

What Do Newspapers Say About Distance Education?

Cansu ALTUNSABAN YERLİKAYA
Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University
cansuyerlikaya@mu.edu.tr

Abstract

The aim of the study was to evaluate how the media covered distance education practices carried out by the Turkish Ministry of National Education between March 16, 2020, and September 6, 2021. The study employed qualitative research methods, specifically the document analysis design. In this context, the study focused on newspapers as a media platform. The research assessed the perspectives on distance education from four newspapers with different ideologies. The primary objective of the study was to raise awareness of existing issues, inform the public, and promote action-oriented solutions, especially in the field of education. Within the scope of the study, instead of emphasizing biased or unbiased media, the fundamental role of the media, which is often more significant than commonly perceived, is underscored. Based on the findings of the research, it is emphasized that the media should be aware of the critical role it plays and that providing inaccurate or misleading information, particularly in the field of education, can have adverse consequences. Additionally, the study draws attention to how and to what extent the topic of distance education is addressed. As a result of the study, the importance of informing the society about the distance education process is discussed, emphasizing the need for accurate and effective communication in this regard.

[This paper was published in: "EJER Congress 2023 International Eurasian Educational Research Congress Conference Proceedings," Ani Publishing, 2023, pp. 83-96]

Keywords *Education System, Media, Distance Education*

Introduction

Education is a process that enables individuals to acquire or enhance knowledge, skills, values, and behaviors. This process encompasses learning experiences and typically occurs through the involvement of teachers, students, and learning materials. Education aims to empower individuals to contribute consciously, competently, and effectively to society. On the other hand, an education system refers to a comprehensive structure encompassing educational institutions, policies, programs, and resources within a country or region. This system covers all levels of education,

from preschool to university (Cabalin, 2015). The education system regulates what kind of education is provided to students, how it is taught, who teaches it, and how the process is financed. Each country or region has its own education system, which is often regulated by laws, standards, and guidelines.

Each country has its unique conditions and priorities that shape its distinct education system. Various factors influence the design, functioning, and outcomes of this education system. Media is one of the factors that have an impact on education systems (Paalman, 1997).

Media is a general concept that encompasses all mass communication tools. Typically, mass communication tools that aim to influence the audience are also regarded as effective instruments for propagating the dominant ideology. Therefore, the media, which operates with the aim of addressing people en masse, directing them towards the consumption of a specific product, and convincing them to endorse certain thoughts and opinions presented to them, performs various functions such as delivering information to the masses, conveying messages, and utilizing their time (Baba et al., 2007). The functions of mass communication tools were categorized into eight headings in a study prepared by the UNESCO Commission, known as the 'MacBride Report.' These are Education, News and Information, Socialization, Motivation, Discussion and Dialogue, Cultural Development, Integration, and Entertainment (MacBride, 1993). One of these functions, news and information dissemination, is considered the most fundamental function of mass communication tools. Mass communication tools provide information about events, developments, and changing conditions in the country and the world, enabling society and individuals to learn about national and global issues, as well as forming social opinions on these issues. Along with this function, mass communication tools not only satisfy individuals' interests and desires but also facilitate their learning about new developments and adapting to them. This function involves mass communication tools reaching, producing, and disseminating events, ideas, and developments that will be the basis of news (Güz, 2005). The socialization function is a means that individuals use to connect with the broader social world; it is the process of learning and internalizing the values, beliefs, and norms of culture, thereby forming a sense of self (Croteau and Hoynes, 2000). Ensuring that individuals adapt to the society in which they live, integrate with it, and become individuals who conform to the behavioral patterns deemed necessary by the society can only be possible

through the socialization function. Thus, individuals, having internalized both written and oral rules, interact with others, having developed a positive role.

The Singaporean education system has achieved international success. Looking back, when Singapore gained independence in 1965, its education system was largely weak. It had fundamental infrastructure deficiencies such as school buildings, resources, and teacher competence. Substantial education reforms were carried out in conjunction with implemented education policies. Today, Singapore's education system is known as a globally acclaimed educational model that has achieved high levels of success and is often praised. Its students consistently rank high in international exams such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study). Their achievements, particularly in mathematics and science, stand out. While this progress in the field of education over the course of approximately 60 years is highly positive, it is also essential to consider the factors that have influenced this development (Lee et al., 2016). In this regard, one of the questions that should be asked is the extent of the media's influence. If the media had adopted a negative or biased stance, could such progress in education have been achieved? If the media had displayed a negative and non-transparent attitude towards the implemented education policies, could public support have been garnered? Could society have elevated its literacy levels from very low levels to today's standards?

