

TEACHER'S OPINIONS ON THE EFFECTS OF THE DISTANCE LEARNING IMPLEMENTATIONS DEVELOPED IN THE SHADOW OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC ON SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS STUDENTS, AN EXAMPLE FROM T.R.N.C.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to determine the opinions of teachers on the effects of distance learning practises developed in the shadow of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on special education needs students and to get suggestions for their improvements. The study group of the research consists of 30 teachers who are involved in the education and training of students with special needs in many special education needs schools and primary schools in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in the 2021 - 2022 academic year. The research was prepared by using a quantitative-qualitative mixed-method. An online form was created in Google Forms and sent to the teachers. In this form there were 7 questions about gender, age, the departments that the teachers graduated from, their education levels (Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate) and the student groups they work with. The answers given by the participants to the questions are shown in the tables. As a result of the findings obtained from the interviews, one of the most important problems faced by special education teachers in the distance learning is that there were behavioural difficulties that students exhibited during online sessions, mistakes in selection of methods and techniques, usage of materials, being cut off from the Internet and insufficient parental support. In the light of the results obtained from this study, various suggestions were presented for the special education teachers to perform efficiently and willingly during distance learning.

Keywords: *Distance Learning, Special Needs Education, Student with Special Needs, Teacher's Technology Usage*

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the data of the World Health Organization, in order to prevent the spread of the new type of coronavirus (COVID-19), which was first detected in China in 2019, face-to-face education was suspended in many countries in 2020 and education and training continued through distance education (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2020; United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2020b). Due to the negative health conditions experienced, especially education and training were adversely affected. With the Covid-19 epidemic period, all educational institutions, from primary school to higher education institutions, have decided to continue their education as distance learning. As a result of this decision, a great change has occurred in the lives of all educators and students. Educators have experienced difficulties in how they will conduct education and training, what kind of materials they will use and what kind of methods and

techniques they will adopt. In addition, we experience that students face a lot of difficulties while attending classes.

In the most general sense, education is the process of changing or creating behavior in the desired direction through the individual's own life (Senemoğlu, 2018). There are two types of education. These are formal education and informal education. Formal education is one of the types of education that its goals are planned, purposeful and instructive. Within the formal education, the place, method, duration, content and practices are known and aimed at create the desired behaviors (Güven, 2014). Formal education is divided into two categories which are mainstream education and non-formal education. Mainstream education is a form of education that starts from pre-school period and continues until primary education, secondary education, higher education and it can be carried out in the form of open education and distance education. Moreover, this type of education is based on various special programs and curricula that are hierarchically structured and chronologically graded (Smith, 2002).

The concept of special education actually falls under the concept of formal education. Within the scope of formal education, special education services are provided to individuals who need special education. Individuals who differ significantly from their peers for various reasons and who are affected by inadequacy, benefit from special education services during the compulsory education period, which is also a form of formal education (MEB, 2018). When the literature is examined, it is obvious that there are many definitions related to the concept of special education. Among these numerous definitions, the followings can be mentioned: Special education is an education service which provides to ensure that individuals with different developmental characteristics can continue their lives independently (Şanal, Güler & Erdem, 2018). "Special education" is the type of education that is carried out in an atmosphere suitable for the disabilities and characteristics of the individuals in the need of special education, with the help of specially trained personnel, training programs and methods developed (MEB, 2010). It is defined as "an individual who, for various reasons, differs significantly from his peers in terms of individual characteristics and academical capability" (Bedir, Ersözlü, & Altun, 2013).

