

## Teaching experiences of faculty members in Turkey during the COVID-19 pandemic: A Photovoice study

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### ABSTRACT

*The global COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected many areas of life including higher education. Educational practices were disrupted, and higher education institutions had to move from in-person to remote teaching quickly to continue education. This transition brought along challenges not only for students but also for faculty. Currently there is limited research on faculty teaching experiences during the pandemic. Using the photovoice method, we explored the experiences of higher education faculty in two Turkish universities when teaching remotely during the pandemic. We identified three areas that were important and influenced faculty member practices: Faculty well-being, lack of preparation, and wrestling with remote education. Our findings grounded in faculty experiences provide insights and areas for higher education institutions to improve remote education practices and provide support to foster student learning, particularly if institutions decide to continue with online education permanently or offer hybrid education options.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, faculty experiences, higher education, photovoice, remote teaching

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### INTRODUCTION

The global COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected many areas of life including higher education (HE). Lockdowns around the world caused disruptions in educational practices and forced institutions to find solutions to continue education by transitioning to alternative modalities of teaching and learning. The transition from in-person to remote teaching had to happen

rapidly. However, this transition brought along challenges not only for students but also for faculty. Faculty members had to re-design and/or adapt their courses to remote teaching quickly during an emergency with little to no support from their institutions which created stress and pressure (Hickling et al., 2021).

A survey conducted by UNESCO on higher education institutions in 57 countries focused on the impact of the pandemic on issues including remote teaching practices, platforms, assessments, and student support showed that the pressure on academic staff increased in 40 countries, that there was a need for training faculty in online and distance learning in 52 countries, and there was a need for guidelines, tools, and learning materials for online teaching in 47 countries. These findings highlight the importance of understanding the complex needs of staff, administrators, students, and faculty during this shift to emergency remote teaching so that effective instruction and support can be provided (Johnson et al., 2020). However, at the time of writing this article most studies published since the beginning of the pandemic focused on the experiences (Gonzalez et al., 2022; Karadag & Yucel, 2020; Sen et al. 2020) and well-being of students during the transition to remote teaching (Aker & Midik, 2020; Katz et al., 2021; Sever & Özdemir, 2020; Yilmazli Trout et al., 2020; Wilczewski et al., 2021) while studies focusing on faculty experiences were limited (Krugielka et al., 2021; McDaniel et al., 2021; Meaghar, 2020).

With the implementation of remote teaching using digital platforms and tools during the pandemic, institutions started to consider options such as offering hybrid courses or continuing education online after the pandemic. However, in making such decisions, it would be beneficial for higher education administrators to consider the experiences of faculty members in teaching online during the pandemic so that necessary adjustments can be made, and support can be provided for successful teaching processes. By taking this premise as our starting point, with this study we aim to contribute to the international higher education field by providing insights on how teaching experiences of faculty members were impacted, what practices can be kept, and what practices can be left behind as the process of going back to ‘normal’ after the pandemic starts.

Using the photovoice method, the purpose of this study is to explore and better understand the experiences of higher education faculty in two public universities in Turkey as they navigated remote teaching practices during the pandemic. Photovoice is a visual participatory research method providing space for participants to share their experiences or address issues that affect them through the use of photos and narratives with the purpose of raising awareness or to effect change in their communities (Wang & Burris, 1997).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Emergency Remote Teaching during COVID-19**

With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic globally, countries went into a lockdown state which necessitated a transition from in-person to remote education to minimize disruptions. The rapid nature of the transition, adjusting content and course designs to an online mode of delivery without preparation and in a short time led to the introduction of the term ‘emergency remote teaching’ (Hodges et al., 2020). Although the delivery modes are the same, it is important to note the difference between online and emergency remote teaching. Online teaching is more than the mode of delivery of instruction as its planning and implementation are grounded in theory and practice specific to the field (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Hickling et al., 2021). Courses are intentionally designed to be delivered completely online with the use of pedagogical strategies in instruction, student engagement, and assessment in a virtual learning environment (Johnson et al., 2020). Emergency remote teaching, on the other hand, refers to a temporary shift of instructional delivery to alternative modes in response to a crisis in which learners are physically separated from their learning environments, peers, and instructors (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020). As the COVID-19 pandemic required a quick shift from in-person to online instruction temporarily,

educational practices within this context should be considered as emergency remote teaching (ERT), and not online teaching.

### **Faculty Experiences**

The move to remote teaching in the face of an emergency affected faculty members significantly. Navigating the new spaces while trying to adjust to the restrictions imposed due to the pandemic, converting course materials into digital and engaging online materials in a short time, and seeking alternative ways to implement their teaching practices with almost no support added more stress and created more work for them, particularly those with no previous experience in online teaching (Crawford et al., 2020; Doyumagac et al., 2021; Hodges et al., 2020; McDaniel et al., 2020; Walsh et al. 2021). Additional challenges included students not having access to technology, faculty members experiencing difficulties in adapting to the new mode of delivery and managing online classes while trying to ensure active participation and engagement of students in class and achieve learning outcomes (Karadag et al., 2021).

