




BEING A DISTANCE STUDENT: VIEW OF PRESERVICE TEACHERS IN TURKEY


Serap Yılmaz Özelçi 

A hybrid model, supported by technology, is used for teacher training in many countries. Sometimes, this is mandatory, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic or an earthquake and other times it is a conscious choice. This study examines the opinions of preservice teachers on their experiences with distance education. The research is a qualitative case study, and the data collection is through a focus group interview, which was evaluated using content analysis. The findings reveal that the experiences during the courses and the attitude of the instructors affect the perception and satisfaction of the participants. The participants evaluated the opportunities offered by their universities as positive efforts but emphasized that being able to benefit from such opportunities is a personal situation. The participants' study skills, self-discipline, technological equipment, internet access, and environment to study made them either advantageous or disadvantageous in distance education.

KEYWORDS: Distance Education, Focus Group Interview, Instruction Technologies, Future of Teacher Training, Preservice Teachers

INTRODUCTION

In our swiftly changing world, as people's daily routines, modes of communication, and even work methods evolve, their learning styles transform as well. This shift has brought attention to the concept of distance education, which has a longstanding history. Distance education is an educational application encompassing pedagogical knowledge and incorporating worldwide technology products. Both developed and developing countries are heavily investing in education technologies and distance education infrastructures ([Anderson,](#)

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2011). Distance education, facilitated by technology, emerges as a learning model that surpasses the limitations of existing learning processes and models, extending the learning process beyond traditional constraints of time and space (Demir, 2014; Isman, 2011). Key benefits of distance education include ensuring the sustainability of education (Akinbadewa & Sofowora, 2020; Omiles et al., 2019; Seage & Türegün, 2020), providing lifelong learning opportunities (Alharthi, 2020; Pambayun et al., 2019), and reducing education costs (Al-Husban, 2020; Harrison & Lee, 2018). Despite the physical separation between learners and teachers, some limitations exist concerning methods, schedules, and time (Albalawi, 2018; Hilton & Canciello, 2018; Thompson & Mcdowell, 2019; Vu & Feinstein, 2017; Weinhandl et al., 2020).

According to the European Association of Distance Education Universities (EADTU), distance education should emphasize four main features: Accessibility, flexibility, interaction, and individualization. The educational environment and process must ensure accessibility to education without compromising individuals' right to an equal education. Flexibility in distance education should be tailored to the individual in terms of time, place, and speed of learning. Interaction should be a two-way, measurable process, and learning-teaching activities should align with the preferences of the individual (European Association of Distance Education Universities (EADTU), 2013). The most advantageous aspects of distance education for students are its flexibility and individuality. The evolving landscape has necessitated a redefinition of the roles of teachers and students (Yi, 2012), particularly in the realm of distance education, where the dynamics of the learning process have undergone a complete transformation. For students, distance education opens a broader spectrum of opportunities for learning and competence. The obstacles addressed by distance education extend beyond eliminating physical distance to overcoming personal shortcomings, socio-economic differences, and barriers to accessing education for various reasons, such as for working individuals (Berge, 2013). Distance education adopts a more student-centred approach (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2002), focusing on facilitating learning. Emphasizing an independent study, it underscores that the essence of learning lies in what learners actively do (Beaudoin, 1990).

Distance education aims to ensure equivalent educational opportunities among students, responding to the ever-increasing demand for education (Okolocha & Nwaokwa, 2016). However, the success of this service, intended to provide equal educational opportunities, is closely tied to technological infrastructure (Collins & Halverson, 2009; Simonso et al., 2003). To engage in distance education, individuals need at least one digital technological device (computer, tablet, smartphone) and access to the internet. The effectiveness of distance education is compromised in environments

experiencing power outages, internet connectivity issues, or network problems. When left unaddressed, these situations can exacerbate socio-economic disparities, hindering equal educational opportunities. Therefore, meeting the necessary conditions is crucial, especially in the era of compulsory education, for individuals to benefit from distance education (Davis et al., 2011; Kaban & Cakmak, 2016; Okolocha & Nwaokwa, 2016).

