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What the Distance Education Themed Master's Theses and Dissertations in Türkiye Examined Prior to Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to evaluate and compare the research tendencies of the theses and dissertations published in Türkiye prior to the Covid-19 pandemic between 2013 and 2018 in the field of distance education in terms of thematic research fields, methodological preferences and the components that scientific researches should include. In accordance with this purpose, theses and dissertations were analysed with regard to such sections as introduction, method, findings, result and recommendations. This qualitative study was carried out through document (content) analysis method and was made use of purposeful sampling. The results suggest the most popular theme among researches is web-based distance learning, most preferred designs are quantitative, qualitative, respectively. Top universities publishing doctoral dissertations in the field are the Universities of Anadolu and Ankara while Gazi University ranks first in master's theses. The years of 2013 and 2014 outnumber other years in terms of doctoral dissertations while 2018 was found as the year when most master's theses was carried out. It was found out dissertations and theses generally have the basic components of a scientific research. The quantitative studies were designed in survey model while qualitative studies focused on case studies. The most commonly used sampling method is purposeful sampling in the case of both research models. It is recommended that more doctoral dissertations could be carried out in the field of distance education in Türkiye and future studies may include not only the studies that the term of distance education exists in the title but also others carried out in the field.

Keywords. Distance education, remote education, covid-19, content analysis.

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound and far-reaching impact on education worldwide. These effects have been both immediate and longer-term, and they have affected all levels of education, from early childhood education to higher education. The Covid-19 pandemic, which emerged in early 2020, suddenly affected the whole world and countries closed their borders, international travels were stopped, curfews were imposed, people were confined to their homes, the service sector had to stop their activities, and people suffered from the disease they had never encountered before. They started to face with the danger of death. This situation has started to have a serious impact also in Türkiye since March 2020. One of the sectors that had to stop its activities in Türkiye, as in the rest of the world, was undoubtedly the education sector. All educational institutions, from pre-school to higher education level, stopped their activities and were in a waiting position until the second instruction from health authorities. After the first shock of the pandemic was overcome, educational institutions began to switch to distance education in order to continue their activities, and from this moment on, the concept of distance education became an important issue than ever before and had to be preferred by almost all educational institutions in Türkiye. Distance education has now become an important part of our lives and has also influenced the academic world. Many studies have begun to be conducted on distance education, and more studies and research have begun to be conducted in the field than ever before. The starting point of this research is to investigate and set forth the main tendencies of the theses and dissertations carried out in a specified timeline before the pandemic in Türkiye and reveal what these studies has focused on without the presence of an issue that shocked the world.

The concept of distance education or distance learning was essentially born out of a need, which is valid for all innovations and inventions in the world. When the instructor and the learner could not come together due to time and space constraints or personal reasons, it was understood that teaching and learning activities could actually be carried out remotely, and thus, the concept of distance education, which arose from a need, has become a service and a scientific field of study offered using the most up-to-date possibilities of technology. Although the transition from traditional, face-to-face education to distance education was a painful process at first for both instructors and students, today distance education services have begun to be offered as a default service by educational institutions. Thanks to digital transformation studies and rapid developments in technology, which have started to make their impact felt in every field, the fields of educational sciences and distance education have started to keep up with the times, and the distance education service, which was initially provided through letters, can now be followed through mobile applications and devices. Thanks to the

developments in digital technologies, distance education applications are used both in formal education and as certificate programs, complementing the philosophy of lifelong education. Distance education programs, which especially meet the educational needs of the working class, are preferred and used by many people around the world day by day.

It is seen that there are many definitions of distance education in the literature and that these definitions are changing gradually in the context of the historical development process and technological developments. Bruder (1989, p. 2) stated that the American Bureau of Educational Research defines distance education as telecommunication systems and electronic devices that enable students and learners to take courses on any subject without location restrictions. Garrison and Shale (1987, p. 28) mentioned three characteristic features of the distance education process:

1. Distance education is generally a learning activity carried out without the teacher and student being together.

2. In order to support the learning process, distance education should allow communication between the teacher and the student.

3. There should be use of technology in distance education activities in order to ensure interaction between the two parties.

The common feature of these definitions made by different researchers is that they state that the most basic feature of distance education is that the obligation for teachers and students to be in the same environment is eliminated. However, some definitions show distance education as a learning method, while others see it as a teaching tool. Regardless of which researcher made it, the common feature of the first definitions about distance education is that, as mentioned above, they state that the instructor and the learner do not have to be physically in the same environment and that it involves the use of technology. However, in historical development and with the advancement of technology, the definition of distance education has also changed. Kaya (2002, p. 12) explains one of the definitions with changing focus as "it is a form of education that uses electronic media or personalised learning tools", but in order to emphasise the change in the definition, it is necessary to express the definition that is widely accepted in the literature. Schlosser and Simonson (2009, p. 1) emphasised that distance education is a type of formal education provided in an institutional sense, in which the learner group communicates with each other, resources and instructors through interactive telecommunication systems without being in the learning environment. As can be seen from this statement, both the definition and form of distance education have evolved over the years and its focus has changed. While the emphasis in the initial definitions was always on the presence of learner

and instructor groups in separate environments, terms such as interactive and telecommunication systems have been included in the definitions made in recent years.

Although there are many alternative definitions defining distance education in the literature, each definition essentially emphasises four important features related to the field (Kambutu, 2002, p. 342). These are respectively;

1. Providing educational services outside the campus with the help of technology,
2. Accessing educational opportunities with the help of many tools without being dependent on the physical environment,
3. Teachers' and students' being in separate environments in terms of time and space, and
4. Accessing educational resources outside the educational environment.

In summary, distance education is a form of education and training in which the teacher and the learner do not need to be in the same environment, allowing them to access educational services through technological devices and opportunities without the concept of time, and in which the communication and interaction between the two parties is also provided through technological opportunities.

