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## EXAMINATION OF OPINIONS ON DISTANCE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN PRESCHOOL PERIOD DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC PERIOD<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

With the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face education activities were suspended in the world and in our country, and distance education activities were started. In this study, the views of the families of the special needs students in the preschool age group and the teachers working with special needs children in the preschool age group about distance education are examined during the COVID-19 pandemic period. For this purpose, phenomenology design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. The study group of the research consists of 10 preschool teachers and 10 parents who have children with special needs in the preschool period. For the purpose of collecting the data of the research, a semi-structured interview form named "Distance Education Opinions", which was prepared separately for preschool teachers and families of individuals with special needs, was used. The data obtained within this research's scope were analysed using descriptive and content analysis, which are among the qualitative data analysis methods. As a result of the research, although teachers and families state that children with special needs do not break away from the education and training processes with distance education systems, they say that the socialization of children with special needs is affected by the distance education system. Both teachers and parents emphasized that distance education systems cause technological addictions in children, regressions are observed, problems occur due to the difference of instructors, and cause adaptation and motivation problems.

**Keywords:** Special needs child, distance education, preschool period.

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<sup>1</sup> This study is derived from the first author's master thesis under the supervision of the second author.

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## INTRODUCTION

Events that occur suddenly at unexpected times and have negative consequences are called crises. It can cause crises in infectious diseases (Çeti & Ünlüönen, 2019). Infectious diseases brought significant problems in every period of history. The reason for this is that the individual with the illness poses a risk not only to himself but also to society (Parıldar, 2020). With the occurrence of epidemics, the necessity of taking various measures by both individuals and states arises (Kaan, 2020). The COVID-19 epidemic, which caused a global crisis, emerged in China in 2019 and showed its effect in all countries of the world in a short period of three months (Dikmen et al., 2020; Karataş, 2020). After COVID-19 emerged and took the form of an epidemic, countries had to take steps to prevent the disease and slow its spread as the first target (Sahi et al., 2020). Many countries have aimed to prevent people from contacting each other around the world by avoiding travel with other countries (Balci & Çetin, 2020). Moreover, practices such as curfews that prevent people from contacting each other in the country, closure of certain businesses, and planning of educational activities in a way that will not be face-to-face were carried out (Aykut & Aykut, 2020). In addition, countries have had to take measures such as people paying attention to the social distance rule (Kara, 2020) and the obligation to wear masks in order to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus. Pandemic conditions have adversely affected many areas such as tourism, sports, the economy, and health, and have revealed the need for countries to take precautions in many areas (Demirtaş & Çıplak, 2020; Dikmen & Bahçeci, 2020; Naik et al., 2021; Özdemir, 2020; Potter et al., 2021; Shih et al., 2021). One of the areas negatively affected by the COVID-19 virus is the education system (Gündoğdu, 2021). The first measure in the field of education against the pandemic is the closure of schools (Serçemeli & Kurnaz, 2020).

The announcement that the first COVID-19 virus was encountered in Turkey was made on March 11, 2020, and various restrictions were made to prevent its spread (Karadağ & Yücel, 2020). In the field of education, it has been decided to take a two-week break from education as of March 16, 2020. In this two-week break, there is no environment suitable for pandemic conditions and an environment where face-to-face training activities cannot be carried out has occurred. This process has brought distance education studies to the agenda for the continuation of the education and training activities of the students. Following the studies, distance education activities were started at all levels as of March 23, 2020 (Gündoğdu, 2021). In the following time, it was during the period when face-to-face education was introduced but due to the course of the epidemic, distance education was turned back (Çizmeçi & Köse, 2021). This is because the COVID-19 virus causes chaos around the world with various consequences, and people are afraid and worried about the effects of the virus (İnce & Yılmaz, 2020; Okan, 2021; Touloupis, 2021).

Countries have tried to ensure the continuity of educational activities through visual, audio, or online platforms within the framework of their own realities and existing infrastructures (Ahmad et al., 2022; Angrist, 2022). In Turkey, distance education activities have been started at all stages and levels in order to maintain educational activities and to ensure the continuity of students' relations with the school and their educational learning (Demir & Özdaş, 2020). In our country, the distance education process has been carried out in various ways at higher education levels for years. However, during the pandemic process, educational services, which are offered as the

main educational activity at pre-school, primary, secondary, and high school levels and cover all students, have entered our lives through the Educational Information Network (EBA) system and Educational Information Network (EBA) TV during the education period (Baysal et al., 2020). In addition to the TRT EBA channel, TRT Child and TRT Okul channels also included content supporting the distance education process (Konca & Çakır, 2021). For the distance education process, there are three service channels called EBA TV Primary School, EBA TV Secondary School, and EBA TV High School. However, it is seen that there is no separate channel for preschool children (Sak et al., 2020).