It is the responsibility of the state to provide the essential infrastructure, ensuring that students, whether in urban centres or remote villages, have equal access to distance education services. Education decision-makers must strategically invest in educational technology, develop purpose-oriented teaching materials, and establish methods and techniques for the effective presentation of these materials (Balaban, 2012; Demir, 2014; Holmberg, 2008; Simonso et al., 2003).

Successful outcomes depend on various factors, such as the preferred learning management systems. Enhancing the interaction capabilities of the institution's chosen LMS and facilitating file-sharing will elevate the quality of the educational training services offered (Khoshemehr (2013)). Practices that hinder student participation and limit interaction are not embraced by students. Even if lessons are conducted synchronously, student engagement cannot be achieved. Motivation plays a crucial role in distance education (Ahmad & Mubin, nd). Another influential variable is the instructor. In the realm of distance learning, how technology is utilized holds more significance than the specific technology used (Nichols, 2003). The instructor's attitude toward distance education, inclination toward technology, and proficiency in its use directly impact students' perceptions of distance education (Rivera et al., 2002).

However, research findings also indicate that a significant number of educators and teachers providing education and training services lack awareness or possess limited knowledge of information technologies (Eygu & Karaman, 2013). This lack of awareness among instructors negatively affects student motivation and academic achievement, particularly their attitude toward the course and distance education (Siemens et al., 2015). In contrast to face-to-face education, the design and content of course materials prepared for distance education should be more enriched. Learning materials and methods should be planned to enable individuals to learn independently (Arat & Bakan, 2014). Considering asynchronous lesson follow-up, the aim is for students to learn without confusion when watching or listening alone. In this context, the content should be well-organized, and enriched with detailed, clear, and understandable examples.

Some universities in Turkey had been interested in distance education for a long time, while others were relatively new to this concept. The implementation of distance education in universities caught both faculty and students

unprepared, regardless of the necessary infrastructure, knowledge and experience. Therefore, the current study was considered necessary to investigate the views of pre-service teachers and provide valuable information about this experience as it shapes the future of the process. It is thought that it is important to receive feedback from students in terms of evaluating distance education conditions.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study is to evaluate distance education practices according to the perceptions of the preservice teachers. In line with this main purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

Q1. How was the application of distance education perceived by preservice teachers?

Q2. How did the preservice teachers perceive their roles in this process?

Q3. How do the preservice teachers evaluate the teaching staff in this process?

Q4. What are the preservice teachers' views on the future of distance education?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study, which evaluates distance education applications according to student views, is a qualitative case study. The case study is up-to-date and where the researcher's control has no control over the variables; is a method used to answer how and why questions (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). Since it is determined how distance education, which is a new situation for students, is perceived, the research has been defined as a case study. Determining and examining a new application as a situation is defined as a descriptive and exploratory case study. The case of the study consists of distance education applications conducted in an education faculty in Central Anatolia. The opinions of the preservice teachers on this case were obtained through the "focus group" interview. It is a qualitative research method that learns about the psychological and socio-cultural characteristics and practices of the groups and sub-groups themselves, which are conscious, semi-conscious or unconscious, and the behaviours and reasons behind these behaviours (Yildirim & Simsek, 2016). The reason for choosing the focus group interview is to have an interactive discussion with more than one participant who has gone through the same process.

In educational research, there is information about the process and how

the research group is affected by the process. The case study is used when the research questions are related to the process (Rose et al., 2015) and enables the effectiveness of the educational process to be explored and the reasons why it is or is not effective to be examined. According to Merriam (1998), case studies are appropriate when the process is of interest. Since the distance education process was analysed in this study, a case study was preferred. As emphasized above, the main reason for designing the present study as a qualitative case study is to analyse in depth how pre-service teachers perceive distance education, which they experienced for the first time, and their views on the process. Therefore, the distance education process was treated as a "case". The main reason for choosing focus group interviews is to allow evaluating this experience together as a group. The fact that the interviews were conducted online also allowed the participants to express their opinions more freely. In addition, the focus group method is much more efficient in gathering information about the feelings, thoughts, ideas and perspectives of individuals as it creates much less tension among the participants (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

PARTICIPANTS

The "case" of the study consists of preservice teachers studying at a faculty of education (with distance education) in Central Anatolia for the spring term. In the courses taught by the researcher as synchronous and asynchronous, the subject, purpose, and method of the research were explained to the students. Those who wanted to participate in the study were asked to reach the researcher by e-mail and contact information was shared in different media (social media, WhatsApp group, and Distance Education and Research Centre page). Thirteen preservice teachers voluntarily formed the study group of the study. However, since two participants did not participate on the session day, the study group consisted of 11 people. Details regarding the study group are given in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptions of the Study Group.

