

Experiences of Graduate Students in Turkish Education During the Covid-19 Pandemic Process

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to reveal the experiences of graduate students in the field of Turkish education during the pandemic process. Phenomenology design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the research. The sample of the research consists of graduate and doctoral students studying at different universities. Easily accessible case sampling was used to determine the study group. The data of the study were collected with the interview guide prepared by the researchers and given the final shape after the expert opinion was taken. The study group was reached by using internet tools (Zoom) and data were collected. The content analysis of data was made. As a result of the research, it was seen that during the pandemic process graduate students experienced advantages such as increased technological opportunities, accessing to online materials easily, time saving and efficient studying opportunities. However, disadvantages such as inefficient lessons, lack of interaction, inability to focus on lessons, data collection problems, and inability to benefit from libraries were also revealed as problems experienced by graduate students. Students expect technological opportunities to continue, but to ensure normalization in some issues that cannot be resolved with these opportunities. They think that face-to-face education is more qualified, communication is better, and research can be done more effectively.

INTRODUCTION

World history is full of events that deeply affected people and changed their ways of life. Sometimes wars, migrations, disasters and sometimes pandemics caused these changes. The covid-19 virus, which emerged in 2019 and is thought to continue its effect for years, was seen in 114 countries, and it was accepted as an pandemic by the World Health Organization. Turkey was among the countries where the pandemic was seen and the first case was encountered in March 2020 (Ministry of Health, 2021).

With the beginning of the first cases in Turkey, a series of measures were taken to reduce the spread and prevent the disease. One of the measures taken was carried out in the field of education. Both the Ministry of National Education and the Council of Higher Education took various precautions related to education. The Council of Higher Education temporarily suspended university education on March 16 (CHE, 2020a), but based on the thought that the effects of the pandemic would continue, it was decided to start distance education at universities on March 18, 2020 (CHE, 2020b).

Council of Higher Education took decisions and distance education studies started in all universities. In this process, education activities such as graduate and doctorate began to be carried out.

Distance Education

Technology, social developments or different reasons cause people to experience changes in many areas, and these developments also play an important role in shaping educational activities. Educational activities, which were previously held face-to-face, began to be carried out through letters in 1728, and thus, educational activities began to take on different forms after that day. After the developments in technology, distance education activities continued to take place through radio, television, computer and internet in the following years.

Distance education which is realized by interacting of the people although they are physically in different places has various advantages and disadvantages. It has benefits such as being economical, being more accessible to everyone

(Traxler, 2018), eliminating the problem of time and place (Beldarrain, 2006) and providing equal opportunities (Salar, 2013). However, there are some problems that distance education brings along with its benefits. Two most basic of these problems can be given as the lack of socialization and not knowing how to interact in distance education (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007).

In the first or later periods of distance education, educational activities were carried out asynchronously; however, these activities can be carried out synchronously with the opportunities offered by today's internet technology. A two-way communication environment can be provided with the synchronous distance education (Yorgancı, 2015) which has more advantages than asynchronous education that provides one-way communication but access whenever students want or need (Watts, 2016), and the recording of the lessons gives the students the opportunity to access these lessons whenever they need. While the ease of access provided by asynchronous education creates satisfaction for students, the lack of interaction creates dissatisfaction (Cole et al., 2014). Synchronous or asynchronous education have advantages and disadvantages depending on the conditions.

Distance Education and Graduate Students in the Covid-19 Process

The rapid spread of the Covid-19 virus made face-to-face education in which students come together almost impossible. As a result of the measures taken, many countries had to close schools until April 2020 (UNESCO, 2020). Over time, millions of students were deprived of educational activities. According to UNESCO's (2021) data, schools in 24 countries were closed in May 2021, and 200,895,815 students were deprived of their education in the world. From the first moment when the Covid-19 virus started to show its effect, the issue of how educational activities should be carried out came to the fore worldwide, and various uncertainties emerged about what should be done in this process (Wang et al., 2020). The distance education (Lee, 2020), which is used to overcome the barriers of disadvantaged groups in normal times and to enable them to participate in educational activities, began to be considered as an option that could be used for all students. Since different alternatives could not be found with the uncertainty experienced in the early days, distance education activities were started in many countries (Zhang et al., 2020). In China, where the virus was first seen, distance education was started in all educational institutions and online education systems were made more accessible in order to facilitate the access of all students (Lau et al., 2020).

As in many countries in the world, it was decided to conduct distance education activities in Turkey. In this process, the Ministry of National Education started distance education activities through EBA TV and universities through online platforms. With the distance education activities initiated by the Council of Higher Education at universities in March 2020, in the beginning, 90.1% of the lessons were performed in the form of distance education. In this process, 121 of 189 universities started distance education on March 23, 2020, 41 universities started on March 30, 2020, and 25 universi-

ties began distance education on April 6, 2020 (CHE, 2020c). These practices at the universities were also allowed at the graduate level; provided that they are auditable, distance education and digital opportunities were used to ensure that there was no interruption in these processes.

