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Teachers' Attitudes Towards Distance Education After The Emergency Remote Teaching Period ¹

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ABSTRACT

Distance education, especially after COVID-19, is becoming more and more important all around the world. Many countries are trying to offer a richer learning environment to students with blended learning that include the combination of face-to-face and distance education. Attitude is an important factor closely related to the success of distance education. In Türkiye, from the cessation of face-to-face education on March 16, 2020, to the resumption of face-to-face education on September 6, 2021, teachers faced many changes and new practices in their educational activities. This research aims to examine the attitudes of teachers working in public schools in Türkiye after this extraordinary period. In this study, a survey research design was employed. A total of 253 teachers volunteered to participate in the study. Findings showed that teachers have an indecisive attitude towards distance education after this unusual situation they experienced. In addition, it was determined that there was no significant relationship between the attitude towards distance education and gender, professional seniority, or the type of profession. These variables are not significant predictors of attitude towards distance education. On the other hand, it was found that the attitudes of the participants towards distance education differ significantly in favour of those with postgraduate education according to their educational level. The results of the research revealed that the educational level significantly predicts the attitude towards distance education.

Keywords: Distance education, Emergency remote teaching, Attitude, Teacher.

INTRODUCTION

Moore and Kearsley (2011) define distance education as a teaching and planned learning activity that takes place in environments where the learner and the teacher are physically separated from each other, requiring communication technologies as well as institutional organizations. It is seen that the concept of distance education and distance learning, which date back to the 1800s, are widely used as synonyms in the literature. However, since the learning activity is carried out only by the student, distance education stands out as a more inclusive naming. In distance education, where different technologies (printed, audio/radio-based, video/television-based, or computer-based) are used regardless of time and place, it is a basic criterion that the teachers and the students are physically separated from each other. This distinguishes distance education from all other traditional face-to-face education approaches (Schulte, 2011). It is still a controversial issue whether distance education, which is seen as an alternative approach to face-to-face education, is as effective as the traditional classroom environment. However, there are various research findings that it is as effective as face-to-face learning when appropriate methods and technologies are used (Phipps & Merisotis, 1999; Shachar & Neumann, 2003; Zhao, Lei, Yan & Tan, 2004; Simonson, Schlosser & Orellana, 2011). Distance education as an education model contains different structures. These are technological infrastructure, organizational structure, teaching structure, social structure, and psychological structure (Yıldız, 2015: 6). The technological structure includes all kinds of software and hardware to provide time and space flexibility in distance education systems and to support the educational process. Organizational structure focuses on the institutional structure that should be in an education system, the functioning of the structure, and cooperation within the organization. The social structure includes the people (teacher, student, administrator, etc.) who are in the distance education system, who are directly or indirectly exposed to the system, their roles, responsibilities, and communication with each other. The teaching structure consists of teaching techniques and activities that teachers use to convey the content they planned within the framework of the learning process in the most effective way. The psychological structure is one of the core components that play an important role in the

¹ "This study was produced from the term project conducted by the first author under the supervision of the second author."



success of the distance education process. It covers the psychological states of individuals participating in the distance education process, such as attitudes and beliefs. The interaction of all these structures with each other constitutes the distance education system.

A national education project was implemented in 2011 to provide equal opportunities in education and improve the technological infrastructure in schools in Türkiye. The project called the Movement of Enhancing Opportunities and Improving Technology (FATİH) has five basic components. These are (1) providing hardware and software infrastructure for schools, (2) creation and management of educational digital content, (3) in-service training of teachers, (4) conscious, safe, and measurable use of ICT, and (5) effective use of ICT in teaching programs. The project does not focus only on strengthening the technical infrastructure. In addition to strengthening the management and organizational structure, it is focusing on the correct and effective use of quality educational content and information technologies by teachers. Within the scope of the project, it is aimed to provide VPN and high-speed Internet access to every school by creating an "information technology class" in all schools and as well as an interactive whiteboard, and wired/wireless Internet access for every classroom. In addition, there are separate project goals for every teacher (EBA applications, EBA market, cloud accounts, sharing course notes) and every student (EBA Market, cloud accounts, digital identity, homework sharing, and individual learning materials) (MEB, 2022). The development of the technological literacy skills of teachers and their ability to integrate new technologies into their classrooms are gaining more and more importance today. Teachers' attitudes play an important role in realizing this change and adopting the new roles they have acquired (Çelen, Çelik, & Seferoğlu, 2013).