Group	Code	Gender	Department	Time (min)	Date
1	M1	Male	Elementary Math	98	16/6/2020
	F1	Female	Elementary Math		
	F2	Female	Guidance and Psychological Counselling		

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Table 1 continued

	M2	Male	Guidance and Psychological Counselling		
	F3	Female	Elementary Math		
	F4	Female	Guidance and Psychological Counselling		
	M3	Male	Computer Education and Teaching Technologies		
2	M4	Male	Guidance and Psychological Counselling	83	17/6/2020
	F5	Female	Guidance and Psychological Counselling		
	F6	Female	Computer Education and Teaching Technologies		
	M5	Male	Guidance and Psychological Counselling		
	F7*	Female	Computer Education and Teaching Technologies		
	F8*	Female	Guidance and Psychological Counselling		

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data were collected using the "Focus Group Interview Form" developed by the researcher. The literature and student observations of the researcher during the distance education experience were used in the development of the form. In the development of the form, the literature and student observations made by the researcher during the distance education experience were utilized. Current research on student views on distance education was examined. The researcher is one of the instructors teaching in the distance education process. During the process, she examined students' motivation, attendance statistics, and retention times through the learning management system. In particular, she contacted students who did not attend the courses and tried to find out the

reasons. The most common answer was that the internet connection was not strong enough in the region where they lived, that they were working during class hours or that they could not find a suitable area at home to attend class. Some students stated that the reason for not attending the lesson was that the lesson was static and boring. All statements formed the basis of the questions in the interview form.

A pilot application was made for the prepared form, and it was applied to students who were excluded from the study group (2M, 2F). The comprehensibility of the statements and their suitability for the research were observed. The final form consists of 4 questions and 10 explanatory questions. Interviews were made through the Cisco Webex program. The researcher delivered the session link and necessary information to all participants before the day and time of the interview. The interviews were held in two sessions (83 min and 98 min) on June 16 and 17, 2020, and the information from the sessions was recorded with the permission of the participants. The recordings were watched, listened and transferred to a Word document. A total of 52 pages of raw data were obtained. The obtained data were read line by line in line with the research purpose, and content analysis was conducted by trying to identify common concepts and reach common meanings. Content analysis is the most appropriate method for analysing the data obtained in the focus group interview (Creswell, 2003).

For the validity and reliability of the analysis, random sections were selected from the records. From the 52 pages of raw data of 11 participants, for example, the texts containing the answers to question 1 and question 4 were coded by two different researchers (who had qualitative research experience in the field of educational sciences). After the coding, the researchers compared the code/theme lists, and it was seen that there was an acceptable agreement between the researchers by calculating the agreement coefficient as 0.87 (Miles & Huberman, 1994). While presenting the findings, direct quotations from the participants' opinions were given and the codes (M1, F4) given to the pre-service teachers were used.

ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

The researcher, based on the relevant faculty, observed participants' lessons and the distance education process. The researcher's familiarity with participants, coupled with the absence of any grading relationship, facilitated open expression. Throughout, the researcher maintained a neutral and supportive role, avoiding opinion expression or direction.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

General Views on Distance Education

The preservice teachers were first asked how they evaluated the process they went through in general. Sub-themes and codes are given in Table 2.