There are many internal and external factors that affect the academic success of graduate students. While talent, interest, attitude, self-confidence, internal motivation, intelligence and perception are internal causes, environment, external motivation and expectations from students are external factors (Ordaz-Villegas et al., 2013).

These factors, which affect the success of students in a positive or negative way, are affected by the period in which the individual lives and the current conditions.

There should be a regular communication and interaction process between the student and his/her advisor in order to determine the theses that constitute the last stage of graduate education, to prepare them and to complete and submit these theses. While it is possible for the student to achieve academic success at the end of a healthy communication process, unhealthy interaction will cause the student to fail. One of the biggest disadvantages of distance education, which was started with the emergence of the Covid-19 virus, is the limited opportunity to socialize (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007). The failure of the student in communicating with his/her advisor or other academicians may cause problems in the distance education process. In addition, the closure of institutions such as libraries where graduate students can do research or the inability to reach students/people in cases where they need to practice are situations that may disrupt their education processes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

When the literature is analyzed, it is seen that there are studies to get the opinions of students at different education levels about distance education. In researches prepared for graduate students some results were got such as students who receive graduate education have high levels of anxiety especially at the stage of writing the thesis (Demirel et al., 2021), the interaction between students and professor is limited, but the professor are directive and online libraries are used effectively in this process (MF Genç et al., 2021), distance education is economical and communication with professor accelerated in this process (SZ Genç et al., 2020), students do not want distance education to continue (Öz Ceviz et al., 2020), students' independence and self-awareness increase (Pasyk et al.), 2021), distance education causes anxiety and stress (Patias et al., 2021), students are highly motivated and distance education is economical, but difficult to focus (Ünal et al., 2021).

The opinions of graduate students about distance education which is one of the measures taken during the Covid-19 period are very important in order to determine the quality, advantages or disadvantages of the education. The opinions of the students will help the professors in organizing the content of the education, the selection of the materials, equipment and methods and techniques used in education. In addition, the detection of the problems experienced in the

education process will also help to eliminate them and to provide more qualified training. In this context, the lack of studies on graduate students studying in the field of Turkish education during the Covid-19 process and the fact that the students' experiences in this process are not known suggest the idea that this study is necessary. It is thought that the study will contribute to the literature in terms of revealing the views of graduate students in the field of Turkish education on distance education and their experiences in the Covid-19 process.

In this study, it was aimed to reveal the experiences of students who received education in the field of Turkish education at graduate and doctorate levels in the Covid-19 process. For this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

- What are the experiences of graduate students on the education process during the pandemic?
- What are the experiences of the graduate students on the research processes during the pandemic?
- What are the experiences of the graduate students on the study processes during the pandemic?
- What are the experiences of the graduate students on the academic relations during the pandemic?
- What are the expectations of graduate students after the pandemic period?

METHOD

Research Design

In the study, phenomenology, one of the qualitative research designs, was used. Phenomenology is an approach that analyzes everything experienced by consciousness and analyzes how people make sense of their consciousness and the world they live in (Craib, 1992, p. 98). In the study, it was tried to reveal the experiences of the students who are studying in the field of Turkish education during the Covid-19 process.

Study Group

The study group of the research consists of 21 students studying at graduate or doctoral level in the field of Turkish education at different universities in Turkey. Easily accessible case sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods, was used in the selection of the study group. The limitations brought by the Covid-19 process were effective in the selection of this method. Information about the students is given in Table 1:

Data Collection

In this research, which was carried out to reveal the experiences of graduate students in the field of Turkish education in the Covid-19 process, in order to get the research data, the interview guide, which was prepared by the researchers and about which opinions were taken from 3 faculty members who were experts in the field of Turkish education was finalized by piloting 2 students and used. The six questions asked in the guide were answered via online connection (Zoom)

Table 1. Information about the study group

	Frequency
Gender	
Male	7
Female	14
Education level	
Graduate	17
Doctorate	4
University	
Kafkas University	5
Fırat University	6
Düzce University	5
Ağrı İ. Çeçen University	1
Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University	2
Erciyes University	1
Marmara University	1

or face-to-face interviews. Recorded interviews were written down by the researchers and confirmation was obtained from the students. Thus, "credibility" was provided in the research. Ethics committee approval was obtained to conduct the study.

Data Analysis

Content analysis method was used in the analysis of the data obtained with the interview guide. In content analysis, there is an effort to reduce and interpret data to determine basic coherences and meanings by taking voluminous qualitative material (Patton, 2014). The forms analyzed by content analysis using the MAXQDA program were coded separately by the researchers and the themes were reached. In order to calculate the reliability of the codes obtained, the compliance values of the codes were checked. In this direction, Cohen-Kappa fit values (Viera & Garrett, 2005) were calculated to determine reliability and the fit was calculated as .78. In order to ensure the internal reliability of the research, direct quotations were made from the students. The validity of the study was ensured by consulting expert opinions and by paying attention to the compatibility of the results with the conceptual framework.

