An examination of distance education and interpersonal relations of adolescents in the pandemic: "Between the four walls"

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Abstract

COVID-19 affected people's lives. This study aims to examine youths' experiences in the context of peers, family relationships, and school environments before and during the pandemic within the framework of self-determination theory. A total of 30 youths were reached. Responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. For the themes of "autonomy" and "competence", the highest percentage of responses were found to be related to distance learning. For relatedness, the harmful effects of the pandemic on peer relationships were more emphasized, while family relationships provided more positive experiences. Findings were discussed along with suggestions for practical studies and further research for mental health professionals.

Keywords: youth, COVID -19 pandemic, family relationship, peer relationship, distance education

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1. INTRODUCTION

Epidemics have struck the world at various times over the years. The outbreak of COVID -19, which can be considered as one of the diseases with a high prevalence rate, has affected the world since March 2020. The epidemic has required specific changes in people's lifestyles. The decisions that countries have made to protect public health have led to changes in social life. The most important of these decisions was the closure of schools and disruption of education as it affected the lives of youth and adults. According to a statement from UNESCO, on March 4, 2020, approximately 300 million children and youth worldwide were deprived of educational opportunities (UNESCO, 2020).

Schools were closed on March 16, 2020, schools in Turkey were closed. However, online education classes continued until the schools opened gradually reopened on March 2, 2021. Another critical decision affecting Turkish youth was the curfew taken imposed on April 3th3, 2020, for those born on or after January 1, 2000, and later. It allowed them to go out for a month in a given situation. School closures and curfews could lead young people to switch from face-to-face to distance learning, limit face-to-face meetings with friends and relatives, cancel leisure activities, and spend most of their time at home. Examining the effect of these changes in young people's lives from their perspective could help plan appropriate long-term treatment and intervention to reduce the negative effects. The purpose of the current study was to examine the challenges associated with the pandemic in the context of youth experiences based on self-determination theory. Youths' pandemic experiences were examined in three main relationship domains: parents, peers, and school.

1.1. Parent relationship

Youth, experiencing rapid changes in their identity, autonomy, and thinking skills want to share adult roles with their social developmental characteristics. It can be challenging for their families to adjust to these rapid changes, and they may be reluctant to support autonomy. As a result of disagreements, conflict between parents and adolescents may also be inevitable (Duy, 2020). However, perceived family support and guidance are essential for healthy development of youth (Branje et al., 2002). In addition, positive family relationships can protect mental health during natural disasters and social trauma (Cooper et al., 2020; Ellis et al., 2020). Family cohesion and caring behaviors have been found to increase during natural disasters (Lindgaard et al., 2009), and parents demonstrate supportive attitudes toward their children (Hafstad et al., 2012).

Turkey is a country where earthquakes are an example of mass trauma. Research has shown that psychological problems of parents can negatively affect children's mental health and parent-child relationship (Kiliç et al., 2003; Yumbul et al., 2018). Therefore, the consequences of earthquakes could be the same as the impact of the COVID -19 on individuals. However, it should be considered that the prevalence, duration, and magnitude of the effects of COVID -19 are different.

COVID -19 studies of parent-child relationships have inconsistent results. Some studies found that supportive and positive relationships between parents and youth decreased (Donker et al., 2020) and conflict increased (Lee & Ward, 2020). Studies emphasize that increased levels of parental stress, strict parenting behaviors, and parents' negative mental health have been associated with offspring's negative mental health (Akgül & Atalan Ergin, 2020; Prime et al., 2020; Whittle et al., 2020;) and negative family relationships (Özer et al., 2020). Conversely, increased time spent with family (Ellis et al., 2020) and feeling close to family (Cooper et al., 2021) are negatively associated with depression. Ultimately, it is reasonable to assume that COVID -19 may have caused changes in family dynamics

and habits. Unfortunately, no study has examined parent-adolescent relationships during COVID -19 in Turkey

1.2. Peer relationship

Fundamental and important relationships show a shift from parents to peers during adolescence (Brown & Larson, 2009). Positive peer relationships are associated with positive mental health (Czyz et al., 2012; Weber et al., 2010). For youth, peer groups have a significant impact on providing social and emotional support and socializing behaviors (Ellis & Zarbatany, 2017).