Table 2**Thoughts on Distance Education Currently Applied.**

Theme	Sub-Theme	Code
Views on Distance Education	Focus on purpose	The solution in crisis, Fast implementation in the short-term
	Education vs Instruction	Educational items missing / more like teaching
	Measurement and Evaluation	Homework did not reach their purpose Online exam choice
	Experience Again	In the same conditions / even if conditions are improved

Preservice teachers were asked to describe this educational experience they had. They were asked whether they consider this process as education or teaching. Five preservice teachers said that their experiences were (F5, M3, F6, M2, M4) both education and teaching. They were conducted smoothly in the process. According to the two preservice teachers (F4, M5), they had an education practice suitable for the conditions. Three pre-service teachers (F1, M1, F2) emphasized that their experiences are a teaching practice and there was no time or opportunity for education. It is thought that these comments of the participants were influenced by their experiences during the teaching of the lessons. In their explanations, they have defined the process according to the attitude of the instructor.

"I define this process as teaching because we could only establish a lesson-oriented communication because of the shortage of lesson time. We did not participate in the lesson as in our formal lessons, and the lectures ended with the lecturer explaining the subject." (F1)

"As a computer education and teaching technology teacher; I learned better how to do my job. So, education and training were together for us. We learned both the course content and what we will experience in the future." (M3)

"It was a teaching process rather than "education. "Education could not be met during this period. I think it reflects distance education." (F2)

The participants were asked whether they wanted to experience a similar experience again if all necessary arrangements were made for the issues, they criticized or disturbed. We observed that the preservice teachers had difficulty answering the question and they tried handling many dimensions of the question. A preservice teacher who had a personally successful period in the distance education process stated that he did not want to experience distance education again. A preservice teacher who thought that he could not get efficiency from the process stated that he thought that distance education applications were inevitable from now on and that he would face the application of distance education again whether he wanted to or not. Seven participants (F5, M2, F4, F2, F1, and F3) clearly stated that they did not want to go through this process again; three participants stated that they wanted to experience it again, and one (M1) participant believed that a hybrid model would be more effective. Examples of expressions are as follows:

“I do not want to experience distance education with these teachers again. They never change their teaching style. “Even if we improve all the conditions of the school, I think we cannot eliminate the disadvantages arising from the students’ private lives (I am a person living in the village, no matter how much internet is defined, I cannot attend any classes.” (F1)

“Home is comfortable for a student who feels under pressure in the classroom, is shy and does not talk. There is no one around. He is alone in front of the computer and there is no one he would be ashamed of looking at him.” (M6)

Preservice Teachers’ Perceptions of Their Role

Participants’ opinions about whether they could benefit from the process sufficiently and the reasons for this, would this change (whether to benefit or not) if the process had been shaped by their preferences, whether attendance was required, and whether the lessons being recorded were examined (see Table 3 for Sub-themes and codes).

Table 3
Role As A Student In Distance Education.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Code
Students’ Role	To benefit enough	Socio-economic opportunities Learner features
	Obligation/not being motivated	Learning habit Sense of responsibility The advantage

Continued on next page

Table 3 continued

Self-discipline for study	for	Self-study skills	Self-discipline	Syn-
		chronous or asynchronous		

First, their evaluations about whether they spent the spring term productively/beneficially and the reasons for this were discussed. Participants drew attention to the fact that being able to benefit from the opportunities offered by their universities as a positive effort in the process is a personal situation. Here, what is meant by individuality is both the character of the learner (individual study and learning skills, self-discipline) and the opportunities the learner has (technological equipment, internet access, a suitable environment for studying). While benefits can be mentioned for those whose conditions are suitable, others could not benefit from this application. The participants' explanations on the subject are as follows:

"Strict discipline and self-sacrificing follow-up are required for the expected efficiency. This system reminds me of the situation of a high school student who failed the university entrance exam on his first attempt." (F3)

"I am in a village. There is internet but no network. I think I have many shortcomings since I cannot follow the lessons. It is not to stay back; my situation is like I have never experienced this period. For this reason, I will contact my professor by e-mail and ask for resources. I will read these resources throughout the summer and try to close my gap." (M5)

Preservice teachers' responses varied when asked about their attitudes if the distance education process had been initiated spontaneously or by choice. Some based their opinions on experience, while others considered external factors. One participant (M1) expressed that their attitude would have remained the same but speculated on potential changes in teacher behaviour. Opinions diverged on whether prior knowledge would enhance preparedness or if outcomes would remain unaffected. Participants acknowledged the advantage of recorded lessons, providing flexibility for asynchronous learning. The consensus highlighted the benefit of accessing lessons at any time, though participants generally didn't dwell on the awareness of being recorded during lessons.

