercan 2018; Deveci, 2019; Aktürk, 2020; Aldemir, 2020; Talan, 2022). The most important reason for this may be that individuals continue their education life freely by eliminating the perception of time and space in distance education. It can also be that it puts the student at the center, supports lifelong learning, and provides students with the opportunity to learn at their own place (Talan, 2022:550). The above results are not surprising because that the survey participants of our study group are a sample of international students who are studying language in Turkey, for this reason they easily find the possibility to practice the Turkish language outside of their class. It is an exchange carried out face to face in a real situation of communication with native speakers in everyday life. In the case of this face-to-face exchange, they can not only speak but at the same time listen, understand and react in a foreign language. In other words, they have the possibility to learn and practice Turkish as a foreign language in the natural environment, in an autonomy. In addition, all survey participants are adept at using the internet and they use it frequently in all areas. Since these students have a high level of income, they have no problem accessing the Internet. Eygü and Karaman (2013) found a significant relationship between students' daily computer usage time and technology and evaluation factors. Likewise, Sapanca (2015) found in his study that the satisfaction levels of those who use the internet for 4-5 hours for teaching activities are higher than those who use the internet for 0-1 hours and 2-3 hours. This is why online learning would be rather comfortable and favorable to them for several reasons already mentioned in the theoretical framework. For example: students who do not have the opportunity to learn the language or improve their foreign language due to their work, can benefit from the advantages of cost, time and space thanks to distance education. Also, the biggest advantage is being able to take classes from the comfort of their home or workplace without putting in any extra effort.

Besides all these positive aspects, in some of the studies conducted in the field, it has been determined that students' attitudes towards distance education are negative. (Erfidan, 2019; Öztaş&Kılıç, 2017, Karatepe et al., 2020; Eroğlu&Kalaycı, 2020). Basaran et al. (2020) in their studies have come to the conclusion, according to the opinions of students, parents and instructors that there are beneficial aspects of distance education during the pandemic period, but there are problems such as limited interaction, passive participation in classes, not considering individual differences, and problems in attending classes due to hardware and internet access problems. Similarly, Karatepe et al. (2020), found in their study that teacher candidates' attitudes towards synchronous lessons were negative. In the study conducted by Eroğlu and Kalaycı (2020), students think that distance education courses are inefficient, boring and inadequate, contain simple topics and unnecessary details, and exams are easy and inadequate. In the same study, a significant part of the students stated that they could not communicate with the instructors (Eroğlu&Kalaycı, 2020).

Although all these and similar studies carried out on distance online education say otherwise, in accordance with the conclusions and the theoretical part of our study, it was found that online education is a satisfactory practice and it would be possible to achieve the intended success once the quality of distance education applications is improved.

Recommendations

To achieve this, it can be recommended to develop online teaching programs, strengthen the communication network and train and equip instructors on special teaching methods. In his study, Can (2020) emphasizes that in order to successfully maintain the distance education applied during the epidemic period, it should be done with technical equipment, access, security, content, planning, implementation, quality, regulation and pedagogical work. On the other hand, in their study examining various aspects of distance education in Turkey, Geçgel et al. (2020) states that for the success of distance education, which has come to the forefront with the pandemic process, the digital skills of teachers and students should be developed and textbooks and programs should be designed accordingly.

For future studies, it could be proposed to use a random sampling method (and not voluntary sampling) and also to use very large sample sizes (greater than or equal to 100). In this way, it would be possible to use parametric methods in the data analysis process and obtain results with higher statistical power.

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