Friendships are usually established tend to be formed with people with who share similar characteristics in school terms of schooling, education, and success during adolescence, and it is essential to maintain emotional support (Duy, 2020). The pandemic required changes in the structure of peer relationships. The curfew also restricted youths' face-to-face peer relationships in with peers at school and in the neighborhood. In this case, the online environment proved to be an alternative to building peer relationships (Buzzi et al., 2021). It was stated that youths who felt lonely were unhappier and used more social media to cope with their unhappiness and less social interaction, but this did not lead to more happiness (Cauberghe et al., 2021). Although online interaction has been identified as a protective factor for adults during times of closure (Pancani et al., 2020), virtual relationships with friends have been found to increase depression in youth (Ellis et al., 2020). Therefore, COVID -19 studies with youth are critical to outline the impact of pandemic restraints on peer relationships. In addition, youth' opinions about online peer relationships can provide insight into how they can have a positive impact.

1.3. Schools for youth in pandemic

School is one of the most important environments for the social and academic development of youth. With the closing of school, distance education began for students of all ages. Distance education is defined as instruction that uses one or more technologies to teach students who are physically separated from the teacher and supports regular and constant interaction between students and teachers, synchronous or non-synchronous (Seaman et al., 2018). Studies on distance education were conducted primarily at the higher education level prior to COVID -19 (Richardson, 2007; Seaman et al., 2018). However, it has been observed that studies are now expanding to all levels of education during COVID -19 (Xie & Yang, 2020).

Effective implementation of distance education is associated with positive learning outcomes. Important factors in the effectiveness of distance education are discussed by Willis (1993) in the context of the characteristics of both the lessons and the students. Accordingly, careful instructional planning requires understanding course requirements and identifying student needs. The pandemic has resulted in a sudden and unexpected transition of education from the classroom to online platforms. Because of this, there has not been a long preparation and planning period for integrating courses into the online environment. Second, the visual materials that teachers use in face-to-face classes and the visual cues that students do not understand, get tired, or want to ask questions cannot be used in distance education (Willis, 1993).

Moreover, teachers and students were not informed about the use of online platforms. It is known that teachers' knowledge and skills related to distance education (Shu et al., 2020) and students' independent learning skills play an important role in the effective implementation of learning (Linn, 1996). The studies on distance education conducted with students in COVID -19 showed the negative

effects of lack of hands-on activities, lack of socialization, and technological limitations of distance education (Akgül, 2022; Hebebci et al., 2020).

1.4. Self-determination theory

It is important to address the needs of youth to support their social-emotional and academic development. Self-determination theory offers a model that explains the dynamics of human needs, motivation, and well-being in a social context (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The approach highlights three basic psychological needs: (1) Autonomy, (2) Competence (3) Relatedness. Autonomy, initiating and continuing one's own actions, refers to being the source and focus of one's own actions. Competence is understanding how to achieve internal and external results and effectively carry out the necessary steps; it means feeling effective in ongoing interactions with one's social environment and experiencing opportunities to use and express one's abilities. Relatedness is the need to develop secure and satisfying relationships with others in the social environment, to care and to be cared for; it can be expressed as a commitment to others and society. While the satisfaction of psychological needs is associated with positive mental health (Davids et al., 2017; Perlman et al., 2017), failure to meet these needs is related to negative mental health (Mills & Allen, 2020; Stanton and al., 2020). Moreover, designing learning environments that meet students' basic psychological needs increases students' motivation, their commitment to achieving the learning goal, and consequently, learning effectiveness (Hsu et al., 2019; Reeve, 2013; Wang, 2017). Pandemic research with different age groups has highlighted the relationship between students' psychological needs and school participation and engagement (Shah et al., 2021; Toste et al., 2021).

Studies have shown that the family and friendship relationships and the school environment of youths change in the period COVID -19. In this case, a reassessment of the youth' needs is important to promote their well-being by identifying the areas in which they need support. The purpose of this study was to identify the needs of youth by examining their experiences in the context of interpersonal relationships and the school environment.