In the study conducted by Liu et al. (2018), the impact of mass media on the formulation and implementation of China's education policies is examined using the introduction of higher education quality assurance policies in the early 2000s in China as a case study. The research findings suggest that the current influence of mass media on China's education policies primarily includes the following aspects: Facilitating the agenda-setting process of education policies; enhancing the legitimacy of these policies; monitoring the implementation of these policies. However, it has been noted that there is a need for improvement in providing a platform for public discourse and enhancing the quality of policy design.

The impact of the media on the education system has become more pronounced and significant with the transition to remote learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. During the Covid-19

pandemic, the influence of the media on the education system included a range of crucial roles such as information dissemination, communication, promotion of remote learning platforms, and raising public awareness. In this process, the media undertook the role of rapidly disseminating current and accurate information about the pandemic. Governments, schools, and health authorities conveyed important guidance to students, teachers, and parents through the media on how to navigate the situation. Additionally, the media played a vital role in informing the public and facilitating discussions on education-related topics, including the effects, challenges, and advantages of remote learning. In addition to all of this, if distance education is implemented correctly and accurately reflected in society, it can be considered as an alternative education model in extraordinary situations such as pandemics. Indeed, following the earthquakes in Turkey on February 6, 2023, a six-month period of remote education was initiated at universities (Telli & Altun, 2023).

Considering the functions of the media, it is evident that it plays an extremely important role in creating social awareness and raising public consciousness in the field of education. In terms of informing the public about developments in the field of education, creating awareness about ongoing issues, and garnering public support for efforts towards solutions, the media holds an influential position. Therefore, the accuracy and impartiality of such information dissemination are of critical importance. In the wake of the Covid-19 virus that emerged in China in 2019, quarantine measures were implemented worldwide. During the pandemic, this situation led to the adoption of remote learning models for education globally, prompting primary and secondary schools as well as universities to undergo a reshaping process in line with global trends and the requirements of the Covid-19 pandemic. In Turkey, schools were initially closed on March 16, 2020, and it was decided to continue education through 3 TV channels and the Education Informatics Network (EBA) within the scope of open and distance education practices at the primary and secondary education levels (MEB, 2020). This remote education process came to an end on September 6, 2021, and face-to-face education resumed. During this process, the Ministry of National Education implemented various applications related to remote learning. The aim of the research is to evaluate the reflections of the practices carried out by the Ministry of National Education regarding distance education in the press between March 16, 2020, and September 6, 2021. In this context, a study

was conducted on newspapers as a media tool. Within the scope of the research, the views of newspapers from different ideologies on distance education were evaluated. The aim is to raise awareness of existing problems, inform the public, and take action to address the issues, especially in the field of education. Rather than the concepts of biased or unbiased media, the media's primary duty holds even greater importance than expected. In this context, the sub-goals of the research are as follows:

1. How did the Ministry of National Education's decision to transition from face-to-face education to remote education on March 16, 2020, reflect in the newspapers?

1.1. How did it appear in the headlines and front-page news?

1.2. How did it appear in opinion columns?

2. Between March 16, 2020, and September 6, 2021, what are the views expressed in newspapers' headlines, front-page news and opinion columns regarding:

2.1. Remote education?

2.2. The EBA platform?

2.3. Opinions on the inadequacy of technological infrastructure?

2.4. Views on the continuation of remote education at different levels of the education system?

2.5. Opinions on inter-institutional transition exams (LGS and YKS)?

2.6. Opinions on in-school exams (written and oral)?

Method

In the research, the document analysis model, which is one of the qualitative research methods, was employed. The study included four newspapers with different perspectives, selected among newspapers with high circulation and follower numbers. The data sources of the research consist of headlines and news on the first page of the selected newspapers and opinion columns. In this context, opinion columns were obtained by scanning all publications of the authors listed under the "All Authors" tab on the official websites of the selected newspapers. Additionally, opinion columns published on a website that compiles all columns were also checked. Similarly, news and

headlines on the first page were accessed from the official websites of the newspapers. All data obtained were collected from publicly accessible sources. In the course of the study, a total of 539 days of newspapers were scanned. Since the data of four different newspapers for 539 days were examined, a total of 2156 newspaper data were scanned.