The effectiveness of distance education has been constantly debated because the instructor and the learners are not together. Based on these discussions, some of the researchers tried to reveal the differences between distance education and traditional education and tried to find out which type of education is more beneficial to the success of students. In addition to this type of research, studies aimed at establishing theory in distance education and studies examining the methodological features of distance education studies have also been conducted. In some of the studies examining distance education studies according to their methodological characteristics, the samples are articles written in the field of distance education, and in some others, the samples are dissertations and theses written in the field of distance education. In their study, which is one of the studies conducted to reveal methodological trends in distance education research and examined the dissertations and master's theses conducted in the field of distance education in North America between 1998 and 2007, Davies, Howell and Petrie (2010, p. 52) found out that the majority of the studies were descriptive studies and they stated that they used samples with more experience in the field of distance education as the study group and that they examined the perception, anxiety and satisfaction levels of these people about distance education, and they concluded that these studies conducted with surveys were generally conducted with descriptive statistical methods. An interesting result of their study is that they

concluded that the existence of quality descriptive studies are valuable in the literature, but the subject should also be examined with other research methods. In their study of 890 articles, Berge and Mrozowski (2001, p. 5) concluded that the most preferred research model was descriptive research, and they also stated that the research conducted largely lacked a specific research topic and future vision. In their study examining the literature, Bryant, Kahle, and Schafer (2005, p. 269) concluded that research on distance education has four common features. They listed these features as (1) communication tools and environment in distance education, (2) educational organisation, (3) instructor or teacher and (4) student or learner. They also stated that prominent researchers in the field could not reach a consensus on how to measure quality in distance education.

In another research conducted in the field and examining 515 articles published between 1980 and 2014, the 35-year period within the scope of the study was divided into 7 parts and it was concluded that the focus of each period was different. According to the findings, the thematic issues that the articles in the field of distance education focus on are specialisation and institutional reinforcement in the period between 1980 and 1984; educational design and educational technologies in the period between 1985-1989; quality assurance in distance education in the period between 1990 and 1994; the first examples of student support and web-based applications in the period between 1995 and 1999; the concept of virtual university in the period between 2000-2004; collaborative learning and web-based communication methods in the period between 2005-2009, and finally interactive learning, MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) and OER (Open Educational Resources) in the period between 2010-2014 (Zawacki-Richter and Naidu, 2016, p. 245). In their study, Bozkurt et al. (2015, p. 355) where they examined 861 articles published in international journals between 2009 and 2013 found that the most preferred research methods were qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods, respectively, and they concluded that in most of the qualitative studies, case study was the most used method while most of the quantitative studies were surveys and most of the mixed-design studies were exploratory and explanatory. They also determined that interview techniques, document review and observation methods were largely used in qualitative research as data collection methods, while surveys and scales were used in quantitative research. They stated that students attending higher education were selected as the study group, but some studies selected the sample group from the primary education level. In addition, it has been stated that since the field of distance education is an interdisciplinary field, deeper information about the field can be obtained by using multiple research designs instead of certain research designs (Bozkurt et al., 2015, p. 356). In another study on the field, 35 articles published in Türkiye between 2005 and 2011 were examined (Horzum,

Özkaya, Demirci, & Alpaslan, 2013, p. 79). In this context, it was concluded that the number of studies conducted in the field of distance education in Türkiye is quite low compared to those of other countries, that the studies generally consist of quantitative research conducted for the evaluation of the literature, and as a result, studies conducted in distance education in Türkiye should be carried out by following the current trends used in the world literature. In another study examining the studies conducted in Türkiye in the field of distance education, 380 dissertations and master's theses published between 2005 and 2014 were examined. According to the results of this study, more than half of the theses completed between the specified dates were done with quantitative methods while the rest were carried out with qualitative and mixed methods, respectively. It was also found out that survey method was preferred in quantitative research and case study method was preferred in qualitative and mixed research. In terms of sampling methods, it was concluded that while the method was not mentioned in most quantitative studies, purposeful sampling methods were mostly preferred in qualitative studies (Gökmen, et al., 2017, p. 1).

According to a study analysing the focus of studies in the field, it was noted that research in the field of distance education stopped comparing distance education with traditional education, and it was stated that this was a good development for the field (Davies et al., 2010, p. 53). In summary, the studies examining the articles and theses in the field of distance education has focused on the complementary elements and structure of distance education, the methods used in research, and preferred research topics. In an ever-changing and increasingly digital world, digital culture manifests itself in every aspect of daily life. This reality is also valid in education systems. Digital technologies are used intensively at all levels of education, from pre-school education to the end of higher education, and this shifts the expectations from educational institutions to other areas than pure education.

The fact that people begin to encounter new realities every day reflects one of the normal situations of today's world. New realities make it necessary for education systems to equip and train students with different and new competencies. In addition, students can use new developing technologies faster and adapt to these technologies faster. The fact that the ability to adapt to change is also valid for educational institutions in the face of this situation revealed by the change process, guides the reshaping of education policies today.

Within the scope of this study, which aims to reveal the status of studies in the field of distance education before the Covid-19 pandemic, the thematic distribution of master's theses and dissertations

written in the 5 years before the pandemic was discussed in terms of whether they contain the basic elements that should be in a scientific research. As a result of the examination of dissertations and master's theses published in the field of distance education in Türkiye, no review study has been found since 2014. Based on this result, the theses and dissertations covered by the study have been discussed since 2013 in order to be compatible with other studies in the literature. In today's world where technology is rapidly advancing, this study was designed considering the need to examine the latest trends before the pandemic within master's theses and dissertations in order to keep up with the developments in the field and, more importantly, to direct these developments in a scientific context.

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the dissertations and master's theses published between 2013 and 2018, which were themed on distance education in Türkiye and before the Covid-19 outbreak, in the context of their thematic distribution and methodological features and the basic elements that should be present in a scientific research with the purpose of revealing the research tendencies prior the pandemic and In line with this main purpose, the studies were examined under the headings of distribution by universities, distribution by thematic fields, methods, and data collection tools. The theses included in the scope of the study were published between 2013 and 2018, are accessible at the National Thesis Centre of Council of Higher Education (YÖK), and contain the term "distance education" in the title.

In line with the purpose of the study, the following sub-problems have been tried to be answered.

1. What is the distribution of theses according to university and year?
2. What is the thematic distribution of theses?
3. What is the distribution of theses in terms of the basic elements that should be present in scientific research?
 - 3.1. What is the distribution of theses in terms of method?
 - 3.2. What is the distribution of theses in terms of data collection tools?

Before working in any scientific field, it is necessary to know the general status of the studies in the literature, which topics are being researched in the field, and which topics need to be researched. This also applies to the field of distance education. Research on the distance education system, which allows learners or distance education participants to study on their own and participate in learning activities at times and places convenient to them and without face-to-face contact with the instructor, is more limited in Türkiye compared to other areas of educational sciences. Therefore, it has been thought that there is a need for a literature review that would provide general and accurate information

about the studies carried out in the field. It is thought that this study will contribute to the field by examining the master's theses and dissertations conducted in the field of distance education in the last 6 years before the Covid-19 outbreak, describing the current situation and revealing the deficiencies, and will help in the selection of topics for future studies. In addition, during the literature review conducted within the scope of the study, since there were no articles or theses examining the studies carried out in the field of distance education since 2014, it was thought that this study would fill this gap in the field and provide complementary and supportive results to other similar studies. Figure 1.1, prepared to show the importance of the study and its place in the literature compared to other studies conducted in the field, is presented below.