One of the early studies on faculty member experiences during the transition by Meagher (2020) discussed challenges around getting familiar with online platforms used for teaching and teaching materials, making classes interactive through using different methods, and adjusting exams and assignment loads. The author also concluded that the main factor underlying these challenges was not having background and experience in teaching online. In another study, Johnson et al. (2020) surveyed 897 higher education faculty and administrators representing 672 institutions from 47 states in the U.S. during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this comprehensive study, the researchers explored faculty experience with online learning, the type of new teaching methods and tools they used, if they had adjusted their curriculum, and what kind of support they needed. The results showed that 49% of the faculty did not have online teaching experience and that only 8% of the institutions received external support during the transition to distance education. Fifty-six percent of faculty used new teaching methods in the online format and 93% made changes in their teaching practices. Additionally, 53% of faculty needed support for working from home while 58% needed support on teaching online.

Similarly, another study by Walsh et al. (2021) conducted with 113 faculty in the USA showed that 66.67% of faculty had no experience with online teaching while 41% of faculty hadn't received formal training in online teaching. According to a report published by the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities in 2020 that surveyed higher education institutions in 60 countries, the overall perception was that there was a lack of innovative instructional approaches stimulating learner autonomy, motivation, and engagement. This was largely due to instructors' lack of familiarity or experience with distance and online learning prior to the pandemic (European Commission, 2020).

Another report published in Norway by Langford and Damşa (2020) surveying 172 academicians revealed that only 30% had previous experience with online teaching which constituted a part of the challenges they experienced in transitioning to remote teaching. Similarly, Krugielka et al. (2021) explored the experiences of academicians in Poland during the pandemic in terms of productivity while working remotely, quality of professional life, and mental well-being. The authors revealed that academicians' perceptions of self-productivity were low, and they had difficulty in adjusting to remote work, this impacted their mental well-being negatively. This evidence highlights the need to gauging the readiness of staff and students, and to provide support accordingly when implementing new changes (Pokhrel et al., 2021).

A study conducted by Md Noh (2021) explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on academicians who worked remotely from a socio-psychological perspective. They found that the academicians had a moderate level of perceived stress. They also identified the factors that contributed to the stress levels of academicians: social isolation, distraction, poor time management, lack of focus, and challenges with learning new technology. Sen et al. (2020)

explored the perspectives of students and academicians in a Turkish university on distance education during the pandemic. Among the challenges in distance education, they identified as part of academicians' experiences were lack of socialization between students and faculty members, technical challenges due to connection issues, and lack of student interaction in class. Additionally, academicians shared that providing equipment and infrastructure needed for remote teaching as well as intentional planning would prevent compromise in the quality of education.

Although the literature examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education faculty is increasing, a majority of the available literature use quantitative approaches identifying areas that impacted teaching and learning experiences during the pandemic. However, there are limited studies using qualitative and participatory approaches exploring faculty members' experiences to better understand the nature of those experiences and to provide insights which could inform ways to approach the improvement efforts in teaching practices by higher education institutions.

### **Parent Faculty Member Experiences**

During the transition to ERT and trying to maintain a work-life balance, academic parents were pressured more with the expanded childcare and/or homeschooling. Although the parenting responsibility of fathers increased during the pandemic, the parenting responsibilities of women compared to men were greater which impacted their productivity and performance as they had less time for their academic, research, and teaching responsibilities (Deryugina et al., 2021; Lantsoght et al., 2021). The challenges experienced by women in academia are well-documented (Fetterolf & Rudman, 2014; Ward & Wolf Wendel, 2004). Skinner et al. (2021) surveyed 3,210 faculty members in the U.S. revealing that both women and caregivers struggled more with managing their time between family, household, and academic responsibilities which affected their well-being negatively. Similarly, Parlak et al (2020) conducted a qualitative study with 21 women in academia working from home and concluded that the gender inequalities were deepened with the pandemic and the productivity of women in academia were impacted negatively.

### **Context**

Turkey has a centralized education system and educational processes in higher education are regulated and managed by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE), including setting university budgets, institutional enrollment and admission caps, and core curriculum guidelines. The centralized system allowed for decision-making and implementation processes to be performed rapidly during the pandemic to prevent interruption in education. However, this top-down approach did not allow instructors to make adjustments in the curricula which created challenges. Following the Scientific Committee's guidelines, first CoHE suspended HE for a few weeks to plan how to proceed with educational practices during the pandemic, and then announced the transition to remote education (Bozkurt et al., 2020). Although remote education has been part of the Turkish HE system for a while, it is not widely used in every university. Of the 209 universities, 123 universities had a Distance Education Center and these universities transitioned to remote education by using their own infrastructures (Dikmen et al., 2020) during the pandemic. For universities without infrastructure for remote education, CoHE decided to provide support through other universities that have infrastructure and/or capacity to provide remote education. However, there were challenges in transitioning to emergency remote teaching.

Approaches taken by universities around the world varied depending on their governance. A report focusing on the impact of the pandemic on higher education throughout the world presented examples from different countries on how universities responded to the pandemic (Salmi, 2020). For example, a university in Argentina postponed classes and rearranged the academic calendar rather than shifting to distant education. The Malaysian Ministry of Education suspended online education and on-campus activities. In Bangladesh, transitioning to online education was

delayed in public universities while private universities shifted to online education. In Brazil, the lack of guidance from the government left university presidents with the responsibility of making the decision individually on how to adjust their educational practices during the pandemic.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of this participatory action research study is to explore the experiences of higher education faculty in Turkey during the COVID-19 pandemic using the photovoice method. In this section, we present an overview of the participants in this study, the research design and how data was collected and analyzed.