2. METHOD AND MATERIALS

2.1. Research Design

Thematic analysis, one of the qualitative analysis methods, was used in the study. It is defined as a method in which a data set is searched to identify, analyze, and report recurring patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In addition, the deductive approach was used, and the themes were defined and named based on the self-determination theory (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

2.2. Participants

The study participants were identified by snowball sampling from youth aged 10-14 years. They live in a settlement in Ankara where families of lower socio-economic levels. To be biased of the snowball sampling method, participants might have similar characteristics. In the snowball sampling method, those selected first should know the intended subject (Flick, 2014). For this reason, a youth who continues with distance learning and generally abides by the rules of the pandemic from the target age group was reached. This youth were also asked to select a peer, and the same process was followed for this youth. A total of 51 youths were reached, 45 of whom agreed to participate in the study. After the pilot study was conducted with 15 youths, the primary process of the study was

conducted with 30 youths (Ngirl= 19, 63.33%; Nboy=11, 36.37%). Participants' age range was 10-14 and the mean age was 12.33 (N10=3, 10%; N11=8, 26.67%; N12=7, 23.33%; N13=6, 20%; N14=6, 10%). A total of 10 participants were educated in 5th grade (33.34%), 7 of them were in 6th grade (23.33%); 6 of them were in 7th grade (20%) and 7 of them were in 8th grade (23.33%).

2.3. Data Collection

The data was gathered through focus group discussions. The focus groups were conducted through online platforms because of pandemic restriction. Ethical approval was obtained from Cappadocia University (E-64577500-050.99-15845). First, an online meeting was held with each participant and their family to provide information about the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and the principles of voluntariness. In addition, an "informed consent form" was obtained from the youths who agreed to participate and their families who gave a permission to participate with their child. Before the main process, a pilot study was conducted with 15 participants selected three from each age group. The aim was to test the interview guide and the survey questions before data collection through the pilot study, problems that might arise due to the online environment were identified and possible solutions were worked out (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). After the pilot study, online focus group discussions were conducted with each age group at the specified day and time. due to the low number of participants in the 10-year-old age group, a single session was held for youths aged 10 and 11. A total of four focus interviews each of them in 40-minute were conducted. The participants' responses were tape-recorded with the consent of the participants and their families.

2.4. Research Tools

A semi-structured interview form prepared by the researcher was used in the focus group interviews. The structure consists of an introductory text that includes the purpose of the research and three research questions. In focus group interviews, the questions should be formulated as clearly as possible, be short and concise, have a single aim, and be prepared as open-ended questions (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Open-ended questions prepared in accordance with these rules and the basis of "experience" are presented: (1) Could you tell us about your school experiences before and during the pandemic? (2) Could you tell us about your experiences in friendship relations before and during the pandemic? (3) Could you tell us about your experiences in your family relationships before and during the pandemic?

3. RESULTS

Participants' responses were examined and categorized under the themes of (1) "autonomy", (2) "competence", (3) "relatedness" suggested by the self-determination theory. The order of categories occurring in the themes from highest to lowest frequency is shown clockwise in the figures. Then, the categories from highest to lowest frequency were examined with the responses given by the participants.

3.1. Autonomy

Autonomy is the initiation and maintenance of one's actions (Deci et al., 1991). Participants' responses were evaluated in the context of whether they see themselves as the source of activities and how they intervene in school life, family and friendship relationships before and during the

pandemic. The theme includes a total of six categories. Categories related to participants' school life were "The negative impact of technology on lessons," "Being bored in online lessons", "Benefits of face-to-face lessons", and "Benefits of online lessons" related to the participants' school life. The category "Family interferences" referred to family relationships and "Changing Peer Relationships" referred to peer relationships.

Figure 1.

The negative impact of technology on lessons
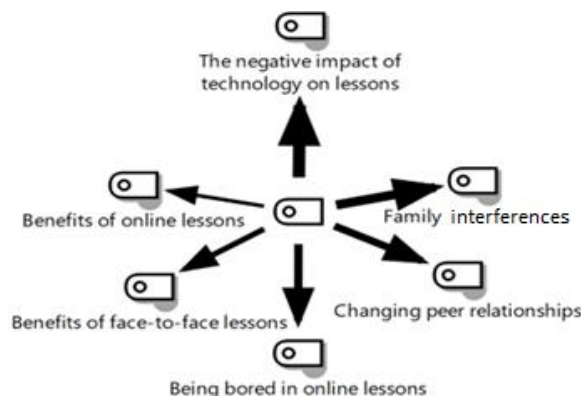
Dimension 1: The negative impact of technology on lessons