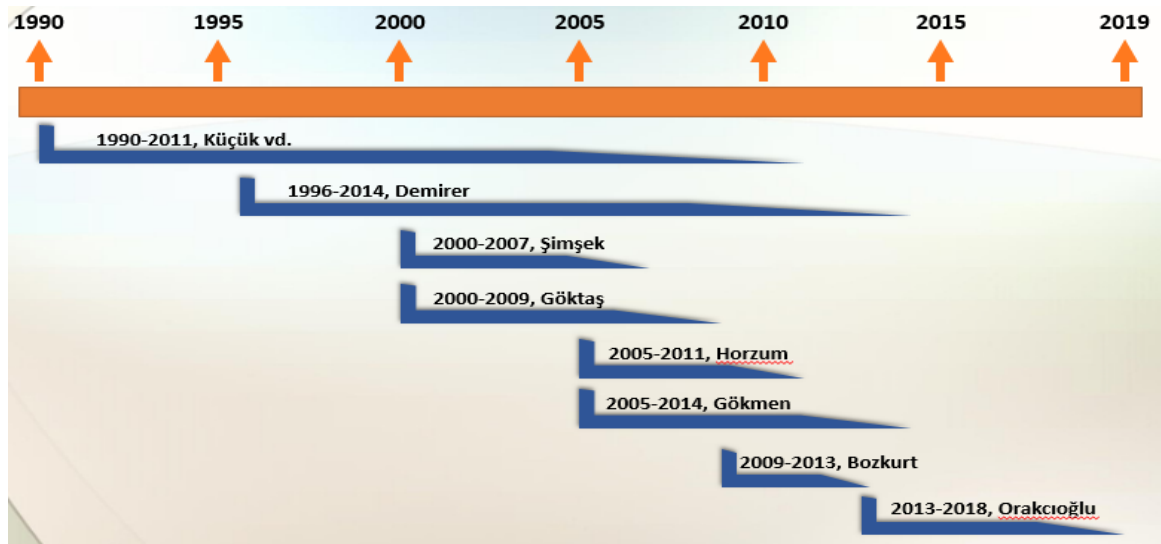


Figure 1. The place of the study within the literature.

Method

Research Model

Qualitative research method was used in this study, which was designed to examine master's theses and doctoral dissertations published in the field of distance education between 2013 and 2018. Document (content) analysis method was used as a qualitative research method. As Bowen (2009, p. 27) defines, document analysis method is an organised way of investigating documents whether on paper or in a digital medium. Analogous to other analytical techniques in qualitative research, document analysis necessitates the scrutiny and interpretation of data to extract significance, enhance comprehension, and build empirical knowledge (Corbin, Strauss, 2008, p. 47). The theses examined in this study were evaluated by the document review method according to the criteria of the data collection tool developed by Demirci, Arıkan and Onuk in 2018 (Eldeleklioğlu Onuk, 2019).

Documents are sources that provide information about the situation or facts to be analysed. Karppinen and Moe (2012, p. 2) stated that, thanks to developing technologies, researchers have the luxury of immediately accessing the information they want, but document review, which is a research method in itself, is not explained sufficiently in textbooks or scientific research, and also stated that the document review method is not only used to reach the necessary resources but also to access real information.

Study Group

The population of the research is the theses and dissertations made in the field of distance education in Türkiye, and the documents are the doctoral studies and master's theses made in the field of distance education in Türkiye between 2013 and 2018 and accessible in the database of the National Thesis Centre of YÖK. Purposive sampling method was used in sample selection. After the research in the database, a total of 35 dissertations and 76 master's theses were found in the field of distance education in Türkiye between 2013 and 2018, with the phrase "distance education" in their titles. Of the 35 dissertations found, 9 were excluded because they did not have access permission or were unfinished, and therefore 24 dissertations were included in the scope of the study. Likewise, 9 of the 76 master's theses scanned were excluded since they did not have access permission or were in the preparation phase, and a total of 65 master's theses were included in the scope of the study, thus 89 documents was reached and included in the study.

Data Collection Tool

In this study, where the document analysis method has been adopted, the 'Academic Publication Evaluation Form', developed by Demirci, Arıtan and Onuk in 2018 (Eldeleklioğlu Onuk, 2019), was used as the data collection tool. This evaluation form, consisting of ten different headings, allows studies to be examined from 52 different perspectives and facilitates in-depth analysis to reveal whether the studies, either thesis or article, have the basic features that a scientific study should have. 10 main headings that make up the Academic Publication Evaluation Form are; 1. Imprint 2. Summary 3. Introduction 4. Method 5. Data collection tool 6. Data analysis 7. Findings 8. Discussion and interpretation 9. Suggestions, and 10. Bibliography.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis technique, one of the qualitative analysis techniques, was used to analyse the data obtained. Descriptive analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that allows data collected

using alternative data collection methods to be separated according to pre-designed topics, summarised and then commented on based on this summary information (Özdemir, 2010, p. 336). The 'Academic Publication Evaluation Form' developed by Demirci, Arıtan and Onuk in 2018 (Eldeleklioğlu Onuk, 2019). was used as a criterion, and the data obtained from the studies were recorded in the Microsoft Office Professional Plus Excel 2013 program and examined with the descriptive analysis method, and frequency and percentage information were extracted.

Results

Findings Related to the Distribution of Studies by Universities and Years

After the findings obtained within the study have been analysed, the results are as follows:

Table 1.