### Participants

Prior to the start of the research process, IRB approval from the second author's institution was obtained. The participants of the study consisted of 34 faculty members who teach undergraduate and graduate level courses in various departments of two public universities in the eastern region of Turkey. In recruiting participants, we used convenience sampling to invite faculty to participate in the study via email explaining the purpose and the process of the study. Once the initial recruitment was completed with a total of 10 faculty members from both universities, we recruited more participants using a snowball sampling and recruited 24 more participants from both universities.

### Research Design and Method

The study is designed as a participatory process using a constructivist approach. By taking a relative position, constructivism assumes multiple and equally valid realities that are socially constructed through the interactions between people and contexts in the research process (Guba et al., 1994). The participatory nature of a study allows participants to engage in generating and sense-making of the data collectively (Abma et al., 2018).

The method employed in this study is photovoice, a participatory action research method, that aims to foster critical consciousness among participants, create an opportunity for participants to document their lived experiences through photography in relation to issues that affect them, and influence change or create social action by reaching decision makers (Wang & Burris, 1994). This method is used widely in the fields of public health (Switzer et al., 2021); social work (Christensen et al., 2020; Christensen et al., 2021), and education (Yilmazli Trout et al., 2019, 2021; Wass et al., 2020).

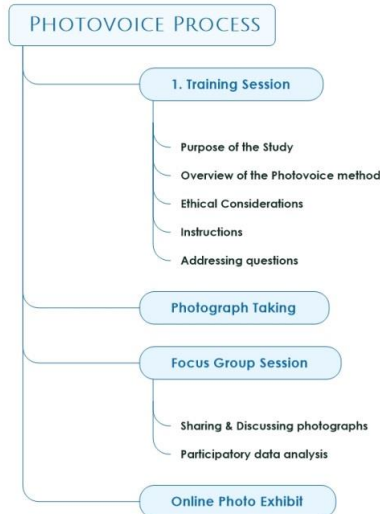
The photovoice process includes four steps which can be modified based on the context and setting. The first step following participant recruitment involves hosting an information session in which the researchers explain the method, ethical concerns, and provide instructions on the process. During the next step, the researchers provide guiding prompts for participants to respond by taking photographs. For the photography phase, participants use their own cameras or if they don't have access to cameras, the researcher(s) provide cameras to participants. Following the photography, participants come together for a focus group session facilitated by the researcher(s) to share their photographs, discuss what the photographs represent, and unpack the meanings behind those photographs.

Due to the pandemic, this study was conducted virtually which necessitated the use of digital tools in data generation and analysis phases to facilitate the process (Kent et al., 2021). An overview of our process is presented in Figure 1. The process started with a one-hour long virtual information/training session on the photovoice method where we described the theoretical background of the method, the process, and ethical considerations in taking the photographs. The sessions were held using the video conference option on the learning management system used at the second author's institution. At the end of the session, we asked participants to document their teaching experiences in ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic through photography. After the

session, a WhatsApp group was created for each university group to have one channel of communication throughout the process. We preferred communicating through group text as the consensus of the group was that it would be more effective and efficient.

**Figure 1**

*An Overview of the Photovoice Process*



### Data Generation

Considering their schedules, the participants collectively decided that a ten-day timeframe would work best to complete the data generation phase which involved taking photographs, providing a caption and a narrative for each photograph, and uploading them to a shared folder on cloud data-base that we created for them. After the data generation phase was completed, we prepared for the focus group sessions by organizing the photographs, captions, and narratives using Padlet, which is a cloud-based software used mostly for educational purposes that allows for real-time collaboration between multiple users. For each university, one Padlet board was created to facilitate the focus group sessions. The Padlet format allowed us to display the participant photographs online all at once. We created one Padlet post for each photograph as the structure of a Padlet post provides space for title (caption), text (narrative), and a visual (photograph). In Figure 2 we present a snapshot of our Padlet board prepared for and used in one of the focus sessions as an example. Displaying photographs using Padlet prevented interruptions in the flow of discussion by allowing one facilitator to share their screen and scroll through the Padlet as participants talked about their photos. Another advantage of Padlet is the comment function on posts which allowed participants to comment on each other's photographs during discussions.

**Figure 2**

## Snapshot of a Padlet Created for One University Group



The focus groups started with discussing how the participants experienced the photovoice process thus far. All participants shared that they enjoyed the process, and that they found the method interesting. Some participants showed interest in implementing the photovoice method in their studies or integrating it into their curriculum as a pedagogical tool. At the end of the focus group, the final round of conversations involved how to implement this approach in specific fields and potential challenges that surfaces and ways to overcome those challenges. After discussing their experiences in engaging the process, we showed the Padlet board created for them with their visuals and narratives.

We gave participants some time to review the photographs and make notes of their insights regarding what they saw and read on Padlet. Then, we asked each participant to present their photographs. In presenting, participants explained the reasons behind taking their photos and described their experiences and provided examples. Participants took turns sharing their insights and/or reflections. Opening space for reflections enriched the discussions and allowed participants to exchange ideas with each other.

## Data Analysis

The data analysis started in the focus group session with participants. After each participant presented their photograph, we facilitated a discussion on participants' reflections, thoughts, and opinions of what they saw and heard. Then, we asked them to analyze the photographs using the **SHOWED** method (Wang & Burris, 1997) in which each letter refers to the following questions: (1) What do you **See** here?; (2) What is really **Happening** here?; (3) How does this relate to **Our** lives?; (4) **Why** does this problem exist?; and (5) How could this image **Educate** others? Since the photovoice process is mostly dialogic, we recorded all our sessions so that we could go back to the recordings and review when needed during the analysis phase.

