



An examination of distance education and interpersonal relations of adolescents in the pandemic

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Abstract

COVID-19 affected people's lives, and the youth were among those that were affected most. This study aims to examine youths' experiences in the context of peer, 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: COVID-19; distance education; family relationship; pandemic; peer relationship; Youth.

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1. Introduction

Epidemics have affected the world at various times over the years. The COVID-19 outbreak, which can be considered one of the diseases with a high prevalence rate, has affected the world since March 2020. The epidemic has required specific changes in the lifestyle habits of people. Decisions made by states to protect public health have caused changes in the course of social life. The most important of these decisions was the closure of schools and the interruption of education because it affected the lives of both youth and adults. According to the statement by 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, in Turkey. However, online education continued until the schools opened gradually on March 2, 2021. Another critical decision affecting Turkish youth was the curfew taken on April 3rd, 2020 for those born on January, 1st, 2000, and later. It allowed them to go out in a determined situation for a month. School closure and curfew could result in young people switching from face-to-face education to distance learning, limiting face-to-face meetings with friends and relatives, cancelling leisure activities, and spending most of their time at home.

1.1. Theoretical background

Examining the effect of these changes in youths' lives from their perspective could help plan appropriate long-term treatment and intervention to reduce the negative impact. The current study aimed to examine the challenges associated with the pandemic in the context of youth experiences based on Self-determination theory. The pandemic experience of youth was investigated in three main relationship domains: parents, peers, and school.

1.1.1. Parent relationship

Youth, experiencing rapid changes in identity, autonomy, and thinking skills, want to share adult roles with their social developmental characteristics. Their families may find adjusting to these rapid changes challenging and may be reluctant to support autonomy. As a result of the disagreement, parent-youth conflict may also be inevitable (Duy, 2021). However, perceived family support and guidance are essential for the healthy development of youth (Branje et al., 2002). Moreover, positive family relationships can protect mental health during natural disasters and social trauma (Cooper et al., 2021; Ellis et al., 2020). Family unity and caring behaviors were found to increase during natural disasters (Lindgaard et al., 2009), and parents demonstrated supportive attitudes toward their children (Hafstad et al., 2012).

Turkey is a country where earthquakes are an example of mass trauma. The research highlighted that parents' mental health problems might negatively affect children's mental health and parent-child relationships (Kiliç et al., 2003). Therefore, the result of earthquakes might be the same as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals. However, it should be considered that the prevalence, duration, and magnitude of the effects of COVID-19 are different.

COVID-19 studies on parent-child relationships have inconsistent results. Some studies found supportive and positive relationships between parents and youth decreased (Donker et al., 2020), and conflict increased (Lee & Ward, 2020). Studies emphasize that increasing levels of parental stress, strict parenting behaviors, and parents' negative mental health have been linked to offspring's negative mental health (Akgül & Ergin, 2020; Prime et al., 2020; Whittle et al., 2020; Prashanth, 2022) 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) is negatively associated with depression. Eventually, it can be assumed that COVID-19 may have caused changes in family dynamics and habits. Unfortunately, no study evaluated the relationships between parents and youth during COVID-19 in Turkey.

1.1.2. Peer relationship

Basic and important relationships show a change from parents to peers in adolescence (Brown & Larson, 2009; Luppi et al., 2021). 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 with people with similar characteristics in school, education, and success during adolescence, and it is essential to receive emotional support (Duy, 2021). The pandemic required changes in the structure of peer relationships. The curfew also restricted youth's face-to-face peer relationships in school and the neighborhood. In this case, the online environment proved to be an alternative to building peer relationships (Buzzi et al., 2020). It was stated that youth who felt lonely were unhappier, and used more social media to cope with unhappiness and less social interaction, but this did not lead to more happiness (Cauberghe et al., 2021). Although online interaction is 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 crucial to outline the impact of the pandemic restrictions on peer relationships. In addition, youth's opinions on online peer relationships may indicate how they can have a positive impact.