Distribution of Dissertations by Universities and Years

| Universities | 2013 | | 2014 | | 2015 | | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | | Total | |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|-------|-------|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Anadolu | - | - | 2 | 28.5 | - | - | 1 | 100 | - | - | - | - | 3 | 12.48 |
| Ankara | 2 | 28.6 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 50 | - | - | 3 | 12.48 |
| Atatürk | - | - | 1 | 14.3 | 1 | 33.3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 8.32 |
| Beykent | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 25 | 1 | 4.16 |
| Çanakkale 18 Mart | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 25 | 1 | 4.16 |
| Dicle | - | - | - | - | 1 | 33.3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 4.16 |
| Gazi | 1 | 14.3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 50 | - | - | 2 | 8.32 |
| Hacettepe | - | - | 1 | 14.3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 25 | 2 | 8.32 |
| İnönü | - | - | 1 | 14.3 | 1 | 33.3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 8.32 |
| İstanbul | - | - | 1 | 14.3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 4.16 |
| Karadeniz Teknik | 1 | 14.3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 4.16 |
| Marmara | 1 | 14.3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 25 | 2 | 8.32 |
| Mersin | 1 | 14.3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 4.16 |
| Sakarya | - | - | 1 | 14.3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 4.16 |
| Selçuk | 1 | 14.3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 4.16 |
| Total | 7 | 100 | 7 | 100 | 3 | 100 | 1 | 100 | 2 | 100 | 4 | 100 | 24 | 100 |

When Table 1, which constitutes the first sample of the study and shows the distribution of doctoral dissertations completed between 2013 and 2018 by university and year, is examined, it is seen that the studies on the field of distance education were made in 15 universities and 24 dissertations were made from 2013 to the end of 2018. Again, looking at the data in Table 1, it is understood that the years in which the most dissertations were made in the field of distance education on a yearly basis were 2013 and 2014, with 7. There was a decrease in the number of studies in the following years, but in later years, the number has started to trend slightly upward. When we look at the universities where the highest number of dissertations were conducted between 2013 and 2018, Anadolu University and Ankara University are in the first place with three studies each. These two universities are followed by Atatürk, Gazi, Hacettepe, İnönü and Marmara Universities with two studies each. Again, according to Table 1, the years in which the fewest studies were carried out in the field since 2013 were 2016 and 2017. While 2 dissertations were made in 2017, only 1 doctoral thesis was made in 2016. The distribution of 65 master's theses, which constitute the other sample group of the study by university and years is given in Table 2.

When Table 2 is examined, which shows the distribution of master's theses made in the field of distance education between 2013 and 2018, which constitute the other sample group of the study, by university and year, it is seen that a total of 65 theses were made in 35 universities in the specified date range. Looking at the data given in Table 2, it could be observed that the year in which the most theses were prepared in the field of distance education on a yearly basis was 2018, with 14, and the year in which the least theses were made was 2017, with 5. At the time of this study, a master's thesis from 2019 was found and the relevant data belongs to April 2019. Since there is a possibility that master's theses related to the field will be made by the end of the year, 2019 is not mentioned as the year in which the fewest theses were made, although the number of theses seems to be 1.

Again, when the data in Table 2 is examined, it is seen that the university with the highest number of master's theses in the field of distance education since 2013 is Gazi University with 8 theses, followed by Hacettepe University with 5 theses and Kırıkkale University with 4 theses.

The findings related to the distribution of the studies have been provided below.

Table 2.

Distribution of Master's Theses by Universities and Years

| Universities | 2013 | | 2014 | | 2015 | | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | | 2019 | | Total | |
|---------------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|----|------|-------|------|-----|-------|-------|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Abant İzzet Baysal | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 11.11 | - | - | 1 | 7.14 | - | - | 2 | 3.07 |
| Afyon Kocatepe | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 11.11 | - | - | 2 | 14.28 | - | - | 3 | 4.61 |
| Anadolu | 2 | 16.66 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 20 | - | - | - | - | 3 | 4.61 |
| Atatürk | - | - | - | - | 1 | 9.09 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1.54 |
| Beykent | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 20 | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1.54 |
| Boğaziçi | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 7.14 | - | - | 1 | 1.54 |
| Bülent Ecevit | 1 | 8.33 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1.54 |
| Çukurova | - | - | - | - | 1 | 9.09 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1.54 |
| Dokuz Eylül | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 20 | 1 | 7.14 | - | - | 2 | 3.07 |
| Düzce | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 11.11 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1.54 |
| Ege | 2 | 16.66 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 3.07 |
| Eskişehir Osmangazi | - | - | 1 | 7.69 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1.54 |
| Fırat | 1 | 8.33 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 100 | 2 | 3.07 |
| Gazi | - | - | 6 | 46.15 | 1 | 9.09 | - | - | - | - | 1 | 7.14 | - | - | 8 | 12.32 |
| Hacettepe | - | - | - | - | 2 | 18.18 | - | - | - | - | 3 | 21.42 | - | - | 5 | 7.7 |
| İnönü | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 7.14 | - | - | 1 | 1.54 |
| İstanbul | - | - | 1 | 7.69 | 1 | 9.09 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 3.07 |
| İstanbul Aydın | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 11.11 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1.54 |
| İstanbul Kültür | 1 | 8.33 | - | - | - | - | 1 | 11.11 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 3.07 |

Table 2. (Continued)

Distribution of Master's Theses by Universities and Years

| Universities | 2013 | | 2014 | | 2015 | | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | | 2019 | | Total | |
|--------------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|------|------|-------|------|-----|------|------|------|-----|-------|------|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Kahramanmaraş | - | - | 1 | 7.69 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1.54 |
| Sütçü İmam | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Karabük | - | - | 1 | 7.69 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1.54 |
| Karadeniz Teknik | - | - | 2 | 15.38 | 1 | 9.09 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 3 | 4.61 |
| Kırıkkale | 1 | 8.33 | - | - | 1 | 9.09 | 1 | 11.11 | - | - | 1 | 7.14 | - | - | 4 | 6.16 |
| Maltepe | 1 | 8.33 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1.54 |
| Marmara | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 40 | - | - | - | - | 2 | 3.07 |
| Muğla Sıtkı Koçman | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 7.14 | - | - | 1 | 1.54 |
| Ondokuz Mayıs | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 22.23 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 3.07 |
| Ortadoğu Teknik | - | - | 1 | 7.69 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1.54 |
| Sakarya | 2 | 16.66 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 7.14 | - | - | 3 | 4.61 |
| Selçuk | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 7.14 | - | - | 1 | 1.54 |
| Trakya | 1 | 8.33 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1.54 |
| Turgut Özal | - | - | - | - | 1 | 9.09 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1.54 |
| Yaşar | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 11.11 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1.54 |
| Yıldız Teknik | - | - | - | - | 1 | 9.09 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1.54 |
| Yüzüncü Yıl | - | - | - | - | 1 | 9.09 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1.54 |
| Total | 12 | 100 | 13 | 100 | 11 | 100 | 9 | 100 | 5 | 100 | 14 | 100 | 1 | 100 | 65 | 100 |

Findings Related to the Thematic Distribution of Studies

The data related to the thematic distribution of dissertations within the research are as follows:

Table 3

Findings Related to the Thematic Distribution of Dissertations

| Thematic Fields | n | % |
|--|----------|----------|
| Evaluation of distance education centres and programs | 2 | 8.33 |
| Using distance education methods in in-service training | 1 | 4.17 |
| Quality standards and marketing strategies in distance education | 2 | 8.33 |
| Factors affecting student success in distance education | 8 | 33.33 |
| Adaptation processes to distance education | 1 | 4.17 |
| Management of distance education | 1 | 4.17 |
| Web-based distance education applications | 9 | 37.5 |
| Total | 24 | 100.00 |

When Table 3, which lists the study areas of dissertations written in the field of distance education from 2013 to 2019, is examined, it could be observed that the studies mostly examined web-based distance education applications with 37.50% (n = 9). Following this, factors affecting student success in distance education were chosen as the study area with 33.33% (n=8). There are quite large differences in the thematic distribution of other doctoral studies written during the years covered by the study, with 8.33% (n=2) evaluating distance education centres and programs and 8.33% (n=2) evaluating distance education centres and programmes and focusing on quality standards and marketing strategies in education. The remaining studies were planned on the use of distance education methods in in-service training, adaptation processes to distance education and management of distance education, each with a share of 4.17% (n = 1).

The thematic distribution of master's theses has been provided in the table below.

Table 4

Findings Related to the Thematic Distribution of Master's Theses

| Thematic Fields | n | % |
|--|-----------|---------------|
| Opinions of students and faculty members about distance education | 1 | 1.54 |
| Students' opinions about distance education | 13 | 20 |
| Opinions of teachers or instructors about distance education | 6 | 9.23 |
| Comparison of distance education and other teaching methods | 3 | 4.61 |
| Using distance education methods in in-service training | 2 | 3.07 |
| Factors affecting student success in distance education | 10 | 15.39 |
| Development of new applications and software in distance education | 14 | 21.54 |
| Reasons for leaving distance education | 1 | 1.54 |
| Adaptation processes to distance education | 1 | 1.54 |
| Management of distance education | 5 | 7.69 |
| Web-based distance education applications | 9 | 13.85 |
| Total | 65 | 100.00 |

When Table 4, which shows the thematic distribution of master's theses, is examined, studies carried out for the development of new applications and software in distance education have a share of 21.54% (n = 14) in all studies. 20% (n=13) of the studies have examined students' opinions about distance education, 15.39% (n=10) have examined factors affecting student success in distance education, and 13.85% (n=9) have examined web-based distance education applications. While 9.23% (n=6) have examined the opinions of teachers or faculty members about distance education, 7.69% (n=5) have examined the methods on the management of distance education. In the remaining studies, 4.61% (n=3) have compared distance education with other teaching methods while 3.07% (n=2) have conducted research on the use of distance education methods in in-service training. Last 3 studies which each has 1.54% among the group have been conducted on the opinions of students and faculty members about distance education (n=1), the reasons for leaving distance education (n=1), and the adaptation processes to distance education (n=1). Accordingly, the thematic area on which master's theses in the field of distance education has been most concentrated since 2013 has been the development of new applications and software in distance education with 21.54% (n = 14).

Findings Related to the Method of the Studies

The findings related to the method of the dissertations included in the study have been provided in the Table 5.

Table 5

Findings Related to the Method of Dissertations

| Method | n | % | |
|--|------------------------|----------|-------|
| Sample Selection Technique | Purposeful | 20 | 83.33 |
| | Simple Random | 1 | 4.17 |
| | Stratified | 1 | 4.17 |
| | Tried to reach all | 2 | 8.33 |
| | Unspecified | - | - |
| | Total | 24 | 100 |
| Method is specified. | Yes | 21 | 87.5 |
| | No | 3 | 12.5 |
| | Total | 24 | 100 |
| If the model is specified, the study is... | Qualitative | 6 | 25 |
| | Quantitative | 8 | 33,33 |
| | Mixed | 7 | 29.17 |
| | Unspecified | 3 | 12.5 |
| | Total | 24 | 100 |
| Qualitative Research Design | Case Study | 5 | 83.33 |
| | Ethnography | 1 | 16.67 |
| | Total | 6 | 100 |
| Quantitative Research Design | Descriptive | 1 | 12.5 |
| | Relational | 3 | 37.5 |
| | Field Test | 4 | 50 |
| | Total | 8 | 100 |
| Mixed Research Design | Explanatory Sequential | 1 | 14.29 |
| | Multistage | 1 | 14.29 |
| | Embedded | 2 | 28,57 |
| | Exploratory Sequential | 2 | 28,57 |
| | Convergent Parallel | 1 | 14,29 |
| | Total | 7 | 100 |

When we look at the sample selection technique used in theses, it is seen that the studies using purposeful sampling have a rate of 83.33% (n = 20). While an attempt was made to reach the entire population in 8.33% of the studies (n=2), simple random (n=1) and stratified sampling (n=1) methods were also preferred in 4.17%. Accordingly, it is seen that the most preferred sampling method in the

dissertations within the scope of the study is purposeful sampling. It is seen that the research method is clearly stated in 87.5% (n=21) of the doctoral studies examined within the scope of the research. Of these studies with clearly stated methods, 33.33% (n=8) were conducted using quantitative, 29.17% (n=7) mixed, and 25% (n=6) qualitative research methods. Studies where the research method is not specified have a rate of 12.5% (n = 3). Considering the distribution of qualitative research designs, which have a rate of 25% (n = 6) among the doctoral studies included in the study, case studies have a rate of 83.33% (n = 5), while one ethnography study has a rate of 16,67% (n = 6). In the distribution of quantitative research designs, field tests have a preference rate of 50% (n = 5), while 37.5% (n = 3) of the studies are in the relational survey model and 12.5% (n = 1) are descriptive. Among the mixed research designs that constitute 29.17% (n=7) of the studies within the scope of the research, embedded (n=2) and exploratory sequential (n=2) research models are the two most preferred methods with 28.57% each. While exploratory sequential (n=1), multistage (n=1) and convergent parallel (n=1) models are the other preferred methods with rates of 14.29% each. The findings related to the method of the master's theses included in the study have been provided in the Table 6.