Since the characteristics and needs of individuals who require special education are different from each other, classification method is used to ensure that these individuals receive appropriate education. In order to identify individuals in need of special education and to provide appropriate services, the Special Education Services Regulation defines the classification of individuals in need of special education according to their inabilities. According to this classification, areas such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (Mild, Moderate, Severe), Intellectual Disability (Mild, Moderate, Severe), Hearing Impairment, Visual Impairment, Physical Disability, Special Learning Disability, Language Speech Disorder, Multiple Disability, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, Chronic Disease and Gifted and Talented abilities constitute areas that require special education (MEB, 2018). Although individuals who need special education show different developmental characteristics and learning needs, they also have similar learning, cognitive and social challenges. Individuals with intellectual disabilities experience difficulties in metacognitive areas such as storing and using information in both long and short-term memory, in attention management for learning, in joint attention and in managing distracting stimulus, inability of planning how to solve the problem, controlling, implementing and evaluating of the solutions in receptive and expressive language according to how they are affected (Çifci-Tekinarslan, 2019). Similarly, there are some common problems in individuals who need special education and have hearing impairment, visual impairment, learning disability, autism spectrum disorder, language-speech disorder and multiple disabilities. These problems can be summarized as; speech and language problems, low academic

achievement, social and emotional developmental problems, problems in acting independently, communication and interaction problems and social skills problems (Avcioğlu, 2019; Diken, 2019; Güzel-Özmen, 2019; Gürsel, 2019; Sarı, 2019).

Due to the negative pandemic conditions we are experiencing, education and training continued for a while as distance learning. Distance Education is conducting educational activities without physical interaction, but by means of tools such as televisions, computers, tablets and mobile phones (Karakuş et al., 2020). It has been evident that distance learning process has many advantages and disadvantages in terms of education and training. It can be suggested that it has benefits providing opportunity to learn at any age, at any time, at any speed and at any place since it removes all the limitations in education. On the other hand, preventing students from socializing, not being able to provide enough help to students who do not have the habit of learning without any help and self-learning, not benefiting enough from practical lessons and not being able to develop desired skills and behaviour can be counted as its disadvantages (Kaya, 2002).

It is obvious that although maintaining distance learning activities turns out to be easy after a while, it is difficult in terms of maintaining special education activities. In order to carry out special education effectively, there must be a cooperation between students, teachers and families. As a matter of course, the most important duty falls on special education specialists in this process. Therefore, the role of the special education teachers is very important in the process of cooperation during this period. In addition, special education teachers need to use technology effectively in order to continue special education activities. The effective use of assistive technologies is closely related to how much knowledge and equipment special education teachers have about these technologies. Assistive technologies can be defined as all kinds of tools, services or methods used to enable individuals with special needs to benefit from educational services, to enable them live as independent individuals in the society and to enhance their quality of lives (Johnston, Thurlow, Altman, Timmons, and Kato, 2009; Reed and Bowser, 2005). The fact that teachers do not have sufficient knowledge and equipment about assistive technologies and accordingly they do not feel competent in using them is considered as one of the biggest obstacles of the usage of assistive technologies (Copley and Ziviani, 2004; Parette, 1997; Zhou, Parker, Smith ve Griffin-Shirley, 2011). In the literature, there are various published studies examining the opinions and thoughts of special education teachers on the use of assistive technologies (Alammari, Al-Haiki and Al-Muqahwi, 2017; Chmiliar, 2007; Copley and Ziviani, 2004; Sydeski, 2013).

There are many studies in the literature regarding the coronavirus epidemic and its effects on distance learning with students with special needs. There are some studies about how the results of the coronavirus pandemic affected students' academic achievements with special needs (Pacheco et al., 2020), on the students' access to education (Jeste et al., 2020; Putri et al., 2020; Stenhoff et al., 2020), their mental development (Asbury et al., 2020; Patel, 2020). To add, there are also various studies about how families are involved in their children' education process (Cahapay, 2020).

However, due to the fact that the effects of the coronavirus are quite new, it is obvious that there are limited studies on the effects of the epidemic on the education of students with special needs in Turkey (Kalaç et al., 2020; Mengi & Alpdoğan, 2020). Hence, it is believed that examining the effects of the coronavirus pandemic period on the education of students with special needs will contribute to the literature.