Following the World Health Organization's (WHO) declaration of the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic on March 11, 2020, face-to-face education was suspended in schools in Türkiye as of March 16, 2020, and emergency remote teaching (ERT) was implemented. According to the Hodges et al. (2020) ERT is "a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances". It includes specific emergency solutions to teaching and learning under unusual and unpredictable situations. The main goal of ERT is to provide temporary access to instruction during a crisis. The Turkish Education System, which has invested heavily in technology integration and teacher training with the FATİH project in the last decade, has found a unique opportunity to evaluate its ability to respond to unusual and unpredictable situations, as with the closure of schools all over the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Steps taken by the Turkish Ministry of National Education (TMoNE) during the pandemic in Türkiye are as follows (Deniz, 2021):

Table 1. Reflections of COVID-19 on the Turkish Education System (Adapted from the study of Deniz, 2021)

March 23, 2020 - TV supported distance education started (10 lessons at primary and secondary school level, 22 different lessons at high school level).	October 9, 2020 - It was decided to conduct face-to-face education by the TMoNE in primary school 1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd , and 4 th grades and secondary school 8 th grades, 6 + 6 lesson hours twice a week, and in high school prep classes and 12 th grades, 8+8 lesson hours two days a week.
March 31, 2020 - TMoNE, High School Entrance Examination (LGS) and University Entrance Examination (YKS) dates have been postponed. LGS and YKS exams were exempted from the subjects in the second semester because the second-semester courses could not be taught in schools.	October 14, 2020 - 500 thousand tablets purchased for students who have difficulties in accessing distance education started to be distributed.
April 3, 2020 - Live classes started with the "Live Classroom" application (for 8 th and 12 th -grade students who are preparing for LGS and YKS exams).	November 02, 2020 - Face-to-face education started in the 5 th grade in secondary schools and 9 th grade in high schools.
April 29, 2020 - The holiday period for schools has been extended until May 31, 2020.	November 16, 2020 - The first-semester break has begun. It has been decided that the teachers' professional study program of 16-20 November 2020 will be made online.
May 14, 2020 - TMoNE opened certified distance education programs to be organized simultaneously and asynchronously to improve the knowledge, skills, and expertise of teachers and administrators.	November 19, 2020 - From Friday, November 20 th to Monday, January 4 th , it has been decided to continue all formal, private, formal, and non-formal education activities through distance education.
May 6, 2020 - The opening date of all public and private schools has been postponed from 30 April to 31 May.	December 15, 2020 - Depending on the request of the parents, it was decided to switch to face-to-face education in public and private kindergartens, and application classes.
June 10, 2020 – It was announced that schools in primary and secondary education will be closed, and distance education will end on June 19. School reports will be given remotely in the form of e-report cards.	December 19, 2020 – It has been announced that distance education, which will last until January 4, has been extended until January 25, 2020. The semester break of the 2020-2021 academic year has been extended for one more week.
June 18, 2020 - It has been announced that the professional work activities for the 22-30 June period, in which teachers will participate, will be carried out remotely via distance education methods.	February 15, 2021 - It was decided to switch to face-to-face education 5 days a week in primary and secondary schools and all kindergartens in villages and similar sparsely populated settlements.

June 19, 2020 – By closing schools in primary and secondary education within the TMoNE distance education ended.	March 1, 2021 - Face-to-face education started 2 days a week in all public and private primary schools and kindergartens, special education classes, 8 th grades of all public and private secondary schools, and 12 th grades in high school.
June 29, 2020 - At the end of the academic year, summer school programs were launched on TRT-EBA TV for primary, secondary, and high school students.	March 3, 2021 - A country map was created according to the number of patients in the provinces across the country. According to this map, the provinces in Türkiye were divided into four groups as low, medium, high, and very high-risk provinces. TMoNE has decided to implement different practices according to risk situations.
August 31, 2020 - The new academic year has started via distance education using TRT EBA, EBA, and live lessons. Lesson content videos of the critical topics and curriculum objectives of the lessons of the second semester in the last academic year were broadcast on TRT EBA (Primary-Middle School-High School) TV channels, and make-up class began.	March 30, 2021 - With the announcement of the country risk map, the decision to switch to face-to-face education across the country, taken by the TMoNE, was stopped again.
September 21, 2020 - One-day face-to-face education was started in preschools and primary school 1 st grades.	