Table 6

Findings Related to the Method of Master's Theses

| Method | n | % | |
|--|--------------------|----------|-------|
| Sample Selection Technique | Purposeful | 40 | 61.54 |
| | Random | 1 | 1.54 |
| | Stratified | 2 | 3.08 |
| | Tried to reach all | 10 | 15.38 |
| | Unspecified | 12 | 18.46 |
| | Total | 65 | 100 |
| Method is specified.. | Yes | 43 | 66.15 |
| | No | 22 | 33.85 |
| | Total | 65 | 100 |
| If the model is specified, the study is... | Qualitative | 10 | 15.38 |
| | Quantitative | 25 | 38.46 |
| | Mixed | 8 | 12.31 |
| | Unspecified | 22 | 33.85 |
| | Total | 65 | 100 |

| | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|-----|------|
| Qualitative Research Design | Case Study | 8 | 80 |
| | Phenomenology | 1 | 10 |
| | Action | 1 | 10 |
| | Total | 10 | 100 |
| Quantitative Research Design | Descriptive | 9 | 36 |
| | Secondary Data | 1 | 4 |
| | Relational | 8 | 32 |
| | Internet Experiments | 3 | 12 |
| | Laboratory Tests | 2 | 8 |
| | Field Tests | 2 | 8 |
| Total | 25 | 100 | |
| Mixed Research Design | Explanatory Sequential | 2 | 25 |
| | Embedded | 1 | 12.5 |
| | Convergent Parallel | 2 | 25 |
| | Unspecified | 3 | 37.5 |
| | Total | 8 | 100 |

In terms of sample selection techniques, it is understood that while purposeful sampling method was used in 61.54% (n=40) of the studies, an attempt was made to reach the entire population in 15.38% (n=10). While stratified and random sampling methods were preferred in 3.08% (n=2) and 1.54% (n=1) of the studies, respectively, the rate of studies without a sample selection technique was found as 18.46% (n=12).

While the research model adopted was stated in 66.15% (n=43) of the theses analysed within the scope of the study, it is seen that the proportion of studies in which the research model was not specified was 33.85% (n=22). Among the research models adopted, quantitative research has a share of 38.46% (n = 25) while qualitative research has a share of 15.38% (n=10) and mixed research models has a share of 12.31% (n = 8).

Among the adopted qualitative research models, the case study design has a rate of 80% (n = 8), while other preferred qualitative research designs are phenomenology (n = 1) and action research (n = 1) with a share of 10%.

While 36% (n=9) of the quantitative studies were designed in the descriptive survey model, relational survey models have a preference rate of 32% (n=8). While internet experiments constituted 12% (n=3) of quantitative research, laboratory (n=2) and field tests (n=2) were also preferred with

2% each. Studies that use the secondary data approach in their analysis have a rate of 1% (n = 4) among quantitative studies.

In studies designed in the mixed research model, which constituted 12.31% (n = 8) of the theses within the scope of the study, exploratory sequential (n = 2) and convergent parallel (n = 2) methods were the most preferred designs with a rate of 25% each, while 12.5% (n=1) of the mixed method studies were conducted using the embedded method. In 37.5% (n=3) of the mixed model studies within the scope of the study, the adopted research model was not mentioned.

Findings Related to the Data Collection Tools of Studies

The data obtained as regards the data collection tool of the dissertations have been provided in Table 7 below.

Table 7

Findings Related to the Data Collection Tools of Dissertations

| Method | n | % |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Survey | 10 | 41.67 |
| Archive Research | 1 | 4.17 |
| Interview | 1 | 4.17 |
| Document | 6 | 25 |
| Focus Group | 2 | 8.33 |
| Scale | 7 | 29.17 |
| Audio-Visual | 2 | 8.33 |
| Tests | 5 | 20.83 |
| Semi Structured Interview | 7 | 29.17 |
| Structured Interview | 1 | 4.17 |
| Validity and reliability specified? | 17 | 70.83 |
| No | 7 | 29.17 |
| Total | 24 | 100 |

When we look at the data in Table 7, which shows the findings of the data collection tools used in the doctoral dissertations examined within the scope of the study, it could be observed that the survey method (n=10) was mostly used as a data collection tool with a rate of 41.67%, followed by scale (n=7) and semi-structured interviews (n=7) with a rate of 29.17% for each.

While the document review method was used in 25% of the studies (n = 6), data collection by testing was used in 20.83% (n = 5) of the studies. Focus group interviews and examination of audio (n=2) and visual materials (n=2) were preferred as a method in 8.33% of the studies. As data collection tools, archive research (n=1), direct interview (n=1) and structured interview (n=1) techniques are seen to be preferred in a small number with a rate of 4.17% for each.

It was observed that the validity and reliability levels of the data collected were stated in 70.83% (n=17) of the studies within the scope of the study, but in 7 studies corresponding to 29.17%, the validity and reliability of the data were not mentioned.

The data collection tools of master's theses examined within the study has been presented in Table 8 below.

Table 8

Findings Related to the Data Collection Tools of Master's Theses

| Method | n | % |
|-------------------------------------|----------|----------|
| Survey | 21 | 32.31 |
| Archive Research | 2 | 3.08 |
| Interview | 1 | 1.54 |
| Document | 6 | 9.23 |
| Focus Group | 1 | 1.54 |
| Scale | 16 | 24.61 |
| Audio-Visual | 3 | 4.62 |
| Tests | 4 | 6.15 |
| Semi Structured Interview | 10 | 15.38 |
| Non-structured Interview | 1 | 1.54 |
| Structured Interview | 3 | 4.62 |
| Unspecified | 8 | 12.31 |
| Validity and reliability specified? | | |
| Yes | 32 | 49.23 |
| No | 33 | 50.77 |
| Total | 65 | 100 |

According to Table 8, where the findings regarding the data collection tools of the master's theses within the scope of the study are given, while researchers preferred to use surveys as a data collection tool in 32.31% (n=21) of the master's theses conducted in the field of distance education

between 2013 and 2019, this was followed by a rate of 24.61% (n=16) of scale use. The scales are followed by semi-structured interviews with a rate of 15.38% (n = 10).

Document analysis method was used by 9.23% (n=6) of the studies as a data collection tool, while tests, respectively, with a preference rate of 6.15% (n=4) and 4.62% (n=3). Audio and visual materials and structured interviews were used at a rate of 4.62% (n=3). While archive research method was preferred as a data collection tool in 3.08% (n=2) of the studies, interview (n=1), focus group interview (n=1) and non-structured interviews were the last methods preferred with a ratio of 1.54% (n=1) for each. In addition to all these, it was not explained which type of data collection tool was used in 12.31% (n = 8) of the studies.

When we look at the rates of specifying the validity and reliability of the data collected within the scope of the studies, it is noticeable that no validity and reliability studies are mentioned in 50.77 of the theses (n = 33).

