

# More than a virus: How COVID 19 infected education in Turkey?<sup>1</sup>

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- Turkey has shifted to distance learning very quickly to continue education in the Covid 19 pandemic.
- Despite the efforts of the state, not all can benefit from distance learning equally.
- Distance learning has impacted citizen participation and the exercise of civic rights.
- National celebrations have played a key role during the pandemic in terms of fostering national consciousness and uniting people.

**Purpose:** We aim with this report to provide information on how the Covid-19 pandemic affected education and citizenship education in Turkey.

**Design:** The report is based on literature review, the analysis of social media, and the observations of the authors. We provide a general framework of Turkish education after the pandemic using sources such as official statements from government offices; social media entries were analyzed to provide different perspectives. Finally, observations of the authors based on their experiences with distance learning were included in the report.

**Findings:** We argue that despite the efforts of the state, there are still problems in the distance learning process, mainly relating to the access to online classes and the very limited room given to Covid-19 as a topic in social studies courses. In addition, we find that social media have played a significant role in increasing citizen participation as a consequence of the pandemic

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Today globalism has reached the point that an incident that takes place in a country can rapidly influence other parts of the world (Gilliom, 1981; Hicks, 2003; Kirkwood, 2001; Merryfield & Kasai, 2004). The ongoing coronavirus outbreak is a grand example of this phenomenon. The virus has spread to at least 187 countries and territories in five

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months after having first been reported in Wuhan, China. As of June 2020, more than 6.2 million people have been infected (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). The pandemic has not just affected healthcare systems around the world, but it has also forced governments to take measures to limit the economic and social damages arising from the contagion. Education systems have been particularly affected. After the WHO's declaration of the coronavirus as a pandemic on March 11th, 2020 many countries have been compelled to shift to online education without any thorough preparations. Turkey, which is one of these countries, launched their online instruction process for all levels from kindergarten[anaokulu] to high school[lise] on March 23rd, 2020 after only preparing in a week (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [Ministry of National Education], 2020). While the Turkish government has been trying to establish a solid, safe and, dependable distance learning setting for millions of students across the country, inevitable disputes about the differences in theory and practice have started. The foci of the said disputes are on citizenship education and its indivisible parts such as equality and fairness. Since *Social Studies Teachers should prepare young people for active civic life, social studies content knowledge and disciplinary inquiry and provide the foundation for civic life* (National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 2018) social studies instructors are bound to take part in the dispute. Therefore, in our role as social studies teachers, we aim to summarize how the coronavirus has affected education, by casting light on its actors' responses to the distance learning process as teachers, parents, and students in Turkey. To draw a general picture of the Turkish Education System after the background information has been given, the most striking dimensions of distance learning and examples of how the coronavirus has affected citizen participation will be discussed in the following chapters.

### 1.1 Background information

After the first coronavirus case was reported in Turkey, schools were closed for two weeks on 16th March 2020. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [Ministry of National Education] declared that the first week was going to be a holiday whereas by the second week the academic calendar would resume.

The state used the initial holiday week for the preparation of distance learning. This would happen in two main ways: 1) a newly established TV channels called Eğitim Bilişim Ağı TV (Educational Informatics Network TV [EBA TV]) and 2) online education platform of Ministry of National Education called Educational Informatics Network.

Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [Ministry of National Education] along with the state TV channel Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kurumu [Turkish Radio and Television Corporation] established three new channels, on which pre-recorded lectures for all grades have been broadcasted during the day. 674 teachers from 93 different fields have recorded TV lessons in the ministry's studios located in Ankara and İstanbul. These lessons are shown to primary school [ilkokul] and middle school [ortaokul] students between 09.00 and 14.00 and replays are broadcasted between 14.30 and 20.00. For high school [lise] students, lessons are presented between 09.00 and 16.30 and are replays are demonstrated between 17.00 and 01.00. Every weekday, one course for students with special needs, two different courses for primary and middle school students and up to three different courses for high school students have been aired. Besides lessons, gym exercises, drama activities, videos on different hobbies, scientific experiments, music breaks, programmes for parents, psychological counselling, and guidance speeches also take place on EBA TV. For the students who are preparing for high school and university admission exams (8th and 12th grades), a special timetable has been used including practice tests with answers and explanations.