With the improvement of the pandemic conditions in Türkiye, it has been announced that on September 6, 2021, face-to-face learning will begin at all levels, five days a week. The Turkish education system, which gained a strong infrastructure with the FATİH Project, tried to benefit from this infrastructure at the highest level at all levels (primary school, middle school, high school). More than one million teachers work in public and private schools. Like many countries in the world, Türkiye has initiated an emergency remote teaching (ERT) period during COVID-19. ERT is an effort to keep education alive rather than to make it sustainable. Many educators around the world have shifted their practice from in-person to remote teaching. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light a considerable number of gaps in teacher training for ERT. When we look at the table above, we see that many changes and new practices have been implemented in schools depending on the pandemic conditions. At the center of all these developments are teachers who try to adapt to the new decisions taken and the distance education process. Attitude is defined as the possible behavior that an individual is expected to display in the face of a situation, event, or phenomenon (İnceoğlu, 2010). Attitudes have a directing effect and impressive power on the emotional states and behaviors of individuals as a result of their experiences. This extraordinary situation experienced with COVID-19, which has deeply affected the Turkish education system as it is all over the world, has led teachers to have different experiences in their professional lives. In this study, the attitudes of teachers working in public schools towards distance education after the COVID-19 pandemic were examined in terms of various variables. For this purpose, the following questions were addressed:

1. What are teachers' attitudes towards distance education?
2. Do teachers' attitudes towards distance education differ significantly according to gender, professional seniority, educational level, and type of profession?
3. Do teachers' gender, professional seniority, educational level, and type of profession predict their attitudes towards distance education?

METHOD

Research Model

This study employed a quantitative survey method to investigate the attitudes of teachers towards distance education after COVID-19.

Study Group

In the Turkish educational system, teachers working for 1-4 grades are regarded as classroom teachers, and those teaching in 5-8 grades are considered as branch teachers. Each school has school administrators (one school principal, one or more vice-principals for every school). School administrators are selected from among those who fulfill certain criteria and are still working as teachers. The study group of the current research consists of 253 teachers. Of the participants, 71 (28.1%) stated that they are working as school administrators (school principal or vice principal), 82 (32.4%) branch teachers, and 100 (39.5%) classroom teachers. The majority of the participants (n=158, 62.5%) were female. A total of 30 (11.9%) of the teachers participating in the study were 0-10 years, 53 (20.9%) were 11-15 years, 59 (23.3%) were 16-20 years and 111 (43.9%) had 21 years and more professional seniority. While 216 (85.4%) of the teachers have undergraduate degrees, 37 (14.6%) have postgraduate education.

Data Collection Tools

In this research, the scale developed by Ađır (2007) was used to determine the teachers' attitudes towards distance education. The construct validity of the scale was tested with exploratory factor analysis. Principal components were used as a factorization method. As a result of the analysis, it was found that the factors affecting the attitudes of teachers towards distance education consisted of two dimensions called the advantages of distance education (14 items) and the limitations of distance education (7 items). The scale consists of 21 items on a 5-Likert type scale and explains 60.1% of the total variance. Items related to the dimension of limitations of distance education (negative statements) are reverse coded. To determine the reliability of the scale, item-total correlations and Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient were examined. The internal consistency coefficient for the overall scale was 0.835. Within the scope of this study, the reliability analysis of the overall scale was recalculated, and the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be as 0.919.

Data Collection and Analysis

To determine whether the teachers' attitudes towards distance education differ according to various variables, the skewness/kurtosis values for each variable, Shapiro-Wilks test scores, Q-Q, and histogram graphs over the subscales and total score were examined. It was observed that the data exhibited a normal distribution. For this reason, parametric tests were used for the variables of gender, professional seniority, educational level, and type of profession. Within the scope of this study, whether independent variables predict teachers' attitudes towards distance education was tested with multiple linear regression analysis. The predicted variable of the study is the attitude towards distance education. Predictive variables are gender, professional seniority, educational level, and type of profession. In this context, autocorrelation between variables (Dublin Watson=1.84), multicollinearity (VIF values between 1.02 and 1.07), and normality values ($p > .05$) were examined. The results of the carried-out analysis showed that the values met all the assumptions within the acceptable range.

