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# Distant Violin Education in the First Outbreak of the Pandemic: Exploring Perceptions of the Instructors in Turkey

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## Abstract

This study examined the period in depth by taking the instructors' perceptions on distant violin education practices in the first semester when the pandemic first hit. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews were held with 29 instructors working in 16 among 26 music education departments. Thus, by making a maximum variation, a significant part of the music teaching departments in Turkey was taken as a sample (65%). The data were collected via Google Meet and Zoom interviews and analysed thematically with MAXQDA software. As a result of the research, it has been determined that the instructors think distance violin education is unsuitable for violin education in many aspects, especially the inability to give immediate feedback, physical intervention, motivation, communication, and technical problems. However, some instructors also point out that distance violin education has positive aspects in terms of self-control, self-development, rewatching the courses, meticulous work for the course recordings, and repetition.

**Keywords:** Violin education, distant education, violin instructors, COVID-19, pandemic, thematic analysis.

## Introduction

### The Pandemic and Distant Education

COVID-19, which came upon all over the world, has forced traditional education to undergo sudden dramatic changes on a global scale. Educational institutions, on the other hand, have switched to distance education to manage this crisis (Özer & Üstün, 2020; Akat & Karataş, 2020). In Turkey, the Council of Higher Education (CohE) (2020) announced that education practices would be suspended for three weeks in all higher education institutions on March 12, and soon the institutions reported that they would continue their educational activities with distance education on March 18.

With this sudden and weary change, the role of teachers has become quite different, and teachers have become guides, coaches and consultants in addition to being instructors (de Bruin, 2021). On the other hand, this change also caused instructors with no experience in distance education to be caught unprepared for this transformation (Akyürek, 2020). Using the activities and methods they used in face-to-face lessons negatively affected the performance and motivation of the instructors who were unprepared and did not have a lesson and activity plans for distance education (Gürer et al., 2016). In addition, issues such as how to use the distance education platforms (de Bruin, 2021) and which way to teach the students, maintaining work-life balance as a result of teaching at home were the challenges for the teachers. Even some teachers carried out distance teaching with students they had never met (Thornton, 2020) - without seeing them or turning on their webcams. In addition to all these difficulties, this is a significant opportunity to explore the possibilities of distance education (Telli Yamamoto & Altun, 2020). 'Developing a positive attitude and being willing,' which can be considered as a readiness parameter, is also a way that can be used to facilitate and make this process successful (Koloğlu, 2016).

Thanks to the weaselly distance education system as a consequence of the pandemic, the teachers' and students' technological knowledge, skills and implementation levels have become important. Undeniably, the difference between experienced technology users and those who are older in terms of technology use is significant (Brändström et al., 2012). Due to their proclivity toward technology (Telli Yamamoto & Altun, 2020) and the ease with which processes can be adapted, today's students have an advantage over previous ones. Numerous factors should be learned and experienced by both students and teachers as a result of the fact that the

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process has novel and unknown elements. There have been some shifts in each party's approach to the other, and they have advanced the process by cooperating and exchanging information (de Bruin, 2021).

Different distance education platforms have been used worldwide during the pandemic. LMS (Learning Management System) refers to the systems that create an online learning environment by combining educational fields and pedagogical tools to manage classes (Sleator, 2010). Moodle and ALMS are the most popular learning management systems worldwide, while Big Blue Button and Perculus are the most popular live-streaming course platforms (Durak et al., 2020).

During the pandemic, all lessons were taught online in Turkey's higher education institutions that provide music education, including instrument lessons. In the literature, it is stated that there is a decrease in the instrument playing time of music department students during the pandemic (Sağer et al., 2020) and that students cannot work efficiently for individual instrument lessons, which pushes them toward laziness (Özer & Üstün, 2020).

