

## University Student's Opinions on Distance Education during the Covid-19 Pandemic<sup>1</sup>

**Eren Akdağ Kurnaz**

Dr., Kütahya Dumlupınar University, [eren.akdag@dpu.edu.tr](mailto:eren.akdag@dpu.edu.tr)

**Asım Arı**

Prof., Eskişehir Osmangazi University, [ari@ogu.edu.tr](mailto:ari@ogu.edu.tr)

Technological advances and the COVID-19 pandemic have led to a significant paradigm shift in the field of education, especially in the field of distance education. In this period, although distance education offers a number of advantages to its users, it has also brought some difficulties. This sudden transition has had a profound impact on students, teachers, and institutions, leading to changes in teaching methods, assessment practices, and student engagement strategies. This study aims to investigate the problems that arise in the distance education process and to examine the effects of these problems on students in detail. A qualitative approach is considered ideal since it enables deeper understanding of experiences of university students during distance education. Convenience sampling was chosen because it provided easy access for the researchers and allowed the inclusion of participants who met the required criteria. The participants consisted of 37 people, 28 girls and 9 boys, who had experienced the distance education and were studying in the Psychological Counselling and Guidance programme in the second year of a state university located in the Aegean region of Türkiye. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using content analysis and thematic analysis methods. According to the findings of the study, the problems encountered by the students in the distance education process were listed under the following main themes: technological problems, problems related to the monitoring and evaluation of the course, motivation problems, emotional and physical problems, communication problems, problems related to domestic and environmental factors, feeling of professional inadequacy. In addition, students' suggestions for solutions to these problems and their opinions about whether they prefer face-to-face or online education were also discussed. As a result, the study offers suggestions for educational institutions and educators to overcome the difficulties encountered in distance education and to make the experience a positive one.

Keywords: distance education, university students, content analysis, COVID 19, educational technology

### INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, which emerged at the beginning of 2020 and had a worldwide impact, dragged people into an unfamiliar process. This process has brought many changes not only at the individual but also at the social level. One of the areas most affected by these changes has undoubtedly been education. As of the middle of the 2020 spring semester, university students took a break from face-to-face education and courses continued with synchronous and asynchronous distance education methods. University students found themselves in a different order in front of screens at

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home instead of the classroom environments they were used to continue their education. In this new process, students and educators have tried to find out how to get the most out of distance education and online courses by experiencing and researching. With this process, institutions have had to continue their educational practices with distance education and therefore have paid more attention to distance education methods and technologies.

The concept of distance education is not a concept that has emerged in recent years. While distance education was carried out in the past with tools such as letters, radio, books, newspapers, today, distance education activities are carried out with various tools such as television, computer, tablet, mobile phone through the opportunities provided by technology. Distance education is an education method in which students and educators do not physically come together and carry out information and learning processes over electronic communication tools and the internet. This type of education provides students with access to resources such as various educational materials, course contents, assignments, and exams. Uşun (2006) defines distance education as an educational technology application in which the source and receiver are in separate environments, individuality, flexibility and independence features, and communication and interaction are provided by technical means. Distance education has become more widespread especially with the development of technology. Video conferencing, e-learning platforms, instructional videos, interactive classroom environments and other online tools enable students to attend classes and monitor learning processes. They also offer flexibility to students so that they can learn at their own pace. According to Ateş (2010), distance education, which was developed as an alternative to traditional face-to-face education, is the biggest change brought by information and internet technologies to educational environments. In distance education, multiple technologies are used synchronously or asynchronously between students and instructors in different locations (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Distance education can be divided into two categories: Asynchronous and Synchronous learning (Nasrullah, 2014). Asynchronous distance learning is based on interactions between teacher and student at different times, such as learning from instructions on paper, listening to recorded lectures or watching pre-recorded visual tutorials in a flexible time frame. In contrast, synchronous learning requires real-time interactions such as listening to live radio programmes or attending live online lectures (Shahabadi, 2015).

