


Opinions of Secondary School Eighth Grade Students upon Distance Education and Preparation Process for High School Entrance Exam during the Pandemic

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Abstract: With the Covid-19 pandemic, the need for examining the effect of distance education process, where millions of students have been caught unprepared, on Turkish education has arisen. It is rather important to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the education in this process and to give the right direction to the process by overcoming the existing problems. In accordance with this purpose, the opinions of the students in secondary school eighth grade during the pandemic have been taken regarding the Turkish education and preparation process for high school entrance exam in this period. Case study, one of the qualitative research methods, have been used in this research. The data has been collected by using an interview form. The findings of the research have been examined by being categorized in line with the questions in the interview form and presented respectively. Distance education has some shortcomings due to certain reasons in terms of Turkish lesson. Many reasons such as the lack of technological knowledge of the students and teachers, the difficulty to access technological tools, communication difficulties in distance education, have reduced the students' interest in the Turkish lessons and negatively affected the preparation process for the high school entrance exam. It has been observed that the most important effect of the current situation is the loss of motivation of the students.

Keywords: Pandemic, Turkish Education, Distance Education, Student Opinion

Introduction

Distance education is a concept that comes up frequently, especially with the rapid developments in internet technology. Distance education, which is evaluated as different from distance learning by Moore & Kearsley (1996), is defined as an education that contains teaching and learning processes based on the use of various technological applications, according to Buselic (2012). Distance education is to deliver education content to students who are not in the same classroom atmosphere, independently of time and place, by using information technologies (Gökçe, 2008). Distance education is a field of education that focuses on teaching methods and technology with the aim of delivering teaching, often on an individual basis, to students who are not physically present in a traditional educational setting such as a classroom (Honeyman & Miller, 1993).

In case of events that cause cessation or disruption of education such as natural disasters, terrorist incidents and pandemics, a quick solution comes up with distance education applications (Kahraman, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has caused some mandatory changes in the way education is implemented by affecting the education system in many countries, and in this context, countries have switched to distance education instead of traditional face-to-face education. Especially in the field of education, which involves a large mass and where interaction is intense, precautions have been taken primarily and put into practice without wasting time. In this way, the decision to suspend education at schools has affected more than 91% of the world's student population. (Miks & McIlwaine, 2020).

Online teaching methods and television-based educations are the most common ones among the platforms that can provide distance education. (Valentine, 2002). For this reason, with the decision to transition to distance education, online media and TV broadcasts started to be used actively in this process in many countries (Stojanovic, El-Khatib, Brandic & Maalouf, 2020). These platforms help to increase the interaction between teachers and students as much as possible to facilitate learning when face-to-face education is not possible, and in this way support distance education to become as close as possible to traditional face-to-face education (Teaster & Blieszner, 1999).

First case in Turkey was detected on March 11, 2020. Direct and indirect effects of this interrupted the daily life routine by bringing some difficulties and this interruption also took effect in the field of education. This pandemic, having spread all around the world, not only negatively affected countries in terms of health; economic, social and cultural aspects, but also put them at a disadvantage in the sense of education (Çakın & Akyavuz, 2020). Accordingly, after the first case in Turkey, education was suspended for a short period of time in pre-school, secondary school, high school and in higher education levels. Then, with the decision of Ministry of National Education and YÖK (Council of Higher Education) together, distance education process was adopted instead of face-to-face education. Since March 23, 2020, the Ministry of National Education in Turkey has included students at every school level in the scope of distance education through three television channels and EBA (Education Informatics Network). In this way, the courses held over the EBA (Education Informatics Network) have been made available via the internet, TRT channel and television, so TV and internet-based distance education platforms have started to be actively used. In order to find solutions to the problems caused by the distance education process, it is significant to identify these problems first. Therefore, there is a need for academic studies in which the opinions of teachers and students who are at the center of distance education are taken and the problems related to distance education are determined.

Purpose of the Research

In this study, it is aimed to determine the existing problems by taking the opinions of the secondary school eighth grade students about distance education and preparation process for the high school entrance exam during the pandemic. In regard to this purpose, answers to the following questions have been sought for:

1. How is the concern and support of the parents of secondary school eighth grade students during the distance education process?
2. What is the attitude of the Turkish teachers of secondary school eighth grade students during the distance education process?
3. What is the effect of distance education process on the Turkish lessons of the secondary school eighth grade students?
4. What is the effect of distance education process on the preparation process for high school entrance exam process for the secondary school eighth grade students?

Method

In this section, information about the research model, sampling, data collection tools and data analysis have been given.