In the study, descriptive analysis and content analysis were conducted. Within the scope of the research, data for headlines and news on the first page were coded for date, title, content, whether the news contained commentary, information provision status, content status (whether there is only a title), critical dimension (positive-negative-informational), and which sub-dimension it belonged to. In the case of opinion columns, data such as date, title, content, critical dimension, which sub-dimension it belonged to, and the explanation status of the news content were coded. The encodings were recorded in MS Excel program. After the encodings were completed, themes were created. For the validity and reliability of the analyses, the analyses were repeated by an expert academic in the field, and the findings were compared.

The data collected within the scope of the study was gathered by the researcher, who analyzed the news articles and opinion pieces with an objective perspective. The raw data from the analyses were meticulously organized into tables using MS Excel software. These tables were created in a way that another researcher could easily review them. This means that access to relevant articles for any potential questions or issues is ensured, and the documents can be reanalyzed by another researcher if needed. In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the research, direct quotations were also included.

Results

1. How did the Ministry of National Education's decision to transition from face-to-face education to remote education on March 16, 2020, reflect in the newspapers?

1.1. How did it appear in the headlines and front-page news?

Newspaper 1, first featured a news article related to remote education on its front page with the headline "What time are the classes?" on March 23, 2020.

Newspaper 2, on March 16, 2020, featured a news article titled "Virus, real education is virtual"

on the front page, with only the news headline.

Newspaper 3, on March 20, 2020, featured a news article titled "We are second in the world in Remote Education" on its front page.

Newspaper 4, on March 26, 2020, published a front-page news article with the headline "Schools will remain closed until April 30" regarding remote education.

1.2. How did it appear in opinion columns?

In the **Newspaper 1**, on March 21, 2020, a column titled "There's a Feast during the First Recess" was first published.

In the **Newspaper 2**, on March 25, 2020, a column titled "Turning Corona into an Opportunity: Between Execution and Divine, National Education!" was first published.

In the **Newspaper 3**, on September 11, 2020, a column titled "How Can the Materialist Ministry of Education Become National?" was first published.

In the **Newspaper 4**, on June 12, 2020, a column titled "Distance Education with Armağan Çağlayan" was first published.

2. Between March 16, 2020, and September 6, 2021, what are the views expressed in newspapers' headlines, front-page news and opinion columns regarding?

Table 1. Dispersion of headlines and front-page news for coding

		Newspaper 1	Newspaper 2	Newspaper 3	Newspaper 4
Headline Status	Yes	20	3	2	19
	No	48	68	75	81
Content Status	Yes	63	43	41	78
	No	5	28	36	22
Comment Status	Yes	0	13	2	45
	No	68	58	75	55
Information Providing Status	Yes	57	31	44	65
	No	11	40	33	35
Status of Being a Column	Yes	4	33	0	12
	No	64	38	77	88

	Positive Review	0	0	2	0
Critical Dimension	Negative Review	0	12	0	51
	None	68	59	75	49
Total number of news		68	71	77	100

According to Table 1, it was seen that Newspaper 4 included the most news about the distance education practices of the Ministry of Education on the first page. When we look at the coverage of the news in the headlines, it has been determined that Newspaper 1 mostly carries news about distance education in the headlines. On the other hand, it was found that the least amount of news was carried to the first page of Newspaper 1. It has been observed that most of the news on the first page is published together with the content, and comments are generally not included within the scope of the news. Although the news is generally published for informational purposes, it has been determined that the columns of Newspaper 2 are also included to a large extent. When the news published on the first page is examined according to its critical dimension, it is seen that no criticism is frequently made, and negative criticism is frequently made in Newspaper 4.

Table 2. Dispersion of headlines and first page news according to sub-purposes

	Newspaper 1	Newspaper 2	Newspaper 3	Newspaper 4	Total
What are the opinions about distance education?	15	22	14	35	86
What are the opinions about the EBA platform?	5	10	13	8	36
What are the opinions about the inadequacy of technological infrastructure?	1	17	6	23	47
What are the opinions about the continuation of distance education at all levels of the education system?	27	9	29	12	77
What are the opinions about inter-institutional transition exams (LGS and YKS)?	12	10	11	16	49
What are the opinions about in-school exams (written and oral)?	8	3	4	6	21

When Table 2 is examined, it can be seen that opinions and news covering general perspectives on distance education are generally included. In addition, it was found that many news regarding the continuation of distance education appeared on the first page. It was determined that a small number of news about the decisions taken regarding the written/oral exams administered in schools were published on the first page. Apart from these findings, the following findings regarding the content of the published news are noteworthy;