In his study, Sahu (2020) concludes that distance education is unsuitable for applied fields such as laboratories and the fine arts. Regarding distance violin education, another applied field, only a few studies have been published in the related literature (Okan & Arapgirlioğlu, 2020) and how this model was used during the pandemic (Sakarya & Zahal, 2020; Kesendere et al., 2020). From this point of view, this research aims to reveal instructors' perceptions regarding distance violin education in the first phase of the pandemic. The study's problem statement is 'What are the perceptions and experiences of the instructors regarding the difficulties, advantages and functionality of distance violin education applied in Turkey in the first phase of the pandemic?'.

## Method

### Participants

Maximum variation sampling was used to select the participants, based on identifying situations with similar characteristics. To ensure diversity, samples were collected from seven regions of Turkey. By contacting 16 out of 26 undergraduate music education programs in Turkey, 29 instructors (12 females and 17 males) who teach violin lessons through distance education were interviewed. More than half of Turkey's music education programs (65%) were reached (see Table 1).

### Data Collection

The study data were collected at the end of the 2020-2021 spring semester when all courses were taught via distance education for the first time due to the pandemic. For this purpose, a semi-structured qualitative interview protocol was prepared. After the questions were drafted, three violin education and distance education specialists were consulted, and the protocol was finalized according to their feedback. The interview participants were informed of the purpose of the study, that the interview would be recorded, that their personal information would be kept confidential, and that the data would be stored using coded names to ensure the protection of personal data. Using a semi-structured interview form, participants were asked about their experiences and views on reaching the targeted acquisitions of the lessons in distance education (e.g., "Do you think that violin lessons through distance education are sufficient in terms of realizing the content, goals and acquisitions of the lesson?"), their previous experience in distance education (e.g., "Have you received any in-service training on distance education before?"), their method of teaching the lesson (e.g., Which distance education model did you use in the violin lesson?"), the factors encountered in teaching the classes (e.g., What are the positive and/or negative situations you encounter in distance violin education?"). Interviews were made with Google Meet and Zoom and lasted an average of 30 minutes.

### Data Analysis

This study used the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA 2020 (20.4.1) to analyse the collected data. As an analysis method, thematic analysis was preferred. In this analysis approach, data are presented in the form of themes after being thoroughly defined and analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), thematic

**Table 1:** Universities where instructors worked

| *Bursa Uludağ University* | *Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University* |
|---|---|
| Balıkesir Necati Bey University | Ağrı Ibrahim Çeçen University |
| Gazi University | Harran University |
| Sinop University | Kastamonu University |
| Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University | Erzurum Atatürk University |
| Aksaray University | Niğde Ömer Halis Demir University |
| Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University | Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University |
| Sivas Cumhuriyet University | Samsun 19 Mayıs University |

analysis is an intriguing method for discovering themes and concepts embedded within a text. Braun and Clarke (2006) implemented a six-step approach for data analysis. In addition, three researchers conducted the analyses.

In the second stage, the data set was reread and 63 initial codes were created (e.g., "instant intervention," "camera angle" as the stance/holding, correct voice sub-theme). Then, these codes were gathered under sub-themes consisting of overarching themes (e.g., learning outcome). In the third stage, four randomly selected datasets were analysed by two experts with a Ph.D. in music education for the peer debriefing procedure (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Experts made suggestions for some codes, sub-themes and relationships between themes. Accordingly, the codes and themes were rearranged, and the codes were grouped under potential themes. The thematic map was developed in the fourth stage by checking the compatibility between these coded extracts and the whole data set. In the fifth stage, the scope of each theme and the names of the themes were clearly defined. In the sixth stage, concrete and striking direct quotations were selected and the coded data contents were analysed for the last time. Finally, the thematic analysis results were reported in line with the relevant literature and the purpose of the current study.

### Trustworthiness

There are many approaches to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research. Some of these techniques have been used effectively in the current study. In this context, techniques such as Peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), 'prolonged engagement' by being in the study area, and 'investigator triangulation' by analysing with more than one researcher (Thurmond, 2001) were used. In addition, the trustworthiness of the study has been increased with the techniques such as 'supporting participatory honesty' by providing the freedom of participants to participate in the project as part of the member checking procedure, returning to the topics discussed before during the interviews and asking different questions to collect the same data, 'doing repeated inquiries' and holding 'confirmation meetings' with the participants (Başkale, 2016).