Today, distance education is widely used in countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, Russia, India, most African countries, and European and Eastern European countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Turkey, Sweden, the Netherlands. Countries such as Poland, Hungary and Romania have been using it for almost more than a hundred years. On average, the roots of distance education go back about 150 years (Morrou, 1982). In this context, the history of distance education can be generally discussed in five periods. These periods can be listed as follows:

1. The pre-correspondence education period: This period includes various educational initiatives aimed at addressing the lack of access to education prior to the establishment of formal correspondence education systems.
2. The period of extensive implementation of education through letter systems: During this period, education heavily relied on printed materials distributed via the postal system, including books, newspapers, guidebooks, and other printed media, to deliver educational content.
3. The era of one-way communication through broadcasting: This phase involved teaching through radio and television broadcasts, which functioned alongside printed materials to provide audio and visual course materials.
4. The onset of two-way audio and interactive communication: With the introduction of two-way audio and video communication technologies, educators were able to incorporate greater interactivity into distance education.

5. The fifth era in the delivery of distance education can be defined as the use of satellite and future technologies integrated through computer and computer fusion systems. Telecommunication technologies such as radio, television, videotape, computer, satellite, and fibre optics are assisting educators with developments in the communications and electronics industry (Cedefop, 2021).

Distance education has many contributions to the education and training process. The flexibility of time and space it provides, its ability to appeal to large masses, its ability to be shaped according to students' learning speeds and methods (Arat & Bakan, 2014), the rich course materials it offers, its synchronous and asynchronous working principles, and its ability to leave a wide space for the student (Kırık, 2016) are among the advantages of distance education. However, in addition to these advantages, there are also problems related to distance education such as weakness in the interaction between the learner and the teacher (Duran, 2020), students' feeling of isolation from their friends and consequently loss of motivation (Durak, 2017), technical and infrastructure problems (Altıparmak et al., 2011), and restriction of some students' access to education due to financial inadequacies (Elcil & Şahiner, 2014). In order to be successful in the distance education process and to provide an efficient education and training environment for students, it is necessary to plan and configure well and to ensure the active participation of students (Türkoğlu, 2003).

There are various studies on the problems encountered by university students in the distance education process. These studies have been conducted to understand the difficulties and dissatisfaction students face in distance education and their strategies to overcome these problems. One of the important studies on this subject was conducted by Hu et al. (2022) in Northern Michigan, a region of the USA severely affected by the pandemic. The aim of this study was to examine the intersection of COVID-19 fear and mental health outcomes among university students. A total of 151 college students (female, 76) participated in the study. Participants' potential psychological symptoms, anxiety, happiness, learning disabilities, and demographic information were investigated. According to the results of the study, the participants' education was severely affected by the pandemic. When students were asked how much their learning quality was affected, they gave an average score of 7.6 out of 10. Acheampong (2023) investigated the perceived impact of COVID-19 on student learning and academic performance with a qualitative approach. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 purposively selected participants. The findings revealed that 63% of the students faced multiple challenges during COVID-19 online learning that affected their academic performance. The study provides insight into students' academic performance during COVID-19 online education. In his literature review, Osadare (2022) examined the effects of distance education applied in the COVID-19 process on students. The results of his research showed that university students suffer from social isolation and other disruptions in the study routine, which leads to lower levels of well-being and poor academic performance. Social isolation and disruptions in study routine caused negative physical, emotional, cognitive, economic, and social transformations. Jili et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study through relevant literature and policy reviews to examine student experiences in the emergency distance education process during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings show that some staff and students experienced challenges related to lack of resources and exposure to use information and communication technologies remotely. Students were found to struggle with issues such as technological problems, lack of motivation and lack of interaction. The article emphasises that higher education institutions should acquire appropriate ICT equipment and develop the necessary facilities, implement rules and regulations for their availability and adequate maintenance. Singh and Grobelaar (2022) stated in their research that the transition from traditional methods to online learning caused difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these challenges include the digital divide, adaptation, course quality and content, the competence of lecturers, and assessment methods. In their study, Kürtüncü and Kurt (2020) themed the problems in distance education as "problems in distance education infrastructure", "lack of face-to-face