Design of the Research

In this study, qualitative research method and case study design have been used. Case study provides rich descriptive information about the situation under research by benefiting from deep and various sources of information. The factors related to the examined situation are investigated with a holistic approach and focused on how they affect the relevant situation and are affected by this situation (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). Besides, the information obtained from the participants' explanations, opinions and other sources of data are combined to make a decision about the examined situation (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

Research Group

The study group of the research consists of 10 boys and 10 girls, 20 students in total who are at the eighth grade in secondary school in Uşak. Criterion sampling method, which is one of the purposeful sampling methods, has been used in the selection of the sampling. Criterion sampling is defined as the study of situations that meet a series of criteria that can be created by the researcher or that can be previously determined (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In this study, interviewing the eighth-grade students who attend distance education activities with live lessons has been taken as a criterion.

Data Collection Tools and Data Collection

The data of the study have been collected with semi-structured interview forms consisting of open ended questions developed by the researchers. In the interview forms created within the scope of the research, questions have been asked to the study group about the effects of distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic period on Turkish education and the preparation process for the high school entrance exam. The

interview forms used in the research had been prepared in accordance with the purpose of the research, and then they have been examined in terms of structure, scope and language validity by three academicians who are experts in the field of Turkish education.

Analysis of the Data

Descriptive analysis has been preferred in the data analysis. The data, which were collected in the descriptive analysis, determine what has been said or what kind of results have been revealed in connection with the research matter of the study. Categories were determined by considering the questions in the interview form. In the findings of the study, each participant was given a specific code and their views were explained (S1, S2, S3...). Studies have been carried out to ensure the validity and reliability of the research. While preparing the interview form, content validity was ensured by taking expert opinion. In the analysis of the data, the coding was done by three different researchers and compared, thus ensuring the reliability of the study. In addition, it has been aimed to increase the reliability of the study by including the opinions of the participants frequently.

Findings

The findings obtained in consideration of the data collected in the research are remarked by considering the sub-problem order.

Findings about First Sub-Problem

The concern and support of the parents of the study group in the distance education process is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The Concern and Support of the Parents of the Study Group during Distance Education Process

Concern and Support of the Parents	N	Samples from Students' Statements
Yes. They were concerned and supportive.	13	<p>S4: My parents were concerned. Since we didn't have internet connection at home, they immediately connected one.</p> <p>S16: I am not good with computers. My father taught me how to attend classes.</p>
No. They were not concerned and supportive.	7	<p>S1: As my mother and father work, they didn't care much.</p> <p>S9: My father wasn't concerned, and my mother couldn't help me because she doesn't know how to use a computer.</p>

13 of the students in the study group stated that they had the support of their parents during the distance education process, and 7 of them stated that they did not get any support. The students needed the support of their parents regarding the difficulties they experienced in technological matters and they had a considerable amount of support. It is seen that the parents who could not provide support are working parents. The importance of parent support in education is also observed in the distance education process.

Findings About Second Sub-Problem

The attitude of the Turkish teachers of the study group during distance education process is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The Attitude of Turkish Teachers of the Study Group during Distance Education Process

The Attitude of Turkish Teachers	N	Samples from Students' Statements
Our teacher was more concerned and diligent.	6	S15: Our teacher made us watch videos to make the lesson more fun. S/he projected questions on the screen and had us solve them. S18: Our teacher was not shouting like in class. Lessons were more productive because the classroom was always quiet.
Our teacher's concern and effort decreased.	11	S10: I think our teacher was tired. It was clear from the tone of her/his voice. S14: Technical problems we experienced from time to time reduced our teacher's motivation. Of course ours, too...
Our teacher's concern and effort didn't change.	3	S2: Our teacher was on time as usual. S4: Our teacher taught the lesson as if we were in the classroom, but some of our friends did not attend the lesson at all.

6 of the students in the study group stated that Turkish teachers were more interested in the distance education process, 11 of them stated that the concern and effort of their teachers decreased, and 3 of them stated that the attitude of their teachers did not change. Based on the opinions of the students, it can be said that there were occasional technical malfunctions in the lessons; however, the teachers paid attention to attend the lessons regularly, on the other hand, the students were reluctant to attend the lessons from time to time. Considering distance education reduces the interaction between teacher and student, this situation is an expected case. In distance education, teachers have crucial duties to make the lessons more efficient.

Findings about Third Sub-Problem

The effect of distance education process on the Turkish lessons of the secondary school eighth grade students is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The Effect of Distance Education Process on Turkish Lessons of Secondary School Eighth Grade Students

The Effect on Turkish Lessons	N	Samples from Students' Statements
The effect was positive.	4	S17: As we did not waste time going to school during distance education process, we were able to spare more time for homework. S20: The class was quiet. I could hear the teacher more clearly.
The effect was negative.	15	S1: I couldn't focus on the lessons. I usually felt sleepy in front of the screen. S5: Not being with my friends was boring for me. I did not attend most of the lessons.
There was no effect.	1	S2: I think nothing has changed. I still listened to the teacher and did my homework on time.

