

## Roles of the Parents in Online Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Phenomenological Study

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**Abstract:** The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected the education process. A sudden shift to online learning changed the mechanism of the education system. As key stakeholders, parents have to undertake the responsibility of this process at home. This study aims to reveal the roles of parents in online learning during the pandemic. It was conducted with a phenomenological research design. The study group consists of 28 parents having children aged 7 to 13 years old. Data collected employing interviews and open-ended questionnaires were analyzed by the thematic analysis method. According to the findings, parents organize their daily lives at home according to online learning of their children. They explain the online learning process in the context of family circumstances, the challenges they experienced, the educational environment, household chores, job responsibilities, and relationships. It is challenging for parents to undertake the roles of reinforcer, supervisor, motivator, and controller in online learning at home. To overcome the challenges they take family or caregiver support, make partnerships, and use external sources like tutoring, web applications, etc. All these findings suggest that with the emergent shift to remote teaching, parents get much more involved in the education process by undertaking the responsibilities of the teachers.

**Keywords:** Parent roles, parent involvement, online learning, primary education, COVID-19.

### Highlights

What is already known about this topic:

- Parents organize their daily lives at home according to the online learning process of their children
- Parents played an intermediary role in helping teachers reach children in the emergency remote teaching process.

What this paper contributes:

- Parents especially mothers have taken responsibility for their child's online learning
- Parents have undertaken such roles as reinforcer, supervisor, motivator, and controller in online learning.
- Parents consider that school management and the teachers are too poor to guide them in this process.

Implications for theory, practice, and/or policy:

- As a result of the wider use of digital tools in daily life parents and children must be qualified as digital citizens.
- By revealing parents' changing roles and responsibilities in an online era, this study will contribute to reframing the parent involvement types for the researchers.

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic broke out in 2019 in the world and profoundly affected all humanity for about three years. In this regard, countries took certain measures in areas such as economy, health, social life, and education. The COVID-19 pandemic, which was found to be transmitted through close contact, especially deeply affected the field of education (Balci, 2020). In this context, to prevent the spread of the virus, schools, where students, teachers, and parents kept close contact, were closed down. As an emergent response to the pandemic. Türkiye also kept schools closed on March 16, 2020. Globally the pandemic affected about 1.5 billion students and youth and during the pandemic schools kept closed for 41 weeks and more in most countries of the world including Türkiye (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2022). With the increase in the number of cases, emergency remote teaching was started (Yilmaz et al., 2020). Emergency remote teaching is an unplanned and temporary instructional delivery mode because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is a crisis circumstance for humankind (Hodges et al., 2020). It takes place through online learning, which means studying from anywhere and at any time (Ferri et al., 2020). However, it is different from the well-planned version, which is seen as a modality (fully online or blended) to invest time and limited resources more efficiently (Anderson, 2011). Because the instruction was carried out online as an emergent response to the pandemic.

With the transition to remote teaching, students continued their learning online at home. Online learning has some restrictions like discovering learners' readiness, body language, and cultural characteristics and it also leads to limited interaction between students themselves and the teacher. It is also hard to assess prerequisites and control the online learning environment. Additionally, students can not take advantage of the expertise of their peers and this increases the workload of the teachers (Anderson, 2011). In this regard, the shift to online learning during the pandemic has both changed the roles and responsibilities of parents and increased their workload regarding children's learning at home. Furthermore, parents' remote working at home, lack of digital skills, and limited physical spaces at home to follow courses have made the online learning process harder (Ferri et al., 2020). However, it is considered a longer period than the education process conducted during the pandemic is going to play an important role in the future of online learning in the post-pandemic era (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Accordingly, this study will make a significant contribution to the field, by revealing the changing roles they undertake for parenting in the future.

## Literature

### ***Parent's Roles in the Education Process***

As key stakeholders, parents have taken place in an inevitable position in remote teaching. They were the only ones, who could keep physical contact with the children. Parents are the strongest role models and the biggest influencers of their children. Children adopt their parents' values and behavior patterns. Parents' encouragement and support for home-schooling activities and their participation in the school process are very important for the education of children ( Duman et al., 2018; Nayir & Sari, 2021). If parents affect their children's education process positively, children will tend to be more successful in their future lives (Ceka & Murati, 2016).

The traditional definition of parent involvement includes participation in educational activities at school and home (Bower & Griffin, 2011). However, parent involvement can take various forms, especially parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, participation in decision-making, and collaboration with the community (Epstein, 1995). Parents, especially mothers, play an important role in shaping children's educational journey as their primary caregivers and educators. Parents support their children's education, especially through encouragement, coaching, and homework help. In addition, parents take great responsibility for children's acquisition of life skills, transfer of values, and social-emotional development. Ignoring parental roles hinders efforts to secure children's right to education

(Barbottin, 2023). As you can see, being a parent means many responsibilities. The most important of these is parenting for education. In this regard, parents are expected to inform the school about the child's developmental period, situation at home, and environmental relations, to keep their children healthy and safe, and to reinforce positive attitudes in children about school and learning (Epstein, 1995). Parents, involved in the education process have performed better in carrying out educational activities at home (Wilder, 2014).

Studies (Kiral, 2019; Pomerantz et al., 2012; trinity.catholic.edu) have shown that interacting between parents and schools to support children's learning leads to improved learning outcomes. Children learn everything from their parents until they start school. In addition, the responsibilities of parents continue to increase after the children start school. In this process, parents have many responsibilities like supporting their home learning (Kiral, 2019) and encouraging educational success (Coleman, 2019). However, this pandemic has affected parenting behaviors both negatively and positively (Janssen et al., 2020). Additionally, the roles and responsibilities of the parents have increased as the daily routines of children have changed and restricted significantly. Children, who stay away from school or their friends, need more love, attention, and support during this period (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2020). This has given more responsibility to the parents regarding both the psycho-social and education of children.

### ***Education Process during the COVID-19***

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools have had to decide on how to continue the education process. Because in this period when the virus is spreading rapidly, protecting the health of students, staff and families is a priority. Therefore all face-to-face classes were cancelled and for the continuity of learning activities at the time of school closures, some modalities (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc.) of information technologies were used all over the World. In this case, teachers were required to deliver online courses (United Nations, 2020). In other words, the COVID-19 pandemic caused an emergency shift from traditional to online learning at all levels of education to help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. With the pandemic, countries took different measures regarding the education process. The exams have been cancelled, postponed, or turned into online versions all around the world including Austria, China, England, the USA, and Turkiye (Demirci et al., 2022). Apart from this, emergency remote teaching is seen as a good alternative to ensure the continuity of education around the world.