FINDINGS

In this section, the findings obtained in line with the research questions are given.

Findings Regarding Teachers' Attitudes Towards Distance Education

Descriptive statistics regarding the scores obtained from the scale regarding the attitudes of the participants towards distance education are given in Table 2 based on the whole scale and subscales.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of scale scores.

Dimensions	N	K (Number of items)	Min.-Max.	\bar{X}	ss	\bar{X}/K
Advantages of distance education subscale	253	14	14 – 66	36.3	9.62	2.59
Limitations of distance education subscale	253	7	7 – 29	14.6	4.13	2.09
Whole scale	253	21	21 – 91	50.8	12.8	2.42

When teachers' attitudes towards distance education are examined, it is seen that the average scores regarding the advantages of the distance education subscale are 36.3, and 14.6 for limitations. As can be seen in Table 2, the participants' attitude scores regarding the advantages of distance education are slightly above the medium level ($\bar{X}/K=2.59$) and below the medium level regarding its limitations ($\bar{X}/K=2.09$).

Findings Concerning the Comparison of Attitudes Towards Distance Education According to Various Variables

Gender

The results of the independent samples t-test, which were conducted to examine whether the teachers' attitude scores towards distance education differed significantly according to gender, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. T-test results of attitudes towards distance education scores by gender.

Dimensions	Gender	N	\bar{X}	S	sd	t	p
Advantages of distance education subscale	Male	95	36.3	10.84	251	0.00	.994
	Female	158	36.3	8.84			
Limitations of distance education subscale	Male	95	14.8	4.31	251	0.66	.506
	Female	158	14.4	4.02			
Whole scale	Male	95	51.1	14.18	251	0.22	.826
	Female	158	50.7	11.98			

As seen in the table, teachers' attitudes towards distance education subscale scores and total scores do not show a significant difference according to gender ($p>.05$).

Professional Seniority

Since there are few participants ($n=5$) with a professional seniority of “between 0-5 years”, this category was combined with an upper category (between 6-10 years) and the analysis continued. The results of the single-factor ANOVA test, which was conducted to examine whether the teachers' attitude scores towards distance education differ significantly according to professional seniority, are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. One-factor ANOVA results by professional seniority

Dimensions	Groups	N	\bar{X}	SS	sd	F	p
Advantages of distance education subscale	0-10 years	30	39.6	9.44	98	1.801	0.152
	11-15 years	53	36.8	9.28			
	16-20 years	59	34.9	8.96			
	+21 years	111	35.8	10.05			
Limitations of distance education subscale	0-10 years	30	14.6	4.11	98.6	0.568	0.638
	11-15 years	53	14.4	3.91			
	16-20 years	59	14.1	3.66			
	+21 years	111	14.9	4.47			
Whole scale	0-10 years	30	54.2	54.2	98.6	1.185	0.320
	11-15 years	53	51.2	51.2			
	16-20 years	59	49.0	49.0			
	+21 years	111	50.7	50.7			

When Table 4 is examined, it has been revealed that teachers' subscale scores and total scores do not differ according to professional seniority ($p>.05$).

Educational Level

Table 5 presents the results of the independent samples t-test conducted to examine whether the teachers' attitude scores towards distance education differ significantly according to their educational level.

Table 5. T-test results of attitude scores towards distance education according to educational level.

Dimensions	Educational Level	N	\bar{X}	SS	sd	t	p
Advantages of distance education subscale	Graduation degree	216	35.6	9.56	251	-2.80	0.005*
	Postgraduation degree	37	40.3	9.06			
Limitations of distance education subscale	Graduation degree	216	14.5	4.15	251	-1.15	0.251
	Postgraduation degree	37	15.3	3.99			
Whole scale	Graduation degree	216	50.0	12.81	251	-2.47	0.014*
	Postgraduation degree	37	55.6	12.01			

* $p<.05$

It is seen that the advantages of distance education subscale scores and the total scale scores for distance education differ according to educational level. The attitude scores of teachers with postgraduate education towards the advantages of distance education ($\bar{X}=40.3$) are higher than teachers with undergraduate education ($\bar{X}=35.6$). Similarly, when the general attitude scores of the participants towards distance education are examined, it is seen that teachers with postgraduate education ($\bar{X}=55.6$) have higher scores than teachers with undergraduate education ($\bar{X}=50.0$).