The main purpose of this research is to present how special education teachers are involved in the education and training activities through distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic period and to reveal what difficulties students with special needs and teachers experience in this period. For this purpose, this study aims to put forth the strengths and limitations of the distance learnings

services provided in this process in terms of the education of students with special needs, by examining the views of teachers on distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic period. In order to achieve the desired goals within this study, answers to the following questions were looked for:

- 1) What are the teachers' thoughts on distance learning in terms of the education of students with special needs?
- 2) What are the benefits and limitations of distance learning services in special education?
- 3) What are the difficulties faced by teachers who carried out education and training of students with special needs in distance learning period during the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Model

Soon after the face-to-face education started in the 2019 – 2020 period, all primary, secondary and higher education institutions switched to online education with the sudden appearance of the Covid-19 pandemic in our country. This study aims to get the opinions of the teachers who continued the education of special needs students during this time. In this context, "Teachers' views on the learning of special needs students in primary schools during distance learning process" were included, and a qualitative-quantitative mixed-research method was adopted. This method has been chosen because it allows teachers who teaches the special needs students to express their experiences and ideas better about distance learning during the COVID-19 process.

2.2 Study Group

The participants of the research were 30 teachers working in special education in the 2021-2022 academic year in TRNC. Demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table.1.

Table.1

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

	Age	Gender	Undergraduate Graduation	Education Status
Ö1	38	Female	Classroom Teacher	Undergraduates
Ö2	43	Male	Special Education	Postgraduates
Ö3	37	Male	Special Education	Postgraduates
Ö4	38	Female	Classroom Teacher	Undergraduates
Ö5	36	Female	Special Education	Undergraduates
Ö6	25	Female	Special Education	Undergraduates
Ö7	26	Female	Special Education	Undergraduates
Ö8	42	Female	Special Education	Undergraduates
Ö9	25	Male	Special Education	Undergraduates
Ö10	32	Female	Special Education	Postgraduates
Ö11	28	Male	Special Education	Postgraduates
Ö12	30	Male	Special Education	Postgraduates
Ö13	33	Female	Preschool Teacher	Undergraduates
Ö14	37	Female	Special Education	Undergraduates
Ö15	41	Female	Classroom Teacher	Undergraduates
Ö16	37	Female	Special Education	Undergraduates
Ö17	36	Female	Classroom Teacher	Undergraduates
Ö18	39	Male	Special Education	Postgraduates
Ö19	29	Female	Special Education	Postgraduates
Ö20	33	Female	Special Education	Postgraduates

Ö21	43	Female	Classroom Teacher	Undergraduates
Ö22	52	Female	Special Education	Undergraduates
Ö23	33	Female	Special Education	Postgraduates
Ö24	51	Female	Classroom Teacher	Undergraduates
Ö25	36	Female	Special Education	Postgraduates
Ö26	24	Female	Special Education	Undergraduates
Ö27	28	Female	Special Education	Undergraduates
Ö28	36	Female	Special Education	Postgraduates
Ö29	38	Female	Special Education	Doctoralgraduate
Ö30	49	Female	Special Education	Undergraduates

When Table.1 is analyzed, it can be seen that 80% of the participants are women and the remaining 20% are men. 23 of the participants are special education teachers, 6 classroom teachers and 1 preschool teacher. According to the table, 18 people, who make up 60% of the participants are undergraduates, 11 people who make up 36.7% of them are postgraduates and the remaining 1 person who makes up 3.3% of them is a doctoral graduate. Our youngest participant is 24 years old and our oldest participant is 51 years old.

Table.2

Groups and Levels of Students with Special Education Needs Educated by Participants

Student Groups with Special Needs	Mentally Disabled(13), ADHD(6), Dyslexia(5), Autism(11), Hearing Impaired(3), Special Learning Disability(7), Cerebral Palsy(4), Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity(7), Down Syndrome (3)
Year Groups of Students	Year 1(12), Year 2(11), Year 3(8), Year 4(9), Year 5(6), all groups aged between 6-18(5), Severe (1)

In Table.2, groups and levels of students with special education needs educated by participants is clearly presented.