As in all stages, distance education has been implemented for the continuation of education and training processes in the preschool period. This process was carried out through EBA and online platforms determined by the teacher (Gökçe et al., 2021). Through the EBA platform, live lessons could not be implemented systematically for preschool children, and the contents of the preschool period were determined by their teachers (Ogelman et al., 2021). Children participated in distance education studies through parent support or people who helped them in the absence of parents. Teachers took an active role in this process and assumed the role of guiding parents about the activities. In this process, it was tried to ensure the continuity of education and training activities with the cooperation of parents and teachers (Akın & Aslan, 2021). Since distance education is a method that has not been done before for preschool, teachers' predisposition to this method and their level of knowledge have been limited (Bakkaloğlu et al., 2018; Can, 2020). It is a matter of debate whether distance education processes are a suitable education model for children in the preschool period. In addition, it is emphasized in the literature that children spending a lot of time with technological devices such as phones and tablets can cause technology addiction (Duran, 2021). Moreover, the developmental period of children and the high level of interaction required in the implementation of preschool education programs make it difficult for this system to be an effective educational activity for preschool children (Veraksa et al., 2021). Since the distance education lessons given to preschool-age children in front of the screen do not offer physical interaction, it can be difficult for children to develop concentration and motivation toward the lessons (Yıldırım, 2021). In order for children to continue their ties with the school and avoid psychological harm, care should be taken not only in terms of access but also in the context of the content of education. Preschool distance education activities should be carried out with careful planning so that preschool children are affected by the process at a minimum level, support their developmental areas, establish a bond with the school and learning activities and maintain this bond (Baysal et al., 2020). Since the educational content in the preschool period is based on the communication between the children and the teacher, they constitute the group that has the most difficulty in adapting to distance education activities. In addition, these changes in educational activities, along with distance education, cause the children's usual patterns to be disrupted (Santos & Lacerda, 2020). Inclusive students with special needs who benefit from education and training activities together with preschool children with typical development may experience the same problems while continuing their education activities with distance education processes.

Distance education, which has not been done for the preschool period before, is a very new concept for children with special needs in the preschool age group (Baysal et al., 2020). Considering that the education received in early childhood for children with special education needs can make significant contributions to the child and his parents (Pinar, 2006), the education received in the preschool period has an important place among children with special needs. Children with special needs who received inclusion services in the preschool period and received services in special education classes and schools continued their distance education activities using the same methods as their peers with typical development in the preschool period. The concept of distance education, which is very new for preschool and special education, has entered their lives with the COVID-19 virus for children with special needs in preschool. This situation creates difficulties in practice and the idea of making various adaptations. When the literature is examined, it is noted that there are few studies on the distance education processes of individuals with special needs in the preschool period. It is thought that the distance education process that countries experience after the COVID-19 virus will help to continue the education and training processes for each individual in extraordinary situations such as pandemic conditions (such as fire, flood, and earthquake). Continuity of education processes in children with special educational needs and at risk is of critical importance. For this reason, there is a need for programs designed with special needs children in the education process in mind. This study aims to reveal the distance education experiences of children with special needs in the preschool period with the statements of teachers and parents, to offer suggestions for future studies that will be planned as an alternative to face-to-face education. In addition, It is aimed to reveal how the process continues. For these purposes, our research problem is; 'What are the opinions of teachers and parents about distance education of children with special needs in preschool during the COVID-19 pandemic?'. Our sub-problems are: 'What are the views of teachers on distance education for children with special needs during the COVID-19 pandemic?', 'What are the views of parents on distance education for children with special needs during COVID-19?' and 'What are the opinions of preschool teachers? What are the situations that arise when comparing the views of teachers and parents on distance education of children with special needs during the COVID-19 pandemic?'

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This research aims to examine the views of preschool teachers and parents of children with special needs, by using the phenomenological (phenomenological) pattern in the qualitative research model of the distance education activities of children with special needs in the preschool period during the COVID-19 pandemic. Phenomenological studies are concerned with subjects that we know about but do not have detailed information about (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In the phenomenological study, the experiences of individuals against phenomena and the way they make sense of these experiences are revealed (Creswell & Poth, 2016). For these reasons, it was deemed appropriate to use phenomenological design in this study and it was aimed to examine the opinions of the participants on the phenomenon of 'distance education of children with special needs in the preschool period.'

### **Study Group**

Preschool teachers and parents of children with special needs who were in the preschool period during the COVID-19 pandemic period participated in the study group of the research. The study was carried out with 10 preschool teachers and parents of 10 children with special needs. The sample of the study group was selected from Kastamonu province. Participants were selected with a purposive sampling design. With purposeful sampling, the participants who participate in the research can be selected according to their most appropriate characteristics (Başkale, 2016). Participation in the research is on a voluntary basis, and the teachers were selected from among the preschool teachers who had inclusive students in the classroom they were defined in the distance education studies implemented during the COVID-19 process. On the other hand, parents were selected from among the parents who had a child with special needs at the preschool education age during the COVID-19 process. The diagnoses of the children with special needs of the participants were reported as hydrocephalus, multiple developmental disabilities, Autism, Mild Intellectual Disability, Language and Speech Disorder, Pervasive Developmental Disorder and Visual Impairment.

### **Data Collection**

In this study, the 'Demographic Information Form' containing personal information about the participants was used to collect data, and a semi-structured interview forms called "Distance Education Opinions for Preschool Teachers" and "Distance Education Opinions for Parents" was prepared for teachers and parents of children with special needs, which was finalized with three expert opinions and prepared by the researcher, was used. The "Distance Education Opinions for Preschool Teachers" form consist of thirteen questions and the "Distance Education Opinions for Parents" form consist of seventeen questions. Participants were informed that their personal information would not be disclosed under any circumstances and that the principle of confidentiality would be respected. The questions to the teachers and parents in the study group were conducted face-to-face by taking COVID-19 precautions by interview method. Due to the fear of contamination caused by the COVID-19 situation and the fact that a participant was in the COVID-19 quarantine process, online contact was made and there were also participants whose data were collected online. For the data collection tools, the Research Permit, which is limited to the 2021-2022 academic year, was obtained from the Ministry of National Education, and the Ethics Committee Permission (Decision No: 02.02.2022/19) obtained from the Kastamonu University was obtained.