RESULTS

Education Process

The pandemic process significantly affected the educational processes of graduate students both positively and negatively (Figure 1). Considering the positive experiences of the students in this process, the followings were stated; time saving (8), less fatigue (3), easy access to lessons (3), easy access to information (2), more time to lessons (2), distant access opportunity (2), the opportunity to participate in online activities (1), the habit of studying at home (1), the use of flexible time (1), the improvement in the ability to use technology (1). It was mostly expressed that graduate students saved time in the education process. It was also stated that the students were less tired and had easy access to the lessons because they were connected to the lessons from

their homes. Other positive contributions were also noted to a lesser extent. When we look at the general opinions, it comes to the fore that it facilitates daily life. P20, one of the students stating that he saved time with distance education during the pandemic period, expresses his opinions as follows:

P20: The instant accessibility of the lessons ensured that there was no loss of time spent both on the road and between lessons. Although I live in the city where the university is located, I used to spend one and a half days at the university during the face-to-face education, but I was able to spare a great deal of this time for myself in distance education.

P7, one of the students who stated that they were less tired thanks to distance education, explains his opinions as follows:

P7: Since I worked as a teacher in a public school in addition to doing my graduate degree, going to the university for lessons and working at the school at the same time was a very difficult and tiring process for me. However, due to the pandemic, it was less tiring for me to join lessons online.

In distance education, it is possible to attend lessons from any place. This provides easy access to the lessons. In this context, the opinions of P19 are as follows:

P19: With the pandemic period, I started online lessons through the system of the university. Normally, the city where I lived and the city where the university was located were far away. I went for face-to-face education for three weeks and this was very difficult for me, I almost had to stop my university education, but I continued my education without any financial expense or loss of time with distance education. When I cannot attend the lessons online in distance education, I have the opportunity to watch it later, and I can look at the subject again whenever I want.

P21 stated that access to information also became easier during the pandemic process:

P21: Since there was such a situation around the world beyond us, many databases were suitable to access. In this context, we are also able to benefit from them. This can be considered as an advantage of the distance education.

There are also some negative situations that graduate students face in their education. In this context, these situations were stated as communication problem (6), ineffectiveness of classes (5), lack of interaction (3), inability to focus on lessons (2), inefficiency of distance education (2), psychological pressure (1), technical problems (1), insufficient benefit from academicians (1), difficulty in adaptation (1), lack of practice in lessons (1). From these experiences, it was stated that communication problems were experienced a lot, the lessons were inefficient, and the interaction decreased. Considering these views, it is understood that there are important problems in terms of the effectiveness of the lessons. Although students have some practical benefits of distance education, it is seen that they cannot fully meet their needs in this process. The opinions of P18 who stated

that they had communication problems in the lessons are as follows:

P18: We communicate with my advisor less frequently, and this infrequent communication causes communication breakdown. It's like we haven't seen each other for a long time. When we talk about the doctoral process, this communication is only by e-mail and telephone, when time intervenes there is no face-to-face communication. This causes some problems. For example, I do what my professor says, but it is either forgotten or understood differently because time intervenes. Negative or wrong understandings and communication problems occur.

It was stated that the lessons in distance education were not efficient. One of the students who thought about this expressed his opinions as follows:

P11: In this process, having online lessons with distance education was one of the biggest problems. There may be difficulties in understanding the lessons.

It was stated that the physical distance of people in distance education weakens the interaction with students and professors. In this context, P3 explains his opinions as follows:

P3: Because of not being able to meet face to face, we cannot communicate adequately with our professors and friends.

Research Process

During the pandemic process, graduate students encountered some new practices in their research processes (Figure 2). Positive experiences during the research process are time saving (9), online data collection opportunity (5), easy access to information (3), efficient working opportunity (3), increase in technology knowledge (1), participation in online activities (1), accessing more resources (1), effective use of the internet (1). It is often stated that these experiences save time. It also stands out that it increases online data collection opportunities, provides easy access to information and provides an opportunity to work efficiently. It is seen that the new process has a positive effect in certain areas in the research processes of graduate students. Especially the more prominent technological opportunities facilitated the research processes. P4's opinions stating that it saves time in the research process are as follows:

P4: Having the necessary time to do the research was positive for the study.

It is understood that it was difficult to collect data during face-to-face period, now they can collect data online and this is seen as an advantage. P16's opinions on this issue are as follows:

P16: Collecting data during the research process is a difficult task. With the distance education during the pandemic period, it became difficult for me to reach people. This negatively affected the data collection process of my study and caused my study to be prolonged. But I realized that the possibility of collecting data with online technology is more practical. I was able to reach many people in a short time.