2.3 Data Collection

In the framework of this study, interview technique was used in order to reveal the views of teachers who are involved in teaching students with special needs, regarding the lessons during the distance learning period of Covid-19. The data collection method of the study was through a semi-structured interview questions. In order to establish the validity and reliability of the questions in the semi-structured interview, three field experts were consulted and the questions were approved by them. While selecting the questions for the interview, the main focus was asking the questions in a way that they could reveal the status of special education in the distance learning process and the problems that teachers encountered during this time. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic process, face-to-face interviews could not be held with the participants. Interview questions were prepared in a program called "Google Forms" and sent to special education teachers as a form. In the interview prepared for teachers in Google Forms, teachers were asked about their gender, age, department they graduated from, educational status (Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate), which school they work in and the group and level of students with special needs they work with. Responses of the participants were obtained through Google Forms, too. Data were collected in September and October 2021.

Table.3

Interview Questions Created for Teachers Working with Special Education Needs Students

-
- 1) Do you think the distance learning platform is suitable for teaching students with special education needs?
-
- 2) What kind of methods and techniques do you use for teaching students with special needs in the distance education process?
-
- 3) What kind of technological tools do you use to conduct the trainings well on the distance education platform? Does it have advantages for you?
-
- 4) What kind of behavioural difficulties did you observe in students with special needs during the distance learning process?
-
- 5) How do you make evaluations in the distance learning process? What do you think about the reliability of the evaluations made?
-
- 6) How do you carry on the education and training of the students with special needs during the distance learning process? Did the families take part in this process?
-
- 7) In order to provide an effective education to students with special needs in the distance learning process and to improve yourself, do you participate in educational games, in-service trainings or different certificate programs?

In Table.3, the interview questions directed to the teachers who are involved in the education of the students with special needs are shown and the answers given to these questions in the study are examined in detail.

2.4 Data Analysis

Among the qualitative data analysis types, the most frequently used method is the content analysis method. In content analysis, similar data are brought together within the framework of certain concepts and themes (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016). The data collected for this purpose must first be conceptualized and then be organized logically according to the emerging concepts and the themes that explain the data must be determined accordingly. After this analysis method, a framework was created according to the themes, the data were processed and the findings were defined and interpreted. Thus, descriptive analysis was created. The data obtained in the descriptive analysis are presented as citations. The aim is to present the results that are obtained in this study in an organized and interpreted form to the readers. Descriptive analysis consists of four stages. These are: (1) Creating a framework for descriptive analysis, (2) Processing the data according to the thematic framework, (3) Defining the findings, (4) Interpreting the findings (Altunışık et al., 2010). At every stage of descriptive analysis, different steps are followed ; (Yıldırım, 2008) These are; (1) **At the stage of creating a framework for descriptive analysis**, a framework for data analysis is created based on the research questions, the conceptual framework of the research, or the dimensions included in the interview and/or observation. (2) **At the stage of processing the data according to the thematic framework**, the data obtained according to the previous framework is studied and arranged.(3) **At the stage of defining the findings**, the data edited in the final stage are defined and supported by direct quotations where necessary. (4) **At the stage of interpretation of the findings**, the explanation, correlation and interpretation of the identified findings are performed.

3. FINDINGS

In this section, the findings obtained from the interview conducted with the teachers who involved in the education of the students with special needs regarding the distance learning process are

presented. At the end of the coding and forming tables of the content analysis made on the data obtained as a result of the interview sent to special education teachers, tables were created by the researchers. The data is given in the table and discussed in detail below.

Table.4

Teachers' views on the question of “Do you think the distance learning platform is suitable for teaching students with special needs?”

<i>Opinions</i>	<i>Frequency(f)</i>
No.	15
It can be used as an alternative if necessary.	2
Not suitable for one-to-one training. It is very difficult for students with special needs to retain information and to provide them permanent learning. Since students have very little attention span, they cannot stay in front of the screens too long.	5
In special education, students and teachers should interact one-to-one.	4
Behaviors of students with special needs cannot be corrected with verbal instructions alone.	1
It is not suitable under normal circumstances. However, family-supported distance learning should be provided rather than having no education at all during the pandemic period.	3
Total	30

When Table.4 is analyzed, 25 of the participants who make up 83.3% of the total, emphasized that it is not possible to provide education efficiently in distance learning for students with special needs and one-to-one interaction is required during the education since children's difficulty in focusing in front of the screens make teaching more difficult. 5 of the participants who make up 16.7% of the total stated that they do not prefer the distance learning unless it is compulsory for the continuity of education.