Interviews were planned with the volunteer participants determined by the purposeful sampling method, by making an appointment with phone calls, in the appropriate environment, and on the date. The environment and date of the interview were determined within appropriate time periods for the researcher and the participants. Care has been taken to ensure that the environments where the interviews will be held are environments where the participant will feel comfortable and where the interview can be conducted efficiently. During the interviews, necessary precautions were taken against the risk of transmission of the COVID-19 virus. In the interviews, the informed consent form was read to the participants and they were asked to approve, the

records that would reveal the identity of the participants would be kept confidential and not disclosed to the public; it was emphasized that even if the results of the research are published, the identity of the participants will remain confidential. Although the face-to-face interview method was preferred in the interviews with the participants, the fear of virus infection in the participants and the fact that a participant was in the COVID-19 quarantine process caused the data to be collected through online environments.

### **Analysis of Data**

The data obtained within the scope of this research were analyzed by using descriptive analysis and content analysis, which are among the qualitative data analysis methods, together. Descriptive analysis is a type of analysis based on the interpretation of data provided by data collection tools according to themes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). Content analysis, on the other hand, is defined as a method that provides repetition of the content of the study by using the data obtained as a result of the research and is used to reach appropriate results by reflecting an unbiased perspective within a certain plan (Koçak & Arun, 2006). By examining the data collected from the participants, codes were examined, and categories and sub-categories were created by examining the codes. Themes were determined in light of the categories and sub-categories created. Obtained data were analyzed with themes titles. During the analysis of the data, the names of the participants were not specified due to the confidentiality principle. Participating teachers, 'T'; parents were coded as 'P' and each participant was given a number according to these codes. T1, T2, T3...; P1, P2, P3... were numbered.

This study, it was tried to increase the validity and reliability by taking expert opinions and making a pilot application. The first version of the interview form, which is the data collection tool of the research, was sent to three faculty members who have doctorate degrees in preschool or special education; feedback was received from all three of them, necessary corrections were made and the interview form was given its final form. In order to reflect the main group of the research, a pilot application was made by conducting semi-structured interviews with a teacher and a parent. Thanks to this application; preliminary information about the technical problems that may occur, the average duration of the interviews, and the intelligibility of the questions and answers were obtained. The obtained data were also answered by the participants about the answers they gave, and the participant confirmed by asking what they wanted to tell. Confirmed statements of the participants were used in the findings section with direct quotations.

In order to ensure the internal validity of the research, expert opinions were sought, participant confirmation was made and direct quotations were included. For external validity, the data collection tool, process, and analysis of the data were explained in detail, the characteristics of the participants in the study group and why they were selected were specified, and the appropriate participants were determined by using the purposive sampling method. The role of the researchers was determined by determining why the method used was chosen. In order to ensure the internal reliability of the study, data loss was prevented by using recording devices while obtaining the data, and the findings were presented without comment. In addition, the data were read independently by two researchers, and codes were created. During the creation of the themes based on the

codes, a consensus was reached among the researchers. The data obtained for external reliability were discussed appropriately in the conclusion part, and the consistency between the data was checked. In addition, it was discussed and agreed upon among the researchers whether the results and findings sections were consistent. Therefore, the external reliability of the study was tried to be increased. The Miles-Huberman Model was used to ensure the reliability of the analysis of the data. The Miles-Huberman Model is a model used to explain the reasons on which social events are based (Baltaci, 2017). A certain systematic relationship can be established between this model and social events (Tatlısu & Bayraktan, 2020). With the Miles-Huberman formula, two coders are coding using the same data. The compatibility of these codings with each other is calculated with the formula  $“(Codes\ with\ consensus)/(Codes\ with\ consensus + Codes\ with\ disagreement) \times 100”$  (Miles & Huberman, 1994). According to the coding control of the study, it is expected that the rate of codes agreed upon by the coders is at least 80% (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). As a result of the coding of the interview results, the rate of the codes that the coders agreed upon was 92.

## **FINDINGS**

In this part of the research, semi-structured interviews called "Distance Education Opinions for Preschool Teachers" and "Distance Education Opinions for Parents" were held separately with teachers and parents for the distance education processes of preschool children with special needs, and the findings were discussed in this part of the research. The findings were discussed in two groups as teachers and parents.

### **Teachers**

Interviews with 13 questions were held with preschool teachers with special needs students in their classrooms about the distance education activities applied during the COVID-19 process of children with special needs in the preschool period. Five themes were reached in line with the data obtained as a result of the interviews. Obtained findings; themes are 'Experience', 'Interaction', 'Solution', 'Comparison' and 'Suggestion'.

#### ***Experience***

Teachers' experiences of teaching via distance education during the COVID-19 process and the experiences of students from the eyes of teachers were examined under the theme of experience. The findings obtained according to the theme of experience are given in Table 1. According to the findings regarding the 'Experience Theme' in Table 1, the categories of 'Teacher' and 'Student' were formed. Two subcategories were created in the 'Teacher' category, namely Difficulties and Advantages. Code '7' in the 'Difficulties' subcategory; There is a '4' code in the 'Advantages' subcategory. Two subcategories were created in the 'Student' category, namely 'Emotions and Moods' and 'Difficulties'. Code '6' in the sub-category of 'Emotions and Emotions'; There are '5' codes in the 'Difficulties' subcategory.