1.1.3. *Schools for youth in the pandemic*

School is one of the primary environments to provide social and academic development to youth. Distance education began for students of all ages with the closure of the school. Distance education is defined as education that uses one or more technologies to educate students who are physically separated from the teacher and supports regular and constant interaction between students and teachers, synchronously or non-synchronously (Seaman et al., 2018; Segbenya et al., 2022). Distance education studies have been conducted mainly at the level of university education before COVID-19 (Richardson, 2007; Seaman et al., 2018). However, it has been observed that distance education studies now extend to all education levels during COVID-19 (Xie & Yang, 2020).

The effective implementation of distance education is associated with positive learning outcomes. Important factors for 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 planning of education requires understanding the course requirements and determining student needs. The pandemic resulted in the sudden and unexpected transition Sebenza of education from classrooms to online platforms (Ebohon et al., 2021). For this reason, there was no long preparation and planning period for integrating courses into the online environment. Second, the visual materials 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 learning (Willis, 1993).

Moreover, teachers and students were not informed about the use of online platforms. It is known that teachers' knowledge and skills about distance education (Shu et al., 2020) and students' independent learning skills play a significant role in effective learning implementation (Linn, 1996). The studies on distance education conducted with students during COVID-19 showed the negative effects of lack of practical activities, lack of socialization, and technological restrictions on distance education (Akgül, 2022; Hebebcı et al., 2020).

1.1.4. *Self-determination theory*

It is important to consider the need 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 emphasizes three basic psychological needs: (1) Autonomy, (2) Competence (3) Relatedness. Autonomy, initiating and continuing one's actions, refers to being the source and focus of one's actions. Competence means understanding how to achieve internal and external results and effectively perform the necessary steps; it means feeling effective in ongoing interactions with one's social environment and experiencing opportunities to use and express one's capacity. Relatedness is the need to develop secure and satisfying relationships with others in the social environment, to care and 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; Karadag et al., 2021), failure to meet these needs is related to negative mental health (Mills & Allen,

2020; Stanton et al., 2020). Furthermore, arranging learning environments that meet students' basic psychological needs increases student motivation, engagement in achieving the learning goal, and consequently, learning effectiveness (Hsu et al., 2019; Reeve, 2013; Wang, 2017). Pandemic research with different age groups emphasized the relationship between students' psychological needs and school participation and engagement (Shah et al., 2021; Toste et al., 2021).

1.2. Purpose of study

As a result, studies showed that youth's family and friend relationships and school environments changed during COVID-19. In this case, a reassessment of the youth's needs is important to promote their well-being by identifying the areas where they need support. The study aimed to identify the needs of youth by understanding their experiences in the context of interpersonal relationships and educational environments.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Research method

Thematic analysis, one of the qualitative analysis methods, was used in the study. It is defined as a method that involves searching across a dataset to identify, analyze, and report recurring patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In addition, the deductive approach was used and themes were driven and called based on 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 was 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 ($N_{\text{girl}}=19$, 63.33%; $N_{\text{boy}}=11$, 36.37%). Participants' age range was 10-14 and the mean age was 12.33 ($N_{10}=3$, 10%; $N_{11}=8$, 26.67%; $N_{12}=7$, 23.33%; $N_{13}=6$, 20%; $N_{14}=6$, 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%). The demographic information of the participants is presented in Table 1.

2.3. Data collection 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 by 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?

2.4. Data collection procedure

The data was gathered through focus group discussions. The focus groups were conducted through online platforms because of pandemic restrictions. 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 were permitted to participate with their children. 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.

2.5. Data analyses

Before the data analysis, the researcher deciphered the data collected through online focus group interviews. The decryptions were transferred to the MAXQUDA program, and the subsequent operations were performed using the functions of the program. These titles were called on a predetermined theoretical basis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). To avoid missing data, responses to the questions were examined together in the following steps. There were approximately 600 texts reported by youth into units of analysis. These units included responses to three open-ended questions. To reduce them to meaningful units, two coders reread the text separately. To identify all units, the coders decided whether they addressed any needs identified by Self-determination theory. In this step, inter-coder reliability was 92%. Next, themes' titles were determined based on the Self-determination theory, and coders used these titles to identify meaningful units. In this step, each coder identified dimensions titled up to themselves. Inter-coder reliability was 83%. In the final stage, the coders worked together on the titles of the dimensions to reach a consensus. Finally, participants' statements and sentences were collected under the appropriate themes and categorized by consensus. Frequency was used to determine the hierarchical relationship between categories (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The frequency showed the number of meaningful units in that category.