With the pandemic, remote teaching has become widespread all around the world. However, the unplanned and unprepared online learning process became challenging for school administrators, teachers, students, and parents. First of all, this process negatively affected students' learning. Students were suddenly away from social interactions. In addition, the uncertainty of this process was an important source of stress for them. All these factors reduced students' motivation to learn (Di Pietro et al, 2020). What's more, students' learning was affected by issues such as the internet, computer access, and remote teaching competence of teachers. On the other hand, teachers had difficulties in managing the online learning process, and worried about providing adequate support to students (Yilmaz et al, 2020). Parents are also involved in the online learning process with their children at home. Parents were regarded as the milestone of online learning at home during the pandemic. Because only they could accompany their children with online learning at home, which became the new learning environment (Misirli & Ergulec, 2021). This new shift in education brought new responsibilities to parents and caregivers.

Various studies have been found regarding the participation of parents in the education process during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the survey conducted by Sari & Maningtyas (2020), the participation of parents in the online learning process of their children is at a good level. On the other hand, Misirli & Ergulec (2021) stated that the online learning process that suddenly started during the pandemic was challenging for both students and parents. Additionally, the authors emphasized that online learning placed a heavy burden on parents. Cayak (2021) also revealed that parents were worried that they could not adequately support their children in the online learning process during the pandemic. Novianti & Garzia (2020) concluded that in online learning activities carried out at home during the

pandemic, parents spent most of the time supervising the children's learning process and accompanying them in this process. In his study aiming to determine the roles of parents during the pandemic, Apriyanti (2021) stated that most mothers participated in online learning and that worksheets, books, and internet resources were mostly used to support the learning process. All told it is pointed out that online learning during the pandemic has caused a change in traditional parenting roles. In this context based on the experiences of parents, this study aims to reveal the roles of parents in online learning during the pandemic. For this purpose, the following questions were answered:

1. How did parents carry out the online learning process at home?
2. What roles did parents play in the online learning process?
3. What are the parents' support strategies for online learning?

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study was conducted with the phenomenology design as a part of the qualitative research method. In this direction, a common meaning is tried to be reached based on the experiences of many people about the related phenomenon. This design aims to understand the true nature of the related phenomenon or concept by reducing individual experiences to a universal explanation. (Creswell, 2015, 77). In this study, the experiences of parents, having children aged 7 to 13 years old, in the online learning process during the pandemic are regarded as a phenomenon. This qualitative study investigated the roles of parents in the online learning process during the pandemic.

### Participants

The study group consists of 28 participants including parents having children studying at primary school. Qualitative research is conducted with a small number of participants selected purposively. In this context, the criterion sampling method is used for this study (Patton, 2014, 230-235). The predetermined criterion for this research is that parents who have children aged 7 to 13 years old and studying at public or private schools. The information about the participants is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics of participants

Code of Participant	Parent	Job Status	Level of Education	Number of Children	Level of Child's Education
K1	Mother	No	Undergraduate	2	3th
K2	Mother	No	High School	1	2nd
K3	Mother	No	Associate degree	1	2nd
K4	Mother	No	High School	2	4th
K5	Mother	Yes	Associate degree	1	1st
K6	Father	Yes	Undergraduate	2	4th
K7	Mother	Yes	Undergraduate	1	2nd
K8	Mother	Yes	Undergraduate	2	2nd
K9	Mother	Yes	Undergraduate	1	2nd
K10	Mother	Yes	Undergraduate	1	4th
K11	Mother	No	High School	1	8th
K12	Mother	No	Middle school	2	6th
K13	Mother	Yes	High School	3	2nd
K14	Mother	No	High School	2	4th
K15	Mother	No	Primary School	3	8th
K16	Mother	No	High School	2	8th
K17	Mother	No	High School	1	8th
K18	Father	Yes	Undergraduate	2	4th
K19	Mother	No	High School	1	2nd
K20	Mother	Yes	Postgraduate	1	Pre-school
K21	Mother	Yes	Postgraduate	2	3th
K22	Mother	Yes	Postgraduate	1	2nd
K23	Mother	Yes	Undergraduate	2	4th

K24	Mother	Yes	Undergraduate	1	2nd
K25	Mother	Yes	Undergraduate	2	7th
K26	Mother	Yes	Postgraduate	1	2nd
K27	Mother	Yes	Postgraduate	1	5th
K28	Mother	Yes	Undergraduate	2	1st

As shown in Table 1, most of the participants consisted of mothers, who were the key persons in the online learning process. Out of 28 participants, who were interviewed, 17 parents were working and 11 parents were housewives. The level of parents' education changed from primary school to postgraduate. More than half of the participants had undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Almost all the participants had one or two children. Their children were at the level of primary school.

## Procedure

The data of this research were collected in the 2021-2022 education term from parents living in different cities (Ankara, Eskisehir, Edirne, Kırklareli, etc.) of Türkiye. To collect the data, a semi-structured interview form and an open-ended questionnaire were developed by the researcher. The prepared form was submitted to eight subject experts for their opinion on its content validity. This semi-structured interview technique allows elaboration on critical points. Open-ended questions also enable researchers to take more detailed responses and get a clearer understanding of the perspectives being put forward (Glesne, 2013). The forms were structured within the framework of the research aims. The form had two main sections: demographic information of the participants and interview questions. This form consisted of 13 questions that determine parents' views on how they carried out the online learning process at home, what roles they took in this process, and how they supported this process.

Data were collected from the participants between 19.12.2020/10.01.2021. Online interviews were held with eleven parents. All participants were completely informed about the aim and interview questions before the interview. They all were voluntary. All interviews were conducted by the researcher. Before the interviews, permission was obtained from the participants for audio recording. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. Among the participants who did not accept the online interview, phone calls were made to ten parents, while data was collected from seven parents via an open-ended survey. For the confidentiality of the participants, they were given code names. The interview questions were presented as attachment.

## Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed with a thematic analysis technique. To analyze the data, Nvivo qualitative data analysis program was used. During this process, the data acquired from the participants were first transferred to text. To check the data, the transferred files were listened to repeatedly. Afterward, they were transferred to the analysis program and the views were coded. The coded views were combined under common themes. Details on themes and categories are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Themes and categories based on analyses

<b>Themes &amp; Categories</b>	<b>The online learning process at home</b>	
	• Family circumstances	• Household chores
	• The challenges during online learning	• Job Responsibilities
	• Educational environment	• Relationships
	<b>The roles of parents in the online learning process</b>	
	• Teaching support	• Time management
	• Control, observation, and follow-up	• Technical support
		• Psychological support
	<b>Parents' support strategies for the online learning process</b>	
	• Family/carer support	• Tutoring & catch-up studies
• Partnership	• Web applications	

As presented in Table 2, this study consisted of three themes: "The online learning process at home", "The roles of parents in the online learning process", and "Parents' support strategies for the online learning process". The categories under the themes were interpreted in a pattern within the framework of the relevant literature and supported with direct quotations.

### **Reliability and Validity**

There are various strategies for ensuring the reliability and validity of the qualitative approach. In this study, appropriate and sufficient participation, role of the researcher, maximum diversity (Merriam, 2015), and detailed description (Glesne, 2013) strategies were used. Appropriate and sufficient participation in research requires continuing data analysis until a certain saturation is reached and spending sufficient time on this task (Merriam, 2015, 221). In this context, the researcher worked on data analysis until the positive and negative experiences were captured. She also carried out the analysis process in two stages. In the first stage, general categories and themes were reached. After a certain period, in the second stage, she prepared the findings by combining and separating these categories and themes.

As a second strategy, the researcher's role requires listening as a learner and speaking as an expert to explain necessary points (Glesne, 2013, 81). In this regard, the researcher first read about the pandemic and online learning literature. During the interview, she listened to the participants primarily as a learner and made explanations as an expert when necessary. Maximum diversity is achieved by determining different characteristics or criteria in a small sample (Patton, 2014, 235). In this study, data were collected from mothers and fathers from different provinces of Türkiye, at various education levels, working or not working, and having children at different school levels. Finally, a detailed description ensures transferability by providing details about the participants and the environment (Creswell, 2015, 252). To meet this criterion, the researcher described the data collection and analysis process in detail. Additionally, the findings were supported with direct quotes to ensure consistency. The findings are described with internal comments and discussed with external comments

### **Limitations**

This study has certain limitations in terms of sample, data collection method, and process. Data was collected from a parent group consisting mostly of mothers. However, the limited number of fathers as participants caused the female perspective to predominate regarding parental roles in the online learning process during the pandemic. Additionally, more comprehensive studies can be conducted by consulting the opinions of grandparents, aunts, or caregivers who are somehow involved in this process. On the other hand, due to the pandemic, the data of this study were collected through online interviews and open-ended forms. With face-to-face interviews, participants can express themselves better and bring a different perspective to this research phenomenon. In fact, with the online photovoice method, participants can be asked to take photos that support their views on how they manage the online learning process. Thus, the research findings would be presented more concretely with visual materials. When these visual materials are considered as confirmation of participant opinions, they can also contribute to the validity and reliability of the study.

### **Findings**

The findings are presented under this title in parallel with the aims of the study. In this context, parents' views on what they did to carry out the online learning process at home during the COVID-19 pandemic, what roles they played, and how they supported this process are presented under the themes and categories shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The map of this research based on themes and sub-categories

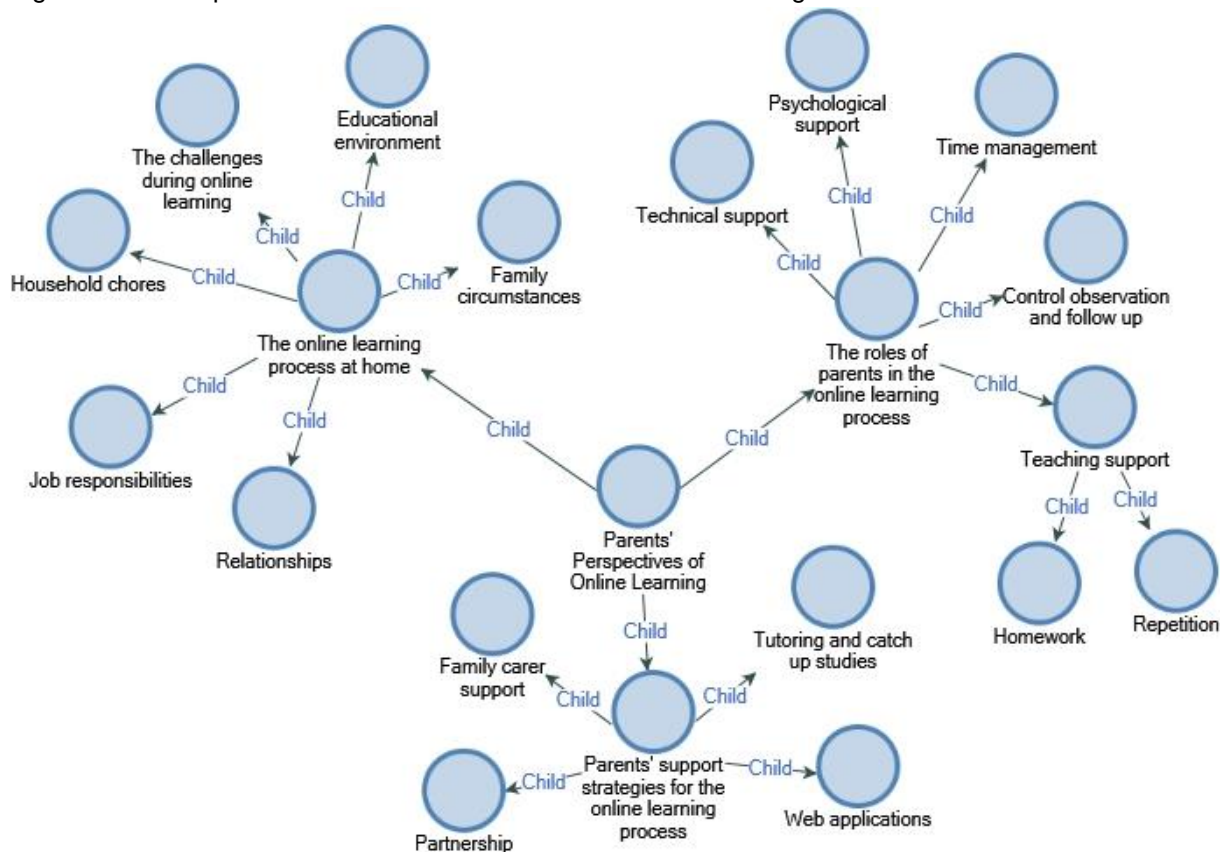


Figure 1 enables us to understand how parents manage the online learning process at home during the pandemic. In this regard, three themes are gained from the data. The categories are also explained under the following titles.