"... you rewind the recording and listen again. You can repeat whenever you want." (F6)

"When people know that they are being watched, their reactions and gestures all change. However, those who are extroverted have no communication problems and are less affected by this. However, in our class, some said what I mean, is anyone else to listen or hear what I must say except my classmates, I do not want that. So, my timid friends got uncomfortable with the record." (F5)

Views Regarding the Effect of Instructors on the Process

Another theme is "the attitudes, attitudes, and competencies of teaching staff on distance education affect their thoughts on distance education". The relationship between the knowledge and experience or predisposition of the lecturers in the use of distance education with the teaching process, the quality of the teaching, and the personal perceptions of the participants on this issue were discussed (see Table 4 for sub-themes and codes).

Table 4

Instructors' Attitude Knowledge And Qualifications About Distance Education.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Code
Instructor's Effect on the Distance Education Process	Attitude	The effect on the quality of the course The effect on students' attitudes on course
	Knowledge and qualifications	Instant solutions to a technical problem Enriching the course content with different methods and techniques
	Role of instructor	Classroom management Dominance Tendency to pass the course

All the participants commented that the lecturers' distance education knowledge, experience, and use competence directly affect the quality of teaching and learning. In addition, they stated that the general attitude of the teacher toward distance education also affected the motivation of the lesson and the time to follow the lesson. A preservice teacher (F4) said, "... I do not think a teacher is needed in distance education. Their reading from the slide adds nothing to me..." she expressed her reproach. However, the main point that the preservice teachers emphasized was again the homework explained in the first finding. It is stated that the dialogues with the instructors are "what is wanted in the homework" and this situation precedes the aim of the course."

"It has an effect. When the teacher had trouble, some got bored while waiting, leaving the system. They said off puff loudly." (M5)

"The teacher should be inclined. Nobody used Web 2.0 tools for teaching. There was only a slide. Sometimes it was not there either. For example, there was a problem with the sound. The instructor could not solve this. he more prone the teacher is the better for the student." (M4)

"We have lost time during the lesson while giving a voice or screen sharing. Our teachers, who are not excellent with technology because of the limited time, cause us to waste time and be inefficient. Most of the time, the questions we asked at the end of the lesson were either not seen by our teachers or were not answered because the lesson time was over. We could not eliminate the question marks in our minds." (F2)

In addition to the above explanations, preservice teachers were asked about the effect of distance education on the teacher's classroom role. All participants thought that the role of the teacher differs from face-to-face education in terms of classroom management and interaction with the student.

"I think it changes. A change that is good in some situations and bad in some situations. That is, while some teachers wanted to establish authority at a distance, they were more insightful and tough than they were in their knitting, while others were much more understanding and helped and tolerated the end." (F1)

"I think that has changed the teacher, not only the person who lectures in the classroom but also the person who supervises the order and peace of the classroom. While the teacher can see what all the students are doing in face-to-face education, there is no such opportunity in distance education. The teacher is unaware of what his student is doing. Maybe the learner is online and then doing something else. The inability of the teacher to intervene in these situations is an indication of changes in the teacher's role." (M2)

Views on the Future of Distance Education

Preservice teachers were asked to discuss the future of distance education, considering the experience they had. In this discussion, which occurs at the points of distance education and socio-economic conditions, equal opportunities in education, and the future of education, the point that the participants agree on is that distance education will be in our lives from now on (Sub-themes and codes are given in Table 5).

According to the participants, educational technologies will undoubtedly have an impact on schools and classrooms. However, this should not diminish the significance of schools. Schools remain crucial, particularly for teacher training. While some courses can be conducted through distance education, teachers and students need to come together and interact in the school environment. In alignment with these explanations, participants were asked to share what the concept of school meant to them. Beyond being a space for teachers and students to spend time together in interaction, it holds more personal and profound meanings for some prospective teachers. Explanations of a participant (F2) who defines a school as life are as follows: *"Faculty means good friendships, fun and mostly one individual outside school. From the moment I started the faculty, I have had friends and friends with whom I can share things with me, apart*