As the conversations around the photographs and the meanings they represent unfolded, we asked participants to think about the key ideas or themes emerging in the conversations. They identified 3 key themes: (1) feeling isolated, (2) lack of preparation, and (3) challenges in remote education. Following the group level initial analysis, we –

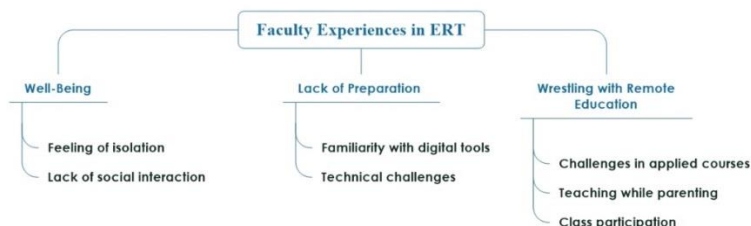
the authors – continued thematic analysis of participant narratives and focus group transcript with a deductive approach by using the themes we identified in the session (Braun et al., 2006). Although we used a deductive approach, we remained open to emerging categories and themes that were not identified initially. This allowed us to refine and create new categories where necessary. We first reviewed the data to become familiar and completed initial coding individually. Then, we compared our codes to refine and reach consensus before identifying the categories and themes. This approach allowed us to identify sub-categories for the themes and establish credibility in the analysis. The analyses yielded three themes: (1) faculty well-being, (2) lack of preparation, and (3) wrestling with remote education. The photovoice process including the analyses were conducted in Turkish. Once the analyses were completed, the first author translated the data from Turkish to English as she is fluent in both languages and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in an Education program in the U.S.

## RESULTS

In this section, we present the findings from our participatory data analysis process in the focus group session that are supported by the findings of further analysis (Figure 3). In presenting the findings, we used pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

**Figure 3**

*Overview of themes and sub-themes*



### Faculty Well-Being

During the focus group sessions, faculty members discussed how they were affected by the changes implemented both in general and in their teaching practices. Some participants provided a more personal and emotional perspective while others were less personal and more objective.

#### *Feeling of Isolation*

Empty buildings, classrooms, and hallways were photographed by many faculty members to reflect the feeling of isolation and loneliness they felt. İhsan, for example, provided a photo showing the empty hallways of a building to express his mood at the beginning of the pandemic: “Joyful classes and nervous exam days which we are used to in our school were replaced with quietness. Our hallways are empty, and our building is surrounded by quietness. This impacted my mood negatively in the beginning of the pandemic.” Serhat is



another faculty member who shared similar feelings as Ihsan. His narrative is also personal and emotive:

The remote educational practices during the pandemic caused me to feel isolated from my environment, distant from social life, and trapped at home. Additionally, I found myself going from one room to another for work, perceiving other people as a threat for my health, and living the same day every day at home like a potted plant.

**Figure 4**

*Photo by Serhat Titled “Mask, Distance, Tiredness”*



In his photograph (Figure 4), Serhat captures the feeling of being trapped by positioning himself on the screen and reflects the new reality experienced by everyone during the pandemic. Although it seems like there is still connection between instructors, students, colleagues and more, they are divided. Virtual connection does not replace the quality of in-person connections and leads people to feel isolated and lonely which impacts their well-being. Tarik’s photograph (Figure 5) of an empty classroom is a visualization of ‘feeling lonely or distanced.’ He reveals similar feelings as other participants, yet in a more objective and factual way he gave an example from teaching practices, drawing attention to how the changes lead to decreased motivation among faculty members.

**Figure 5**

*Photo by Tarik Titled “Teaching to An Empty Class”*



Although the implementation of remote teaching was somewhat a solution for students, it was not the same for faculty members. When teaching, the instructor gauges whether students comprehend the content delivered or not through the look in students’ eyes. An instructor’s motivation increases with the looks students have when they comprehend the content. However, this was not the

case in remote education. Instructors felt lonely as they taught. They were lonely and unhappy like they were teaching to an empty class (Tarik).

The narratives and photographs of faculty members point out the significant impact that remote teaching practices had on them. The emotions and experiences they shared reveal that the nature of their practices mostly depend on in-person engagements and the lack of this aspect negatively affected their well-being.

### ***Lack of Social Interaction***

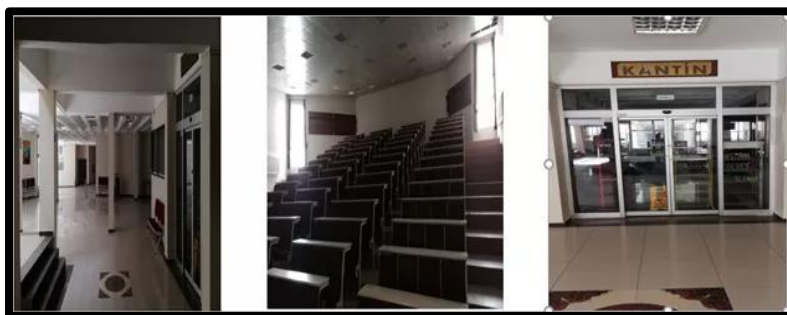
The virtual environment of courses limited and impacted the nature of social interactions as many faculty members discussed. Serhat, in his photographed titled ‘Void’ (Figure 6) depicted these feelings and highlighted the negative impacts:

Empty hallways and classrooms, and instructors who are alone in their offices... Not being able to interact with students in person, particularly in social sciences, is one of the factors that decreased motivation and the quality of the education.