**Table 1.** Teachers' Views on the Experience Theme

Category	Subcategory	Code	N
Teacher	Difficulties	Hard	T1, T2, T3, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9
		Class Control Issues	T1, T2, T3, T5, T8, T9
		Lack of Technology	T1, T2, T7
		Exhausting	T5, T6, T7
		Family Intervention	T5, T7
		Lack of Information	T6, T2
	Advantages	Not going to school	T2
		Family Involvement	T2, T6, T9
		Experiencing Technology	T4, T10
		Awareness of the Family	T9
Student	Emotions and Moods	Self Development	T10
		Happy	T3, T4
		Enjoyable	T4, T9
		Pleasant	T6, T9
		Different	T3, T8
		Reluctant	T2
	Difficulties	Impatient	T10
		Absence from Class	T6, T7, T8
		Attention Issues	T7, T8, T10
		Adaptation and Adaptation Issues	T4, T8
		Technological Issues	T2, T6
		Educational Difficulty	T5, T7

Eight teachers stated the hard code, which is the most repeated code. The expression of one of the teachers, who stated that he had a difficult experience, is as follows:

*"It was difficult, very difficult, our period was very difficult, especially with our children. Since it is a young age, it is not normally possible to sit down and listen to the lesson. Special children don't have it anyway, so special children are not included in the groups. We had to deal with them one-on-one because we had a hard time even with one-on-one due to our own age. Our distance education process was 20 minutes, even that challenged us."* (T1).

**Interaction**

The interaction of the teachers with the students who participated in the life lessons in the education processes given via distance education during the COVID-19 process and the parents of the students with special needs in their classes are examined in the theme of interaction. The information obtained according to the interaction theme is given in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Opinions of Teachers on the Theme of Interaction

Category	Code	N
Teacher-Parent	Talking About the Child's Situation	T4, T5, T7, T8, T10
	Inform	T1, T2, T6, T9
	To Assign Homework	T3, T7, T9
	Restricted Interaction	T6, T10
Teacher Student	Easy Communication	T4, T5, T6, T7, T9, T10
	Communication Difficulty	T1, T2, T3, T8



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Not Attending Class	T2, T3, T6, T7
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According to the findings of the 'Interaction Theme' according to Table 2, two categories were created as 'Teacher-Parent' and 'Teacher-Student'. '4' in the 'Teacher-Parent' category; There are '3' codes in the 'Teacher-Student' category.

**Comparison**

The effects of distance education and face-to-face education applied during the COVID-19 process on the education of children with special needs in the preschool period are examined in the theme of comparison according to the opinions of teachers. The information obtained according to the comparison theme is given in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Teachers' Views on the Comparison Theme

Category	Subcategory	Code	N
Distance Education	Strengths	Staying in the Comfort Zone	T5
		Family Assistance	T10
		Contribution to Health	T2
		Not Detachment from Education	T7
		Interacting With Friends	T7
		Inability to Socialize	T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9, T10
	Limitations	No Contact	T1, T4, T5, T7, T9, T10
		Display Issues	T1, T2, T3, T7, T9
		Inability to Include	T2, T4, T5, T7, T8
		Adaptation and Focus	T1, T4, T8, T9
		Family Terms	T5, T6, T8, T10
		Individual Difference	T1, T2, T6
		Setbacks	T3, T4, T5
		Not Doing With Family	T2, T5, T7
		Behavior Problems	T1, T2, T3
		Technology addiction	T3, T4
		Lack of Content	T1, T8
		Clarifying the Differences	T8
		Face to Face Education	Strengths
Ensuring Interaction	T1, T3, T5, T10		
Communication	T1, T2, T9		
Peer Education	T8, T9		
Individual study	T7		
Adapting to the Classroom	T8		

According to Table 3, according to the information obtained about the 'Comparison Theme', it is divided into two categories as 'Distance Education' and 'Face to Face Education'. The 'Distance Education' category is divided into two sub-categories 'Strengths' and 'Limitations'. Code '5' in the 'Strengths' subcategory; There is a code of '13' in the 'Limitations' subcategory. A sub-category, 'Strengths', was created in the 'Face to Face Training' subcategory. There are '6' codes in the 'Strengths' subcategory. T7, one of the eight teachers who talked about the situation of not being able to socialize, said: *“They get bored, they get bored quickly, and they can't socialize. They cannot play games with each other, they are not in contact, and they are always in apartment life until that age. They are the same during the pandemic process.”*

Talking about the differences becoming clearer, T8 said:

*“One of my students had a little stuttering. I did distance learning when I had COVID when we went into quarantine this year. Normally, he didn't stutter that much in class, for example, his self-confidence was very high. When the child stuttered a few times in the live lesson, he didn't want to come to school for a while when we returned to school. His mother was with him, for example, there was such a serious problem, we overcame it, but it was very difficult. Face-to-face, the child was a self-confident child, even though he stuttered, he would never give up until he said he would, and he wouldn't come back. It was not felt in the classroom, it was not noticed.”*