### The online learning process at home

The roles and responsibilities of parents have increased, especially with the transition to remote teaching during the pandemic. From the participants' opinions, it is understood that the online learning process at home is mostly carried out by mothers. Whether mothers worked or not, they played an active role in the child's online learning process. For this reason, this study was shaped especially through the experiences of mothers during the online learning process. Parents generally defined the online learning process at home in terms of family circumstances, the challenges during online learning, the educational environment, household chores, job responsibilities, and relationships.

### Family circumstances

While carrying out the online learning, parents explained their family circumstances in terms of the number of siblings and working status. Students' family circumstances closely affect their educational status. In Türkiye, mothers generally undertake parental roles and responsibilities. For this reason, in addition to other gender roles, the participants expressed that they had difficulty in carrying out online learning with their children at home. Especially if the number of siblings participating in online learning at home was more than one, families had difficulties in providing both the environment and equipment for all. Participants express their family circumstances in this regard as follows:

*K13: We have a computer, but it is shared among siblings. Her elder sister also uses it because she is preparing for university exams. Since we live in a house with two plus one room and we are a large family, the child does not have a separate room.*

*K21: First of all, we had a technology device problem. There was a timetable clash for the children and me. Two computers, a tablet, and a mobile phone were used at home.*

The working status of the participants is also an important factor for online learning. In Türkiye, mothers are mostly involved in children's education as parents. This situation makes the process more difficult for working mothers. Participants tried to overcome this difficulty by either giving up on themselves or getting support from other family members. A mother (K26) who works from home explained this situation as follows: *"I am working, we are both on the computer at the same time while he is in the online class. But I am all ears. Currently, I describe myself as a housewife, not a working mum. On the one hand, I am a PhD student. So I try to keep up with all three, but never even one of the three is perfect"*. A father (K18) who works from home also stated his experience regarding child care: *"I think the biggest problem in this process is the childcare during the day. The hardest problem we observe is the supply of caregivers"*.

### **The challenges during online learning**

Since education was carried out online from home throughout the pandemic, all responsibility for this process fell on the parents. In addition, student-teacher interaction is limited to online classes via computers. In this regard, control, feedback, correction, and catch-up studies are carried out by parents at home. In this regard, the participants explained the process as follows:

*K27: My child did not understand, I need to explain the subject. The subject is unknown to me and I need to study it. I know everyone has a homework fight at home. All mothers and fathers are warning their children by saying sitting at the desk, turning on your camera, and listening to your lesson, and it seems that mothers and fathers are doing much of the work at home rather than teachers. I do not think that national education is successful in this sense at all.*

*K28: Since we were first graders, it was very difficult to learn sounds from online classes. No matter how much it is explained on the screen, we have to put more effort into explaining it and making it work. But it is very difficult to listen to anything again after the online class. If she was going to school, at least she would understand the sounds fully at school and we would only be repeating them at home.*

During the pandemic, children were not very willing to participate in online learning. At this point, parents tried to respond to the psycho-social needs of the children at home. The majority of parents in this research emphasized that their children had attention deficit, motivation, and adaptation problems. Parents' opinions on this subject are listed as follows:

*K3: In the online class, the children are very careless, and the teacher rebels. There is distraction. He plays with a pencil and eraser. This time, he gets surprised when the teacher asks a question. Generally, all children have attention deficit disorder.*

*K23: His teacher teaches the lessons very well, but my son has difficulty in being motivated. It is very hard for him to sit in the chair and listen to the lesson without interruption. Therefore, I feel that there is a disconnect between the subjects. A complete learning environment is not created, student-teacher interaction is incomplete, peer learning is incomplete, and the habit of doing homework is disrupted.*

*K25: There was an adaptation process at the beginning of remote teaching. There were problems such as getting distracted easily or not being able to focus at all. Not being able to communicate face-to-face with their teachers and friends and not being able to go to school are very challenging for children. Remote teaching does not contribute sufficiently to children's social and emotional development.*



## **Educational environment**

The shift to remote teaching with the pandemic process has also changed the educational environment of children. Children had to spend most of their time at home in front of the computer. This means organizing an educational environment for children at home. Parents have turned part of their homes into classrooms for the education of their children. However, it is inevitable to experience some disruptions when doing online learning at home. Parents expressed opinions that the educational environment that parents organize for their children at home is not like a school or a classroom:

*K1: The home environment is not like the environment at school. There are lots of toys around. He can pick up something and get distracted. He can take food and drink, and turn off the microphone and camera, everything is in his hands. If he turns around and does something else, the teacher doesn't see it.*

*K19: Since it is a home environment, it is inevitable for children to be distracted. For example, the doorbell rings and they wonder what is going on, and since they are in their room, they play with objects and toys around them.*

*K26: Every child's room has now become their school. However, there is a comfort that comes from the home environment. There are millions of distracting factors such as the toy in the room, the WhatsApp ringing coming from the neighbor upstairs, the knock on the door, the mother talking on the phone, the microphones being left on, and the parents being heard talking from behind.*

Establishing an online learning environment at home is not limited to just providing space and equipment. It also requires knowledge of using technology. The inadequacy of parents in technology use has disrupted the online learning process. In this regard, K2 said, "We had difficulty logging into EBA, I do not have sufficient technical knowledge. "We are trying to connect to the system, but it kicks and we cannot connect." Similarly, K6 emphasized, "The children are missing the lesson due to internet connection problems, power outages or other technical problems." In short, children could not fully participate in online classes at home due to computer, internet connection problems, or power outages.