At the beginning of distance learning, lecture duration was about fifteen minutes but now it varies from twenty to twenty-eight minutes. Social studies lessons are broadcast every Tuesday and three different social studies teachers teach fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades by using smartboards. The lesson curriculum has not changed after the pandemic, covering the topics defined in the national curriculum. Examples of topics for the first week were: [Çevremizdeki Ekonomik Faaliyetler \[Economic Activities in Our Environment\]](#) for 5th grades, [Ülkemizin Kaynakları ve Ekonomik](#)

[Faaliyetleri \[Resources and Economic Activities of Our Country\]](#) for 6th grades, Toprak Yönetimi [[Land Management](#)] for 7th grades and Toplumsal Alandaki İnkılaplar ve Gelişmeler [[Revolutions & Developments in the Social Life](#)] for 8th grades.

A typical social studies TV lessons starts with the name of the topic and an explanation of key concepts. Teachers utilize PowerPoint presentations, images, newspapers, maps, animations, and statistical data while teaching and sometimes direct questions to students. The non-interactive nature of the offline TV format does not allow students to actively participate, nor does it give teachers the flexibility to allocate an amount of time for questions and answers that is tailored to the level of understanding of students. Teachers also tend to read the texts on screen verbatim. In the last ten to fifteen minutes of the lecture, the social studies teachers show and answer questions about the topic in hand (mostly answering multiple-choice questions) and tell students the page ranges of exercises in social studies textbooks related to the topic. The repetition of the same course is shown once again and uploaded to the EBA website during the day. As shown in the timetable (Picture 1) lessons are held at fixed times; however, replays are also available on the EBA website for students to review. Given the lack of the official data, it is impossible to estimate the level of student attendance in the EBA TV classes.

**Picture 1: EBA TV timetable for 1-5 June 2020**

SINIF	SAAT	PAZARTESİ	SALI	ÇARŞAMBA	PERŞEMBE	CUMA
ORTAOKUL 5. SINIF	09:00	TÜRKÇE-5	SOSYAL BİLGİLER-5	İNGİLİZCE-5	TÜRKÇE-5	İNGİLİZCE-5
	09:30	MATEMATİK-5	FEN BİLİMLERİ-5	MATEMATİK-5	DİN KÜLTÜRÜ VE AHLAK BİLGİSİ-5	FEN BİLİMLERİ-5
ORTAOKUL 6. SINIF	10:00	TÜRKÇE-6	SOSYAL BİLGİLER-6	İNGİLİZCE-6	TÜRKÇE-6	İNGİLİZCE-6
	10:30	MATEMATİK-6	FEN BİLİMLERİ-6	DİN KÜLTÜRÜ VE AHLAK BİLGİSİ-6	MATEMATİK-6	FEN BİLİMLERİ-6
ORTAOKUL 7. SINIF	11:00	TÜRKÇE-7	SOSYAL BİLGİLER-7	İNGİLİZCE-7	TÜRKÇE-7	MATEMATİK-7
	11:30	MATEMATİK-7	FEN BİLİMLERİ-7	MATEMATİK-7	DİN KÜLTÜRÜ VE AHLAK BİLGİSİ-7	FEN BİLİMLERİ-7
ORTAOKUL 8. SINIF	12:00	TÜRKÇE-8	T.C. İNKILAP TARİHİ VE ATATÜRKÇÜLÜK-8	İNGİLİZCE-8	TÜRKÇE-8	İNGİLİZCE-8
	12:30	MATEMATİK-8	FEN BİLİMLERİ-8	DİN KÜLTÜRÜ VE AHLAK BİLGİSİ-8	MATEMATİK-8	FEN BİLİMLERİ-8
İMAM HATİP ORTAOKULU	13:00	ARAPÇA-5	ARAPÇA-6	ARAPÇA-7	ARAPÇA-8	KUR'AN-I KERİM
UYUM SINIFLARI	13:30	UYUM İÇİN TÜRKÇE	UYUM İÇİN TÜRKÇE	UYUM İÇİN TÜRKÇE	UYUM İÇİN TÜRKÇE	UYUM İÇİN TÜRKÇE
ÖZEL EĞİTİM	14:00	MATEMATİK	AİLE BİLGİLENDİRME	TÜRKÇE	AİLE BİLGİLENDİRME	HAYAT BİLGİSİ
VELİ KUŞAĞI	21:00	BİZDEN		BİZDEN		BİZDEN
TEKRAR	14:30 - 20:00					