**Solution**

All of the teachers stated that they carry out distance education activities with live lessons and assignments. Nine of the teachers stated that the students with special needs in their classrooms did not attend the live lessons with other students or they attended sporadically. The solutions developed by the teachers against this situation and the work they did with their students with special needs when they attended the lesson were examined under the name of the solution theme. The findings obtained according to the solution theme are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Teachers' Opinions on the Solution Theme

Category	Subcategory	Code	N
Event Adaptations	Language Development	Sound Study	T6, T7
		Tongue Lip Exercises	T6
		Song	T6
	Motor Skills	Cut Paste	T1, T4
		Captain Rough Transfer	T9
		Bead Insertion	T2
		Painting	T4
		Line Drawing	T6
	Academic Skills	Story	T1, T6, T7, T8
Number		T4, T7	
Adaptations	Instructional	Homework	T3, T4, T5
		One-to-One Work	T6, T7
		Audio Material	T10
		Big Object	T10
		Failure to Develop a Solution	T5
		Using Images	T10
		Extracurricular Adaptations	Family Guidance
Online Chat	T1, T8		

According to Table 4, it was divided into two categories as 'Event Adaptations' and 'Adaptations' according to the findings related to the 'Solution Theme'. The 'Activity Adaptations' category is divided into three sub-categories as 'Language Development', 'Motor Skills', and 'Academic Skills'. Code '3' in the 'Language Development' subcategory; Code '5' in the 'Motor Skills' subcategory; In the 'Academic Skills' subcategory, there is a '2' code. In the 'Adaptations' category, two sub-categories were created as 'Instructional' and 'Extracurricular'. Code '6' in the 'Instructional' subcategory; In the 'Extracurricular' subcategory, there is a '2' code.

**Suggestion**

The suggestions of the teachers regarding the distance education activities that can be applied to the children with special needs in the pre-school period or that can be applied in the future are examined under the name of the suggested theme. The information obtained regarding the suggested theme is analyzed in Table 5. According to the findings regarding the 'Suggestion Theme' according to Table 5, two categories were obtained as 'Education' and 'Support'. '2' code in the 'Education' category; There are '6' codes in the 'Support' category.

**Table 5.** Teachers' Opinions on the Suggestion Theme

Category	Code	N
Education	Family Education	T4, T9
	Teacher Education	T6
Support	Educational Content	T1, T3, T4, T6, T7, T8
	Technology	T5, T7
	Internet	T5, T7
	Materiel	T2
	Financial Opportunities	T5
	Teacher	T10

Saying that family education should be given, T4 expresses this situation as follows:

*“Family education is absolutely necessary. I think there will be family education in distance education and interaction with the family. Here, the biggest problem in our school is that families do not want to be involved in education or do not know. Some families do not know how to treat their children. If he knows, it is more likely that the child will do what we say. I think it would be very nice if there was a family education.”*

**Parents**

In order to examine the distance education activities of children with special needs in the preschool period during the COVID-19 process, interviews with 17 questions were conducted with parents who had children with special needs in the preschool period. At the end of the interviews, the data were analyzed and analyzed. According to the findings, five themes were reached. The findings were discussed in five groups under the themes of 'Impact', 'Comparison', 'Distance Education', 'Relationship', and 'Suggestion'.

**Impact**

The changes observed by parents in children due to the fact that children with special needs stay at home more with the COVID-19 process, the effects of distance education on children with special needs and their parents, are examined under the theme of Impact. The findings obtained according to the effect theme are given in Table 6. According to the findings regarding the 'Impact Theme' in Table 6, the categories of 'Child' and 'Parent' were formed. Three subcategories were created in the category of 'Child': 'Emotions and Emotional states', 'Education', and 'Other'. Code '9' in the 'Emotions and Emotional states' subcategory; Code '8' in the 'Education'

category; There is a '3' code in the 'Other' subcategory. Two sub-categories were created in the category of 'Parent': 'Emotions and the Emotional States' and 'Child Education'. '8' code in the 'Emotions and emotional states' subcategory; There are '6' codes in the 'Child Education' subcategory.

**Table 6.** Parents' Views on Impact Theme

Category	Subcategory	Code	N
Child	Emotion and Emotional States	Boring	P1, P2, P3, P5, P8, P9
		Combative	P2, P4, P5, P7
		Annoyed	P3, P4, P7, P10
		Longing	P1, P3, P5
		Reluctant	P6, P9
		Cry	P3, P5
		Shy	P4, P6
		Stubborn	P7
		Introversion	P3
	Education	Setbacks	P1, P2, P4, P6, P7, P10
		Language Speaking	P1, P8, P9
		Not Wanting To Take Lessons	P1, P6
		Pen Holding	P3
		Using Scissors	P3
		Color Learning	P6
	Other	Number Learning	P6
		Alphabet Learning	P6
		Irregularity	P1, P2, P4, P8, P9
	Parent	Emotion and Emotional States	Lack of Friends
Behavior Problem			P8
Anxiety			P1, P2, P8
Boring			P8, P9
Depressed			P4, P8
Sadness			P1
Worry			P3
Child Education		Fear	P4
		Tired	P7
		Stress	P6
		Spending Time Together	P5, P7, P8
		Support at Home	P5, P7, P8
		Event Variety	P8
	Not Taking Lessons	P1	
	Trying to Gain Information	P7	
	Lack of Information	P6	

There are six parents who talk about their children's educational setbacks. P4 expresses this situation as follows: *“He could not interact with the teacher during his stay at home, I was always present. My child could not get along with other children, so we had a lot of adaptation problems because school has started now. We rewound everything we knew before.”*

**Distance Learning**

The distance education processes of the students with special needs in the pre-school period and their studies in this process are examined under the theme of distance education. The findings obtained according to the effect theme are given in Table 7.