2.6. Ethical consideration

All participants were asked to give their informed permission. This study did not cause any harm to any person, group, or environment. The procedure of the research was approved by the Ethical Committee of Cappadocia University (E-64577500-050.99-15845)

3. Results

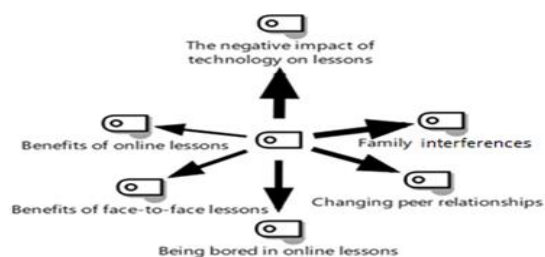
Participants' responses were examined and categorized under the themes of (1) "autonomy", (2) "competence", and (3) "relatedness" suggested by the Self-determination theory. The order of categories occurring in the themes from highest to lowest frequency is shown clockwise in the figures. Then, the categories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



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

The frequency of the category is 11. The participants mentioned that the lack of technological devices prevented them from following the lessons. They stated that there was no need for digital tools during face-to-face education, but poor internet connection during the pandemic made course follow-up difficult. They emphasized that some of their friends could not attend the online courses, and some did not participate in the classes even though they had technological devices. In addition, they cited that while they were learning online, they were distracted by other issues that were capturing their attention. Below are examples of 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 online education, I am constantly shifting to it because something catches my interest and I fall behind from the lessons." (K21)

3.1.2. Dimension 2: Family interferences

The frequency of the category is 10. The category consists of responses that include family interference with participants' autonomy. Participants emphasized their families' interference with training tasks (homework, tracking course entry and exit, etc.), friendship relationships, and desires for loneliness. They indicated that the increased hours spent at home with the family were related to increased follow-up on educational tasks. In addition, they emphasized that having everyone at home reduced the amount of time spent individually and that their families intervened with loneliness needs. The restrictions and prohibitions imposed by their families on online conversations with their friends are also explored under this heading. Examples of the participants' responses are as follows:

"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)

3.1.3. Dimension 3: Changing Peer Relationships

The frequency of the category is nine. The 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 stated that the activities they engaged in with their friends, the content of their chat, and their games changed. In addition, they have planned for the times they could meet face-to-face with their friends. 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)

3.1.4. 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 of space constraints, technological impossibilities, and being at home all the time. They stated that getting out of the house and coming to school during face-to-face education increases their motivation. Examples of the participants' responses are presented 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, and 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)

3.1.5. Dimension 5: Benefits of face-to-face lessons

The frequency of the category is six. Responses can be discussed under the disruptive environment at home that affects attention, easy connection to the lesson, and easy meeting 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 are as follows:

"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, we have to do half an hour in online education." (K4)

3.1.6. 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)

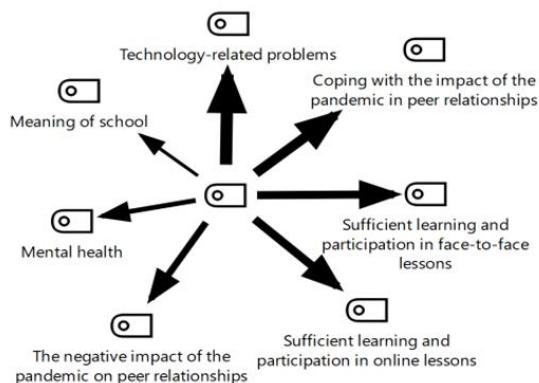
Adolescents received the highest rate of responses on the topic of distance education on the theme of autonomy (f = 29, 60.42%). This was followed by answers on family relationships (f= 10, 20.83%) and peer relationships (f = 9, 18.75%).