## Results

As a result of the thematic analysis, four main themes (see Figure 1) and 17 sub-themes were determined. Themes and sub-themes are explained in titles. Participants are ranked up to 29 with the letter 'K' and without any sorting rule. For example, 'P1'; refers to participant number 1.

### Learning outcome

*Posture/Holding and Correct Playing*

14 of the 29 participants stated that distance education is insufficient to achieve the acquisitions. Four participants

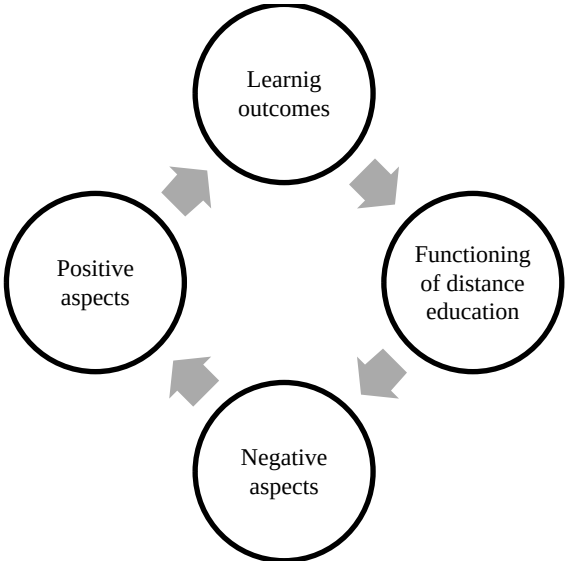


**Fig. 1:** Major themes

noted that the instrument lessons are unsuitable for distance education. Therefore, they are inadequate for acquisitions. Emphasizing that instrument training is done with a master-apprentice relationship, P13:

> It is definitely not the same ... Because our work is like the master-apprentice relationship and it includes everything, there are many situations in which we need to intervene immediately. We need to correct the mistakes in terms of technique and musicality.

P26, on the other hand, stated that both the practicality of the course creates a disadvantage and that it is not sufficient for students who have just started violin education:

> It is not enough as a practical course. I mean, if it were a theoretical course, maybe it would be, but as I said, it is not suitable for beginners at all. I have a hard time teaching posture and holding.

Eleven participants stated that the efficiency in posture, holding and qualified vocalization was affected due to reasons such as not being able to show both hands together in the camera and videos, problems related to the camera, small images of the person on the platform used, not being able to see from several angles, having problems in perceiving the direction of the violin as a result of shooting with the front camera.

### Working Performance

Four participants stated that distance violin education is good enough to reach the acquisitions. Participants think that they have the opportunity to devote more time to theoretical subjects in the distance education process, that students who lack study in the normal process improve their studies, and

that some students behave more responsibly. P10 expressed the following views on this issue:

> If face-to-face education is 5, distance education is 3.5-4. Students who did not study face-to-face either sent videos in distance education and studied more. This happened thanks to distance education… of course, it is not a substitute for face-to-face education. Still, it put a responsibility on the students and they started to consider themselves critically.

### Individual Differences and Readiness

Three participants stated that gaining the acquisitions varies according to the student's characteristics. Students learning style, capacity, interest and readiness have an impact on this issue, and it is among the opinions that some students can act more responsibly with online education and others learn more effectively at home. The views of P3 and P23 on this subject are as follows, respectively;

> It's based on the student's manner, learning style, lifestyle, there are people in the world who receive education in this way, you know, it's a bit about the culture, it's about readiness.
>
> It was only a little better with students who were really prone to or capable of furthering this, I mean, the student is already ready, and there was not much trouble with students who could handle many things with a little warning.