P19 stated that new alternatives emerged and access to information became easier with the following words:

P19: Before the pandemic period, I used to do my research on the literature mostly on the internet, but during the pandemic period, I did the same on the internet, but during this period, there were many websites, libraries, museums, etc. that shared paid content freely. Since these websites provides free sharing opportunity, it is easier for me to access information.

P14 who stated that he conducted his research more efficiently in this period when socialization was low expressed his opinions as follows:

P14: A faster writing process. It suffers less disruption because of less sociability etc.

Graduate students also experienced negative situations due to the fact that they were exposed to some restrictions during the research process along with the pandemic period. Some of the negativities experienced in this process are as follows: difficulty in collecting data (7), communication problem with academicians (5), limited research options (3), inability to use the library (3), difficulty in the research process (2), psychological problems (1), reluctance (1), difficulty in long-term research (1), inability to conduct face-to-face research (1). Among these negativities, the difficulties in the data collection process, the restriction of communication with academicians, the limitation of research options, and the inability to benefit from the library are the issues that are often mentioned. Considering these, it is striking that there are problems caused by restrictions. In particular, the inability to conduct face-to-face research made the data collection process difficult and led students to research that did not require practice. Although this process brought some alternatives, it could not fully replace the face-to-face research. The opinions of P18, who stated that they had difficulties in collecting data in this process, are as follows:

P18: I'm at the Institute of Educational Sciences and the studies we do or, let me say further, our thesis-related studies are always applied studies with students. We currently have no students. Our face-to-face studies with them are always delayed. From a study perspective, this is delayed as we cannot work with people in the study group. For example, let's say I will submit the thesis proposal form, but my friends at other universities are in the application phase, but they are waiting because there are no students at the moment. They can't act in any way.

Due to the lack of face-to-face interaction during the pandemic period, there is a communication problem with academicians. P5 expresses his opinions on this matter as follows:

P5: We couldn't talk enough with our advisor or other professors, we had to try to handle everything over the phone, which made it difficult for us.

Due to the disruption of face-to-face studies, it became difficult to conduct some research. P13 stated that research options decreased as follows:

P13: Since it is not possible to have face-to-face access in academic studies to be conducted, it caused restrictions in the realization of some academic studies. It was

possible to carry out limited types of academic studies. This situation limited our choices in academic studies.

Some problems arose as the libraries, which are one of the important centers that researchers benefit from, are affected by the restrictions. P1 stating that he could not benefit from the libraries says:

P1: We could not use the library. Libraries didn't lend books. That's why I was negatively affected.

This process also had negative effects on the psychology of the researchers. P11 expresses his opinions on this issue as follows:

P11: There may be psychological problems due to uncertainties and this has a negative effect on the process.

Study Process

During the pandemic period, there were differences in the study habits of graduate students (Figure 3). Students needed to reorganize their study habits. In this context, issues such as studying in harmony with working hours (9), the habit of studying at home (3), arranging research times (3), planning according to lessons (2), and directing to literature review (1) are mentioned. The students mostly stated that they study in harmony with their own working hours, develop the habit of studying from home and organize their research time. The new process necessitated a change in their study habits and the students who gained the habit of studying at home made arrangements according to their working hours. The opinions of P7 who states that they make arrangements according to working hours are as follows:

P7: Since I work as a teacher in a public school, our lessons were also online due to the pandemic. I arranged my study hours according to the start and end hours of these lessons

P13 who stated that he gained the habit of studying at home in the new period explained his opinions as follows:

P13: I did not make any special effort since there were no situations that required spending time such as social life, different activities etc. and there were curfews in general. I generally spent my time with self-study in a home environment.

Students do research while taking lessons. The opinions of P17, who stated that he adjusted his study plan according to his lessons, are as follows:

P17: I prepared a schedule according to the hours of the lessons and adjusted my time.

With the pandemic, it is seen that there are transformations in the study environments with the restrictions experienced by the students. Students, who have to study at home mostly, shared their experiences such as crowded and noisy environment (6), effective use of time (4), comfortable environment (3), unsuitable working environment (3), lack of change (2), appropriate working environment (1). Many students state that there is a crowded and noisy environment in the houses. There are also those who mention that they can use their time more efficiently and have a comfortable environment in their new environment. Therefore, it is seen that the new environment brings some advantages and disadvan-

tages. P7's opinions, stating that having a crowded and noisy environment in homes creates difficulties, are as follows:

P7: Since I have other siblings at home, noise and crowd of the house are one of the negative aspects of my study environment.

P20 who states that he used time efficiently during the pandemic period expresses his opinions as follows:

P20: The working environment at home provided me a great advantage in terms of time and space. Since I worked from home during the pandemic due to my job, I had the opportunity to run both my school and my job together at very close time during the day. I had the opportunity to return to my work as soon as the lesson was over, and to my lesson as soon as I finished my job. This allowed me to have a practical working and studying environment.