Besides watching EBA TV lessons, students have been encouraged to use the EBA website. This website was developed by Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [Ministry of National Education] and has been in service since the 2011-2012 academic year (Özer, 2020). After the pandemic, the EBA website has been updated and an online lesson function was added. Before the pandemic teachers were only allowed to share contents asynchronously but after the updates a synchronized lesson service has been in operation. At the beginning of the distance learning period, online lessons on the EBA website were targeted only to 8th and 12th grades in order to allow them to prepare for the national exams, whereas now they have been made available to all grades. However, to lead an online class, teachers are allocated a specific time slot by their school's management. School principals usually send weekly online lesson assignments to teachers to give them time to prepare. During the online lessons, which approximately take one hour, students and teachers access the website with their personal password and usernames. Students raise *virtual hands* by using a button on their screen to ask or answer a question, they can also turn on their microphones if they want. Teachers can send

homework via the website and check if students complete the tasks or not. On the other hand, the EBA website is not sufficient in terms of communication. Students cannot send direct messages to teachers or their friends apart from online lesson and can only receive messages from teachers. Both teachers and students can share files on EBA portal. Teachers update instructional materials such as curriculum-based videos, e-books, quizzes, worksheets, documentaries, cartoons from preschool to high school[ise] level (Özer, 2020). Students can also share files in different formats, open survey or discussion topics. Informative videos, cartoons, and pdf files about coronavirus have been periodically uploaded on the EBA online library. Telecommunications companies have provided free internet for teachers and students using EBA. Moreover, there are teachers who use other platforms such as Zoom and Discord to teach online and avoid the technical problems that have afflicted the EBA website. Some of them also use instant messaging phone applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram to send and receive homework instead of the EBA system.

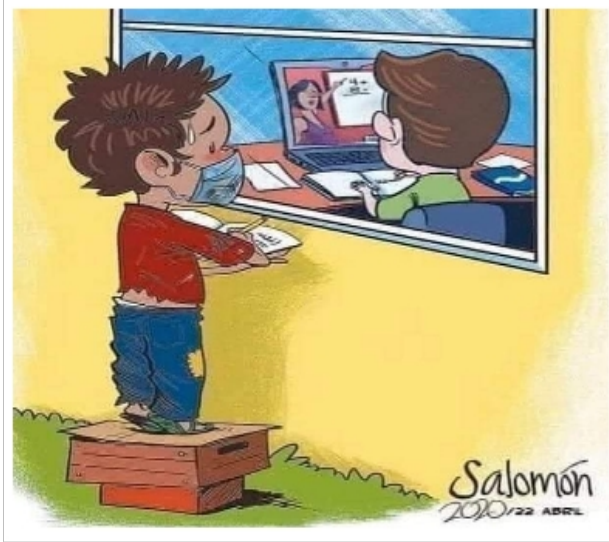
In addition to these, a psychological support line has also been established to help students and parents in need. As of 23rd March 2020, for the first time in the country's history, distance learning started for approximately 18 million students and more than one million teachers. The Minister of National Education Ziya Selçuk [tweeted](#) that "There cannot be any recess for cognizance, science, education, consciousness, and learning, we ring the bell and gather around our students in any conditions, online education is beginning..." that the process of *gathering around students in any conditions* started officially. The online education process has been advertised on the internet with the hashtag #tatildeğiluzaktaneğitim [#distancelearningnotvacation] and the government has emphasized that the process has been taken seriously and Turkey has been ready. Has Turkey really been ready for distance learning? Has every student in the country participated equally in online education? We claim, in the following sections, that despite the hard work that has been done, there are still problems.

## 2 TO WHAT EXTENT IS EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY ACHIEVED?

Equality of opportunity in education is defined as avoiding any type of discrimination while providing equal rights to all individuals to access education depending on their skills and needs (İnan & Demir, 2018). It is also one of the basic principles of the Turkish Education System (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [Ministry of National Education] 1973). Although this right is guaranteed by the Constitution, we claim that not all the participants of education can utilize it sufficiently. At least reflections of the distance learning process indicate that. Especially problems in accessing education and taking the individual differences into account appear as the most remarkable dimensions of the inequality of opportunity.

## 2.1 Accessing education

Picture 2: Salomon, 2020



Due to the nature of distance learning, television and the internet are the core components of the process. These components are also the most widely used communication tools in the modern world. Despite the high rate of usage, neither all the pupils nor all teachers have access to them. This causes the debate on the fairness of distance learning, which we want to summarize using one of the recent and most widely shared images in Turkish social media (Picture 2).