education", "limitation of opportunity", "mood brought by the pandemic" and "exam anxiety". Solution suggestions were themed as "improving the distance education infrastructure", "using additional web-based applications", "giving homework instead of exams" and accelerated programme". Karagöz et al. (2020) addressed the problems of medical faculty students receiving distance education during the pandemic process. According to the results of their study, the study frequency of a large proportion of students (82.1%) decreased compared to the past. Lack of motivation in students is noteworthy. Keskin Kızıltepe and Kurtgöz (2020) conducted a study to determine the attitudes and opinions of nursing students towards distance education they received during the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result of the study, it was determined that the students had problems in following and participating in the courses during the distance education process, had difficulty in comprehending and learning the theoretical and practical parts, and felt inadequate in practice. In the research conducted by Sarıkaya (2021), it was aimed to reveal the opinions of prospective music teachers about distance education during the pandemic process. According to the results of the study, music teacher candidates' interest in distance education applied during the pandemic process is lower than traditional education. Students state that they have communication problems with their teachers during the distance education process and that they cannot find sufficient opportunities to access technological tools such as internet and computers. In the study conducted by Yolcu (2020), it was tried to understand the distance education experiences of classroom teaching students of the faculty of education. As a result of the study, it was determined that students encountered problems in distance education such as insufficient opportunity to ask questions, lack of communication with teachers and friends, distraction in the home environment and unsuitability for practical courses.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The changes in human life because of various situations such as diseases and natural disasters in the world show us that distance education applications will be used much more and will become much more important in the coming years at every stage and sector of education, with students from all levels of education. This situation makes it necessary to conduct more studies on distance education, to examine the subject in depth, to analyse what students experience in the process and to identify possible problems in advance.

The aim of this study is to examine the opinions of university students about distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic process, to analyse their experiences and thoughts in the process and to make suggestions for the future. The study is important because it is related to distance education during the pandemic and is thought to bring new perspectives to distance education. The aim of this research is to reveal the opinions of university students about the problems they encountered during the distance education process. For this purpose, answers to the following main question and sub questions were sought in the research:

- 1- What are the problems faced by university students during the distance education process?
  - What are the problems university students encounter in distance education courses, exam, and assignments?
  - What are the students' solution suggestions regarding this process?
  - Do students prefer face-to-face education or distance education?

### **METHOD**

#### **Research Model**

This study, in which the problems encountered by the students in the distance education process and the effects of these problems on the students are investigated, is of the phenomenology type from

qualitative research methods. Phenomenology is an approach that focuses on phenomena that we are aware of but do not have an in-depth and detailed understanding. In phenomenological research, data collection sources are individuals or groups who live the phenomenon that the research focuses on or who can express and reflect this phenomenon (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). Semi-structured interview technique, one of the qualitative data collection techniques, was used in the study. Content analysis and thematic analysis methods were used to analyse the data. Content analysis and thematic analysis are commonly employed methods for analyzing qualitative data. They are very effective for understanding individuals' experiences, opinions, and ideas, aligning with the objectives of our study aimed at exploring students' perspectives on the distance education process.

### **Participants**

The participants consisted of 37 people, 28 girls and 9 boys, who had experienced the distance education process and were studying in the Psychological Counselling and Guidance programme in the second year of a state university located in the Aegean region of Türkiye. Convenient sampling method was used in the selection of participants in the study. Convenient sampling method is the selection of the sample from easily accessible and applicable units due to the limitations in terms of time, money, and labour force (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016). This sampling method provides speed and practicality to the research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

### **Data Collection Tool**

In this study, which was conducted to evaluate the problems faced by students during the Covid-19 pandemic process, which affected the whole world, and to present solution suggestions, a semi-structured interview form prepared by the researchers and finalised in line with expert opinions was used to obtain the study data. Semi-structured interviews are between two extremes. Semi-structured interviews are neither as rigid as fully structured interviews nor as flexible as unstructured interviews. Since it provides this flexibility, an interview form was developed to use semi-structured interview technique in the research. While preparing the semi-structured interview form, firstly the questions to be asked about the study topic were determined. While creating the questions, principles such as writing easy-to-understand questions, asking open-ended questions, preparing focused questions, avoiding directing, avoiding asking multidimensional questions, and organising the questions logically were paid attention (Koçoğlu & Egüz, 2019). To create the interview form, firstly, the literature on the subject was reviewed. After the literature review, the semi-structured interview form was submitted to the expert opinion. After the expert opinion, the semi-structured interview form was finalised. To investigate the problems encountered by the students in the distance education process, students were asked six questions. The questions asked to students to get their opinions about the problems they encountered in the online courses they took and exams during the distance education process. The following questions were asked to obtain students' opinions about distance education:

1. What are the problems you encounter while taking distance courses? Can you give examples and explain? What are your suggestions, if any?
2. What are the problems you encounter in your distance exams? Can you give an example and explain? What are your solution suggestions, if any?
3. What are the problems you encounter while preparing homework? Can you give an example and explain? What are your solution suggestions, if any?
4. What are the problems you encountered during these periods before coming to the faculty? Can you give examples and explain? What are your solution suggestions, if any?
5. If you had a choice, which one would you choose between distance education, distance exam and face-to-face education and exam? Can you explain why?