Type of Profession

The attitudes of the teachers working at the public schools towards distance education were examined under three different categories as school administrators (school principal and vice principals), branch teachers, and classroom teachers. The results of the single-factor ANOVA test, which was conducted to examine whether the teachers' attitude scores towards distance education significantly differ according to the types of duties, are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. One-Factor ANOVA results by type of profession.

Dimensions	Groups	N	\bar{X}	SS	sd	F	p
Advantages of distance education subscale	School administrator	71	37.2	9.12	162	0.562	0.571
	Branch teacher	82	36.1	9.34			
	Classroom teacher	100	35.7	10.21			
Limitations of distance education subscale	School administrator	71	15.1	4.10	157	0.749	0.474
	Branch teacher	82	14.3	4.46			
	Classroom teacher	100	14.4	3.87			

Whole scale	School administrator	71	52.3	11.81	162	0.729	0.484
	Branch teacher	82	50.5	12.93			
	Classroom teacher	100	50.1	13.45			

It has been revealed that teachers' subscale scores and total scores do not differ according to the task of the profession ($p>.05$).

Findings on Predicting Teachers' Attitudes Towards Distance Education

Multiple regression analysis results for teachers' attitudes towards distance education are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Multiple regression analysis results in predicting attitudes towards distance education.

Variables	B	Standart Error _B	β	t	p
Gender					
Female – Male	0.267	1.77	0.0208	0.151	0.880
Professional seniority					
11-15 years – 0-10 years	-3.729	2.93	-0.2908	-1.271	0.205
16-20 years – 0-10 years	-6.200	2.91	-0.4836	-2.127	0.034*
+21 years – 0-10 years	-3.734	2.67	-0.2912	-1.401	0.162
Educational Level					
Postgraduate – Graduate	5.609	2.31	0.4374	2.423	0.016*
Type of Profession					
Branch – School administrator	-2.034	2.18	-0.1586	-0.935	0.351
Classroom – School administrator	-1.642	2.16	-0.1280	-0.761	0.447

$R=0.209$, $R^2=0.0436$, $F_{(7,245)}=1.60$, $p=0.137$

* $p<.05$

Gender, professional seniority, educational level, and type of profession related to the attitude towards distance education were included in the analysis. As can be seen in Table 7, no significant relationship was found between gender, professional seniority, educational level, type of profession, and attitude towards distance education ($R=0.209$, $R^2=0.0436$, $F_{(7,245)}=1.60$, $p>.05$). According to the results of the t-test for the significance of the regression coefficients, the variables of gender, professional seniority and type of profession do not have a significant predictive effect. On the other hand, it was determined that the educational level positively predicted the attitude towards distance education.

DISCUSSION

In Türkiye, from the cessation of face-to-face education on March 16, 2020, to the resumption of face-to-face education on September 6, 2021, teachers faced many changes and new practices in their educational activities. In this study, the attitudes of teachers working at public schools towards distance education after this extraordinary period in Türkiye were examined.

Research findings showed that teachers have an indecisive attitude towards distance education. In addition, it was determined that there was no significant relationship between the attitude towards distance education and gender, professional seniority, and type of profession. These variables did not have a significant predictive effect. On the other hand, it was determined that the attitudes of the participants towards distance education differed significantly in favor of those with postgraduate education according to their educational level. The results of the research revealed that the educational level significantly predicts the attitude towards distance education.