Table 5

The Future of Distance Education.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Code
Future of Distance Education	Always After That	No need to spend 7-8 hours at school There should be a school for socializing, lessons can be remote School is important for friendship, face-to-face interaction, sharing, and teacher Characteristics in teacher education.
	Socio-Economic Conditions	Socio-economic inequalities emerged Family (not paying attention to education, number of rooms in the house, number of people/students living in the house) Area of residence (lack of infrastructure, power outages)
	Equality of Opportunity Education	Equality should be provided by the government

from my family. I find a job and earn money. I realized that to live and stand on my own feet without depending on others; I must be an economically free individual. For me, the faculty was equal to life, so although I think the distance education process will teach students something, I do not think it will bring life experience. In my opinion, the school is a necessary institution for the healthy running of this process. For educational activities to be efficient enough, they should be conducted together with the institutions and activities they host." It is considered essential to foster characteristics related to the affective domain rather than confining learning activities to the school setting. With the aid of educational technologies, participants no longer need to spend 7-8 hours at school for learning purposes. However, participants underscored the importance of dedicating 2-3 hours a day to school for socialization and affective development. In contrast to those who perceive school in this manner, one preservice teacher emphasized that the socialization process can occur through various means, and it is inaccurate to view the school as "necessary" solely based on this aspect. The pertinent explanation is provided below:

"Four years of faculty. Are we socializing in only 4 years of our life? Or do not individuals between the ages of 18-22 who have no faculty education socialize and communicate with their peers? We receive formal education at school, and of course,

if the school did not exist, we would surely interact with this process elsewhere. If you say peer education, this is more the case in primary and secondary education. I do not think it's effective in college. You are now an adult at the university. Therefore, even if there is no school, there will be situations in our lives where we can establish and maintain relationships and share.” (M3)

One of the advantages of distance education is that students can manage their learning processes. Through asynchronous lessons, students can determine the time for course follow-up based on their capabilities and preferences, providing them with a sense of liberation. Participants were asked for their opinions on this matter, and as pre-service teachers approached the topic from various perspectives, divergent opinions emerged. While some participants (F6, M3, M4, M5) expressed feeling liberated, as they could allocate time for themselves and steer the learning process according to their preferences, others (F4, M2) indicated difficulties, expressing a need for guidance in the learning process. Two participants (M1, F2) highlighted that some students perceive the process as irresponsible rather than self-directed. Another angle was presented by two participants (F5, F1), who contextualized the situation in terms of socio-economic opportunities, linking the sense of emancipation to these factors.

“Distance education has restricted the student rather than liberating it. School is an environment for free thinking. I think our teachers are more tired at home, too. For students, I think that laziness rather than liberation triggers the creation of irresponsible individuals.” (M1)

“I do not think we can get free. We have friends who are uncomfortable in the family environment and cannot express their opinions because the environment is not suitable. We are freer to discuss in class.” (F1)

“In a village, like mine, 134 km away from the city centre, where it snowed until the 23rd of May, without internet infrastructure and with frequent power cuts, four children, mother, father and grandmother had to live in a house, still did not have a room of his own or a student who does not even have a desk to study on is freer in his school.” (M2)

Participants unanimously acknowledged the exacerbation of socio-economic disparities through distance education. While one participant (M3) anticipated these differences to diminish with increased collective experience, another (F1) emphasized economic constraints affecting both traditional schooling and distance education. Cultural disparities, rooted in family experiences, were identified as contributing factors. The participant highlighted persistent disadvantages in the education system, especially in scenarios involving power outages or connectivity issues.