- No problems related to distance education were mentioned in Newspaper 3, and the reports put forward by the Ministry of Education or other institutions and organizations were not included in the headlines and the news on the first page.
- While it was written in Newspaper 1, Newspaper 2 and Newspaper 4 that parents and students in LGS did not comply with social distance rules and posed a risk, in Newspaper 3 the situation was explained that parents could provide support to students.
- While the news titled "There is no problem in our EBA system" is published in Newspaper 3, the reports published by the Ministry of Education are included in newspaper 4 and it is stated that there are problems.
- While it was written in Newspaper 3 that this situation would be good and was for the benefit of the students when the exam dates were postponed, no news was made when the exams were postponed.

Table 3. Dispersion of the news in columns regarding their coding

	Newspaper 1	Newspaper 2	Newspaper 3	Newspaper 4
Number of Authors	11	12	4	8
Critical Dimension	Positive Review	1	0	0
	Negative Review	14	17	5
	None	35	5	0
Total number of columns	50	22	5	38

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that the number of columns is less than the number of headlines and news on the first page. It has been determined that the most headlines and first page news were published in newspaper 4, while the most columns were published in Newspaper 1. However, it was seen that 12 different columnists wrote about issues related to distance education in Newspaper 2. It was noted that only 4 columns were published in Newspaper 3 within the specified period.

Table 4. Dispersion of columns according to sub-purposes

	Newspaper 1	Newspaper 2	Newspaper 3	Newspaper 4	Total
What are the opinions about distance education?	7	7	3	12	29
What are the opinions about the EBA platform?	3	3	0	1	7
What are the opinions about the inadequacy of technological infrastructure?	3	8	0	2	13
What are the opinions about the continuation of distance education at all levels of the education system?	28	1	2	13	44
What are the opinions about inter-institutional transition exams (LGS and YKS)?	5	3	0	7	15
What are the opinions about in-school exams (written and oral)?	4	0	0	3	7

When Table 4 is examined, it is seen that the columns generally write about the Ministry of Education's practices regarding the continuation of education at the education system levels and the opening and closing of schools. In addition, columns expressing general opinions were among the topics frequently discussed by the authors. On the other hand, it was determined that the topics related to the EBA platform and the Ministry of Education's practices regarding in-school written and oral exams were least published. Themes regarding the content of the published articles are listed in Table 5.

Table 5. Dispersion of columns according to themes

	Newspaper 1	Newspaper 2	Newspaper 3	Newspaper 4	Total
Active Education Model	1	0	0	0	1
Adaptation of Content	0	0	0	1	1
Adaptation of the Student	1	0	0	1	2
Compensation	2	0	0	0	2

Diluted Class	1	0	0	0	1
Exam Cancellation	1	0	0	1	2
Exam process	2	0	0	1	3
Exam Requirement	2	0	0	0	2
Face to face education	2	0	0	2	4
Face to Face Exam	1	0	1	3	5
Fun EBA	1	0	0	0	1
General Status/Opinion	2	5	0	2	9
Health	8	1	1	12	22
Holiday	2	0	0	0	2
Hybrid Model	3	0	0	0	3
Inefficient Education	1	0	0	2	3
Inequality of Opportunity	1	0	0	1	2
Infrastructure	4	8	0	4	16
Lack of content	1	0	0	0	1
Negative Content	0	2	0	0	2
Opening of Schools	5	2	2	1	10
Opening of Village Schools	0	0	0	2	2
Parental Permission	1	0	0	0	1
Parent's Precautions	2	0	0	0	2
Precaution/ Recommendation	3	4	0	12	19
Priority Education	2	0	0	2	4
Process management	0	0	1	0	1
Security	4	1	1	11	17

Teacher Adaptation	0	0	0	1	1
Topic Distribution	1	0	0	0	1
Training Scenarios	0	0	0	2	2

When Table 5 is examined, it can be seen that health-related issues are mostly discussed in the columns. It has been determined that issues related to health have been mentioned, such as opening schools without vaccination of teachers and students, the risk of whether or not students comply with social distance rules in schools, the availability of cleanliness in schools, and the inability to arrange physical areas so that parents and students can comply with social distance rules during exams. In addition to these issues, precautions to be taken and security-related issues were also discussed in the columns. Apart from these topics, infrastructure is also one of the themes most frequently included in columns. Issues regarding infrastructure, such as the facilities of students, the fact that there are places where there is no internet infrastructure, teachers teach with the resources they have at home, and the fact that there are many students who cannot access EBA due to lack of infrastructure, are discussed in the columns. It seems that the opening of schools and the general situation/opinion are among the prominent themes in the columns. Apart from these, it was determined that the columnists mentioned different themes related to distance education, which are included in Table 5.