## **Household chores, job responsibilities, and relationships**

Online learning takes place at home, where the basic needs of all family members such as eating and drinking, cleaning, laundry, and ironing also take place. In other words, certain routines must be followed at home. These household chores are mostly carried out by women. Women are responsible for maintaining their own work-life at home, as well as monitoring the education of their children and doing household chores. In this regard, the majority of the participants stated that they did the household chores according to their children's online class:

*K2: I arrange all my work according to his online class. If there is an online class in the morning, I cook and do my chores accordingly. Of course, this disrupts the chores I have to do at home a bit.*

*K4: Sometimes I feel overwhelmed, weekdays are filled with children's stuff. The chores are also my responsibility. Cleaning, ironing, laundry, and eating... I can't clean up during the weekdays. We just have breakfast, and I clean up the kitchen, then I just take care of the kids and I can't do anything else. I can't even go to the market without leaving the kids alone at home.*

*K21: It's exhausting. Because you can't clean up during the week. You can't vacuum the house during the online classes. If I vacuum in the morning, one is in the online class, and if I vacuum in the afternoon, the other one is in the online class. We would hire a cleaner from outside. But we cannot now. This situation is frustrating.*

*K26: 24 hours a day is not enough for me. In other words, I can't keep up with my work life, the household chores, and the child's responsibilities. That's why I try to cook dinner while the child is doing his homework in the kitchen. The food has to be prepared for the evening. There is laundry, wash it, dry it, and iron it...*

As can be seen, in addition to social gender roles, women also take part in work life. Working women also fulfill their job responsibilities in this process. Thus, women's responsibilities at home have increased. Some women even think that they cannot pay enough attention to their children's education. As a working mother, K5 said, "I cannot take care of my daughter as I want because I work, I feel inadequate. If it weren't for her aunts, my daughter would be left behind" while K7 expressed herself as follows: "Because I am a working person, I cannot keep up with my child's online learning process, I can not pay as much attention to him as I should, but we only study together on the weekends". Additionally, participants' opinions revealed that working women felt worn out and tired in this process:

*K20: ... I cannot sit down to do any work before 8-9 p.m. My workload plus the workload of the house makes my working hours longer. Apart from my work, I am also trying to complete my doctoral thesis. I also have my academic studies. Apart from routine work, I have to do most of my work responsibilities at night. I am sleep-deprived. My main problem is fatigue. This process caused a serious increase in women's workload.*

*K21: My courses at university have increased. I do my undergraduate classes in the afternoon. I am also a doctoral student. I am also taking care of children's education. Additionally, housework... I do my work after midnight. I prepare lecture notes, do household chores, etc., and academic studies are left behind.*

The fact that every need from A to Z is met together at home harms the communication and relations between children and parents. Parents who were always with their children at home throughout the pandemic stated that this process especially eroded the mother-child relationship. Mothers who stayed at home with their children, especially in the online learning process, exemplified this situation as follows:

*K22: We do everything at the same house. Even though our rooms are different, she always comes and goes with us. She feels lonely when I tell him to go, I have work to do... When I leave my work and take care of her, I get worried because my work is waiting. This time my patience with her is decreasing and my voice is rising. She says don't shout at me this time. However, I am trying to explain myself to her.*

*K26: Our relationship was negatively affected by this issue. Not just a mother who plays and chats, but who also gets his homework done, sees his inadequacies, tries to fix them, and gives punishment when necessary... My child is saying to me that I would get rid of you even if schools were opened and added that my teacher doesn't push me that much.*

*K27: I have to remind him of his responsibilities. No matter how soft I try to make it. The child feels pressure. I feel like a guard too. This feeling tires me, it tires him too, and frankly, it wears out our relationship from time to time.*

### **The roles of parents in the online learning process**

This online learning is carried out by mothers at home with their children. Mothers often undertake this great responsibility alone. However, it has been observed that fathers are more actively involved in this process, especially in homes with working mothers. If we make a general evaluation of parents, they stated that they especially felt like teachers because they supported their children's online learning process during the pandemic. On the other hand, since the management of the online learning process lies with the parents, they also undertake the roles of control, observation and follow-up, time management, and technical and psychological support.

### **Teaching support**

Parents have especially endeavored to provide educational support to their children in the online learning process. The basic logic underlying remote teaching, which is compulsory with the pandemic, is to ensure that children achieve their learning outcomes without putting them at risk. In this regard, parents have taken more responsibility for repeating subjects and homework compared to the period before the pandemic. Parents' opinions about homework are listed as follows:

*K11: Teachers assign homework. For example, it says that this homework will be done by noon tomorrow and will be sent by WhatsApp group. The next day, the teacher sends the answers and they compare them. The teacher says that you will make them do their homework, remind them of their lessons, and check their homework. He puts the responsibility on parents.*

*K24: We check the homework and then send it to the teacher. We check the homework given in the workbooks. Because the teacher says he can't keep up with everything.*

While doing homework, parents also see what the children are missing. Before the pandemic, parents reported the missing subjects to the teacher, but they repeated the subjects in remote teaching. In this regard, K1 said “... We have to explain everything. Of course, much more was put on us. The teacher does not know who understands the subject in the online course and who does not. We always try to explain it ourselves”. Similarly, K2 supported this situation with the following statement: “I try to explain again the parts that he does not understand, but I cannot be sure, sometimes I wonder if the teacher explains it like that too, I don't know, we call the teacher and ask, he says he explains it like this, and then I repeat it accordingly”. K19 emphasized parental support at home and said, “As parents, I think our workload is too much. I realize that if there is no support from parents at home, children do not devote themselves to lessons. While doing homework, we repeat the issues that they do not understand or cannot figure out until they understand”.

### **Control observation and follow-up**

Parents took part with their children in the online learning process carried out at home. Parents, especially those with primary school-age children, emphasized that they attend classes together, check the room from time to time, and follow the process closely. In this process, parents compared themselves to inspectors or guards. Parents expressed their control and observation roles with the following opinions:

*K1: Children are easily distracted after a certain hour. They are always on the computer and we have to check on them. There are many toys on the table in his room at home. Sometimes we come in and we see him holding something in his hand and fiddling with it. If he were at school, he wouldn't be able to take toys to class. They can also turn off the camera during the lesson. During this process, the teacher cannot see what they are doing, we observe their room in the meantime. If we do not control it, primary school children may play games in their rooms instead of lessons.*

*K3: Like an inspector, I leave him alone in the room during online class, but his door is open, so I listen to him and keep my ear to him while doing chores at home. I wonder what he is doing and whether he can answer questions.*

*K4: When he went to school, at least we were only getting his homework done, and in class, he was with the teacher. Now we are together at every stage. I wonder if he listens to the lesson, and what he does in front of the computer, I feel like an inspector. I have to constantly monitor them to see if they are watching the lessons or what they are doing. I don't want them to fall behind in their classes.*

*K11: I always keep an eye on the child. He was under the supervision of teachers at school. When I'm at home, I have to keep track of myself. I'm like a teacher at home. I always keep it under surveillance. I am interested. I think if I don't pay attention, he will listen and listen and pass away.*

Parents underline that in addition to homework control and lesson observation, they closely follow their children's online learning process. In this regard, K18 explained what they did with the view that “we try to follow the daily lesson hours, do studies on what is done in the lesson and its repetition, and pay attention to the controls of the time spent in front of the computer”. K24 emphasized that he followed the education process very closely by saying “...I follow online courses to see what subject they are

covering. If there is a subject that he cannot understand, I always have my ear to my child so that I do not have difficulty in reinforcing it". In summary, the roles of the teacher in the classroom had to be assumed by the parents in the remote teaching process during the pandemic. This situation has caused serious pressure on parents.