“Not every family is the same and not everyone lives in the city centre. The school

makes them appear evenly. A rich student and a poor student can take lessons at the same table and desks under equal conditions.” (F4)

“Whether everyone has a technological device or even the same quality today is proof that distance education is directly related to the socio-economic level. Education is everyone’s right, not just the right of those who have the means.” (M1)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this research, the opinions of pre-service teachers about being a distance student were determined. In the interviews with 11 participants from different departments and grade levels, general evaluations of distance education, the effects of distance education on the student role, the contribution of the instructor to the efficiency of distance education and the digital transformation in education, the future of distance education and the teaching profession were discussed. The findings show that although the participants are aware that distance education is an opportunity offered to them, there is dissatisfaction with the implementation process. The positive or negative experiences during the teaching process, and the attitudes of the instructors, have affected the preservice teachers’ evaluation of the process as education or training. Measurement and evaluation methods and techniques used in distance education are among the points that cause the most disagreement among the participants. While the participants evaluated the opportunities offered by their universities as a positive effort, they emphasized that being able to benefit from these opportunities is a personal situation. Learner characteristics (individual study and learning skills, self-discipline) or the learner’s facilities (technological equipment, internet access, suitable environment to study) made the participants advantageous or disadvantageous (this is the general statement of the participants). More than half of the participants stated that they did not want to go through this process again. All these findings are in line with research based on the views of students regarding distance education in different cultures (Almuraqap, 2020; Nenko et al., 2020; Utomo et al., 2020).

Preservice teachers characterize their experience as “instruction” and perceive that distance education lacks the characteristics associated with the affective domain of education. This perspective may stem from the abbreviated course durations in distance education and the lecturers prioritizing content transfer due to concerns about covering the curriculum. The university’s choice of the Learning Management System (LMS), Adobe Connect, offers limited opportunities for student engagement, resulting in a lack of mutual interaction during lessons. Instructors, often rushing to deliver their lessons promptly due to frequent sound problems, may overlook or dismiss student reactions. This experience might lead preservice teachers to view the process

as merely instructive, contributing to the reluctance of many participants to undergo this process again. Early research on distance education also supports this finding. Negative experiences with distance education can create aversion among students, shaping a pessimistic perception of distance education, as suggested by [Mitchell et al. \(2005\)](#).

Teachers need to develop new skills for the design and planning of teaching materials in line with the principles of distance education ([Beaudoin, 1990](#)). Technical support should be extended to both teachers and students to help them acquire these skills, recognizing that familiarity with distance education impacts perceptions [Agir \(2007\)](#); [Ates and Altun \(2008\)](#). Educators engaging in distance education must acquire technological proficiency. While some may assume that technology will replace educators, this is not accurate. Instead, educators should adopt a technology-based teaching approach, placing the student back at the centre of education. This novel approach can pose challenges for educators, especially those lacking strong knowledge of technology or pedagogy, who may question their roles. Even educators with sufficient knowledge may find it challenging to seamlessly integrate technology and pedagogy. Those who have never utilized technology and student-centred pedagogy and resist the evolving relationship between teacher, student, and technology may encounter the most difficulties ([Burns, 2011](#)).

Teachers should be equipped to troubleshoot technical problems in distance education, offer guidance, and respond to basic questions about information technology. However, support in the distance education process is not limited to instructors. To achieve the objectives of the process and ensure success in teaching, students' adaptation to this new format must also be supported. This can be particularly complex for students due to a combination of personal traits, such as individual study and learning skills, self-discipline, the impact of reduced socialization, and a negative attitude toward technology. Simultaneously, the opportunities available to students directly or indirectly influence the learning process. To become successful online learners, students must exhibit proactive and self-disciplined behaviours ([Huang, 2020](#)).

Considering students' opportunities in both social and technological aspects, factors like the home environment, family perspectives on education, and family livelihood (including situations where students work during class hours or care for younger siblings while the family is occupied), can significantly affect student success. Issues such as the availability of necessary technological equipment for accessing distance education, internet accessibility, network stability, power outages, and access to textbooks and resources are characteristics that also impact student's ability to derive benefits from distance education. [Lau et al. \(2020\)](#) emphasize that the successful implementation of distance education introduces infrastructure and equipment

needs, posing challenges for individuals with low socioeconomic status. This statement is in line with the research findings. These are the negativities that teacher candidates frequently emphasize. In distance education, students may experience heightened insecurity compared to traditional classes. This lack of trust can be attributed to the influence of economic conditions on education, with employers often failing to understand or support the process for their family members or employees. Consequently, this can affect attendance and course completion. Therefore, educators must not only offer psychological support but also maximize student participation and involvement in the process (Falowo, 2007). An effective learning style is essential for success in an online environment, and students are significantly impacted by this shift (Battalio, 2009). Educational decision-makers must recognize the need for Learning Management Systems (LMSs) tailored to the educational requirements of diverse students, potentially offering a blend of face-to-face and virtual interaction. Failure to address these needs may result in excluding students from the educational environment (O'Neill et al., 2004). Again, this situation supports the findings of the current research. The main reason why participants cannot attend classes is that the preferred LMS does not allow interaction. Similarly, in the study conducted by Gillies (2008), prospective teachers stated that they did not feel like real students because they could not get immediate answers to their questions and could not interact with their teachers.