## Process of the distance education

*Type of Distance Education*

6 out of 29 participants stated that they continue distance education synchronously, 10 of them asynchronously, and 13 of them with mixed methods, both synchronous and asynchronous. As a result of the interview with the participants, it was seen that 21 participants asked for a performance video by assigning students homework to play the violin. 5 of these 21 participants offered the option of preparing a written assignment on analysis of performance, etude analysis, violin history, and techniques instead of a performance video due to reasons such as the students' not having a violin or limited internet access. P18 expressed their opinion on this matter:

> I asked students who have instruments and whose internet environments were suitable to send a performance video. I also asked some students who have trouble accessing the internet and do not have an instrument to do research or summarize theoretical or specific topics as homework.

Participants followed different ways to give feedback on student videos. They used methods such as interpretation during online classes (n=13), feedback by phone call or video call (n=4), and video preparation with simultaneous feedback-correction explanations on the video (n=7). K28, who prefers to give feedback via video call, said, "I told the student to be ready at a specific time on WhatsApp...let's connect like in the live lesson. He played, and I corrected it every time like you should play like this and do it like that." In addition, another method used by the participants is to send a sample performance video to the student. Although some participants played it and shot themselves (n=11), some chose to send appropriate samples over the internet (n=2). P8, which includes topics that appeal to all students in their sample videos stated:

> Since you can't shoot a video for each student individually, the piece played by each is different. Therefore, I focused on the technical issues in the works played by all the students… After shooting videos that they would benefit from, I asked them to apply them in their etudes and works and send me the videos.

*Distance Education Platforms and Utility Applications*

Twenty participants said that the institution they work for has a platform for distance education, one stated it does not, and 6 prefer to use other platforms due to their ease of use; therefore, they do not have information about the institution's platform, two stated that they could not use the institution platform because they had platform-related usage problems (violin lessons appear as classroom lessons, different teachers appear in a single class and teachers do not have the opportunity to teach with their students). It is also seen that all of the participants use at least one utility application other than the institution's platform (see Figure 2).

*Working Environment*

It is seen that most of the participants have access to distance violin lessons from home (n=21), but some use their offices in the institution to conduct the lessons (n=4). Some participants stated that they also use both home and office environments alternately according to the requirements of the course and their own possibilities (n=5). 2 participants carried out the education apart from these places as well. P25:

> Our distance education centre had several studios… we held our live classes and stuff in our room in our own department with our resources at hand, and we were able to use the studio by scheduling it with an appointment system.

It was stated by many participants that there were limitations regarding the working environment. These limitations are having company (n=2), the noise of ambient sounds (n=2), conflict with the schedules of other household members (n=5), the negative effect of the environment on motivation (n=3),

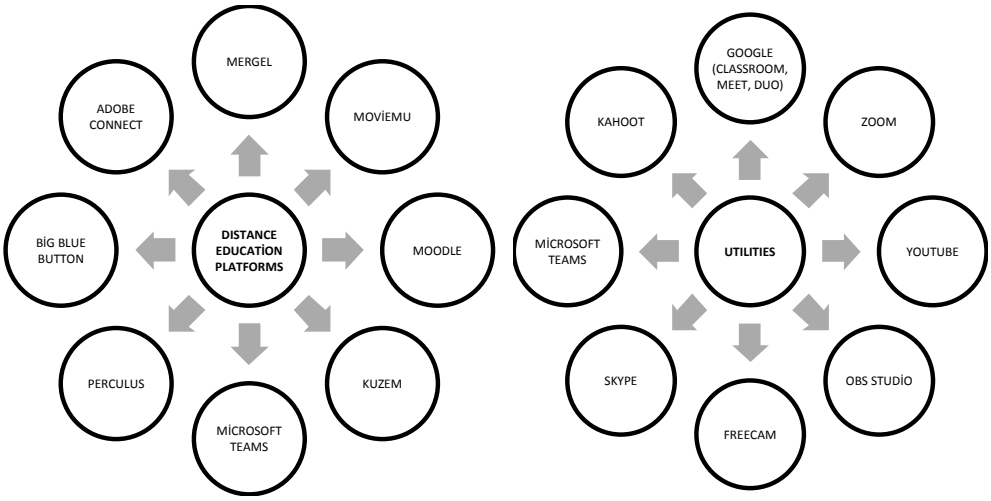


**Fig. 2:** The platforms and utilities employed in the distance education period

being a parent or child in the home environment ( n=4), the crowd (4), violin requiring loud practice (n=6) and inadequate physical facilities (n=1).