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 (figure 2). 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



3.2.1. 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 anxiety about the incomplete realization of full learning in online courses is evident in their responses. Examples of the participants' responses can be found below:

"It is a little harder to interrupt the teacher in face-to-face lessons by 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)

3.2.2. Dimension 2: Coping with the impact of the pandemic on peer relationships

The frequency of the category is 14. The responses in the category include participants' responses about using online platforms to maintain friend 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)

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

The frequency of the category is 12. The answers focus on the positive contribution of the opportunities provided by the face-to-face courses to their competencies. Participants emphasized that they did not have problems using their learning capacities while continuing face-to-face lessons, and they could participate more effectively in class. Examples of participants' responses are as follows:

"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)

3.2.4. Dimension 4: Sufficient learning and participation in online lessons

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

"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)

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

The frequency of the category is nine. Participants in the competence theme similar to the autonomy theme also highlighted the negative impact of the pandemic on peer relationships. However, unlike autonomy, the responses were examined not expressing themselves to maintaining peer relationships and their inability to behave effectively in peer relationships. 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)

3.2.6. Dimension 6: Mental Health

The frequency of the category is five. Participants' responses focus on online courses causing sleep problems, the harms of the internet, and a generally negative mood. Below 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)

3.2.7. 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 the school as a fun place to go that met needs for information gathering and to develop friendship relationships, 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)

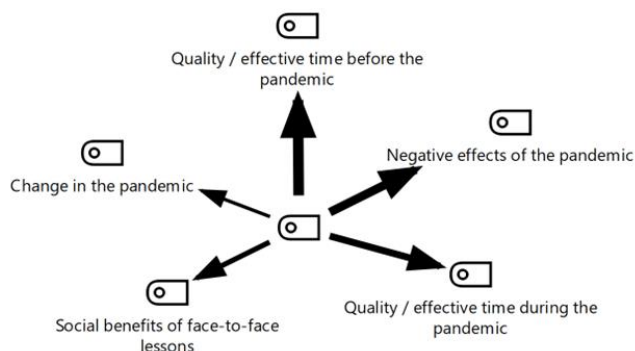
In the competence themes, no categories related to family relationships appeared. Responses regarding distance learning had the highest frequency ($f = 53, 69.74\%$), and peer relationships came after this category ($f = 23, 30.26\%$).

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



3.3.1. 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 expressed that they spent more and more time with family, relatives, and friends. Examples of participants' responses are provided below:

"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)

3.3.2. Dimension 2: Negative effects of the pandemic

The frequency of the category is 29. During the pandemic, the participants' responses focused on connection problems in friendship and family relationships. Participants particularly 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)

3.3.3. Dimension 3: Quality / efficient time during the pandemic

The frequency of the category is 22. The responses in the category focused on the participants' relationships with their families. The focus of the 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 participants' 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)

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

The frequency of the category is 22. Responses revealed that online lessons cause negative changes in adolescents' relationships with their teachers and friends. Examples of the participants' responses are presented 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 face-to-face communication with the teacher." (K26)

3.3.5. Dimension 5: Change in the pandemic

The frequency of the category is five. The responses were evaluated around the change in friendship relationships caused by the pandemic. They indicated that before the pandemic they could play games that involved closer contact with their friends and that with the pandemic they had to play games through technological devices. One participant stated 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 seen together in the categories of quality/efficient time before the pandemic, quality/efficient time during the pandemic, change in the pandemic, and the negative impact of the pandemic. However, it can be noted that the responses related to peer relationships are most frequently given in the categories of quality/efficient time before the pandemic, the change in the pandemic, and the 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 of social benefits of face-to-face education, which is evaluated concerning distance education, is seen as 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 period when the importance of peer relationships increases with the desire for independence from family and autonomy (Santröck, 2014). The pandemic necessitated changes in youth's demands and needs with the closure of schools, remote education, restricted face-to-face interaction with curfews, and increased time spent at home. Youths interacted on online platforms with their peers, spent more time with their parents, and received their education through online tools. This study aims to further examine the meaning of these experiences for youths in depth. Self-determination theory provides a perspective that allows individuals to evaluate their intellectual and academic development together. In theory, the needs of "competence", "autonomy", and "relatedness" are taken as the basis for enhancing an individual's well-being and academic motivation. These three needs determined the general framework and theme titles of the study.

A total of six categories emerged in "the autonomy" need. It was observed that youths most frequently mentioned their needs related to family, peer relationships, and distance learning. Autonomy needs the most apparent youth technology usage for their lesson and teacher communication in the school context. A few youths emphasized online courses support their autonomy needs; most of them indicated that there was preventing youths' benefits 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 showed that students who have sufficient equipment and do not have problems connecting to the internet have a more positive opinion of distance education than those who have problems in this regard (Kaynar et al., 2020).