Here, Serhat draws attention to the importance of social interactions in teaching practices not only in classroom settings but also outside the classrooms. His depiction of instructors as ‘alone in their offices’ implies the informal engagements between students and faculty, and among faculty members. The spaces Serhat photographed include a classroom which relates to the class setting while the hallway and cafeteria reflect the busiest areas on campus indicating the places where social interactions outside the classroom take place.

### **Figure 6**

*Photo by Serhat Titled “Void”*



Tarik photographed the building where he teaches (Figure 7) and revealed the negative emotions he experienced:

Although we get together with our students virtually, our school is deserted and colder without them. With the negative psychological effects encountered, we – as faculty members- understood better how in-person education is more satisfactory.

Through this photograph, Tarik communicates how he is distanced from his students and colleagues which contribute to the feeling of loneliness.

## Figure 7

*Photo by Tarık Titled “Deserted and cold”*



### Lack of Preparation

The conversations among faculty members revealed similar concerns around becoming familiar with and navigating the learning management systems for effective and efficient use in course content delivery. These concerns stemmed from the faculty members' different levels of experiences with the learning management systems. This was one of the areas that required preparation which faculty members did not have, but they were able to address this issue by making individual efforts.

The second area which required preparation was infrastructure which was addressed in the photos and narratives of the participants. Some faculty members revealed that they preferred to be on campus to have access to stable connection, and to use the equipment available in classrooms. Onur, who teaches an applied culinary arts course, draws attention to the disruptions that occurred during class in his photograph titled ‘commitment to teaching’ (Figure 8):

As an academician who was making every effort to be helpful to students during the pandemic, having technical challenges such as losing video was a disruption to the class. Not being able to continue class due to technical challenges was saddening.”

The reason for the infrastructure issues was that the internet services were being provided through one carrier because of the location. Thus, the services were limited to the capacity of the carrier. In his photograph, (Figure 8) he provides a peek at behind-the-scenes efforts to show how he tried to overcome the technical challenges by making efforts on his own:

First, I purchased a Wi-Fi replicator as shown in the photograph. Then, I thought it was not enough, and purchased a second Wi-Fi replicator. However, the video image was still not clear, and I ended up purchasing a third Wi-Fi replicator to improve the internet quality. (Onur)

## Figure 8

*Photo by Onur Titled “Commitment to Teaching”*



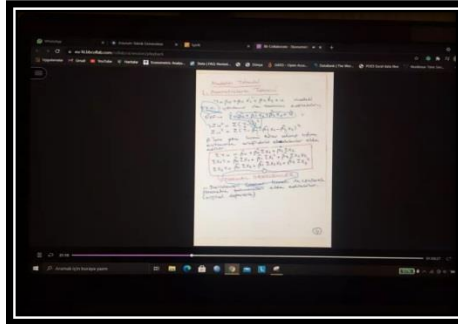
Like Onur's comments and photograph, Haluk provided a photograph (Figure 9) drawing attention to the set-up he had to prepare to teach. He shared that, "while sharing screens was efficient in teaching how to use statistical software, this was not the case for teaching the theoretical aspects of the content." In explaining this photograph, Haluk said that he would prefer to be in the classroom to teach theoretical content in person with a set-up using the equipment of the department. He added in his narrative that "the effectiveness of virtual classes could be improved by providing physical equipment (camera, tablet, etc.) to faculty members."

**Figure 9**

*Photo by Haluk*



Another problem that emerged because of technical problems was related to the increased workload of faculty members. İlker, who is an assistant professor in the econometrics department, provided an example from his experiences when teaching content particularly that involved mathematical equations. He shared that the whiteboard feature of the learning management system did not function properly, and thus, to overcome this obstacle, he prepared handwritten notes to use when teaching (Figure 10). This situation caused extra work and time with no additional compensation. Similarly, Gürol shared that the course material and exam preparation in remote teaching increased his workload significantly.

**Figure 10***Photo by Ilker*

As shared in participant photographs and narratives, technical difficulties and not having access to equipment that would enhance the teaching experience indicate the lack of preparation in moving in-person education to remote. Faculty members had to find a way on their own to deliver courses without interruption. The support system that was in place in the institutions was limited to basic training and technical support regarding the learning management systems they adopted.

### **Wrestling with (Emergency) Remote Education**

Our third finding is related to the experiences that faculty members had in their remote teaching practices which included three sub-categories that are: (1) challenges in applied courses, (2) teaching while parenting, and (3) participation/interaction. Faculty members were of the shared opinion that the negative impact of remote teaching was felt more in the applied courses which affected the quality of education.

### **Challenges in Applied Courses**

Some of the challenges were unique to certain courses such as applied courses. Faculty members shared that they felt the distance in teaching and the negative impact on the effectiveness and quality of the courses they taught. For example, Tolga, a professor in engineering, shared a photograph of his lab coat hanging in the closet in his office (Figure 11). He wrote: "My lab coat that I wear to classes was not worn since the pandemic started. It's collecting dust in the closet".