## Assessment and Evaluation

At the end of the interview about the assessment and evaluation in distance violin education, it was seen that the participants carried out it in 7 different ways. These are theoretical exam (n=4), theoretical assignment (n=2), live performance exam (n=1), performance video for the exam (n=9), weekly performance and participation evaluation (n=5), both theoretical and performance-based exams (n=7), performance exam for those who have an instrument and theoretical exam for those who do not (n=1). In addition, many participants stated that students were tolerated by both universities and instructors considering the pandemic conditions. P11 expressed on the subject:

> During the distance education, we, as a university, tried not to prey upon too many students … we assessed by taking into account their psychological status.

## Positive Aspects

### *Meticulous Work and Repetition for Video Recording*

Eight of the participants stated that during this process, the students did more repetitions to be able to play correctly while preparing to send a video assignment to their teachers, and they worked more meticulously in order not to make mistakes. It was also stated that the students had the opportunity to listen to themselves by recording and they tried to send the recording they played the best. P2 stated:

> For example, he can play the etude or the piece in face-to-face lessons. When he is not in a place, we can either stop him or he says "oh my!" and stops but cannot do it during the recording. So he has to work and play meticulously like a concert recording. Students may have tried to do this a little more carefully, fearing that they will start from the beginning and carry it to the end.

### *Being able to Watch the Lessons Again*

Six participants stated that the fact that the lessons can be stored and watched again on the internet is a positive aspect for the student. Accordingly, P14 commented:

> The fact that the lesson can be recorded and the student can access it whenever they want is a great advantage not only for those who can't watch the lesson synchronously, but also for those who watch that lesson and then miss something and want to look back.

## No Place Restriction

By making comments from different perspectives, they emphasized that the absence of place restrictions in distance violin education positively affects education. Such as P20, among the 9 participants, stated, 'The student can do the course in an environment where he/she feels comfortable,' and P27: 'If there is a professor I want to take lessons from abroad, why shouldn't I benefit from his/her knowledge over the internet?'

## The Opportunity to Improve Themselves

Five participants stated that they could spare time for their individual studies in this process. P11, who is happy that he could spare time for his instrument: 'I am definitely thrilled, I was alone with my violin, I could spend more time on my instrument,' and P21, who focused on his academic studies, stated, 'Staying at home was an opportunity for me, I focused on my own publications, it was good for me.'

Seven participants stated that they learned some new information they did not know in this process, researched

to make some implementations, and discovered innovations in teaching their lessons. In addition, they stated that in this process, they made implementations and assignments aimed at developing and researching not only themselves but also their students, especially in using technological tools. K1, who directed his students accordingly, stated: 'I made it necessary for the students to learn a musical notation software.' Five participants said that in face-to-face lessons, more emphasis was placed on the practice and performance of the violin, and the theoretical subjects remained in the background. This was positive to be able to handle theoretical subjects. P18:

> While working with my student, I realized that we were skipping some theoretical topics…for example, we study Vivaldi, but we just mention his life with three words… now it has enabled us to include the theoretical and music culture part more.

*Self-control*

Four participants stated that distance education positively affects students' taking responsibility, planning themselves, and improvement in time management. In this regard, P28 said, 'Even though it does not substitute face-to-face education, it has placed a responsibility on the students; the students have started to look at themselves critically.'