Discussion and Conclusion

Within the scope of the study, 24 dissertations and 65 master's theses in the field of distance education between 2013 and 2018 were examined, and it was seen that the theses generally included the basic elements of scientific research, with a few exceptions.

When looking at the thematic distribution of theses, it has been concluded that there were two popular topics. It could be stated that this situation is directly proportional to technology, which is advancing day by day, and digital transformation studies that have begun to be implemented almost everywhere in the world, including the field of educational sciences. It has been observed that another popular topic is related to distance education students. Since the target audience of distance education applications is directly students, this result shows that the studies are carried out for the right purpose.

Within the scope of the study, the basic scientific elements that should be included in the studies have also been investigated using the 'Academic Publication Evaluation Form'. It has been observed that the studies, whether dissertations or master's theses, generally contain the basic elements of scientific studies. The situations revealed as a result of the analysis are given on the following pages.

According to the research results, 24 (26.97%) of the 89 theses made at 15 universities in the field of distance education from 2013 to April 2019 are dissertations, and the remaining 65 (73.03%) are master's theses. While the doctoral studies examined within the scope of the study were made in 15 universities, the master's theses were made in 35 universities. While the most productive years in

terms of dissertations were found as 2013 and 2014 with 7 theses each, the most productive year in terms of master's theses was 2018 with 18 theses. It could be stated that the reason for this increase in master's theses during the specified period is the increasing awareness about the concept and programs of distance education as a necessity of the age. When we look at the universities where theses on the field of distance education were published, Anadolu University and Ankara University were the universities with the most theses published in the field, with 3 theses each for dissertations, and Gazi University with 8 theses for master's theses.

It was determined that the most discussed topic in the thematic distribution of dissertations written in the field of distance education between 2013 and 2018 was web-based distance education applications. Digital transformation, which is the holistic transformation carried out by organisations in human, business processes and technology elements in order to provide more effective and efficient service and ensure beneficiary satisfaction, in line with the opportunities offered by rapidly developing information and communication technologies and changing social needs, which countries have started to do in macro and micro sense, has gained momentum. Today, the fact that doctoral studies about distance education applications, which essentially means digital transformation in education in itself, have mostly focused on this thematic area in recent years, means that the studies follow the innovations and developments brought by the age and use web-based versions, which are the latest evolved form of distance education today.

It has been determined that the second most frequently discussed topic after web-based distance education applications is the factors affecting student success in distance education. The reason why identifying the factors affecting the success of students or learners who constitute the direct target audience of distance education, or in other words, the customer portfolio, may be to find out how effective distance education applications, which are very different in structure from traditional education applications, are in achieving success.

The subject that was most examined and thematically emphasised in the master's theses within the scope of the study was the development of new applications and software in distance education. The fact that master's theses mostly deal with this subject, which is a choice that overlaps with digital transformation activities, proves that distance education applications can be delivered to students in many alternative ways, different from traditional education methods. The second most frequently discussed topic in master's theses is to reveal students' opinions about distance education, and in

choosing this theme, it may be aimed to reveal the thoughts of students or learners in the target audience about distance education, which is a different educational practice in itself.

According to the Academic Publication Evaluation Form used as the analysis tool of the study, the main elements expected to be expressed from scientific research in the method sections are the research method, study population, sample and model, and the explanation of the sub-headings of these headings.

It was observed that the method sections of the dissertations examined within the scope of the study contained the basic elements that should be in the method section of a scientific research, with a general average of 95.83%. As a result of the analysis, it was concluded that the most preferred sample selection technique in doctoral studies is purposeful sampling. According to Patton (1990, p. 169), the logic and power of purposeful sampling comes from the fact that it allows the selection of the sample group that is richest in terms of information in research. Information-rich sample groups also allow obtaining in-depth information about the issues underlying the research purpose. This wealth of information provided by purposeful sampling has enabled the theses within the scope of the study to benefit most from this technique.

According to the analysis made in terms of research models, it was concluded that qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods were preferred with very close percentages. However, when looking at the types of research models, it was observed that some models outweighed others. Case studies in qualitative research models, field experiments in quantitative research models, and embedded and exploratory sequential designs in mixed models have come to the fore as the most preferred research models.

When the method sections of master's theses were examined, it was concluded that they had the characteristics that should be in a scientific research, with a general average of 76.53%. However, the striking result here is that the research model was not mentioned at all in 33.85% of the master's theses within the scope of the study. It is an interesting result that the research model is not mentioned in scientific studies that aim to reveal existing or existing events or situations from a scientific perspective.

Among the studies with specified models, quantitative research models predominate in master's theses, in contrast to the almost equal distribution in dissertations. This was followed by qualitative models and then mixed models. Among the adopted qualitative models, the case study stands out as

the most preferred model while in quantitative research, the descriptive model, followed closely by the relational model, and were found as the most used research designs. In mixed research designs, exploratory sequential and convergent parallel designs were the designs frequently used by researchers.

As the data collection tool, researchers preferred the survey method in both dissertations and master's theses. Surveys, which aim to obtain opinions on various research topics from participants of a pre-defined group, have become effortless today as they are mostly conducted via the internet or e-mails, and thus have become the most preferred data collection tool by researchers. Other data collection tools preferred by researchers are scales, document review and semi-structured interviews, respectively.

While the validity and reliability of the data collected within the scope of dissertations are generally stated in the studies, these levels were not mentioned in more than half of the master's theses.

According to the research results, 24 (26.97%) of the 89 theses made at 15 universities in the field of distance education between 2013 and 2018 are dissertations, and the remaining 65 (73.03%) are master's theses. Davies, Howell and Petrie (2010; pp. 42-56) and Gökmen et al. (2017, p. 1-25) concluded in their research that master's theses are more numerous in the field of distance education. The reasons for this situation can be described as the low number of doctoral programs opened, the admission requirements for the program being more stringent than those for master's programs, and the shorter duration of master's programs, according to Gökmen et al. (2017, pp. 1-25). It could be stated that this result obtained within the scope of the study overlaps with the results in the literature. When we look at the distribution of theses by years, it is seen that dissertations in the field of distance education have entered a downward trend since 2014, the same is true for master's theses; however, master's theses then entered an increasing trend and reached their largest volume in 2018. As the reason for this decrease since 2014 was determined by Gökmen et al. (2017, p. 1-25), new focal points have emerged in the field of distance education and educational technologies, and as the possibilities of providing distance education with mobile devices have been discussed, studies have focused on developing new programs or software.