6. What would you like to say about this process you went through?

### **Data collection**

Semi-structured interview technique, which is a qualitative data collection technique, was preferred as a data collection technique. Qualitative research is a type of research that deals with the process rather than products or outputs and where meanings are important (Merriam, 1988: Cited in Yılmaz & Altınkurt, 2011). Semi-structured interviews are frequently preferred by researchers for reasons such as having a certain level of standardisation and flexibility, eliminating the limitations of tests and questionnaires based on writing and filling in, and helping to obtain in-depth information on a specific subject (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). It is considered beneficial to employ various data collection methods in enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings. Each of the questions in the semi-structured interview form was asked to the participants verbally and in writing on the distance education platform and the participants' answers were obtained. At the same time, the participants were asked to send their answers to the interview questions via e-mail and the answers were evaluated by the researchers.

### **Analysing the Data**

In the study, content analysis and thematic analysis techniques were employed to categorize the responses obtained from students through written semi-structured interview forms. The data obtained from the forms were firstly transferred to the Office programme and read several times to ensure the recognition of the content of the interviews and priority codes were created accordingly. Then, the codes were brought together and the themes (categories) that will form the outlines of the research findings were revealed by defining and naming potential themes, and content analysis and thematic analysis were performed. Content analysis is defined as a systematic technique in which some words of a text are summarised with smaller content categories through specific coding (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016). In content analysis, it can be said that it is aimed to increase the quality of the data obtained from the categories (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). Thematic analysis is to interpret the similar data by associating certain concepts and themes with the concepts that can explain the collected data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). The results of the analysis were presented in the findings section of the study under thematic categories. Examples of the findings were provided through direct quotations attributed to the students, such as "Student 1," "Student 5," etc., illustrating their respective problems and opinions.

### **FINDINGS**

The analysis and findings obtained from the answers given to the questions asked to the university students in the interview form are given in the tables below. Findings obtained from the study were given and defined under codes and themes. It is also enriched with direct quotes.

#### **Problems faced by university students during the distance education process.**

As a result of the analysis, seven themes were reached related to the student's opinions about problems they encounter in distance education process. In table 1, the problems of university students encountered during their distance education process are given.

Table 1  
Problems encountered by students in distance education

Theme	F
1. Technological issues	34
2. Problems based on monitoring and evaluation of the course	33
3. Motivation problems	28
4. Emotional and Physical Problems	26
5. Communication problems	25
6. Problems related to domestic and environmental factors	23
7. Feeling of professional inadequacy	22

It is seen in Table 1 that the first problem encountered by the students in distance education is technological problems. The second problem encountered by the students in this process is the problems related to the monitoring and evaluation of the course. These problems are followed by motivation problems, emotional and physical problems, communication problems, problems related to domestic and environmental factors, and feeling of professional inadequacy.

**Problems university students encounter in distance education courses, exam, and assignments.**

Table 2  
Problems related to technological issues

Theme	Codes
Technological issues	Internet connection problems Problems caused by the platform used for distance education Power cut Problems with accessing technological tools

The first theme obtained from the research revealed that one of the most important problems encountered by the students in the distance education process was technology-related problems. Students stated that they experienced technological problems during distance education such as internet interruption, power outage and inability to take microphone and screenshots due to the intensity of the system used for distance education. Regarding this issue, the students expressed the following:

*"The most common problem I encounter in distance education is the disconnection of the course connection due to power cuts or internet problems." (Student 33)*

*"I cannot enter the system on the first try during the common class hours of the whole school (especially at 9 a.m. and 1 p.m.). I must make many attempts and by the time I enter, the class has already started" (Student 30)*