Table.5

Teachers' views on the question of “What kind of methods and techniques do you use for teaching students with special needs in the distance learning process?”

<i>Opinions</i>	<i>Frequency(f)</i>
I just used video.	4
Using the direct teaching technique, I reinforced by sending homework and videos from the internet.	6
I am using direct narration technique and I am using question and answer technique.	8
Visual tools and games	4
I used Todi Cognit.	1
Setting similar tasks of the sample work.	2
Homework, family-supported education, Video-supported education and training	3
Narration with examples, drama, role modelling	2
Total	30

In accordance with Table.5, 21 of the participants, who make up 70% of them, stated that they used the methods and techniques as they use in their traditional teaching during the distance learning processes, while 9 people who make up the remaining 30% said that they supported the education with technological materials.

Table.6

Teachers' views on the question of “*What kind of technological tools do you use to conduct trainings well on the distance learning platform? Does it have any advantages for you?*”

<i>Opinions</i>	<i>Frequency(f)</i>
I used a computer for distance education and it did not give me any advantage.	2
It made us use the computer better. It allowed us to enrich the lessons with videos and visuals.	5
I used Zoom program. During the lesson, I turned on the camera and tried to interact with the student one-on-one.	4
Tablet and computer	7
Laptop and phone	6
Watching videos, supporting with visuals and listening to songs on the internet about the subject	1
I continued the lessons on the computer. Through phone, I sent supporting videos via WhatsApp application and checked the homework.	5
Total	30

When Table.6 is analyzed, it can be seen that all of the participants were able to carry out the lessons simultaneously through the computer via zoom, Google Meet, etc. In addition, they emphasized that they sent homework using applications such as WhatsApp.

Table.7

Teachers' views on the question of “*What kind of behavioural difficulties did you observe in students with special needs during the distance learning education process?*”

<i>Opinions</i>	<i>Frequency(f)</i>
Due to the difficulties experienced in education, there were problems with their developments.	1
Reluctance, crying, leaving lessons, unable to sit still, distraction.	14
Inability to sit in front of a screen for more than ten minutes.	1
I didn't observe any problem behavior.	1
Having a short attention span, having difficulty looking at the screen all the time and having difficulty in learning the topic as soon as stopping looking at the screen	6
Never attending classes	1
Behaviors such as leaving the class to play games on the computer, punching the computer, crying, biting and hitting the parents sitting next to them	2
Talking constantly, asking questions, turning off the camera, not fulfilling the responsibilities given (such as homework)	4
Total	30

As stated in Table.7, the most frequently expressed challenges by the participants are the behavior that negatively affect the quality of education and training, such as reluctance, distraction, and boredom in front of the screen. In addition, the next challenging problem is that students do not fulfill the responsibilities given to them to reinforce.

Table.8

Teachers' views on the question of “*How do you make evaluations during the distance learning process? What do you think about the reliability of the evaluations made?*”

<i>Opinions</i>	<i>Frequency(f)</i>
I wanted the videos of what I taught. I think there is no reliability.	4
I think that the evaluations made during the distance learning process are not reliable.	3
I evaluated them by checking the homework and students' answers to the questions I asked during the lesson. I don't think it's reliable. Because someone else, instead of the child, can do the homework.	8
I make it with the help of parents. But its reliability is questionable.	4
I made an evaluation based on the child's participation during the lesson.	5
Evaluations were made considering the pandemic conditions.	1
I made it in the form of an online exam and I find it reliable.	2
I made an evaluation by getting information from the family and according to the videos of the students recorded when they were doing reading. I find it reliable.	3
Total	30

When Table.8 is analyzed, it can be seen that 25 participants did not find the exams reliable, the remaining 5 people evaluated the students with the support of their families and they found the evaluations reliable. It is clear that almost all of the participants decided the evaluation criteria by taking into account the pandemic conditions during the evaluation.