**Figure 11***Photo by Tolga Titled "Collecting Dust"*

Tolga's photograph draws attention to the disruption experienced in fields such as life sciences, which include applied courses, that require special equipment and materials as well as a lab environment. Thus, during the ERT processes, students lacked the practical experience they needed as part of the curricula.

## Figure 12

*Photo by Erdem Titled “(Un)Applied Courses”*



Erdem, a professor in the culinary arts department, shared a series of photographs (Figure 12) with the caption of “(Un)Applied Courses.” He drew attention to the challenges of remote teaching, particularly in applied courses, which result in students not getting the best education. He wrote in his narrative:

The three photographs at the bottom are images from the food styling techniques course before the pandemic while the three photographs at the top are images showing the attempts to teach the same course in front of the camera. As an academician, I felt sad that applied courses can't be taught online under these conditions and even if taught, it will not be sufficient which will result in students not benefiting from the course. In my opinion, the 3 semesters we spent in front of the screen is a loss in terms of practice. (Erdem)

Tolga and Erdem addressed a major issue faced by many faculty members teaching applied courses in various fields. While in Erdem's case, the issue could be resolved somewhat, it was not the case for Tolga. A similar example was provided by Ebru from the field of sports sciences in which she shared that the practical components of her courses were ceased: “It would not be fair to the students to teach theory only in a course that has an applied component”. Teaching applied courses remotely without any prior preparation or support was a challenge for professors. They found themselves in a difficult position in figuring out how they could deliver the content in the best way possible without compromising content or quality.

The experience of faculty members in remote education during the pandemic was not only negative. Faculty identified some positive aspects related to assessment of student work and reduced workload for faculty members in some cases. For example, Yılmaz, who teaches the course ‘professional English’ shared that his biggest challenge prior to distance education was that students would refuse to do presentations. He explains :

Most of his students would accept to get a zero on the presentation rather than presenting in front of their classmates. However, with the use of virtual platforms for class during

the pandemic, their assignment was to record a video of their presentation and upload it to the learning management system. To my surprise, most of the students were not hesitant to record themselves doing a presentation in English. Thus, I was able to implement a performance-based assessment with online education. (Yılmaz)

Student familiarity with using social media and other digital tools helped reduced their hesitation of presenting in front of their peers in-person. The online nature of the assignments resonated with students allowing them to overcome their hesitation to present in front of their peers. This could also be attributed to the fact that the videos they uploaded to the system would only be seen by the instructor, not their peers. As a result of this new experience, Yılmaz shared that he considers using the online assignment as an option to engage students more when in-person education resumes.

### ***Teaching While Parenting: Role Duality***

Given that most of the participant are parents, the lockdown requirement coupled with transitioning to ERT blurred the lines between their roles as parents and faculty and challenged them to navigate the role duality in a balanced way which was not always possible. Children stayed at home because schools were closed and having a babysitter was not an option due to the lockdown which increased the responsibilities of faculty members as parents. Sevim, an assistant professor shared a photo illustrating the challenge of conflicting roles at home (Figure 13). In her description of the photo, she wrote:

The photo was taken in the living room. An adult and a child are on the carpet. The adult has a cellphone in her hand, teaching. A picture book and toys are pictured. The parent and the child are playing or not playing!! During the pandemic, my teaching practices have been affected significantly. Synchronous teaching, spending time and doing (or not being able to do) activities with a three-year-old constitute a challenge for me while this can be considered as an advantage for my child. (Sevim)

**Figure 13**

*Photo by Sevim Titled “Kindergarten or University Class?”*



Erdem, another faculty member with two children, pictured the challenges he had while teaching (Figure 14). In his photograph, he illustrates how he had to share his desk/office with his children which became a new playground for them. Having to entertain and care for his children interrupted his academic responsibilities at times.

**Figure 14**

*Photo by Erdem Titled “Children’s Playground”*

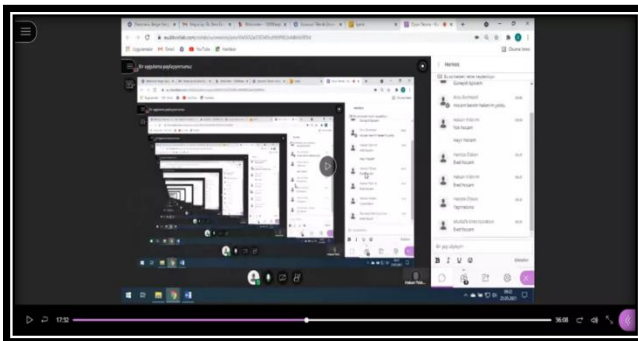


### ***Participation/Interaction***

Faculty members revealed that class attendance and participation were another problem they encountered in remote teaching. Issues such as not having access to (stable) internet connections, having limited data plans on phones, and sharing the devices with other members of the family were among the factors contributing to low class attendance of students during remote education.

**Figure 15**

*Photo by Gürol Titled “Demotivation”*



Gürol addressed how his motivation decreased in classes due to low attendance and the decreased participation of students in class (Figure 15). His photograph shows his screen during a class time with a few students without their videos on. With the videos being off and students not interacting much, Gürol found it challenging to gauge how the class went. All these factors demotivated him.