*"There are times when I cannot switch on the microphone. When I encounter such problems, the solution I usually use is to try again and again to switch it off. Sometimes there are connection interruption problems caused by power outages during the exam. Because of this, time can be lost." (Student 27)*

*"First of all, there may be disconnections while listening to the lectures due to problems such as internet or power cuts. I think the power cut is the most important problem we may*

*experience. Because after it is cut off, it may not come back for 3-4 hours or even more." (Student 22)*

*"I may have problems with the internet connection. At home, all of my family members' class hours overlap and my internet speed may slow down." (Student 10)*

**Table 3**  
**Problems based on monitoring and evaluation of the course**

Theme	Codes
Problems based on monitoring and evaluation of the course	Time limitation during homework and exams Comprehensive assignments Not providing adequate explanations about assignments given Limited communication compared to face to face education Limited knowledge and practice in distance education and learning methods

The second theme obtained from the research is the problems based on the monitoring and evaluation of the course. Students stated that they encountered problems both in the course process in distance education and in exams and evaluation. In the process of monitoring the course, students stated that the lessons were not productive, and in the evaluation phase, they stated that they had problems especially with the duration of the exams. The statements of the students related to this theme are as follows:

*"Some of the lecturers are not suitable for distance education. In addition, my method of understanding and comprehending the course is not compatible with distance education." (Student 19)*

*"I don't have any problems in preparing homework, but I have trouble understanding what exactly is asked in the assignments given in some of our lessons." (Student 13)*

*"Not every teacher can use the lesson efficiently. Therefore, we cannot understand much from the lesson. Some of our teachers who give homework can give homework with strict and challenging conditions as if they only have their own course." (Student 16)*

*"I had time problems in the exams. I don't think it is fair and does not measure knowledge." (Student 23)*

**Table 4**  
**Motivation problems**

Theme	Codes
Motivation problems	Distraction while following the lesson Focusing problems Difficulty in fulfilling responsibilities The comfort of being at home

The third theme reached from the research is the motivation problems. Students stated that the motivation problem they experience in distance education is due to the long hours they spend in front of the screen and the conditions of the environment they are in. They expressed this problem as follows:



*"I can't focus on the lessons, I don't want to study, our lesson times overlap with my siblings, I can't get efficiency from the lesson." (Student 5)*

*"The fact that our lecturers' voices are cut or low during the lesson affects me negatively in terms of focusing on the lesson." (Student 9)*

*"I think that I cannot have the necessary seriousness in front of the screen, and I cannot focus on the lesson sufficiently. I think that there is a serious difference between attending a lesson in a classroom and attending a lesson in a room of the house." (Student 15)*

*"I realised that I could never adapt when I entered the lesson on my phone, I felt as if there was no atmosphere of a lesson, I could not even listen, maybe it was a problem caused by me, but it bothered me a lot." (Student 18)*

Table 5  
Emotional and physical problems

Theme	Codes
Emotional and Physical Problems	Feeling stressful during exams Physical problems such as backache, eye problems Difficulties of being away from peers and teachers Psychological problems caused by being away from school

The fourth theme reached from the research is the emotional and physical problems experienced by the students. Students stated that they had both emotional and physical difficulties in the distance education process. Emotionally, they stated that they experienced lack of self-confidence due to their inability to enter social environments, and physically, they experienced back and lower back pain and eye problems due to the long time they spent in front of the computer. The statements of the students related to this theme are as follows:

*"Since my computer does not have a speakerphone, I have to use my phone, which causes back pain and fatigue." (Student 4)*

*"I have at least one homework from almost every subject. This causes me to spend a lot of time in front of the computer. As a result, I experience eye fatigue, inability to see as well as before, back, and lower back pain, and waking up tired. Distance education is much more tiring than face-to-face education. I must say that this process wears me out both mentally and physically." (Student 9)*

*"I think our lack of self-confidence has increased. What we could say by standing on the blackboard in the classroom, now we cannot say by opening the microphone." (Student 10)*

*"Sitting in front of the computer for hours both prevents me from focusing on the lesson and causes serious harm in terms of health." (Student 16)*

Table 6  
Communication problems

Theme	Codes
Communication problem	Communication problems in group assignments Limitation in communication between teacher and student and students among themselves Limitation in discussion and interaction during lessons