When we look at the distribution of the universities where the studies were carried out, it is seen that Anadolu University and Ankara University take the lead in dissertations. Anadolu University is the institution that initiated distance education activities in Türkiye with its Open Education Faculty,

which has been operating since 1982, and therefore it is understandable that its name comes first in doctoral studies. Ankara University, on the other hand, provides distance education services in many areas needed by students, from associate degree programs to bachelor's degree completion, from non-thesis master's programs to certificate services, through the Distance Education Centre (Ankara University, 2019). When we look at the situation in master's theses, it is seen that Gazi University is clearly leading. The reason for this situation is that the theses published in the field of distance education at this university are published within both the education institute and the informatics institute, and as stated by Gökmen et al. (2017, p. 1-25), there are many program alternatives for doctoral and master's studies.

In their study where they examined 308 doctoral studies and master's theses published in the United States in the field of distance education between 1998 and 2007, Davies et al. (2010; p.42-56) concluded that the number of theses investigating the use of new technology is decreasing; however, although the field of distance education is a relatively new field in Türkiye compared to other countries, the number of studies investigating the use of new technologies in education is quite high.

When looking at the distribution of theses in terms of research methods, it was seen that quantitative research was preferred, qualitative research came second, and mixed research was preferred last. The same conclusion was reached in other studies in the literature (Berge & Mrozowski 2001, p. 9; Davies et al. 2010, p. 50; Gökmen et al. 2017, p. 18), which are similar to this study in terms of method and content, emphasising the validity of the research results. The reasons why theses on distance education are designed in the quantitative research model are that the quantitative research methodology can be applied in a shorter time compared to qualitative research, activities such as observation or document review that need to be done in qualitative research are time-consuming, and data collection tools such as the scale or survey used in quantitative research methods are able to provide greater convenience to the researcher in terms of application and being able to be filled out via e-mail or websites. As Gökmen et al. (2017, p. 18) indicated, since the most preferred research method in scientific research in our country is quantitative research, it was an expected result that the mostly preferred research method in the theses within the scope of the study was the quantitative method.

The result that the most preferred design in the context of research methods is scanning in quantitative research and case study in qualitative research is in line with the results of the literature (Berge & Mrozowski 2001, p. 9; Davies et al. 2010, p. 50-51; Gökmen). et al. 2017, p. 19).

Quantitative survey designs, which enable the analysis of the current situation at any time and condition in line with a designed research method, are easier to carry out in the context of application compared to experimental designs, and therefore their preference rates are high. Among the possible reasons why the case study is the most preferred design in qualitative research is that it consists of only interpreting and analysing an existing situation. In the work titled “Qualitative research through case studies” written by Travers (Act. Yin, 2008, p.59), case study is defined as the method used to deeply examine and comprehensively analyse new, unknown or previously unexamined phenomena or situations. It can be said that the theses within the scope of the study preferred the case study design as a result of their efforts to examine a feature of distance education that has not been studied before. In addition to all these, the rate of studies that do not mention the research designs adopted within the scope of the studies is close to half. On the other hand, when mixed design studies were examined, it was seen that embedded, exploratory sequential and explanatory sequential research designs are used. However, these mixed research designs were generally not explained by the author of the research, and as a result of the analysis, it was found out what kind of design it actually was. Most researchers using mixed research designs used both quantitative and qualitative data in their studies but presented both data as results without specifying the adopted design. Based on this result, more emphasis should be given to the scientific research methods course in which research designs are explained within the curriculum the institutes have and as Gökmen et al. (2017, p. 19) indicated, it could be said that mixed designs should also be explained separately.

It was observed that the studies examined within the scope of the study used purposeful sampling as the sample selection technique, regardless of qualitative or quantitative model, with a big difference compared to other techniques. The main purpose of this selection is in the nature of the purposeful sample selection technique. Büyüköztürk et al. (2016, p. 100) stated that purposeful sampling is used to examine in detail the situations that constitute a rich source of information. Based on this definition, the generally preferred sample group within the scope of the studies was distance education students or instructors teaching distance education courses, as they were seen as a quite sufficient source of information. Similarly, the fact that purposeful sampling is the generally preferred technique in studies in the field of distance education (Gökmen et al. 2017, p. 19) supports the result of the study.

The fact that the theses and dissertations analysed within the study mostly used surveys and then scales as the data collection tools coincides with the results of other studies (Davies et al. 2010, p. 50, Bozkurt et al. 2015, p. 347; Gökmen et al. 2017, p. 19). The rates of stating the validity and

reliability of the data collected within the scope of the studies were measured as 70.83% for doctoral theses and 49.23% for master's theses. In the study of Şimşek et al. (2009, p. 948) in which 259 master's theses published in the field of educational technology in Türkiye between 2000 and 2007 were examined, although it was concluded that the theses had significant deficiencies, especially in terms of internal and external validity, the validity and reliability degrees were mentioned in more than half of the dissertations and in approximately half of the master's theses, and the fact that Gökmen et al. (2017, p.21) reached similar results is an indication that these deficiencies in the studies have begun to be eliminated in recent years.

Recommendations

According to the results of this research, in which 89 dissertations and master's theses, which were conducted in the field of distance education in Türkiye between 2013 and 2018, were open to access and had the word distance education in their titles, were examined in terms of their demographic and methodological characteristics and the basic features that should be present in a scientific research, it was concluded that the studies were mostly conducted for the analysis of the current situation in the quantitative scanning model, and students were largely selected with the purposeful sampling method who were subject to distance education. While 24 doctoral dissertations have been written in the field of distance education since 2013 until the end of 2018, this number increases to 65 in master's theses. Nowadays, when digital transformation studies are gaining momentum and all barriers in education are being eliminated, it may be recommended to increase the number of doctoral theses that can be considered more scientifically qualified in the field of distance education and to encourage doctoral students to work in this field. The fact that the studies are mostly quantitative and that surveys and scales are used as data collection tools and that these surveys are generally sent to the participants via e-mail or websites poses the risk of not fully reflecting the opinions of the participants. Since filling out survey e-mails is an undesirable activity for anyone to do, it may be necessary to focus on qualitative studies. The theses included in the scope of the study were master's theses and dissertations published in the Thesis Centre of the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), open to access and containing the phrase 'distance education' in their title. Future studies may include other studies related to the field of distance education, even if the term distance education is not included in the title. It is also recommended to carry out such kind of research on the post Covid era to fully understand how the research tendencies have evaluated and MA and PhD students may also carry out their studies on topics that has not fully investigated yet.

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