Additionally, faculty members had shared that they thrive in interacting with students in class and the level of participation is an indicator of a successful class. However, this was not the

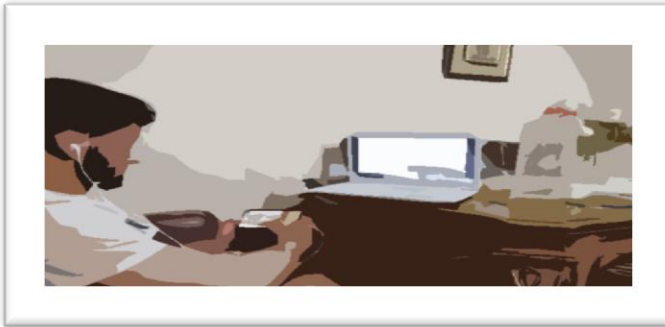


case for remote classes. Sema, in her photograph (Figure 16), illustrated the lack of participation by students. In this photograph, a student joining a class from his home is depicted. Sema described:

He is virtually present; however, he has his headphones on and is playing a game on his phone while ‘attending class.’ We, as professors, assume that the students are listening to the professor carefully, but we know the reality that they are not engaged and yet we continue teaching...

## Figure 16

*Photo by Sema Titled “Pretending”*



This photo (Figure 16) represents a shared challenge by professors from both universities. As professors could not require students to turn their cameras on, they did not have a chance to know whether the students were present and paying attention in class. Lack of student participation and interaction caused a decrease in the motivation of faculty members. Sevim is another participant who discussed how challenging it was to motivate students and keep them engaged in class. She felt disappointed because she couldn't keep students actively engaged in class. As stated by one of the participants, Burak,

“neither instructors nor students were prepared for remote education as it is more appropriate for individuals with high self-management and self-discipline levels, who can manage learning strategies well, who are enthusiastic about learning, and who have high self-motivation.”

This insight coupled with the other professors' photographs and narratives may provide additional insight into students' lack of attendance and participation in classes.

## DISCUSSION

In this section, we discuss our findings within the current relevant literature. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic occurred at multiple levels from societal to individual including in many areas of life. These unprecedented times, and the measures taken, caused disruptions including in higher education. To prevent or minimize the negative effects of the pandemic, educational practices shifted towards remote teaching leaving faculty with a huge undertaking on short notice. The sudden shift in working and teaching environments and modes, lack of social interaction, and isolation left individuals struggling to maintain a balance between work and family responsibilities. Together this created emotional distress. The negative impact of the pandemic on faculty well-being is reported in several studies (Johnson et al., 2020; Sacco et al., 2021).

While the visible factors affecting well-being include lack of social contact and feeling of isolation, other factors that are less visible but as affective are reported as concerns about the change in mode of course delivery, infrastructure-related problems, feeling unprepared for remote

teaching, lack of interaction, and pedagogical concerns (Altinpulluk, 2021; Bonsangue et al., 2021; Doyumagac et al., 2021; Valsaraj et al., 2021). The increase in faculty workload is another factor that we identified contributing to their diminished well-being. Preparation and delivery of online courses takes an extensive amount of time (Chiasson et al, 2015; De Gagne et al., 2009). Research shows that during the COVID-19 pandemic, increased workload for faculty was one of the major challenges related to remote education (Day et al., 2021; McDaniel et al., 2021; Sacco et al., 2021; Sen et al., 2021). Lack of experience and training, familiarity with online tools, and infrastructure can be regarded as contributing factors to the increased workload. Research on faculty experiences shows varying levels of experience with online teaching with majority having minimal or no experience (Johnson et al., 2020; Karadag et al., 2021; Ralph, 2020; Valsaraj et al., 2021). Lack of experience with remote teaching also affects the quality of education.

Research shows that students' satisfactory experiences during ERT were related to instructors' familiarity and competency with using various digital platforms and tools efficiently to support student learning (Almendingen et al., 2021). Another study conducted with European countries reported that innovative instructional approaches that stimulate learner autonomy, motivation, and engagement were lacking in the European Member States. Facing time constraints, many faculty members mostly "just replaced face to face teaching and learning with synchronous online classes" (EADTU Report, 2020, p.3) which contributed to a decline in the quality of education. According to the report, educators were unsatisfied with high-speed and stable internet connections at home, training and guidance in adapting class materials and pedagogies to remote teaching, and support from institutions. All these factors contribute to the shared opinion that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted education in varying degrees in developed and developing countries which brings the issues of equity and quality of access to the fore.

Faculty members had to navigate the new virtual spaces on their own to find better ways to continue to connect with students and to offer them a good education without having to compromise the quality. As the transition to ERT happened rapidly, faculty members did not have enough time or support to prepare learning materials for virtual learning. The support they received from their institutions was limited to technical support regarding the learning management system they adopted. While the faculty members were committed to providing the best education they could despite the challenges, the lack of attendance and/or participation by students in classes added to the challenges they already had and decreased their motivation to teach. Karadag et al. (2021) found that universities' remote teaching capacities were low and insufficient due to insufficient human resources, hardware and software structures and capacities, content production capacities, exam infrastructures, and budgets. Durak et al. (2020) conducted a study on the remote teaching capacities of universities in Turkey with participants from 33 universities and found that only 6 universities had the infrastructure and capacity to offer courses synchronously in remote teaching.