The fifth theme is the communication problem that students experience with their teachers and classmates. In distance education, students stated that they had difficulties in sharing their ideas and thoughts with both their teachers and their classmates on the screen, so they could not communicate effectively, especially when doing group work. Students expressed this problem as follows:

*"On the way to the university, the lectures are discussed and debated there, and the lectures are better understood and enjoyable. After the class, we used to group in the library and do homework or prepare before the class. We used to read books and discuss. Unfortunately, this semester was not like that." (Student 21)*

*"I think that being in the same environment with people who are in the same situation as me and socialising with them is also a part of education." (Student 28)*

*"I think that it is easier to remember information with effective communication, verbal and non-verbal (gestures, hand gestures) communication. Attention can be distracted very quickly in distance education. As long as there is no movement on the screen, one can get distracted, but even if our attention is diverted away from the teacher or our speaking friend, it is easier to recover." (Student 32)*

Table 7  
Problems related to domestic and environmental factors

Theme	Codes
Problems related to domestic and environmental factors	Having other siblings taking lessons at home Noise in the home environment Limited opportunities such as having a separate room

The sixth theme reached from the research is the problems experienced by the students due to domestic and environmental factors. The students stated that they experienced problems such as noise and interruption of their lessons because they acted according to the current flow of the lives of other family members living at home. They stated that they experienced problems such as the lack of adequate conditions such as heat and comfort due to the environment and the overlapping of the lessons of many children in the house at the same time. These problems were expressed by the students as follows:

*"I am sure there are thousands of students who have difficulties like me, who do not have a single room to study at home, etc. I wish there had been planning for such a situation before the virus, maybe we would not have had such difficulties. I think we should work more on equality of opportunity in education." (Student 5)*

*"Home conditions can cause many problems. For example, listening to lectures while there is noise at home is a big problem in terms of focussing. Or you have to constantly warn the people at home during the exam." (Student 7).*

Table 8  
Feeling of professional inadequacy

Theme	Codes
Feeling of professional inadequacy	Feeling academically inadequate Feeling inadequate in the field of application

The seventh theme reached from the research is the feeling of professional inadequacy experienced by the students in the distance education process. Students stated that they felt inadequate in the applied and experiential learning areas required to be professionally competent. The statements of the students related to this theme are as follows:

*"Especially not being able to fully learn the content of our field courses seems to lead to professional inadequacies." (Student 10)*

*"I think the most important thing is that we are very disconnected from the courses, and we cannot get the desired efficiency. Especially not being able to learn the content of our field courses seems to lead to professional inadequacies." (Student 10)*

*"I realised that although the lessons can be passed easily, they have no meaning unless we understand them and fully master the information about our profession." (Student 14)*

#### **University students' suggestions regarding the problems they encounter in distance education process.**

Table 9  
Students' suggestion

Theme	Codes	f
Students' suggestions	Development of platform used for distance education Giving homework instead of exams Keeping exam durations longer Giving courses on distance educations to teachers and students	37

Students suggested that the measurement and evaluation process should be carried out with homework instead of exams in distance education. If there will be an exam, they suggested that the exam periods should be kept longer, or the students should be divided into groups and taken the exam at different times. The students shared their thoughts and solution suggestions based on their experiences about exams and the teaching of the courses to carry out the distance education process in a better way as follows:

*"I think assigning homework rather than exams is a more logical solution. Because the information we learn while doing homework is more permanent. For example, the homework of preparing a lesson plan was so useful that I now know how to conduct that lesson when I teach in a classroom. However, since the purpose of the exam is only to know the questions, I think it does not carry much learning purpose for the students." (Student 7)*

*"As a solution suggestion, I can say that our teachers should give instructions while giving homework. In this way, we can both understand the homework and get efficiency from the homework." (Student 28)*

*"Both students and our lecturers should be trained on how to make distance education efficient." (Student 16)*

### **Students' preferences about face-to-face education or distance education**

Tablo 10  
Students' preferences

Theme	Codes	
Students' preferences for face-to-face education	Ease of communication with teachers and classmates Asking questions and getting answers immediately about things you dont understand Motivational environment Opportunities for practical learning	35

When the students were asked whether they prefer face-to-face education or distance education, most of them stated that they prefer face-to-face education. The answers given by the students to the question of face-to-face education or distance education are as follows:

*"If I had a choice, I would prefer face-to-face education. Online education does not provide me with efficiency in most courses. I would also prefer face-to-face in terms of the exam, if I am going to fail in the exam, I prefer to fail for reasons that are in my hands. Not because of situations beyond my control." (Student 16)*

*"I would prefer face-to-face lessons and face-to-face exams. One-to-one communication in face-to-face education facilitates learning. In the exam, you strive for the same goal in a quiet environment with everyone, this both increases your motivation and you do not have any focusing problems." (Student 7)*

*"I would definitely want it face to face. I wouldn't have internet problems. And cheating would have been minimised. Unfortunately, cheating is very common in distance exams. Fair, deserved grades are not obtained." (Student 17)*

### **CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

Distance education has become a widespread education model especially in recent years. However, with this new form of education, various problems experienced by students have also emerged. In this study, the problems encountered by students in distance education were discussed and the most common problems encountered by students in distance education during the Covid 19 pandemic were determined. According to the results of the study, these problems are technological problems, problems related to monitoring and evaluating the course, motivation problem, emotional and physical problems, communication problem, problems related to domestic and environmental factors, and feeling of professional inadequacy. Especially technological problems, lack of motivation and communication difficulties are the most common problems encountered by students in the distance education process.

It is important to draw attention to these problems experienced by students and to take steps to solve these problems. Educational institutions and governments should improve technological infrastructure and support students in providing access at home. Support mechanisms should be established by educational institutions for students to cope with technical problems. In addition, measures should be taken to increase the motivation of students and various methods should be used to encourage their active participation in the distance education process. Educational materials and teaching methods should be reviewed, and interactive learning experiences should be encouraged. To overcome communication problems, various tools and platforms can be used to strengthen communication between educators and students. Guidance services and support groups should be established to support open and regular communication between students and educators.

In conclusion, distance education seems to be a model that will maintain its importance as a part of the education system in the future. However, to help students adapt to this model, educational institutions should understand the problems faced by students and offer solutions. Overcoming these problems will be possible with the co-operation of stakeholders. When these problems in distance education are effectively tackled, the success of students will increase, and our education system will become stronger. When we find solutions to the problems in distance education, we will have the chance to create a more inclusive, fair, and effective education system.

We can offer some suggestions to overcome the problems faced by students in distance education and to provide a more effective distance education experience. To prevent students from interrupting their education due to technical problems, educational institutions should help students, especially low-income students, with appropriate devices and reliable internet access. Technical support can be provided to students by establishing a technical support line and counselling units. Creative approaches should be used to increase students' motivation, course materials and teaching methods should be diversified.

By giving students interesting projects, their level of participation and interest can be increased. In addition, students should be encouraged to follow themselves and set goals. Student-teacher and student-student communication is important. Communication can be improved by regularly using tools such as virtual class meetings, discussion forums and video conferences. Students should be encouraged to ask questions and ask for help. Assessment processes in distance education should be rethought. Assessment methods should reflect students' actual achievements and should be developed to prevent dishonesty. When designing assignments and exams, teachers can focus more on methods such as open-book exams, project-based assignments, and presentations. Educational institutions should tackle inequality and offer special support to students from low-income families. Inequalities can be reduced by taking measures such as free internet access, devices, or course material assistance. These suggestions may be a start towards providing solutions to the problems faced by students in distance education. However, it should not be forgotten that the needs of each student are different, so flexibility and sensitivity should be prioritised.

Further academic inquiry into distance education research can explore several avenues to deepen our understanding of its effectiveness, impact, and potential for improvement. Researchers can explore innovative pedagogical strategies and instructional designs tailored specifically for distance education. Investigate the effectiveness of various teaching methods, technology-enhanced learning

environments, and interactive multimedia resources in promoting student learning and engagement in remote settings. Factors influencing student motivation, persistence, and success in distance education programs can be investigated. Also, researcher can examine the role of self-regulated learning strategies, social support networks, and intrinsic motivation in fostering student engagement and academic achievement in online learning environments. Lastly, the impact of instructor support and training on the quality of distance education delivery can be investigated. By addressing these research areas, researchers can contribute to the advancement of knowledge in distance education and inform evidence-based practices for enhancing the quality, accessibility, and effectiveness of distance learning experiences.

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