Research conducted at the higher education level in Turkey by the University and Research Laboratory Assessments [University Assessments & Research Laboratory \(UNIAR\)](#) (2020) reveals that students faced challenges preparing for distance education and courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is imperative to assess whether students are adequately prepared for distance education. A face-to-face orientation presentation can precede distance education or a demo presentation should be conducted at the beginning of distance education. Establishing learning groups and self-help teams among students and supporting them in developing self-study and time-management habits can be beneficial. Basic technology skills should be assessed. Potential students and instructors should be informed about the "spirit" of distance education (Burns, 2011). This preparatory process will contribute to a more qualified learning experience for students.

The primary self-critique voiced by preservice teachers about the process is that the advantage of distance education, particularly the absence of physical attendance and the ability to record lessons, fosters complacency. With this mindset, which they label as irresponsibility or negligence, they admit to not following lessons even when conditions are favourable. This situation can be attributed to a lack of understanding of the essence and purpose of distance education.

As technology advances and its impact on education grows, countries prioritize lifelong learning, emphasizing the increasing role of educational technologies and digital learning to ensure equal opportunities in education (Serdyukov, 2017). The debate on the continued physical existence of schools as institutions has surfaced, with a fundamental prediction suggesting that schools may function as content design and development centres, creating teaching materials beyond current practices. However, it is essential not to overlook the fact that schools serve as socializing environments for all stakeholders (Smith, 2011). Research findings indicate that all participants value interaction and social/emotional sharing within the school context. Even if teaching activities are conducted remotely, models that facilitate periodic interaction appear more functional (Anderson, 2011; Burns, 2011; Holmberg, 2008). Schools have existed in the past and will persist despite emerging educational technologies. However, change and transformation are inevitable. As new systems emerge, teachers in schools will assume more adaptable roles (Collins & Halverson, 2009).

Considering that distance education will play an increasingly prominent role in our future lives, it should be evaluated from a holistic perspective. According to Turkey Informatics Committee report (2002), Turkey faces challenges in keeping pace with the development of distance education, citing issues like a lack of quality, standardization, and institutionalization (TBS Report, 2002). This research, which discusses the experiences of preservice teachers, provides the viewpoint of one of the stakeholders in distance education. It has been observed that addressing many of the negative aspects from this perspective requires public sanctions or actions from the party providing distance education services to enhance the quality of education.

Research findings and relevant literature show that the efficiency of distance education depends on many variables. The benefit rates of students in distance education, which is offered without equality in terms of variables such as technological infrastructure, possession of technological devices, and internet access, are not equal. In this context, education decision-makers should analyse access opportunities to education in more detail. Distance education offers freedom to the student. However, this freedom causes irresponsibility in students who do not have self-discipline and individual study skills. Students need to be made aware of these aspects. Another factor that determines the quality of distance education is the digital competence of the instructor. Faculty members need to be supported in this regard (both in terms of material design and application skills).

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study was developed with 11 teacher candidates who had no or very limited previous distance education experience. The opinions of participants with more distance education experience may differ. Experiencing distance education for the first time within the scope of a compulsory education process may have affected the participants' opinions. For example, if distance education is used in teaching an elective course, participant opinions may differ. The limitations of the LMS used affect the efficiency of the participants in the course. Different results may be obtained in processes carried out with better-designed interactive LMSs. Another limitation is the difference in the socio-economic conditions of the participants. Many of the participants live in the village or city centre and share the same house with family elders other than their parents and siblings. Their subjective possibilities are reflected in their perspective on distance education. The results may differ in a study conducted with participants under equivalent conditions.

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