### Negative Aspects

*Immediate Feedback-Correction and Physical Intervention*

Four participants expressed their opinions on this sub-theme. These opinions are that the lesson is based on the master-apprentice relationship, that immediate corrections should be made, that physical postures and movements cannot be expressed effectively through direct instruction, that they should be shown and corrected by touching the instrument, and that the students reinforce the mistake by making a video when the errors are not corrected immediately, and that they have a problem in understanding the immediate corrections due to the synchronization during the lessons. P16 stated on the subject:

> Our job requires physical contact with the student. In other words, we cannot achieve much success by explaining the students' wrist, finger, left hand, left arm, bow grip, bowing, etc. from afar… Even when we do this one-on-one, we have many problems. We correct it, it comes back, and we correct it again. That's a huge problem to do this online, over images, over a video.

*Synchronization*

Five participants stated that playing together in violin education is important and that they could not play together due to the synchronization problem in distance education. P9 noted at this point:

> You cannot play with the students on the internet where the one-to-one reciprocal practice is required, where you need to play together. Because it doesn't accord, it doesn't synchronize. I had much trouble because they did not accord with each other.

### Problems with the Device (Image/Sound)

Six participants stated that they experienced hardware deficiencies such as the lack of cameras, poor quality speakers, and the lack of devices of the students related to the devices used to access the distance education platforms. P19 said:

> There are those who live in villages and those who live in areas without internet connections. Some do not have a phone with a camera; this is a big problem. In fact, there are still students who do not use e-mail.

Nine participants stated that they had problems with sound quality. The participants said that they could not talk about musicality in the lessons because the quality sound could not be produced as a result of reasons such as poor quality sound produced by the speakers, loss of sound quality due to connection and temporal disruptions, applications tuning the sound, preparing videos with inadequate quality equipment or not adjusting the microphone distance.

### Absenteeism

Six participants stated that the fact that there is no compulsory attendance in distance education led students to absenteeism. P15, who gives lectures even though there are no students said:

> Since there was no compulsory attendance, the participation of the students was very low in the lessons. In other words, we had to conduct the lessons with 3-5 students, sometimes with no participation at all.

### Absence of Students' Instruments with them

Thirteen participants stated that students did not take their instruments with them due to the perception of a holiday or their sudden return to their homes, and this was because it was announced that the schools would be closed for two weeks in Turkey in the first outbreak of COVID-19. As a result, the practical part of the lessons was carried out with the students who had a violin, and the theoretical part was carried out with those who did not. P25 also stated that pandemic restrictions affected this issue, and 'I ask students if they can find a violin, and they say there is a curfew and an intercity travel restriction. So, we conducted the lessons based on theoretical information.'

Other negative situations experienced in distance violin education are the negative impact on student and teacher motivation (n=8), distance lessons not going beyond basic knowledge (n=4), students' perception that they are on holiday (n=5), students' irresponsibility and abuse (n=5), the

process being more tiring than face-to-face education (n=5), students' inability to gain stage experience (n=2), and temporal disruptions in the target plan (n=3).

## Discussion

With the pandemic, due to the separation of education from the physical environment to a virtual environment, students and instructors encountered an educational environment they did not know. When the study findings are evaluated, it is noteworthy that there are positive and negative aspects, but the negative ones are more dominant. In this process, teachers experienced feelings such as fear, anxiety and concern due to the pandemic and working conditions, intense seminars and administrative work, and the variable education policy of governments (Cheng & Lam, 2021). Students have adapted to the process quite well (Austin, 2021), although they felt uneasiness and tension (Sakarya & Zahal, 2020). Distance education has also created a socio-psychological gap in students (Koutsoupidou, 2014). It is seen that teachers share their professional experiences and knowledge through social media platforms such as 'Musiklärarna' that they have created during the term (Thorgersen & Mars, 2021), with the attitudes of experienced teachers towards helping their young colleagues (Cheng & Lam, 2021) or cooperation and solidarity meetings with prospective teachers (Thomas et al., 2021).