The frequency of the category is 11. The participants stated that the lack of technical aids prevented them from following the lessons. They stated that there was no need for digital aids during face-to-face education, but poor internet connectivity during the pandemic made course follow-up difficult. They emphasized that some of their friends could not participate in the online courses, and some did not attend class even though they had technological devices. In addition, they indicated that they were distracted by other issues that took up their attention while learning online. The following are examples of the participants' responses:

"Therefore, she/he does not attend classes during the pandemic, but some do not" (K4)

"I was more likely to attend classes in face-to-face training. In the online education, I am constantly shifting to it because something catches my interest and I fall behind from the lessons." (K21)

Dimension 2: Family interferences

The frequency of the category is 10. The category consists of responses that include the interference of the family in the autonomy of the participants. Participants emphasized their families' interference in educational tasks (homework, tracking course entry and exit, etc.), friendship relationships, and longing for solitude. They indicated that the increased hours spent at home with family were related to increased follow-up on educational tasks. In addition, they emphasized that everyone's presence at home reduced the amount of time they spent alone and that their families intervened when they had loneliness needs. Restrictions and prohibitions imposed by families

regarding online conversations with their friends are also explored under this heading. Examples of participants' responses include:

"I could not focus too much on my lessons. That's why my mother blocked two people or something. I was sorry, I insisted, because she did not remove the obstacle. She said no. I thought, my mother knows the truth, I gave up trying to lift the ban." (K19)

"But as long as my mother stayed at home, my mother got used to seeing my face. After staying in the room for an hour, now my mother takes me out. So, I go back to my room and close my door... I want to be alone…" (K19)

Dimension 3: Changing Peer Relationships

The frequency of the category is nine. Responses in this category focus on participants who were separated from their friends due to curfews and the social distance rule. Participants emphasized that being separated from their friends changed the quality of their friendship relationships. They indicated that the activities they engaged in with their friends, the content of their conversations, and their games changed. They also scheduled times when they could meet with their friends in person. Examples of the participants' responses are as follows:

"For example, I saw more of my friends when there was face-to-face education. In online education, I'm just asking if you attended the class or not. My relationship with them was almost cut off. So, there has been a lot of change." (K21)

Dimension 4: Being bored in online lessons.

The frequency of the category is eight. In this category, participants emphasized that online courses are monotonous because space is scarce, technical capabilities are not sufficient, and being at home all the time. They indicated that it increases their motivation to get out of the house and come to school during face-to-face classes. Examples of the participants' responses are listed below:

"When we went to school, at least we could breathe; even if we went to school, at least we would go out. But now, we cannot go anywhere because of the pandemic. We attend classes; the internet goes off, the electricity goes out, the sound goes off. There is a problem when we can fully understand the lesson, and our adaptation falls apart, and our motivation decreases." (K25)

Dimension 5: Benefits of face-to-face lessons

The frequency of the category is six. Responses can be discussed under the items disruptive environment at home that interferes with attention, easy connection to class, and easy meetings with teachers. Participants indicated that face-to-face instruction is more beneficial and emphasized their own choices and opportunities in face-to-face education. Examples of participants' responses include the following:

"We can also be disturbed by the sounds of furniture coming from around at home. This did not happen much at school." (K26)

"When there was a place, we did not understand, we immediately asked our teacher. But now that computer lessons are short, normally 40 minutes at school, but we have to do half an hour in online education." (K4)

Dimension 6: Benefits of online lessons

The frequency of the category is four. Participants indicated that they felt more comfortable in online courses because they were comfortable at home. Examples of the participants' answers can be found below:

"In terms of items, we try to bring it from home when something we forget when we go to school. We have nothing to forget at home." (K14)

"The good things about online education are that we sit in more comfortable chairs, not in the desks at school." (K26)

Adolescents received the highest rate of responses on the topic of distance education on the theme of autonomy (f = 29, 60.42%). This was followed by answers on family relationships (f= 10, 20.83%) and peer relationships (f = 9, 18.75%).