4 of the students in the study group stated that distance education had a positive effect on Turkish lessons, 15 of them stated that it had a negative effect, and 1 of them stated that this process had no effect on Turkish lessons. In general, it is seen that students complain about the decrease in the efficiency of Turkish lessons during the distance education process. It can be claimed that distance education is insufficient and has deficiencies for language teaching, which is based on four basic language skills.

Findings about Fourth Sub-Problem

The effect of distance education process on the secondary school eighth grade students' preparation process for the high school entrance exam is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. The Effect of Distance Education Process on the Secondary School Eighth Grade Students' Preparation Process for High School Entrance Exam

The Effect on the Preparation Process for High School Entrance Exam	N	Samples from Students' Statements
The effect was positive.	6	S3: The distance education process gained us time to be able to do tests. S7: We attended the classes we wanted, we didn't attend the ones we didn't want to, so we solved questions instead.
The effect was negative.	14	S5: Distance education was boring for me. I did not want to study. S13: I experienced internet problems and couldn't focus on the lessons.

It is seen that 6 of the students in the study group were positively affected by distance education during the high school entrance exam process, while 14 were negatively affected. 70% of the students were negatively affected by this situation. It can be said that students have mostly suffered during the preparation process for the high school entrance exams, which is considered a serious step for the future of the students. Even though some students mention about some positive aspects of it, the distance education process, where there is less interaction and are technical problems, has negatively affected the motivation of students and teachers.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, in which it is aimed to determine the existing problems by taking the opinions of the secondary school eighth grade students about distance education and the preparation process for the high school entrance exam during the pandemic, it has been determined that the students have needed the support of their parents in order to overcome the technological deficiencies and that they have had this support to a large extent. In order for the technology policy to be used effectively by the citizens in a country, all individuals should have as much knowledge and access as possible (Ergüney, 2015). In order for students to benefit from the distance education applications as requested, it is essential that they have knowledge about the internet use and access to it. The attitudes of the parents, who play a significant role in distance education, during the pandemic appear as an important factor in the achievement of the educational activities. Therefore, it is important to provide technology literacy training required for distance education to all parents and to inform them about the process. Arslan et al. (2021), in their study in which they examined the views of parents on distance education during the pandemic, they included the suggestions of the parents about this process. Parents notified that expect of distance education, online book reading lessons and longer periods of classes for both themselves and the students.

Based on the opinions of the students, it can be said that there were occasional technical malfunctions in the lessons; however, the teachers paid attention to attend the lessons regularly, on the other hand, the students were reluctant to attend the lessons from time to time. In general, it is seen that students complain about the decrease in the efficiency of Turkish lessons during the distance education process. It can be claimed that distance education is insufficient and has deficiencies for language teaching, which is based on four basic language skills. Besides, 70% of the students were negatively affected by this situation. It can be said that students have mostly suffered during the preparation process for the high school entrance exams, which is considered a serious step for the future of the students. Even though some students mention about some positive aspects of it, the distance education process, where there is less interaction and are technical problems, has negatively affected the motivation of students and teachers. In literature (Kan & Fidan, 2016; Uzoğlu, 2017; Tuncer & Bahadır, 2017), it has been detected that students find distance education advantageous in some aspects and disadvantageous in some aspects.

Alpaslan (2020) and Serçemeli and Kurnaz (2020) examined the views of academicians upon distance education. Mahdy (2020) investigated the effect of distance education on the academic success of Veterinary

School students during the Covid-19 pandemic period. Altun Ekiz (2020) examined the views of the school of physical education and sports students, and Altuntaş Yılmaz (2020) examined the views of physiotherapy and rehabilitation department students on distance education during the quarantine period. Eroğlu and Kalaycı (2020) carried out research about Turkish Language course via the comparison of distance and face-to-face education. Keskin and Özer Kaya (2020) investigated the evaluations of undergraduate and graduate students regarding distance education during the pandemic period, and Yolcu (2020) and Andoh, Appiah and Agyei (2020) examined the evaluations of university students regarding distance education. Alam (2020) researched mutual views on teachers and students regarding distance education during the pandemic period, while Kaden (2020), Kocayığıt and Uşun (2020) and Fidan (2020) researched teachers' opinions on distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic period.

These studies have revealed similar results with our research results. According to the students, there is no superiority or failure of this system on its own. However, it has been concluded that the students mostly prefer face-to-face education and that they consider distance education system is more appropriate as an emergency action plan in times of crisis.

Recommendations

1. Learning outcomes about distance education can be included in the curriculum.
2. Apart from the studies on the evaluation process of the EBA (Education Informatics Network) platform with teachers, studies on content creation for various courses can be conducted.
3. Studies can be carried out to determine what kind of other activities and interesting materials can be used regarding learning and teaching processes in state channels.
4. Support services regarding distance education can be provided for students.
5. Alternative solutions can be developed by improving technological infrastructure facilities.
6. Informative seminars for parents about distance education can be conducted.

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