Discussion, Conclusions and Suggestions

Mass media, which has been the number one factor in the formation of social structures over time, has gained many powers within the system and, thanks to this power, has played active roles in the formation of new balances in society. Within the framework of these active roles, Arabacı (2004) emphasizes that answers should be sought to some questions: What task does or should the media fulfill? How much should he be influenced by management, or is it possible for him to be independent from management, while trying to do his basic duty? How free should the media be? If he will not be free, has the reason for his existence disappeared? If there is to be freedom, should there be limits? If so, who will draw that border, with what right and how? Correct answers to these questions will provide a clearer understanding of the relationship between media and politics. Therefore, the media is seen as an alternative system that provides public services and is appointed

by the society.

In the research, a study was conducted on newspapers as media tools. Within the scope of the research, the views of newspapers from different ideologies on distance education were evaluated. The evaluation revealed that ideologies are reflected in the newspapers' news production and content. One of the selected four newspapers published very few news articles and did not include any negative information regarding the remote education process. Another newspaper, on the other hand, had numerous news articles and opinion columns related to distance education, with a predominance of negative news content. It was observed that this newspaper did not include positive news/information. In the remaining two newspapers, it was generally found that there was a lack of critical perspective in the news related to distance education, and the news aimed to provide information. In light of the findings, it was emphasized that the media should be aware of the critical role it plays and should especially provide impartial and accurate news content, particularly in the field of education, as misguiding the public can have negative consequences.

As a result of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- By voicing the problems experienced in the media, awareness of the problems can be created and action can be taken to solve the problems.
- The columns mostly focused on health, precaution/advice and security themes. Guidance can be given to ensure diversity of these themes.
- Within the scope of the study, 4 newspapers were examined. By increasing this number, comparisons can be made and comprehensive recommendations can be made.

References

- Akdağ, M. (2020). Medya siyaset etkileşimi bağlamında Türkiye’de siyasetin medya alanındaki düzenlemeleri üzerine bir inceleme. *Erciyes İletişim Dergisi*, 7(2), 1173-1197.
- Arabacı, C. (2004). *Basın ve siyaset üzerine...* (M. Işık, Ed.), Eğitim Yayınları.
- Baba, C., Cherecheş, R.M., & Moşteanu, O. (2007). The mass media influence on the impact of health policy. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 3(19), 15–20.

- Bertrand, Claude J. (2004). *Medya etiği*, Başbakanlık Basın-Yayın ve Enformasyon Genel Müdürlüğü.
- Cabalin, C. (2015) Mediatizing higher education policies: Discourses about quality education in the media, *Critical Studies in Education*, 56(2), 224-240, doi: 10.1080/17508487.2014.947300
- Croteau, D., & Hoynes, W. (2000). *Media/Society: industries, images, and audiences*, Pine Forge Press.
- Güz, N. (2005). *Haberde yönlendirme ve kamuoyu araştırmaları*, Nobel Yayın Dağıtım.
- Lee, S. S., Hung, D., & Teh, L.W. (2016). An ecological view of conceptualising change in the Singapore education system. *Educ Res Policy Prac*, 15, 55–70. doi: 10.1007/s10671-015-9176-1
- MacBride, S. (1993). *Bir çok ses tek bir dünya: iletişim ve toplum – bugün ve yarın*, Unesco Türkiye Milli Komisyonu Yayınları.
- Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB] (2020). *Bakan Selçuk, 23 Mart'ta başlayacak uzaktan eğitime ilişkin detayları anlattı*. <https://www.meb.gov.tr/bakan-selcuk-23-martta-baslayacak-uzaktan-egitimeiliskindetaylarianlatti/haber/20554/tr>
- Paalman, M. (1997). Media analysis for policy making. *Health Policy and Planning*, 12(1), 86–91.
- Liu, S., Cai, L., & Zhao, X. (2019) The role of mass media in education policies: A Chinese case study, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 41(2), 186-203, doi: 10.1080/1360080X.2018.1554548
- Telli, S. G., & Altun, D. (2023). Türkiye'de deprem sonrası çevrimiçi öğrenmenin vazgeçilmezliği. *Üniversite Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 6(2), 125-136. doi: 10.32329/uad.1268747