### **Time management**

During the pandemic, remote teaching was introduced at every school level, from preschool to higher education. It has been a little more difficult for children of primary education to carry out this process from home compared to other groups. While time management was provided with a bell at school, this task was carried out by parents at home. Parents' views on time management and the methods they use are as follows:

*K4: I always keep an eye on the clock so that I don't miss it. Time passes quickly, they always start the lesson with my warnings.*

*K11: Previously, we kept children away from computers and phones. But now we have to make children sit in front of computers and phones. It became our duty every morning to wake the child up and get him to sit in front of the computer.*

*K12: We generally follow it. Go to class, class has started, class time, did you attend or not?*

### **Technical and Psychological Support**

The pandemic has caught people unprepared in every respect. Remote teaching, which was made compulsory with sudden decisions, is also a result of this. During the pandemic, online learning was conducted through various platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc. In this context, children who are inadequate in technology have difficulty in continuing this process. At this point, parents sometimes helped their children themselves and sometimes with support from other family members. Parents' practices regarding technological support are as follows:

*K8: We are part of this process. As a mother with a child going to primary school, he cannot solve the problem caused by the internet alone, we must be ready.*

*K20: I turn on the computer, set it up, and we attend the lesson together. He needs my support in using the computer to attend the online class.*

*K25: I organized the educational environments. I ensured that there were no deficiencies in their technological equipment.*

Children also needed psychological support in the online learning process during the pandemic. Because, on the one hand, they tried to avoid COVID-19, and on the other hand, they tried to participate in online classes. To carry out this process in a balanced way, parents tried to keep their children's morale and motivation high. Parents' opinions on this subject are as follows:

*K10: In this process, it is the family's responsibility, as a parent, to ensure the child's participation in the lesson and to increase his motivation. By keeping calm, we try to support children in getting out of the current situation most healthily and efficiently.*

*K11: We ensure that children adapt to lessons. For this reason, I try to do what the child wants at home. I'm trying to encourage classes.*

*K19: We tried to help our child adapt to the lesson by warning or congratulating him.*

### **Parents' support strategies for online learning**

It has not been easy for parents to carry out the online learning process from home during the pandemic. Parents generally state that online learning is not as effective as face-to-face education and think that face-to-face education should be taken by taking the necessary precautions. However, parents

supported this online learning process, which was mandatory during the pandemic, as much as they could. During this period, parents tried to continue both their daily work and the online learning process at home. In addition, working parents carried out their duties from home or at work. Thus, they handed over the children to families or caregivers at home.

On the other hand, teaching is not an area of expertise for most parents. Parents were inadequate in their children's homework or lessons. For this reason, parents needed support and cooperation to carry out online learning with their children at home. Parents used strategies such as family/carer support, school administration-teacher cooperation, tutoring and catch-up studies, and web applications to support online learning.

### **Family/carer support**

During the pandemic, people stayed at home except for essential needs and business conditions. For this reason, working parents could not be directly involved in the online learning process. These parents received support from family or caregivers. Parents' opinions in this context are as follows:

*K5: We get up in the morning, I leave her to her grandmother. She has aunts who go to university there, they support her in this process and I am at work between 10-16.00. For this reason, I cannot be directly in the process.*

*K6: Since he has a caregiver, he tries to help when I am at work.*

*K9: I received support from friends and family. Since this process was exhausting, I sometimes received help from my closest friends and people whose academic knowledge I trusted to make healthier decisions on some issues.*

*K28: I get support from my family when I am busy working from home. My mother and sister follow the online class.*

### **Partnership**

During the pandemic, there was an emergent shift to remote teaching without any preparation. For this reason, parents expressed that they had difficulty managing the online learning process at home. During this process, they preferred to communicate primarily with the school administration and teachers on the issues they were stuck on. When they could not reach the school administration or the teacher, the parents tried to solve the problem among themselves. Parents' views on partnership in this regard are listed as follows:

*K3: I usually ask the teacher when there is a problem. There is not much communication with parents in the classroom. There is only one friend. Sometimes he asks me what he should do and I help him.*

*K10: We kept our communication strong with the classroom teacher and school administration.*

*K24: We can always reach our teacher. We can consult and talk to her about anything we want. As a parent, I can provide support to other parents. If I know something, I try to help someone else too.*

As can be seen, when parents encounter a problem in this process, they first try to reach the teacher. Then, they share this situation with other parents and try to find a solution. However, it was observed that the partnership and support of the school administration were insufficient in guiding the parents in this process. A parent explained this situation as follows:

*K26: Parents have a big responsibility. Parents and the school must cooperate... Only at the beginning of the semester did the school administration hold a face-to-face meeting with the parents. It was an informational meeting for parents. This process was talked about a little at the meeting. I don't think meetings like this are productive, but our teacher did not hold a*

*separate meeting. But it had to be done. There are great expectations from parents, but at least they need to be given guidance or information on how to help their children in online learning. After everything is over at the end of the semester, there is no point in saying that the children fell behind in this subject and missed this subject, as it is very difficult to recover it retrospectively. Immediate intervention is necessary in the primary school group.*

### **Tutoring and catch-up studies**

Parents were worried about their children's education during the pandemic. Because the responsibility for children's education lies directly with the parents. During the remote teaching process, parents had their children take online or face-to-face tutoring on subjects in which they were inadequate. K4 explained this situation as follows: *"It's not like a school environment. I hired a private teacher for a while. He came to support"*. K5 also expressed his opinion as follows: *"We agreed with a teacher to provide face-to-face tutoring because I was a little nervous at the beginning of the semester"*. On the other hand, as an alternative to tutoring, parents supported their children in this process by getting them catch-up studies from different sources. Because the examples given only in online courses were not sufficient. K19 said, *"We did more homework and practice at home. We paid more attention to our lessons. Even though we couldn't explain as much as a teacher, we tried to support him as much as we could in subjects in which he got stuck with education sets"*.