The findings regarding the negative aspects of distance education during the pandemic show that most of the problems were experienced due to the internet and connection. Due to the sudden start of the process, it is seen that the technological infrastructure to ensure sound quality could not be established (Schiavio et al., 2021), and connection problems in synchronous lessons negatively affected the instrument lessons (Joseph & Merrick, 2021) and playing together activities cannot be done. It is also seen that teachers have different knowledge and skill levels in using technology, and some do not have enough knowledge about using digital resources (Akyürek, 2020; Hash, 2021). In studies on the subject, it has been determined that older teachers' finding distance education advantageous (Calderón-Garrido & Gustems-Carnicer, 2021) or being ready for e-learning (Kibici & Sarıkaya, 2021) are lower than younger ones. In addition, technological inadequacy and inexperience affect teacher motivation negatively (Cheng & Lam, 2021).

Another issue that negatively affects teacher motivation is that student cameras are turned off. It is seen that students with disabled cameras engage in behaviours such as messaging and shopping online (Austin, 2021) and exhibit behaviours that do not comply with class etiquette (Inal et al., 2021). In addition, the fact that teachers cannot see all students simultaneously negatively affects the lesson (Calderón-Garrido & Gustems-Carnicer, 2021). In addition, the cameras enabled will cause education to engage in private life, and studies will be needed to prevent different and unauthorized uses (Aşkın, 2021). One of the problems that teachers frequently mention is that students do not have, reach the instrument they will use in the lesson or do not have the instrument with them (Joseph & Lennox, 2021; Cheng & Lam, 2021).

The instructors in the study group expressed that distance education was a saviour during the pandemic. When the relevant literature is examined, it is seen that conducting lessons through distance education has similar positive aspects, such as it ensures that students do not sour on the school (Hash, 2021). It is essential to ensure the continuity of the lessons and the necessity of continuing music education under all conditions (Akyürek, 2020). In addition, distance education provides profit in terms of distance and cost (Joseph & Merrick, 2021), and the fact that the camera and sound recording are open triggers the teacher, requiring them to attend classes more ready and equipped in order to be active at any time (Aşkın, 2021).

Synchronized video conferencing (Hash, 2021) and asynchronous performance videos (Calderón-Garrido & Gustems-Carnicer, 2021) are the most frequently used methods for conducting distance instrument training or orchestral lessons. Students also find asynchronous lessons more beneficial than synchronous lessons because they can be viewed again (Schiavio et al., 2021). The course content, on the other hand, consists mainly of theoretical subjects due to the negativities in practice (Calderón-Garrido & Gustems-Carnicer, 2021). Platforms/applications/websites such as Zoom, Whatsapp, Youtube, Google Classroom/Hangouts/Slides/Crome MusicLab etc. were mostly preferred as resources or aids in the lessons. In addition to these, in music lessons, teachers used musical notation software, virtual classroom platforms, music production workshops, digital portfolios and musical notation archives such as BlackBoard Collaborate, Finale, Sibelius, Musescore, NoteFlight, Smart Music (Hash, 2021), Microsoft Teams, Skype, SeeSaw, Groove Pizza, Incredibox, Beepbox (Joseph & Lennox, 2021), Pear Deck, Sountrap (Austin, 2021), Moodle, TeamViewer, Aurlia and musition (Joseph & Merrick, 2021), FlipGrid, Tone Savvy, Shedthemusic (Thomas et al., 2021).

## Conclusion

As a result of the current study, considering the nature of violin education, it can be said that distance education is not entirely suitable for the sensitive procedures of violin education. On the other hand, when it is considered in terms of students, the instructors also point out positive aspects regarding taking responsibility and self-control. However, it can be said that distance education in violin education is sustainable as a way to maintain education during the epidemic period rather than being a reason for preference due to communication between teacher and student, teacher/student motivation, and technological/technical negativities. From this point of

view, it is recommended to use applications suitable for violin education to provide sound and image synchronization for violin performances by teachers and students. In addition, it would be appropriate to provide in-service training to violin educators so that they can better use distance violin education platforms and utility applications.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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