P19 who states that it is more comfortable to work at home expresses his opinions as follows:

P19: Even though there were difficulties, it was very advantageous for me to teach as a teacher and to listen to lessons as a student from home. Being in a comfortable environment at home, teaching in comfortable clothes, not having to go somewhere reduces the stress factor and makes positive contributions to the success of the lesson.

Some students have an unsuitable studying environment at home. P3 states this situation as follows:

P3: It negatively affected my working and studying environment at home, both the fact that my work requires being done from home and there are lessons sometimes caused confusion.

Academic Relations

In the new process, graduate students faced some limitations in their academic relations with their advisors and friends they studied with, and they tried to overcome these limitations (Figure 4). In this context, the dimension of reducing in interaction (5) stands out in general. In addition, there are also those who state that the relations are not negatively affected (2). P2's opinions on the decrease in interaction with academics and other students are as follows:

P2: If we had the opportunity to meet face to face, we could have had a more effective and productive process. In other words, I can say that it has a negative effect on our relationship, as it does in every situation.

P16 stating that the new process did not affect their academic relations says:

P16: I was already far from my friends because I was in the thesis period. Everyone was doing their own work. There was no change in my relationship with my advisor. I realized that everything could be done.

Issues in their relations with their advisors were stated as the support of the advisor (5), communication problem with the advisor (3), online communication with the advisor (2), and only telephone conversation with the advisor (2). According to these, although there are restrictions between the advisors and the students, it is understood that the advisors help them and the problems are tried to be solved by using alterna-

tive tools. Despite the negativities experienced, P3 states that he received the support of his advisors as follows:

P3: Our relationship continued because my advisor was a caring and tactful person.

P18 who stated that he had communication problems with his advisor during this process expressed his opinions as follows:

P18: There were disconnections in my communication with my advisor. I don't know if the statement of misunderstandings is correct, but when the time intervened and passed, due to his administrative and busy work we had a communication breakdown.

P7 who continues his relationship with the advisor by communicating online says:

P7: During this process, we had regular online meetings with my advisor and he gave me information about how my studying process, works are and what I should do.

Graduate students also experienced some new situations in their relations with each other. In this context, issues such as not being able to meet with friends (4), limited communication with friends (4), increased communication with friends (1), and online communication with friends (1) were mentioned. Especially the students who just started their graduate education stated that they could not meet their friends face to face and they could not establish a dialogue despite the long period of time. Some students stated that communication with their friends was limited. One student said that with the increase in online communication opportunities with friends, their communication improved more. Education was interrupted during the pandemic period and students who just started their graduate education did not have the opportunity to meet their friends. P3 describes this situation as follows:

P3: I couldn't meet any of my friends because of distance education.

The opinions of P19 who stated that he had limited communication with his friends are as follows:

P19: We didn't come together with friends except for three weeks, I only saw their names in the lessons. I didn't have any private communication except for a few people, but we were in contact with a few people about the lessons, process, homework and exams.

P18 expresses that his communication with his friends increased and says:

P18: I usually talk to my friends on the phone. We share the necessary resources via e-mail. I can say that my communication with my friends increased. They also exchange ideas about the things they are doing and will do. I can consult them. I can reach them on the phone whenever I want, and due to the exchange of views with my friends on this issue, communication also increased compared to usual times, they also call me more, communicate more, consult more.

Expectations

Figure 5 Considering the expectations of graduate students after the pandemic process, these issues were stated; the continuation of online activities (4), partial continuation of

distance education (3), online lessons (2), returning to normal life (2), meeting with the advisor more frequently (2), strong interaction (2), efficiency of the lessons (2), being able to do applied studies (1), returning to face-to-face education (1), providing technology usage education (1). When the opinions of the students are analyzed, it is seen that the online activities and distance education should continue in a certain framework because they have benefits. The students listed their expectations about life before the pandemic in the issues that they felt lacking during the pandemic period and could not be compensated. Within the framework of opinions, the pandemic period led to the expectation that practices should be done continuously because they have some advantages. P20, who wants to continue online activities, which is one of the advantages of the new era, explains his opinions as follows:

P20: I think that the advantages of technology should be used after the pandemic as well. In some cases I really want works done from distance where it is not necessary to take people's time. I think that financial loss and waste of time in education can be prevented by using the internet. To me, the generation born in this technology will be ready for this, and middle-aged people will catch up with the era only by giving adaptation education and trainings to them.

Since distance education has some advantages, P19, who wants to continue distance education partially in the following periods, explains his views as follows.

P19: Continuing distance education by strengthening the technical infrastructure and providing the necessary opportunities to individuals will both prevent time loss and provide financial savings. In other words, I think it would be beneficial for some of the distance education practices to continue after the pandemic.