### **Web applications**

Web applications have become widespread as most people had to stay at home during the pandemic. During this period, web applications began to be used more widely in education. It is now seen that parents prefer web applications more frequently to support and reinforce their children's education. In this regard, parents think that web tools should be included in the remote teaching process. In this context, examples of parent opinions are presented below:

*K3: I open lecture videos on the internet to support. I have them take tests on the subjects they cover. I also make myself review the topic. We solve similar examples on the web. Also, the teacher says to watch it on EBA TV.*

*K10: Students should participate in the lesson with different applications without just giving lectures, and it should also be tested whether the students listen to the lesson with tools such as Web 2 applications.*

## **Discussion**

The study was an effort to investigate the roles and experiences of parents in the online learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic in Türkiye. For the aims of the research, the answer to the question of how parents carried out the online learning process at home during the pandemic was sought. In this context, participants grounded the online learning process at home on the context of family circumstances, the child's educational needs, educational environment, household chores, job responsibilities, and relationships. Family circumstances are different in every home and it is not possible to determine these circumstances. In this study, parents' employment status, number of siblings, and home-schooled children were discussed within the scope of family circumstances. Parents, especially mothers, going to work or working from home have closely affected the child's online learning process. At this point, the participants emphasized that they carried out the online learning process from home with family or caregiver support. Participants even stated that *"finding a caregiver during the pandemic was a big problem for families"*.

Although the pandemic period has been challenging for everyone, it has had disproportionately greater negative impacts on working parents and women. Many parents are stressed due to disruptions and uncertainty in school and childcare schedules (Brower, 2022). On the other hand, the number of siblings

at home and the number of children receiving education are among the family circumstances that challenge parents during the online learning process. The number of siblings studying at home prevented access to online learning. In parallel with this finding, Basaran et al. (2020) also revealed that children could not attend online classes regularly because they have a course timetable clash. According to Erbas (2023), families having more than one child receiving online learning at home and the children not having separate rooms pose a serious obstacle to online learning. On the other hand, Bhamani et al. (2020) emphasized that this situation is a learning loss for children.

During the online learning process, parents tried to meet the educational needs of their children at home. In this regard, parents underlined that children need feedback, correction, and motivation. Because remote teaching is inadequate in terms of control, feedback, correction, repetition, and interaction. Limited online interaction reduces children's motivation (Erbaş, 2023). In addition, students stated that they could not understand the subjects in online courses and could not get answers to the questions they asked (Basaran et al., 2020). On the other hand, Misirli and Ergulec (2021) emphasized that only basic courses such as math, science, and social studies are given in online learning. During this period, children isolated due to the pandemic were deprived of art lessons where they had the chance to express their feelings. Thus, children's motivation regarding the education process has decreased significantly.

Throughout the pandemic, parents have tried to carry out online learning by preparing an educational environment for their children. Within the possibilities at home, children participated in online learning either in their rooms or in a corner of the house. In this regard, parents have simplified children's rooms or living rooms, which contain various distracting stimuli, and transformed them into a learning environment. In Ozdogan and Berkant's (2020) study, this situation was defined as space independence by parents and students and was stated as an advantage. Students even expressed the convenience of participating in remote teaching from home. However, in this study, parents stated that it was not easy to organize a home education environment in terms of online learning management and infrastructure. Because children could not concentrate on lessons at home like at school. Parents have intervened more with their children to carry out online learning at home. This situation negatively affected mother/father-child relationships. In particular, mother-child relationships have been damaged by constant warnings such as *"Do your homework, study, listen to your teacher, attend the lesson"* In this context, children reproached their parents with expressions such as *"You are not my teacher, you are too cruel, I don't like you"*.

While parents were conducting online learning at home with their children, they also tried to fulfill their household chores and job responsibilities. This situation has put a strain on working mothers the most. Working mothers have arranged their chores according to their children's online lessons. For this reason, mothers did the laundry, ironing, and cooking during the day while the children were in class, and cleaned the house after class. In other words, parents arrange their daily work according to their children's online learning hours (Ribeiro et al., 2021; Toran et al., 2021). They devoted time to his job responsibilities and personal studies at night when everyone else was asleep. During the pandemic working mothers compared themselves to robots in terms of performing multiple performances and to superheroes in terms of struggling with difficulties (Kiziloglu, 2021). Parents who had to work during the day left their children with grandmothers or caregivers.

As can be seen, parents made more efforts while carrying out the online learning process at home. In this process, unlike the normal period, parents had to assume the responsibilities of teachers and school administration at school. The control, observation, and follow-up role of parents has come to the fore, especially in managing the online learning process at home. Almost all of the behaviors exhibited by the teacher during classroom management at school were imposed on the parents. Parents checked their children at regular intervals while they were in online lessons and, if necessary, attended the lessons with their children and observed this process closely. The research of Ribeiro et al. (2021) also supports this finding. The authors revealed that parents observed their children in online lessons. Because children are not mature enough to take responsibility for their learning. On the other hand, parents also

took over the bell duty at school and managed the children's start-end times at home, so that the children would not miss their lessons. In parallel with this finding, Suarez Fernandez et al. (2022) also stated that parents spent more time on children's environment management during the pandemic.

Parents ensured that online lessons continued with technical support in case of a problem with hardware or software. However, parents think that they are inadequate to increase children's learning motivation. Because, unlike the collaborative learning environment with their peers at school, children are isolated at home and exposed to an artificial learning environment. For this reason, parents play an important role in the learning motivation of children, since they are the only ones keeping face-to-face contact. Parents play an intermediary role in helping teachers increase children's learning motivation (Astuti et al., 2022). In this period when interaction is very low due to the pandemic, it is seen that parents are trying to motivate their children with rewards and punishment. However, punishment is not a suitable motivator for children. Mak (2021) has also stated that physical punishment further reduces children's motivation to learn.

This research revealed that parents put the most effort into providing educational support to their children. Parents stated that children were given a lot of homework during this period. According to the participants, this is because online courses are insufficient and not as effective as face-to-face courses. Homework done by teachers in school courses before the pandemic is left to parents throughout the pandemic. Parents mostly help their children with their homework (Ribeiro et al., 2021). In other words, as Suarez et al. (2022) stated, parents supported their children more with homework during the pandemic. It has been shown that parental support is more beneficial than teacher support in improving children's academic skills in online learning during the pandemic (Gunzenhauser et al., 2021). In addition, in this study, it is seen that children are not given enough feedback in online lessons and since there is no evaluation, the repetition and reinforcement of the subject is left to the parents.