Table.9

Teachers' views on the question of “*How do you continue the education and training of the students with special needs during the distance learning process? Did the families take part in this process?*”

<i>Opinions</i>	<i>Frequency(f)</i>
I continued online via Zoom. The family got involved in the process.	8
I continued with the help of the family over the phone. I revised the topics.	2
I continued by sending and sharing messages to families via WhatsApp.	6
I sent supporting videos and homework about the topic.	4
I tried to continue it as an synchronized online lesson, but when the children did not participate, I sent videos.	3
By interacting with the student one-to-one, I tried to solve his/her problems and I tried to boost his/her confidence by giving him/her a chance to speak.	4
After the explanations in lesson, the students are asked to do homework and they are supported.	1
I tried to do it as synchronized online lesson as much as possible.	2
Total	30

When Table.9 is analyzed, it is given that 25 participants underlined that they had synchronized online lessons during the distance learning process and they also mentioned that they got the support of the families in this period. On the other hand, the remaining 5 people highlighted that they carried out the lessons asynchronously with homework and helpful videos, again with family support.

Table.10

Teachers' views on the question of “*In order to provide an effective education to students with special needs in the distance learning process and to improve yourself, do you participate in educational games, in-service trainings or different certificate programs?*”

<i>Opinions</i>	<i>Frequency(f)</i>
Of course. I'm always in favor of teachers improving themselves.	5
Especially teachers in this field should improve themselves in distance learning and participate in the trainings.	5
Since technology is advancing rapidly, we should definitely participate.	5
I do not have any opinion on this topic.	1
Getting support is to the advantage of teachers.	5
I will definitely participate. Because we need to attend trainings in order to learn how to approach special educated needs students and to teach them more easily.	3
I participate. Because, every new method and every new idea learned will make it easier to reach children.	6
Total	30

According to the Table.10, all participants expressed their needs for in-service trainings, that is about developing technology, developing new educational softwares and methods that can better attract the attention of children with special needs who have attention deficits.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

With the appearance of COVID-19 epidemic, ensuring the continuation of education without disruption has been main target of all countries (Can, 2020). In order to achieve this goal, some changes occurred in terms of education. Face-to-face education has been replaced by the distance learning model. The distance learning model that emerged especially in this process should not be considered as a planned and purposeful system. This education model should be evaluated as an emergency education model that developed as a solution to a crisis situation (Hodges et al., 2020). In this study, in which the distance learning applications in the COVID-19 process were examined in terms of the views of the teachers who took part in the education of the students with special needs, the teachers expressed their opinions on the activities they performed and the problems they faced in this process.

Maintaining the education and learning of the students with special needs in the framework of distance learning is one of the leading topics that have been discussed in our world today. Taking into account of the findings obtained from this study, it can be once again emphasized that special education teachers should be in one-to-one interaction with special needs students. The fact that students with special needs have concentration problems even in the classroom environment, it is impossible for them to conduct themselves in front of the screens. In this context, the teachers who participated in this study argued that students with special needs could not be taught during the

implementation of the distance learning. The findings of this study are in accordance with the research of Barnum, 2020; Fauzi & Khusuma 2020; Ferlazzo, 2020.

The obstacles experienced by the teachers of the students with special needs during the lessons held on the distance learning platform is another issue that draws attention. Within the scope of this analysis, the most outstanding problems experienced by teachers are the behaviors that negatively affect the quality of education and training, such as reluctance, distraction and boredom in front of the screen and failure to fulfill their responsibilities. In addition, the problems experienced especially in technological equipments and internet connections are also frequently mentioned. It is evident that the problems remained the same in the study conducted by Xie & Yang, 2020. When the literature is reviewed, it is obvious that these identified problems are common in many other researches (Alea et al., 2020; Arora & Srinivasan, 2020; Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020; Fauzi & Khusuma, 2020; Rasmitadilla et al., 2020; Sönmez, Yıldırım and Çetinkaya, 2020).