3.2. Competence

Competence involves understanding how to achieve various external and internal results and effectively perform the required action (Deci et al., 1991). Participants' responses include effectiveness in interpersonal relationships and activities in school life; these are assessed through the use and expression of their ability. There are a total of seven categories under the theme. The categories, "Technology-related problems", "Sufficient learning and participation in face-to-face lessons", "Sufficient learning and participation in online lessons", and "Meaning of school" referred to the school environment; "Coping with the impact of the pandemic in peer relationships" and "The negative impact of the pandemic on peer relationships" referred to peer relationships. No category was identified in the theme related to family relationships; there was also a "Mental health" category that could be addressed in the context of individual characteristics.

Figure 2.

Categories of competence theme
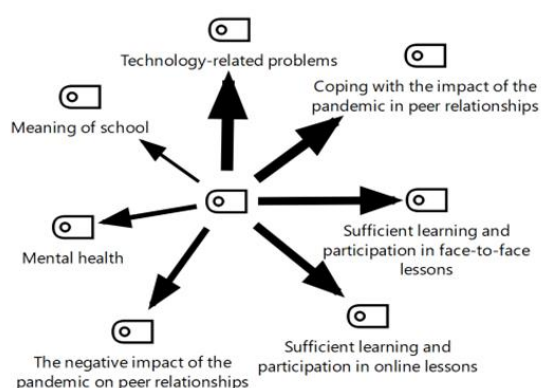
Dimension 1: Technology-related problems

The frequency of the category is 20. In this category, participants most frequently emphasized the negative impact of technological problems and time constraints in online courses on their learning, exam grades, and opportunities to express themselves in class. Their fear of incomplete realization of

full learning in online courses is evident in their responses. The following are examples of the participants' responses:

"It is a little harder to interrupt the teacher in face-to-face lessons, actually, turning on the microphone and so on. But when we were at school, we could ask the question more comfortably." (K26)

"Considering the negative aspects of what our teachers tell, we constantly experience disconnections, because there are disconnections in our teachers' internet or our internet in the lessons, we cannot get enough and necessary education." (K12)

Dimension 2: Coping with the impact of the pandemic in peer relationships

The frequency of the category is 14. Responses in this category include participants' responses about using online platforms to maintain friendship relationships. The focus is on effective efforts to meet with peers and self-expression in peer relationships. Examples of participants' responses are as follows:

"For example, we constantly talk to a classmate. There is a course I attended, and we are still meeting with my friend there. Online of course." (K12)

Dimension 3: Sufficient learning and participation in face-to-face lessons

The frequency of the category is 12. Responses focus on the positive contribution that face-to-face course opportunities have made to their competencies. Participants emphasized that they had no problems using their learning capacities while continuing face-to-face lessons, and that they were able to participate more effectively in class. Examples of participants' responses include the following:

"But for example, before the pandemic, we were working more coordinated and comfortably at school." (K14)

"I could understand the lesson more efficiently when I was in the school environment." (K26)

Dimension 4: Sufficient learning and participation in online lessons

The frequency of the category is 12. Participants mentioned the opportunities provided by online courses to improve their competence. In particular, participants who described themselves as shy or reserved indicated that they felt more comfortable expressing themselves and speaking their minds in online courses. In addition, participants emphasised that the frequency of using online platforms for course purposes increased during the pandemic. The following are examples of the participants' responses:

"I do not understand, I think my other friends do not understand either. I mostly watch lecture videos. I read more books. So, I raise my grades. I was also doing it when I was in face-to-face education, but it happened more during the pandemic." (K13)

Dimension 5: The negative impact of the pandemic on peer relationships

The frequency of the category is nine. Similar to the autonomy theme, for the competence theme, participants also emphasized the negative impact of the pandemic on peer relationships. However, unlike autonomy, responses that did not relate to maintaining peer relationships and their inability to effectively engage in peer relationships were examined. Examples of participants' responses are as follows:

"We could mingle with our friends if we were face to face because our classes changed when we passed the sixth grade." (K17)

"As I said, my friendships have weakened. I already had a very close friend a few months ago. ….. and finally decided to end our friendship. We decided that by talking on the phone." (K23)

Dimension 6: Mental Health

The frequency of the category is five. Participant responses focus on online courses causing sleep problems, the harms of the internet, and a general negative mood. The following are examples of the participants' responses:

"But now we don't even need to get up when we take a break in the face-to-face class. We do not even want to walk home." (K25)

"We can play online games, but online games damage our brains." (K28)

Dimension 7: The meaning of the school

The frequency of the category is four. Participants emphasized that the pandemic changed the meaning of school. They described school as a place to have fun, gather information, and make friends, but these meanings changed during the pandemic. Sample responses are as follows:

"It was a place where I played games with friends, had fun, and learned information, but now it feels very boring." (K7)

In the competence themes, no categories related to family relationships appeared. Responses regarding distance learning had the highest frequency (f = 53, 69.74%), and peer relationships came after this category (f = 23, 30.26%).