The COVID-19 pandemic has closely affected the world. This period has also been challenging for education stakeholders, as in every sector. Especially with the transition to remote teaching at home, the roles and responsibilities of parents have increased. In this context, parents use various strategies to support their children's education. First of all, working parents receive family or caregiver support depending on their family circumstances. During this period, families had difficulty finding caregivers. Grandparents, aunts, or caregivers were together with the children during online learning and helped them when they had a problem. On the other hand, parents have been in constant communication and cooperation with teachers to manage this process effectively. During this period, teachers tried to support students through various communication channels through parents. Additionally, when parents encountered a problem, they tried to find a solution by consulting other parents. However, parents could not establish the necessary cooperation with the school administration in conducting online learning. Parents expected guidance from the school administration during this period of uncertainty. However, school administrators stated that they made serious efforts in communication and cooperation to support families during the pandemic (Jones & Forster, 2021). On the other hand, it seems that parents of children preparing for the exam are more anxious during this period. These parents had their children take private lessons. Other parents also had their children receive catch-up studies with educational sets and test books. In addition, the use of online tools and web resources increased in the online learning process (Lee et al., 2021). In this study, parents stated that they widely used web applications recommended by teachers to support learning.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

The COVID-19 pandemic has deeply affected every area of social life. As an emergent response to the pandemic, there is a sudden shift from face-to-face education to remote teaching. It is very challenging for parents as a key education stakeholder. In this study, the changing roles of parents as key education stakeholders are to be revealed. In this regard, the findings suggest that parents especially mothers take responsibility for the child's online learning. In the case of mothers working, grandparents, aunts or



caregivers take this responsibility. On the other hand, parents have to organize their daily lives at home according to the online learning process of their children. Parents also have underlined that children have low motivation to learn alone at home. They also think that online learning is not as effective as face-to-face education at school. Parents try to help their children achieve their learning outcomes by themselves or by getting external support. On the other hand, parents feel like teachers in this process at home, because they usually say to children "Start your online course, listen to your teacher, pay attention, don't care about anything" and this harms the relationship between parents and children. In this process, it is seen that parents also undertake such roles as reinforcer, supervisor, motivator, and controller in online learning at home.

Children at primary school may have technical difficulties in attending online courses, and some parents can easily handle technical problems, others may receive external support or the children may miss the course. Parents also think that school management and the teachers are too poor to guide them in this process, though they can reach the teachers in case of need. To overcome this process, parents should behave calmly and proactively. In sum, it is very challenging for parents to conduct the online learning process at home with primary school children. It can be added that apart from emergent cases like the pandemic, online learning is not a good choice for children, who are not mature enough to take on their educational responsibilities.

Online learning is becoming a strong alternative for all learners from primary to higher education. For this reason, parents, especially mothers who take a serious part in the education of children, should improve their technology use competencies. On the other hand, motivating children to online learning can be problematic, especially for primary school children. To motivate them, parents must explain the importance of online learning for their future education instead of rewards and punishments. However technological infrastructure is a big problem in Türkiye. The officials must provide students with the necessary hardware, software, and access to the internet.

School-parent partnerships could be a bit poor in remote teaching during the pandemic. It was an unplanned shift to remote teaching for all stakeholders. However, it can be said that the parents got confused in this process because of the uncertainty and emergent policies. In this regard, school management should strengthen their partnership with parents by arranging online or face-to-face meetings separately for all classrooms. On the other hand, to make a much better support for online learning parents should be encouraged to attend online courses on digital competencies. Because of the wider usage of digital tools in every side of daily life, parents and children should be educated as digital citizens including digital security, access, literacy, law, ethics, etc.

For researchers, this research subject can be investigated after the pandemic to compare the changes in parents' roles. What's more, researchers can conduct meta-analysis or meta-syntheses studies, which reveal the parents' roles before-during-after the pandemic. To get multiple points of view on parents' roles, they should conduct interviews with school administrators, teachers, and students as well. On the other hand, the researchers can use different data collection tools like the online photovoice approach. It is a strong approach, combining participants' photography with dialogue. It can be used in various contexts like social action research, experiential activities, supervision, etc. Additionally, by revealing parents' changing roles and responsibilities in different contexts, they can reframe the parent involvement types.

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## APPENDIX-1

The interview questions were as follows:

1. As a parent, how do you spend a day at home with your child during online learning? How do you feel as a parent in this process?
2. As a parent, how do you manage your child's online learning process during the pandemic period?
3. How has the pandemic affected your child's education process?
4. How has your child's education process changed with the pandemic?
5. Do you think your child can achieve the learning outcomes during the online learning? Have you received any support on this issue?
6. What are the advantages and disadvantages of online learning for parents?
7. How would you define being a parent in online learning during the pandemic? What does it mean to you to be a parent educating your child via online learning during the pandemic?
8. How was your relationship with your child affected by the online learning process during the pandemic?
9. Where do you see yourself as a parent in this process of online learning? How would you define your role in this process?
10. As a parent, what did you do differently from your child's education process before the pandemic?
11. What did you do to overcome the difficulties you encountered as a parent during this period? Do you get support from anyone?
12. In your opinion, how can current online learning practices be more effective during the pandemic? What are your suggestions on this subject? What advice can you give to other parents during this process?
13. As a parent who has enabled his child to learn via online learning throughout the pandemic, is there anything you would like to add in the context of your roles, duties, and responsibilities in this process?

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### Author's Contributions (CRediT)

The author: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – review & editing.

### Acknowledgements

Not applicable

### Funding

Not applicable.

### Ethics Statement

Ethical approval was obtained for the study (Trakya University Ethical Committee Approval Number: 24.02.2021/ E-29563864-050.04.04-26114).

### Conflict of Interest

The author does not declare any conflict of interest

### Data Availability Statement

The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

### Suggested Article History

Submitted: December 21, 2023 – Accepted: February 17, 2024

### Suggested citation:

Kurum Tiryakiođlu, G. (2024). Roles of the Parents in Online Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Phenomenological Study. *Asian Journal of Distance Education*, 19(1), 120-141. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10674551>



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