**Table 7.** Views of Parents on the Theme of Distance Education

Category	Code	N
Live Lesson	Ensuring Participation	P1, P3, P10
	Failure to Provide Education	P4, P8
	Mobility	P5
	Dislike	P6
	Adaptation Issues	P2
	Focus Problem	P7
	Lack of Opportunity	P9
Events Held	House Activity	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9
	Painting Studies	P1, P3, P7, P9
	Number Studies	P1, P3, P5, P9
	Singing	P1, P5
	Dexterity	P6, P9
	Pairing	P7
	The game	P4
	Big Small Concept	P3
	Playing the Maracas	P5
	Playing the Tambourine	P5
	What to Do in Live Lesson	P2
	Small Steps Tutorial	P8
Problems Encountered	Child's Reluctance	P4, P6, P9
	Internet Problem	P2, P10
	Not Encountering a Problem	P7
	Technical Issues	P1
	Lack of Education	P8
	Authority Issues	P2
	Lack of Technological Tools	P9
	Lack of Material	P5

According to the findings related to the 'Distance Education Theme' in Table 7, the categories of 'Live Lesson', 'Activities', and 'Problems Encountered' were created. '6' in the 'Live Lesson' category; There is a '12' code in the 'Activities' category and an '8' code in the 'Problems Encountered' category.

**Comparison**

The comparison of the distance education and face-to-face education of children with special needs in the preschool period from the eyes of the parents is examined under the theme of comparison. The findings obtained according to the effect theme are given in Table 8.

**Table 8.** Parents' Views on the Comparison Theme

Category	Subcategory	Code	N
Distance Education	Strengths	Keeping Up With Education	P4, P9, P10
		Family Interest	P4
		Family Awareness	P8
	No Change	P5	

Limitations	Inability to Socialize	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9	
	Technology Addiction	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9	
	Education Decline	P1, P2, P4, P9, P10	
	Instructor Difference	P1, P4, P5	
	Not Understanding	P1, P6, P10	
	Adaptation Problem	P2, P4	
	Disciplinary Issue	P2	
	Attention Problem	P4	
	Motivation Issue	P6	
	Focus Problem	P7	
	No Peer Education	P8	
	Face to Face Education      Strengths	Socialization	P2, P3, P5, P7, P8
		Language development	P1, P3, P7, P9
		Layout	P2, P4, P8
Interaction		P8, P9, P10	
Discipline		P2, P6	
Skill Learning		P7	

According to the findings regarding the 'Comparison Theme' in Table 8, two categories were created as 'Distance Education' and 'Face to Face Education'. The 'Distance Education' category is divided into two sub-categories 'Strengths' and 'Limitations'. Code '4' in the 'Strengths' subcategory; There are '11' codes in the 'Limitations' subcategory. In the 'Face to Face Training' category, it is divided into a sub-category as 'Strengths'. There are '6' codes in the 'Strengths' subcategory. There are nine parents who talk about technology addiction. P6, one of these parents, expresses this situation as follows:

*“I frankly did not see a very positive aspect. Because children's minds were always on the phone in distance education. As you know, the new generation is always the phone, phone, phone... They don't think about anything but games. I have observed this in my other child as well. When they enter the recess from the classes, they immediately open a game on the phone. So I did not understand much about distance education. Playing games on the phone also caused them not to attend classes. We had a lot of trouble with this issue.”*

**Relationship**

The interaction of the parents of children with special needs in the pre-school period with the teacher of the class in which the child with special needs is registered is examined under the theme of relationship. The findings obtained according to the relationship theme are given in Table 9.

**Table 9.** Parents' Views on the Relationship Theme

Category	Code	N
Teacher-Parent Relationship	Be Interested In	P2, P3, P9, P10
	Guidance	P4, P5, P9
	Unexpectedness	P1, P2, P7
	Information	P6, P9
	Satisfaction	P1
	Not Communicating	P8

According to the findings related to the 'Relationship Theme' in Table 9, the 'Teacher-Parent Relationship' category was created. There are '6' codes in the 'Teacher-Parent Relationship' category.

### **Suggestion**

The suggestions of the parents of children with special needs in the pre-school period to the distance education activities in which their children with special needs will be included in the applied or future processes are examined from the suggestion theme. The findings obtained according to the suggestion theme are given in Table 10.

**Table 10.** Parents' Views on the Suggestion Theme

<b>Category</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>N</b>
Suggestions	Individual Face to Face Education	P1, P7, P8
	Book Support	P2, P3, P7
	Family Information	P7,P8, P9
	Interactive Events	P1, P3
	Internet Support	P2, P10
	Technological Tool Support	P2
	Social Environment	P5

The 'Suggestions' category was created according to the findings related to the 'Suggestion Theme' in Table 10. There are '7' codes in the 'Suggestions' category.