Another problem is that it affects the autonomy of youths in that they cannot ask the teacher questions whenever they want to. On the other hand, face-to-face education can provide students with opportunities such as directly communicating with the teacher, understanding students' negative feelings about the lesson from their gestures, and offering alternatives (Willis, 1993). Consequently, the lack of technological tools, the limited communication opportunities in distance education, and the possibility of benefiting only from the opportunities offered by digital devices in education seem to limit the autonomy

needs of youths (Babieva et al., 2022). Moreover, the convenient opportunities provided by home-based continuing education support autonomy.

The youths emphasized family relationships or peer relationships within the framework of autonomy. The youths rated family interventions as limiting their autonomy. They particularly emphasized the restrictive attitudes of their families towards their lessons 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 they were associated with increasing negative mental health in children (Whittle et al., 2020; Prime et al., 2020). The current findings indicated the increasingly restrictive attitudes of families towards peers and teaching. In addition, youths emphasized that their autonomy was also restricted in peer relationships. They stated 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 the youths being able to be themselves and not being restricted (Giordano, 2003). It might be hypothesized that youths who are both constrained by their parents and experience limitations in their peer relationships need support in developmental issues.

Competence themes contained categories related to peer relationships and distance learning. Responses related to distance education were more emphasized in this theme. Youths stated that they had problems understanding, following, or participating in online courses; however, they felt more efficient and effective in the face-to-face classes. Youths' negative attitudes towards distance education (Li & Lee, 2016) and their lower level of independence learning skills may affect their competence perceptions (Linn, 1996). Students believe that they would not understand the subject in distance education, and they only prefer distance education for subjects that they can understand themselves. Eventually, it is believed that both digital skills studies to improve students' competence perceptions in distance education and motivational studies conducted on learning competencies in distance education are important.

Social anxiety (American Psychological Association, 2013) emphasized that youths' responses might be related to youths' competence (I was afraid my friends would laugh at me, I am shy, I am timid, etc.). Some participants emphasized they feel more comfortable and effective in expressing themselves in distance learning. However, another study found that individuals with social anxiety stay away from online learning environments (Ajmal & Ahmad, 2019). Social anxiety is negatively associated with academic self-efficacy and self-reported GPA (Hood et al., 2021). Current results seem inconsistent with previous findings. Therefore, more research is needed on social anxiety and learning in online environments.

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 during breaks during face-to-face education but deleting this was not possible during distance education. In other studies (Akgül, 2022; Hebebcı et al., 2020; Kaynar, 2020), the negative effects of distance education on the need for socialization and peer relationships were shown. Youths try to maintain their peer relationship 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, more emphasis was placed on the positive effect of the pandemic on family relationships. It was observed that youths who had little opportunity to see their family in the pre-pandemic period effectively used increased time with family. However, youths also talked about their longing for activities such as picnics and hikes with family or for people in 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 examined relationships between parents and youths during COVID-19 have inconsistent results. While some studies

emphasize 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 spent (Ellis et al., 2020) and conflict with family has increased (Akgül, 2022). Feeling close to family is negatively associated with 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). Factors such as pre-pandemic family relationships, general family dynamics, and the child's age 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 sequence of positive family dynamics can be seen as 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 of youth. 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 may provide a broad perspective for literature and practice (Akgül, 2022). Second, this study conducted an in-depth analysis with open-ended questions aimed to explore youths' pandemic experiences in detail. Therefore, the number of participants was limited. Based on the results, studies conducted with larger study groups might be important to reveal the general view. Specifically, youths with high 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 findings highlighted the need for autonomy and competence in distance learning during the pandemic and relatedness in peer relationships. Intervention services conducted in partnership with mental health professionals and educators appear important in meeting the needs.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the changing needs of youths during COVID-19 about friends, family, and the school context should be considered. Problems in online lessons and relationships with peers and families hurt adolescents' competence, autonomy, and relatedness needs. Youths' relatedness needs could be negatively impacted by declining face-to-face relationships with peers 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, satisfying youths' relatedness needs.

In addition, an increase in family interferences could decrease 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 promoting their competencies in face-to-face education.

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