3.3. Relatedness

Relatedness involves the development of safe and satisfying interactions with others in the person's social environment (Deci et al., 1991). The participants' responses, their commitment to their peers and families, and the impact of the school on these relationships were evaluated during the pandemic. The theme includes a total of five categories. Among the categories, "Quality/efficient time before the pandemic", "Quality/efficient time during the pandemic", "Change in the pandemic," and "Negative effects of the pandemic" related to participants' peer and family relationships. "Social benefits of face-to-face lessons" referred to the school.

Figure 3.

The categories of the relatedness theme
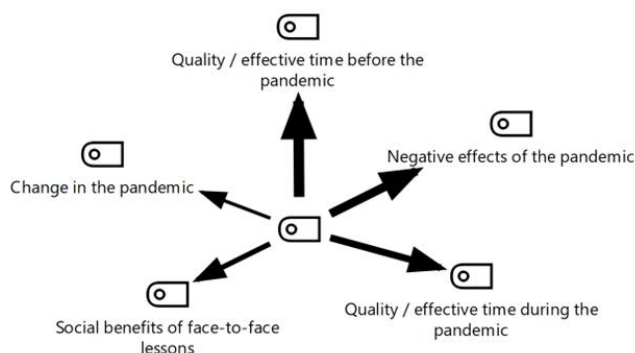
Dimension 1: Quality / efficient time before the pandemic

The frequency of the category is 35. Responses included an emphasis on positive relationships and engagement in family and friendship relationships. Participants indicated that they are spending more and more time with family, relatives, and friends. The following are examples of the participants' responses:

"In the past, we could meet with our friends before the pandemic, dine outside, play football. We could play basketball. We could socialize." (K24)

"We spent more time being good… we had fun... We used to go on a picnic or something in the summer, meeting relatives." (K26)

Dimension 2: Negative effects of the pandemic

The frequency of the category is 29. During the pandemic, participants' responses focused on connection problems in friendship and family relationships. In particular, participants emphasized their loneliness in family relationships and expressed their longing for their friends. Examples of participants' responses are as follows:

"My father stays at home and deals with the phone. He has a room, and he shoots on the internet. My mother is constantly doing housework. So, I'm stuck between four walls, I'm just sitting there." (K7)

"I miss them so much. I understand your values right now." (K22)

Dimension 3: Quality / efficient time during the pandemic

The frequency of the category is 22. The responses in this category focused on the participants' relationships with their families. The focus of positive changes in interpersonal relationships is primarily on family relationships. Participants indicated that they had the opportunity to spend more time with their families, play games, see each other more, and receive more care from their families. Examples of participant responses are as follows:

"But now that we are always at home, I spend more time and converse with them. I play games with my little brother, and I converse with my sister; I have lessons and everyday life. I think it has increased more, my interest in my family." (K22)

Dimension 4: The social benefit of face-to-face lessons

The frequency of the category is 22. From the responses, it appears that online teaching causes negative changes in the relationships of young people with their teachers and friends. Examples of the participants' answers are given below:

"But we want to communicate online courses, but our cameras are usually turned off because we are in a home environment. We do not have a face-to-face communication with the teacher." (K26)

Dimension 5: Change in the pandemic

The frequency of the category is five. The responses were evaluated in terms of the change in friendship relationships caused by the pandemic. They indicated that before the pandemic they were able to play games that required closer contact with their friends, and that the pandemic caused them to play games through technological devices. One participant indicated that friendship relationships changed positively after the pandemic. Participants' responses were as follows:

"We could go out and play when we were at school, and now we play from the computer during breaks." (K1)

"Before the pandemic, I had no desire to make friends…But the pandemic turn I started to make more friends. They seemed more sincere to me." (K12)

Responses to peer and family relationships are grouped into the categories of quality/efficient time before the pandemic, quality/efficient time during the pandemic, change during the pandemic, and negative impact of the pandemic. However, it is noted that the responses related to peer relationships are most frequently given in the categories of quality/efficient time before the pandemic, change during the pandemic, and negative impact of the pandemic (f = 69; 61.06%), and the responses related to family relationships are most frequently given in the category of quality/efficient time during the pandemic (f = 22; 19.47%). The category "social benefits of face-to-face education, evaluated in relation to distance education, is considered to be the area with the lowest frequency (f = 22; 19.47%).