Studies are showing that teachers have a positive (Ağır, Gür, & Okçu, 2008; Baran, 2008; Çelen, Celik & Seferoğlu, 2013; Kocayığıt & Uşun, 2020) attitude towards distance education before the pandemic. Studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic also showed that teachers' attitudes towards distance education differ according to various variables. Akyürek (2021) stated that teachers' attitudes towards distance education differed significantly according to gender, educational level, and professional seniority, while Aksoy Kökosmanlı (2022) stated that there was no significant relationship between teachers' attitudes towards distance education, gender, and professional seniority. In the study carried out by Moçoşoğlu and Kaya (2020), it was determined that there was a significant difference between teachers' attitudes towards distance education and the variables of age and professional seniority. While there were studies indicating that teachers' attitudes towards distance education do not differ according to gender (Yahşi & Kırkıç, 2020), there were also studies that found a significant relationship between attitudes towards distance education and gender, professional seniority, and educational level (Yassıbaş, 2021). In Türkiye as well as in the whole world, distance education has started to be implemented as an obligation rather than a necessity during COVID-19. In the last decade, Türkiye has invested heavily in its technological infrastructure, digital content, and teacher training with the FATİH project. The Turkish education system had the chance to test the results of this great

investment in the COVID-19 pandemic. Many administrators and teacher training were carried out within the scope of the FATİH project with the protocols signed between the Ministry of National Education and various institutions. The fact that attitudes towards distance education do not differ according to gender, professional seniority, and type of profession, which is a finding of this research, maybe the result of these training sessions. The aim of teacher training in the form of face-to-face and distance education is to increase the knowledge and skills of teachers on technology-supported education and the conscious use of technology (MEB, 2022). Therefore, it can be considered as an expected and intended situation that teachers' attitudes do not differ according to gender, professional seniority, and type of profession.

Another important finding of the study revealed that the general attitudes of teachers towards distance education are at an unstable level, and this attitude differs only in favor of postgraduate teachers according to their educational levels. Educational level is a significant and positive predictor of the attitude towards distance education. Undergraduate education includes a more general learning process related to a field; postgraduate education contributes to in-depth specialization in this field (Aydemir & Çam, 2015). Distance education, which matured at the primary, secondary, and higher education levels in the 1980s and 1990s in Türkiye, has become an important part of education, especially after the 2000s, with the new developing technologies. Distance education programs are generally found at the higher education level at associate degree, undergraduate, and non-thesis graduate levels (Bozkurt, 2017). The number of master's programs with thesis is limited (İzmirli, Şahin İzmirli, & Çankaya, 2019). Students gain the ability to access, compile, interpret and evaluate information during graduate education. In addition, they are introduced to new and different educational practices specific to their fields. The fact that postgraduate education is a meaningful and positive predictor of the attitude towards distance education. We consider this situation as the reflection of these new approaches experienced by teachers in the education process.

With the closure of schools, social distance rules, and changing personal/social sensitivities, emergency remote teaching has become the dominant educational activity during the COVID-19 pandemic all over the world (Sezgin, 2021). Emergency remote teaching (ERT) is not distance education. ERT took place as a result of COVID-19 to fit the online learning. It does not aim to establish a long-term sustainable learning ecosystem. ERT aims to provide temporary instructional support for learners. It is the process of assimilating learning activities with remote access to face-to-face education with the help of technological tools. As for teachers, the current pandemic which is neither the first nor last was a challenging process and the workload was increased. This situation has changed their perception of distance education radically (Bozkurt et al., 2020).

Attitude refers to a positive or negative reaction or tendency that cannot be directly measured against a situation or event. Positive or negative attitudes towards distance education have the power to affect the efficiency of the education and training process positively or negatively. This research is important in terms of revealing the attitudes of teachers who have experienced an extraordinary process such as the COVID-19 pandemic towards distance education. Today, distance education cannot be expected to replace face-to-face education. However, many countries are trying to offer a richer learning environment to students with blended (hybrid) learning that include distance education as well as face-to-face education. Distance education is a dynamic and constantly developing field. Teachers are one of the core elements of this process. We believe that examining the attitudes of teachers is a useful way to determine the possible problems encountered in such practices. Türkiye has made a great investment to eliminate the digital gaps and enhance the quality of education in the last decade with the FATİH project. The success of the FATİH project against extraordinary situations such as COVID-19 should be carefully examined. It was seen that teachers' attitudes towards distance education are at an undecided level in this research. This study revealed that there is a need for large-scale in-depth studies on the strengths, weaknesses, and components to be developed for the FATİH project.

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