In line with the data obtained from the special education teachers participating in this study, it is clear that the support of the family during COVID-19 epidemic period is vital for the students. It is emphasized that some of the families supported their children during this process, while some of them did not take an active role in the distance learning process. From the perspective of the special education teachers who got involved in this study, informing parents at the beginning of the process is an alternative way to enable them to be more active during distance learning. According to the literature review, the support given by the parents to the education process is vital in the success of children in and after school life (Coley et al., 2020; Hanson & Pugliese, 2020). As Bozkurt (2020) stated, the role of parents in their children's learning and teaching processes has increased during the COVID-19 process. Providing support to parents by schools and teachers in the distance learning process can contribute to reduce the problems during this period. For instance, teachers can communicate regularly with students and their parents through phone or text messages to inform them about the time they spend together at home, the activities they do and the possible activities that they can do (Gross & Opalka, 2020).

The concept of distance education has led to the introduction of many innovations into education and training. It is undeniable that the use of technology lies at the heart of these innovations. All educators have experienced that the use of technology is crucial especially in the distance learning process. In this context, it is of great importance that all educators create their methods, techniques or materials that they will use in trainings as completely technology-oriented. Zoom, Google Meet, etc. are the distance learning applications used by teachers in this time. The common answer to the question asked to the teachers on how teachers carried out the evaluations of the students was the Whatsapp application which is also a finding of this study. Teachers argued that they made evaluations as a result of the activities sent using this application. Special education teachers who took part in the learning of students with special needs also had to use such programs in order to conduct education and training. It has been observed that especially children of primary school age should receive family assistance when using such programs. Considering the students with special needs, it has been seen that it is difficult to keep the students active during the education, as mentioned before. Taking into account all of these, it can be said that the methods, techniques and materials that teachers choose should be suitable for the distance learning platform. Attending in-service training courses, where different educational activities are taught with different methods and techniques, will not only increase the efficiency of the lessons or the attention and motivation of the students, but also the quality of the education. It is clear that the opinions of the special education teachers participating in this study about attending in-service training courses are almost the same and they claimed that they should improve themselves by constantly taking part in such

trainings. All of the findings obtained in this study are in accordance with the study of Rasmitadilla et al (2020).

As a result, the teachers who participated in this research faced obstacles during the lessons while distance learning. Moreover, it is stated that they strongly support the view that distance learning cannot replace face-to-face education. When the educational backgrounds of the special education teachers in this study is examined as well as their opinions, it can be seen that there is a difference between the opinions of undergraduate and postgraduates. It is obvious that the views of the postgraduate teachers are broader and even more comprehensive. When the experiences of the teachers participating in this research are examined at the time of the distance learning, it is observed that the students with special needs had many behavioural problems during the lessons. Cooperating with families to minimize the behavioural problems of the students with special needs was a strong suggestion by the special education teachers that took part in this study.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The opinions of special education teachers on the distance learning and the experienced problems during this process and some suggestions for teachers and learners of distance learning platform are presented below:

- 1) Inter-institutional cooperation can be increased by developing innovations in eliminating the technological infrastructure challenges that cause the disruption in distance learning.
- 2) Comparative research can be conducted on the distance learning processes of typically developing students and special education needs students during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 3) During the Covid-19 pandemic, further research can be conducted to address the problems faced by teachers who continued to educate students with special needs and to eliminate these problems.
- 4) In order to encourage the families to take part more effectively in the distance learning process, trainings for parents can be organized. In this way, the efficiency of the education can be increased even more.
- 5) When schools are open, teachers should make plans to train students for a distance learning format so that they can prepare the students to develop skills in distance learning (Fronapfel & Demchak, 2020). In this framework, teachers and parents can be supported on practices that consider individual differences.
- 6) At first teachers can be trained on teaching strategies and materials that can be used in distance learning in order for all teachers to use the materials used in education and training more efficiently and willingly during the distance learning,
- 7) For students with special needs, accessible resources suitable for their individual needs can be announced through different communication tools. At the same time, a separate education environment can be created for special needs students and education and training can be provided more efficiently.
- 8) Projects can be created that will enable special education teachers to participate in in-service trainings even before the online process starts.

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