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of youth aged 10-14 years in the context of family, friendship relationships, and school environments before and during the pandemic within the framework of self-determination theory. Youth is a time when the importance of peer relationships increases with the desire for independence from family and autonomy (Santrock, 2014). The pandemic resulted in changing demands and needs of youth with school closures, distance learning, limited face-to-face interaction with curfews, and increased time spent at home. Youth interacted with peers on online platforms, spent more time with their parents, and received their education through online tools. This study aims to further explore the meaning of these experiences for youths in depth. Self-determination theory provides a perspective that allows individuals to collectively evaluate their intellectual and academic development. In the theory, the needs of "competence", "autonomy", and "relatedness" are considered the basis for improving an individual's well-being and academic motivation. These three needs determined the general framework and themes of the study.

In the case of the "autonomy" need, a total of six categories were identified. It was found that youths most frequently mentioned their needs related to family, peer relationships, and distance learning. Autonomy needs appeared to be most prevalent among youth in their use of technology for

their lesson and communication with teachers in the school context. Some youth emphasized that online courses support their autonomy needs; most of them indicated that this prevents youth from benefiting from distance education even if they wanted to. The Ministry of National Education (2020) distributes tablets to students. However, in the reports of the official sources, there was no information about how many students could not benefit from the technological devices. A study has shown that students who have sufficient equipment and do not have problems with Internet access have a more positive opinion of distance education than those who have problems in this regard (Kaynar et al., 2020).

Another problem is that not being able to ask the teacher questions whenever they want interferes with young people's autonomy. On the other hand, face-to-face teaching gives students the opportunity to communicate directly with the teacher, to understand the students' negative feelings about the lesson from their gestures, and to offer alternatives (Willis, 1993). Consequently, the lack of technological tools, the limited communication options in distance education, and the possibility of benefiting only from the possibilities of digital devices in the classroom seem to limit the autonomy needs of youths. Moreover, the convenient opportunities offered by home-based continuing education support autonomy.

The youths emphasized family relationships or relationships with peers in the context of autonomy. The youths rated family interventions as restricting their autonomy. In particular, they emphasized their families' restrictive attitudes toward their education and peer relationships. Autonomy is an important need for youth development (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1989). Studies based on self-determination theory emphasize the critical role of parents and teachers in autonomy support (Soenens et al., 2018). During COVID -19, parents' stress levels and strict parenting behaviors increased and were associated with increasing negative mental health in children (Whittle et al., 2020; Prime et al., 2020). The current findings suggest increasingly restrictive family attitudes toward peers and teaching. In addition, youths emphasized that their autonomy is also being restricted in their relationships with peers. They indicated that technology plays a role in limiting their autonomy in choosing friends, preferences in interacting with friends, and topics of conversation. In youth, peer relationships are defined by youth being able to be themselves and not being restricted (Giordano, 2003). The hypothesis could be that youths who are both restricted by their parents and experience restrictions in their peer relationships need support in developmental issues.

The competency themes included categories related to peer relationships and distance learning. Responses related to distance education were more prominent in this theme. Youth indicated that they had difficulty understanding, following, or participating in online courses; however, they felt they were more efficient and effective in face-to-face classes. Youths' negative attitudes toward distance education (Li & Lee, 2016) and their lower independent learning skills (Linn, 1996) may influence their perceptions of competence. Jaggar (2014) found that students had the belief that they would not understand the topic in distance education, and they preferred distance education only for topics they could understand by themselves. Ultimately, it is believed that both digital literacy studies are important in improving students' perceptions of competence in distance education and motivational studies of learning competencies in distance education.