P11 who states that he could not meet the advisor face to face wants to meet the advisor more in the following periods and says:

P11: At least in the thesis stage, I hope to be able to establish better communication with the advisor. So, I think that my knowledge about the field will increase and I will gain different perspectives.

P17's opinion, which demands strong interaction and efficient lessons, is as follows:

P17: I want the rest of the education to be face-to-face and productive, and good relations to be established.

P18 who wants to carry out more difficult practicing studies after the pandemic expresses his opinion as follows:

P18: The process affects everything, even this one. In this thesis process or later, our wish is for the pandemic to end as soon as possible and for us to return to normal life, continue our normal education and continue our normal work. If the process goes like this, as I said, we will try to adapt to this process both in terms of subject change, practices and methods.

DISCUSSION

The change and transformation that took place in many areas of education during the pandemic process is also seen in graduate students. In this study, the experiences of grad-

uate students in the field of Turkish education during the pandemic process were analyzed. In this context, students' education process, research process, study habit, academic relations and expectations were evaluated. During the education process, students' experiences are divided into positive and negative categories. Among the positive experiences, there are issues such as saving time, less fatigue, easy access to lessons, easy access to information. Considering these experiences, it is understood that distance education practices have some advantages for students and they continue their education more easily. These advantages draw attention in terms of making education more accessible.

Considering the negative experiences of the students in the education process, it is seen that they experience problems such as communication problems, inefficient lessons, lack of interaction, and inability to focus on the lessons. Disadvantages of distance education compared to face-to-face education were emphasized more. Problems about communication and interaction, which are easier face to face, are at the forefront of these. It is one of the results that the distance education lessons are not seen as beneficial. Technical problems in this process are also important. Similar results emerged in the studies on graduate students in the literature. Demirel et al. (2021), in their study, revealed that distance education lessons were inefficient, especially in practice, and the thesis studies were negatively affected in this process. Genç et al. (2021) stated that there were problems in socialization and interaction, Genç et al. (2020) found that technical and infrastructure problems were encountered. Unal et al. (2021) revealed that there were focusing problems, Karahan et al. (2020) stated that there were communication problems, Chang (2020) emphasized that distance education eliminated physical interaction, and Öztürk (2021) mentioned that face-to-face interaction disappeared. Similar results were found in studies conducted with undergraduate students. Seale et al. (2012) found that the pandemic processes greatly affected the communication of students negatively, Saavedra(2020) revealed that learning losses occurred, Fansury et al. (2020) and Nurfaidah et al. (2020) also reached the conclusion that the interaction decreased. The experiences of the students in the research processes were also realized in positive and negative aspects. Considering the positive experiences of the students, topics such as time saving, online data collection opportunity, easy access to information, and efficient studying opportunities come to the fore. Time saving comes first in the research process as well as in education. With the more effective use of technological tools, people can do researches from their homes faster. Since socialization was also limited, they were able to spend more time to do their researches. Online data collection tools, which were not used much before, were used extensively in this period and their advantages began to be noticed by students. In this process, because many institutions made their databases free to access, easier access to information was possible. It is possible to reach similar results in other studies in the literature. According to the studies, students stated that distance education saves time and is economical, provides easy access to information and also to materials and lessons (M. F. Genç