P8, one of the three parents who mentioned individual face-to-face education and family information, expresses this situation and family information as follows:

*"I think home education should be started. So the number of children with special needs is not that high. I think that at least certain hours of the week can be taken by the teacher for one-to-one home education. At least, I think it ensures that the interaction between teacher and student is not interrupted. Maybe the interaction in the classroom can be cut off, and they cannot enter the crowd, but these children do not have an alternative such as distance education, at least I think it would be much more convenient for us to go to school or the teacher at school to come home before the teacher interaction is interrupted. Even if distance education will be used, it can be family information. There should be one-to-one teacher-mother interaction and parent interaction, such as what can be done to the family in the process. The teacher cannot communicate with our children online. He can't stand on the screen, I know, so when he doesn't have another friend with him, he doesn't stay on the screen for that long to talk to his teacher."*

### **CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION**

This research aims to examine the views of preschool teachers and parents of children with special needs the distance education activities of children with special needs in the preschool period during the COVID-19

pandemic. In this regard, it is thought that it would be useful to examine the views and experiences of teachers about distance education processes in general before their opinions on students with special needs. Teachers state that preschool children encounter problems in participating in distance education processes, and that a certain part of the class members do not follow this education process in live lessons. They state that the reason for this is that children suffer from adaptation and adaptation problems to the live lessons provided during the distance education process, they encounter technological problems, attention problems occur, and they have difficulties in the education they receive with this method. For these reasons, they encountered children who did not follow the live lessons. When the literature is examined, studies conducted in parallel with these findings indicate that students experience technological problems in distance education processes, problems in their participation in live lessons due to motivation problems (Demir & Kale, 2020; Işıkoğlu et al., 2021; Ünal & Bulunuz 2020;) and that children's distance education processes are examined. They state that they have problems in developing counter-attention (Avcı & Akdeniz, 2021; Kalelioğlu et al., 2016; Kırıcı, 2022). Teachers state that they make adjustments in distance education activities for students with special needs in their classrooms according to their language development, motor skills and academic skills. In these adaptations, teachers say that they mostly make adaptations for their academic skills. It is thought that the reasons why teachers have made adaptations in the field of language speaking are caused by the language-speech problems frequently encountered in students with special needs. The teachers made simplifications according to the situation of the students with special needs and made various adaptations for their inadequacy in the activities they applied to the students who showed typical progress in the assignments and lessons they gave. The adequacy of teachers' adaptation studies can be discussed. It is thought that students with special needs not doing adaptation studies for other developmental areas will negatively affect other developmental areas in the period when students' development is rapid. When the literature is examined, it has been emphasized that adaptations should be made for students with special needs against their differentiating features from their peers in distance education processes and that teachers also make adaptations (Akbayrak et al., 2021). When teachers compared distance education and face-to-face education for students with special needs, they mostly mentioned the limitations of distance education and the strengths of face-to-face education. It is a remarkable finding that although they talk about the limitations of distance education, they do not mention any limitations of face-to-face education. This situation shows that teachers have the view of face-to-face education activities as the most effective way for the education of students with special needs. Teachers state that most of the limitations of distance education for students with special needs are that students cannot socialize and they cannot contact students with special needs in educational activities. Teachers talk about limitations such as that children with special needs cannot be included in distance education processes, that it causes problems with being connected to the screen, that it causes educational regressions, and that family conditions are not sufficient for distance education processes. In addition, it is a remarkable finding that the differences between a teacher's distance education process and a student with special needs in his class become clear and affect the child's interest in education processes (Alpaslan, 2020), not providing a social space, not taking into account individual differences (Başaran et al., 2020), low motivation of students and showing problem behaviors (Mengi & Alpdoğan, 2020), encountering setbacks



(Şenol & Yaşar, 2020), family socio-economic and inadequate level of education, the student's problems in being involved in the course processes for various reasons (Ünay et al., 2021), the inadequacy of the content to a certain extent (Bayburtlu, 2020) and the fact that it may lead to technology addiction and screen problems (Aykar & Yurdakal, 2021) studies are found.

When parents of children with special needs in the pre-school period were asked how their children's education was affected by staying at home during the COVID-19 process, they stated that they mostly saw regressions in their children. Parents state that this process also affects their children's language development intensely. The reason for these is thought to be that the changes in the emotions and emotional states that children with special needs experience during this process reduce their educational performance. Parents' inability to teach their children during this period, problems in support at home, and the inadequacy of education services for children with special needs may also cause children to regress. On the other hand, it is thought that the fact that they stay at home more due to the COVID-19 process and that the necessary linguistic stimuli are not sufficiently provided at home are thought to be effective. On the other hand, there are parents who state that children with special needs gain various skills such as holding a pencil, using scissors, learning colours and numbers in this process. It is thought that the reason why children gain these skills is that parents take an active role in their children's education and fulfil the requirements of the distance education activities used. On the other hand, when the literature is examined, there are participants who state that there are disruptions in the education of their children in the study, which examines the experiences of mothers with children with special needs during the COVID-19 process (Koçbeker & Karamuklu, 2022). This situation may cause regressions in the development of children (Akbulut et al., 2020; Şenol & Yaşar, 2020). On the other hand, the fear of virus contamination in parents has pushed their children to stay at home. As a result of this situation, it is thought that children who are always in the same environment and people develop negative emotions such as irritability, anger, stubbornness, crying, and reluctance. When the literature is examined, in parallel with the research findings, parents have stated that their children experience emotional changes due to staying at home for a long time (Akgül & İra, 2021; Demirbaş & Koçak, 2020). According to the opinions of the parents, when the other effects of distance education processes on their children are examined, parents talk about their children's disorder and peer deprivation. The distance education process, which quickly entered the lives of children with special needs along with the pandemic process, caused the children to spend most of their time at home, which caused the children's routines/regularities such as getting up in the morning and going to school, eating at certain times, and sleeping hours. In addition, parents observed an increase in problem behaviours with the increase in the amount of time their children were at home. It can be thought that the reasons such as the increase in the duration of staying at home due to the pandemic conditions, the changes in their mood, the differences in their habitual patterns, and their staying away from the education processes are effective in the display of behavioural problems of their children. In addition, it is stated that children with special needs suffer from peer deprivation due to their isolation from social environments during the pandemic process. In particular, this situation can heavily affect the absence of close siblings in the age group and children living in city centers. When the literature is examined, there are studies emphasizing that distance education processes cause disruption of children's order (Üresin et