Another challenge that increased stress for parent faculty members, particularly women, was undertaking full-time childcare while working from home. Parent faculty members either had to take turns with their spouses in caring for their children so that they could continue teaching, or as in Sevim's case, had to do both at the same time. Similarly, a study by Parlak et al. (2021) explored the experiences of Turkish female academicians during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that female academics struggled attending to household responsibilities, caring for children, and professional responsibilities which led to exhaustion and feelings of inadequacy.

Sen et al (2020), in their study exploring the views of academics on education during the COVID-19 pandemic, found that academicians thought that while distance education has multiple benefits, it also has disadvantages such as lack of interaction and efficiency. Academicians stated that distance education brings challenges particularly in applied courses which require more time to prepare, and various delivery tools and the productivity is decreased. Additionally, they were able to dedicate less time to their academic practices as most of their time was taken up by trying to fix

technical issues or problems that emerged due to distance education. While navigating these challenges, faculty members felt a decrease in their motivation, which is similar to what we identified in this study.

One of the major concerns that faculty members had, particularly in applied courses, was that students did not get the practical experience they were supposed to have according to the curriculum. As there were no arrangements for students to get the practical experience, this lack would impact students in their future careers when they graduate. The concern for their students and the success of their teaching through virtual means impacted faculty members' well-being negatively which then impacted their motivation for teaching. This indicates the importance of considering each course separately when making decisions related to online teaching. Johnson (2020) discusses the importance of planning for transitioning to online education for effective education and support during crises by taking into consideration the needs of employees, administrators, students, and instructors.

Our study is limited to two public universities in the eastern part of Turkey, thus limiting the transferability of findings and some of the recommendations to these institutions only. Considering the differences between private and public universities, the experiences of faculty members should be considered within a public university context. Additionally, our study involves the experiences of faculty in the eastern part of Turkey. Based on regional differences, the experiences of faculty from other regions may have different aspects to consider.

### **IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

The results of this study indicate that a big part of the challenges that faculty members experienced were related to the disruption of their teaching practices and its effects on their well-being. Faculty members were expected to continue teaching despite the restrictions, challenges, and the stress that came with the global COVID-19 pandemic, and yet limited support – whether technical, practical, or emotional – was provided for them. They struggled to navigate the unknown spaces of a new 'normal' and conditions by themselves. This information is valuable for institutions to improve their current support mechanisms, particularly in underserved areas, and to take into consideration when making decisions on transitioning to hybrid or online teaching permanently.

Another important aspect to consider when making decisions on online education is the nature of the course. Particularly in courses with practical components such as laboratory sciences or sports sciences, online teaching may not be as effective as in-person education and would rob students of technical skills that they need to learn in person. Each course should be evaluated differently when it comes to remote education. As discussed in the findings, while there were similar challenges experienced, in some cases there were different challenges that were specific to the course. Thus, when making a decision on moving to remote education completely, each course should be considered on its own and faculty members teaching those courses should be consulted. Institutions' infrastructure and students' access to the internet are two major areas that need to be considered in such decisions. Additionally, faculty members should be provided training on online instruction and digital tools in addition to the learning management systems that institutions use, and how to adjust their curriculum and course requirements to online teaching.

Higher education institutions transitioned to remote teaching and the transition was considered successful by university leaders. While most HE institutions provided training and technical support, some universities faced problems in delivering content remotely in terms of technology and tools (Farnell et al., 2021). Although this study focused on faculty experiences from two higher education institutions in Turkey, the findings obtained are not limited to Turkey only. Similar issues were identified in other countries (EADTU Report, 2020; Salmi, 2021). Considering the cultural, social, and economic differences between countries, a bottom-up approach rather than a top-down approach would be more effective in addressing these issues. However, bottom-up approaches can

be challenging to implement depending on the context. Kezar (2012) discusses the convergence of two approaches from the bottom-up and makes the distinction between participation encouraged by top-down leaders where staff is brought in for 'advice' and decision-making partnership by giving staff ownership. Our study contributes to the international higher education field and literature by sharing faculty experiences of remote teaching as a first step for a bottom-up approach in addressing issues.

As Bozkurt et al. (2020) discussed, when everything goes back to normal, what students will remember from the pandemic will not be what they learned, but how they felt or how they were supported. This holds true for the faculty members as well. Given the challenges they faced and how they had to navigate those challenges with little to no support, it is important to learn how faculty could be supported better so that they can aid students in their learning through remote or distance education. Therefore, learning from faculty members' experiences is vital, particularly if higher education institutions are to decide on continuing the remote or hybrid education from now on. Based on the findings of the study, support and training on remote education for faculty members should be provided so that faculty can design and deliver their courses using appropriate pedagogies to increase student engagement and quality of instruction. Additionally, technological infrastructure should be improved to prevent disruptions. Faculty responsibilities and performance expectations can be reduced in unprecedented times to accommodate their needs. Lastly, faculty members can be involved in decision-making processes regarding adopting distance education practices post-pandemic so that quality of instruction and learning can be maintained. These are some of the initial considerations that can be implemented to support faculty and maintain quality of education.

This paper contributes to the body of knowledge in the field by increasing faculty member voices on their experiences and needs which affect their teaching practices. The participatory approach allowed for faculty members to share their experiences with each other and exchange ideas on ways to overcome some of the challenges they faced. Additionally, participating in this process provided them with a new method they can implement in their teaching and research practices. At the end of the photovoice process, faculty members asked questions about how they could use this approach in their fields, what challenges may emerge, and how those can be navigated.

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