The social anxiety (American Psychological Association, 2013) highlighted in youths' responses could be related to youths' competence (I was afraid that my friends would laugh at me, I am shy, I am timid, etc.). Some participants emphasized that they felt more comfortable and better able to express themselves in distance learning. However, another study found that individuals with social anxiety avoid online learning environments (Ajmal & Ahmad, 2019). Social anxiety is negatively related to

academic self-efficacy and self-reported GPA (Hood et al., 2021). Current results seem inconsistent with previous findings. Therefore, further research on social anxiety and learning in online environments is needed.

Relatedness might seem like the most affected need during COVID-19. Youths emphasized the negative effects of distance education on the relatedness need. They could communicate with their classmates in class and breaks during face-to-face education but delete this was not possible during distance education. In other studies (Akgül, 2022; Hebebci et al., 2020; Kaynar, 2020), the negative effects of distance education on the need for socialisation and peer relationships were shown. Youths try to maintain their peer relationship in online, however research has shown its negative effect on youths' mental health (Cauberghe et al., 2021; Ellis et al., 2020). For instance, youth spend time online games with their friends. Computer games can be controversial in terms of their functionality in developing peer relationships (Kowert et al., 2014). For this reason, it is important for mental health professionals and educators working with youths to create functional ways and suggestions for maintaining peer relationships during the pandemic.

In contrast to peer relationships, the positive effects of the pandemic on family relationships were more emphasized. It was observed that youths who had little opportunity to see their family in the pre-pandemic period used the increased time with family effectively. However, youths also talked about their desire for activities such as picnics and hikes with family or with people from their extended family. In studies conducted in social trauma settings, feelings of family belonging, caring behaviors (Lindgaard et al., 2009), and supportive attitudes toward children have been shown to increase (Hafstad et al., 2012). Studies that have examined parent-adolescent relationships during COVID -19 have inconsistent results. While some studies emphasise that supportive and positive relationships between parents and youths have decreased (Donker et al., 2020) and conflict has increased (Lee & Ward, 2020), others emphasize that time demands (Ellis et al., 2020) and conflict with family have increased (Akgül, 2022). Feeling close to family has been shown to be negatively related to depression (Cooper et al., 2021). However, negative parenting behaviors and stress have also been shown to be associated with negative behaviors and negative mental health (Kiliç et al., 2003; Prime et al., 2020; Whittle et al., 2020; Yumbul et al., 2018). Factors such as pre-pandemic family relationships, general family dynamics, and the age of the child are thought to play a role in interpreting the results. Participants in this study did not mention family conflict before or during the pandemic. Therefore, the pandemic episode of positive family dynamics may be considered a protective factor for family relationships.

In interpreting the results of the study, the limitations of the study should also be highlighted. First, the participants in the study were limited to the age group. The experiences of individuals of different age groups and characteristics may differ during the pandemic. Therefore, examining the needs of age groups within the framework of self-determination theory in further studies could provide a broader perspective for literature and practice (e.g.Akgül, 2022). Second, this study conducted an in-depth analysis with open-ended questions to explore in detail youths' experiences with the pandemic. Therefore, the number of participants was limited. Based on the results, studies conducted with larger study groups may be important to obtain a general picture. In particular, youths with severe social anxiety and lack of access to technology are important groups for future studies. Finally, the study does not involve an intervention, as it was conducted for descriptive purposes. However, the results highlight the need for autonomy and competence in distance learning in the pandemic and relatedness in peer relationships. Intervention services conducted in collaboration with mental health professionals and educators appear to be important in addressing the needs.

In summary, the changing needs of youths during COVID -19 period should be considered in relation to friends, family, and the school context. Problems in online classes and peer and family relationships negatively impact adolescents' competence, autonomy, and relatedness needs. Youths' relatedness needs could be negatively impacted by declining face-to-face peer relationships in the long term. Therefore, future research could develop programs that promote face-to-face interaction and support adolescents' relatedness needs in the school context. One striking finding is the positive relationship between parents and children that meets youths' relatedness needs. In addition, increasing family interference could interfere with youths' autonomy. Educators and mental health professionals should pay attention to family training studies to ensure that parents promote adolescent autonomy and better parent-child relationships. Finally, online instruction may have caused adolescents to lose learning and change the meaning of school. The current findings indicate that some youths did not learn because they did not continue the online lesson. Therefore, supportive learning strategies and curriculum design could be critical to promote their competencies in face-to-face education.

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