al., 2021), children cannot meet with their friends (Kundakçı et al., 2022), and causes changes in children's behaviour (Çetin & Ercan, 2021) in parallel with the study findings.

When the parents of children with special needs in the pre-school period were asked to compare the distance education and face-to-face education their children received, the parents did not mention any limitations of face-to-face education, although they mentioned the limitation of distance education. This shows that parents see face-to-face education as the most effective way of education. They mention that with face-to-face education, their children become socialized, offer the opportunity to interact with other people, positively affect their language development, and create order when children go to school. It is thought that parents' having these thoughts is due to the problems experienced in the distance education processes carried out under pandemic conditions. Children with special needs can interact with their friends in face-to-face education environments and socialize with the support of teachers when appropriate. With the inclusion programs applied for students with special needs in face-to-face education processes, children with special needs can socialize with their peers (Akman et al., 2018). Language development is positively affected by the presence of children in social environments, especially in the pre-school period, which is the most open period for development, by providing peer interaction (Gülay, 2009). In addition, it is seen that children with special needs create many routines for themselves, such as staying at certain hours, eating, going to school and coming from school while in face-to-face education activities. According to the statements of the parents, these patterns of children with special needs have changed during the pandemic process and have been replaced by the disorder. When the literature is examined, it is seen that socialization is easier with face-to-face education (Karakuş et al., 2020; Özdoğan & Berkant, 2020; Şad & Akdağ, 2010; Üçer, 2020), interaction can be provided (Avcı, 2020), language development is improved from the child's contact with the environment. There are studies that state that it is positively affected (Kol, 2011) and that the order in the school period is disrupted when the distance education processes are started (Üresin et al., 2021).

In line with the data obtained, the differing or similar views of the teachers who have students with special needs in their classes and the parents of children with special needs about the distance education process applied together with the pandemic process will be examined in this section. First of all, according to the teachers, taking distance education due to the pandemic causes students to develop positive emotions in general. On the other hand, parents state that children with special needs develop negative feelings when they stay at home and receive distance education during the pandemic. Considering the reason for this, it is thought that children with typical development adapt to differing situations faster than children with special needs and benefit from the positive aspects of the process. On the other hand, children with special needs may have difficulties adapting to distance education processes due to difficulties in adapting to different processes, deterioration of their usual habits, and development of problem behaviours. When we look at the experiences of parents and teachers, it is seen that both groups develop negative processes and emotions in general. On the other hand, both groups made efforts to improve themselves. It is thought that the reason for this is a process that they have not experienced before, so parents and teachers are working to understand the process. Among the teachers, there

are those who state that the distance education provided for children with special needs can contribute with the help of their parents. When we look at the limitations of distance education processes, teachers and parents state that it affects the socialization of children with special needs, causes their technological addictions, regressions are observed, problems occur due to the difference of instructors, and causes adaptation and motivation problems. Obtaining similar findings from parents and teachers suggests that distance education processes applied for children with special needs may cause serious problems in the subjects expressed. In face-to-face education, teachers and parents of children with special needs mention that children can socialize and interact. In addition, the fact that the two groups do not mention the limitations in face-to-face education is an important data, and it is concluded that they receive face-to-face education as the most effective way.

Teachers state that students in their classrooms show participation problems in live lessons, which is one of the distance education activities they use, and students encounter technological problems in the process. Parents of children with special needs also talk about the reluctance of children in distance education processes and the problems that occur in technological tools. For this reason, the majority of parents state that they do not attend live lessons. Teachers also state that they mostly use homework as a distance education method for children with special needs. When we look at the homework given, it is seen that both groups talk about language development, motor skills and academic skills. The fact that studies on other skill areas are not mentioned suggests that the development of children with special needs is not supported holistically through distance education.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

While selecting the children with special needs of the parents included in this study and the preschool teachers with special needs students in their classes, no limitations were made regarding the inadequacies of the children. It is thought that studying separately according to the types of disability in future studies will contribute to the field. There is a need for research that will look at the experiences of children with special needs, parents, and teachers during the pandemic process, not only from an educational perspective but from a wider window. Parents of children with special needs should not be forgotten while the distance education processes are being implemented, and their active participation should be ensured. It is important for parents to learn about distance education processes in order to make the education and training services that their children will receive by using distance education methods more efficient.

## **ETHICAL TEXT**

In this article, the journal writing rules, publication principles, research and publication ethics, and journal ethical rules were followed. All responsibilities related to the article belong to the responsible authors. Ethics committee approval of the study was obtained from Kastamonu University Ethics Committee about this study (Decision No. 02.02.2022/19).

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