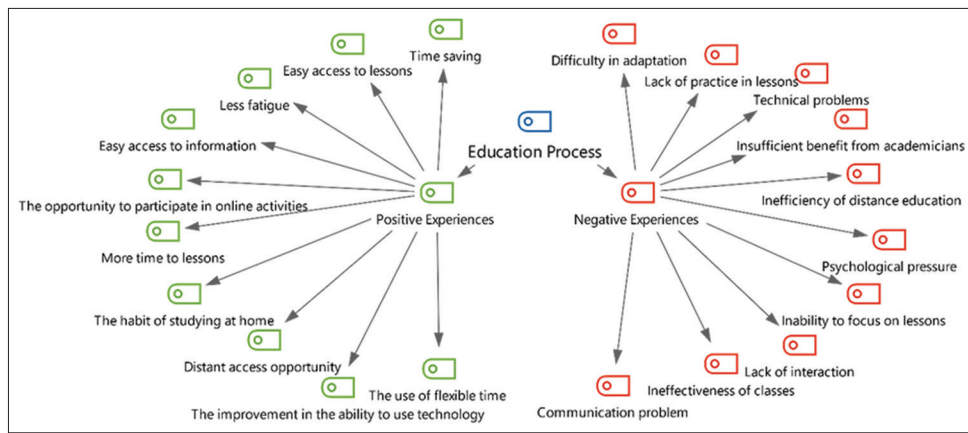


Figure 1. Experiences Related to the Education Process

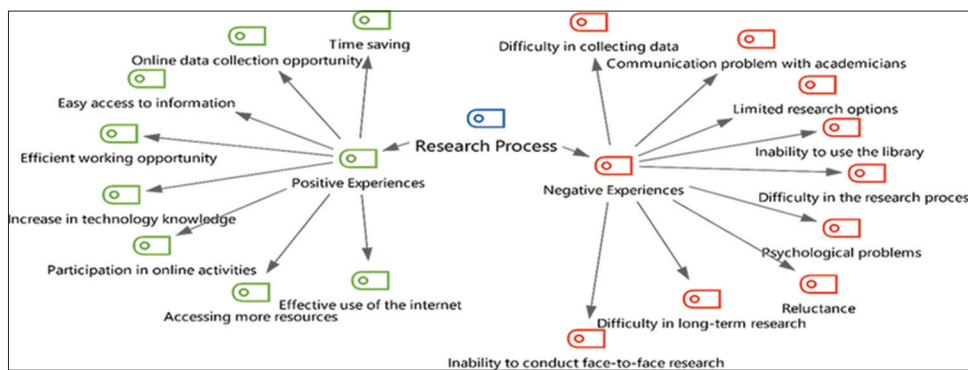


Figure 2. Experiences Related to the Research Process

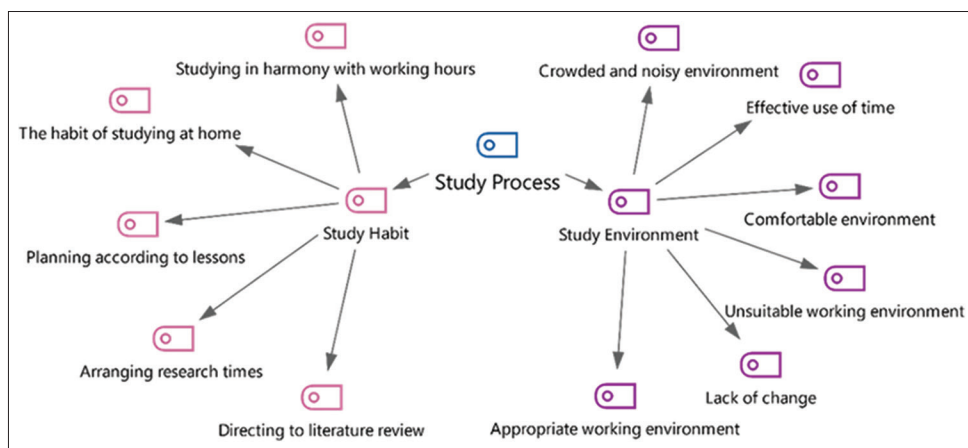


Figure 3. Experiences Related to the Study Process

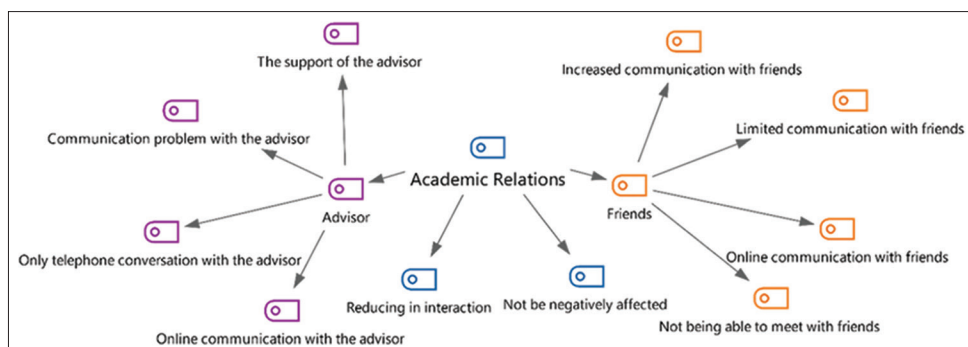


Figure 4. Experiences Related to the Academic Relations

et al., 2021; S. Z. Genç et al., 2020; Ünal et al., 2021). In addition, studies revealed that students' independent learning skills were developed in the distance education process (Öztürk, 2021; Pasyk et al., 2021). Kör et al. (2013) also found that the use of interactive materials such as animation, video and simulation in distance education lessons had a positive effect on success.

Considering the negative experiences of the students, there were situations such as difficulty in collecting data, communication problems with academicians, limitations in research options, and inability to benefit from the library. Especially since it became impossible to collect data face to face, many students could not continue their researches. Some of the institutions did not want to give permission for research due to the pandemic. This resulted in the inability to collect data and to complete the research. Because of this, some students started to do researches based on document analysis. Students who had communication problems with academicians were deprived of guidance for their research and fell in an uncertain process. The negativities experienced were a problem for the students, especially due to the restrictions. Karatepe et al. (2020) revealed in their research that online lessons limited the communication of graduate students and they had problems in communicating with both their friends and advisors. Demirel et al. (2021), on the other hand, found that the students experienced anxiety due to the pandemic process and some of them had to make changes in the thesis.

When experiences in the study habit are considered, changes were made in study habits and study environments. In study habits, issues such as studying in harmony with working hours, studying at home, arranging research times come to the fore. Since some of the graduate students also work in a job, they arranged their studying hours according to their working hours. Many students stated that they gained the habit of studying at home due to restrictions and they made arrangements on research times. Students who spent most of their time at home needed a new study habit and made new regulations according to their needs. Genç et al. (2020) stated that students were not only away from academic environments, but also disconnected from social environments, and revealed that students were locked in their houses and became lonely in this process.

There were changes in the studying environments of the students, students studying at the places such as library were forced to study at home. Students studying at home stated that there was a crowded and noisy environment, they could use time effectively at home, there was a comfortable studying environment, and there was an unsuitable studying environment. Especially in crowded houses, the participation of many students in online lessons and activities caused confusion at home. Since all family members were at home, the noisier environment had negative effect on students. Some of them also expressed the advantages of studying at home and stated that they used time more effectively, and others emphasized that the house provided a more comfortable studying environment. The results of other studies in the literature also show that graduate students are negatively

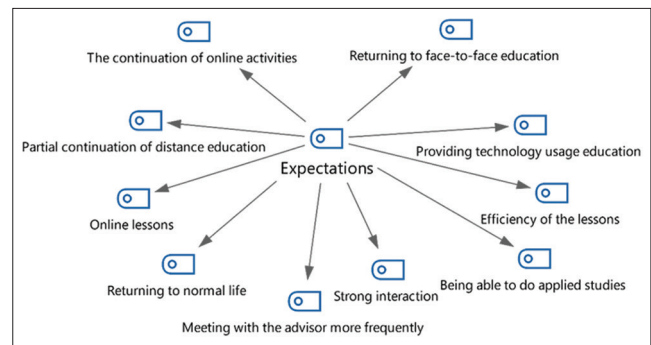


Figure 5. Experiences Related to the Expectations

affected by factors such as family and study environment during the distance education process (M. F. Genç et al., 2021; S. Z. Genç et al., 2020; Patias et al., 2021).

There were also seen significant changes in the academic relations of the students. In this period when face-to-face interaction was limited, students were able to meet less with their advisors and friends. In this context, they experienced a lack of interaction, had communication problems with their advisors and friends, and tried to maintain their relations with the help of online tools to solve these problems. Some students also stated that they could not meet and communicate with their friends. Chang (2020) also revealed in his research that interaction is limited due to online education. According to a study of Karahan et al. (2020), on the other hand, it was found that students preferred the lessons that they could communicate with their teachers, and they tried to avoid other lessons.

In terms of expectations of the students after the pandemic, they want the advantages brought by this period to continue and they want the issues they had problems to be the same as before the period. It is expected that the practical advantages of distance education will continue. Returning to normal life, being able to meet and interact with the advisor more are among the expectations. Considering these views, the idea that the lessons are easy to access but not efficient enough becomes more dominant. In this respect, the existence of partially distance education is more accepted. Another topic that stands out in the normalization they expect is the face-to-face communication. Students want to be in a more normal relationship with their academic environment. In some studies in the literature, it was seen that students expressed their opinions about the discontinuation of distance education (Bozkırlı & Er, 2021; Karatepe et al., 2020; Öz Ceviz et al., 2020; Puspitasari et al., 2020). However, in some studies, it was found that students were satisfied or partially satisfied with distance education (Chirikov & Soria, 2020; M. F. Genç et al., 2021; Gopal et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

When the experiences of graduate students during the pandemic process are analyzed, a general approach to this process emerges. In this process, students experienced some new advantages as well as significant disadvantages. The increase in technological opportunities and the tendency of individu-

als to these tools created some advantages. However, despite the technological tools, important deficiencies that could not be eliminated continued to exist. There was a great deal of negative situations in interaction. As in the education process, the restriction of face-to-face interaction in the research process created problems for students. Although they had the opportunity to meet online with their friends and advisors, it could not be an alternative to face-to-face interaction. In this context, students expect technological opportunities to continue, but to ensure normalization in some issues that cannot be resolved with these opportunities. They think that face-to-face education is more qualified, communication is better, and research can be done more effectively. Considering these views, it is possible to think that the experiences of the pandemic period will also be effective on the future lives of the students.

Due to the fact that the pandemic process is experienced all over the world, it is possible to encounter similar situations in different countries. Analyzing the experiences of graduate students in many countries will provide information on forming the future of education. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the future of graduate education in the international context.

Suggestions

- Universities should take some precautions to solve the problems experienced by graduate students.
- Distance education should be rearranged in such a way that it can be used beneficially for students.
- Expectations of students should be taken into consideration in future face to face education practices.
- Studies should be conducted on the experiences of students studying in different countries and fields.

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