The frustration of teachers not being able to adequately support their students due to poor access to online resources is evident in online forums such as Ekşi Sözlük<sup>2</sup>: "I have approximately 500 students and I try to keep up with the process. I say *I try* because it is so

inadequate. First, there is not equality of opportunity. Out of 500 students, I can get in contact with only 200-250 of them because unfortunately, not everyone has either access to the internet or computer. This is not their fault. Even though I find the lessons on EBA TV good, only 20 minutes per week is inadequate in terms of reinforcing the subject. Lack of feedback also causes ambiguity. Despite this I try as much as possible to check and give feedback on students' homework that some of my students cannot benefit from. This really makes me sad... Although we cannot create a real classroom atmosphere, for now, this is the best we can do." ([metaletapankiz](#))

As we can conclude from the teacher's opinions, lack of internet connection sources leads to unfairness for some of the students and for those who have only a TV also cannot benefit from it enough due to limited course time. Students also feel left behind as well: ten-year-old [Emirhan](#), who only has access to a TV states:

"My friends at school can participate in online lessons and continue their education but I cannot. I have been left behind education wise. I ask for help to continue my education."

Likewise, another teacher [points out](#) that there are students who cannot participate in distance learning relied on financial problems:

"Yesterday one of my students told me s/he has no WIFI at home, connects by phone, and since one GB is used for each lesson s/he cannot participate in the course anymore. Telecommunications companies, they just talk big. Provide limitless Internet to students. If not now, when?"

Even though telephone operators provide free internet to the students, apparently it is still not completely satisfying to access and follow lessons regularly. In his speech on a tv program, Minister Selçuk stated that 20% of the students had internet connection problems. Unfortunately, this statement cannot be interpreted as 80% of them have access to distance learning. An example of a parent's [tweet](#) corroborates it:

“Good morning. Have a blessed Friday. I am in dire straits as a parent. I have two children; one of them is a sixth grader and the other one is an eighth grader. I want to inform you [minister of education] that we do not have a computer at home and the cell phone is incompatible [for internet]. What should we do?”

As can be seen from the tweet, having access to the Internet alone is not enough to benefit from distance learning. This leads us to another point that draws a reaction from teachers, students, and parents.

### 2.1.1 Adding more fuel to the fire: Technical problems

From the very beginning of the distance learning process, technical problems have taken a big place preventing distance learning from working satisfactorily. Either the user or platform-based issues have caused interruptions to the service from time to time. Since the whole process started very quickly without thorough preparations, it was inevitable that EBA would have some errors when millions of students and teachers start to use it. The general directorate of Innovation and educational technologies stated that during the distance learning process EBA website has been visited 1.8 billion times and became the world's 6th most visited educational website with its 6.9 million active students and almost one million teacher users. For this reason, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [Ministry of National Education] has been working to solve the technical problems continuously providing system updates. However, problems still exist. These are the words of a fourth-grade student, on [a forum](#):

“I cannot access the system within the schedule they determined. I cannot complete my homework. I could not complete any of the tasks that my teacher assigned to me. I cannot keep up with the lessons. Also, the lessons on EBA TV are so short. I do not understand anything. I want more effective lessons and to understand. What is the problem with the system? ... It makes me sad. My teacher could not see if I completed my homework or not on the system and I feel embarrassed. I have been trying for hours to access the EBA website, but it does not work.”

The technical issues appear to impact the fruitfulness of distance learning negatively and not only in terms of coursework performance but also psychologically. Teachers also agree with that:

“The live course application does not work well. I can access and start the course, but my students cannot participate. About five of them say they cannot access from the beginning. Those who can access cannot hear or sometimes cannot see me. If three out of twenty students participate in the course completely, we thank God.” ([fairwhitewater](#))

It is interesting to note that, to avoid technical problems on the EBA website and inadequacy of TV lessons some of the fee-paying schools and private teaching institutions have started to continue education via their own digital platforms. This is the cause of serious concern: not only does inequality of opportunity occur among students based on having or not access to online education, but it also discriminates between students even when they have access to the distance learning tools. All these direct criticism at the fairness, efficiency, and practicality of distance learning. To sum up with the words from another teacher:

“Based on our one-month-old distance learning experience, we have seen that the school is the sole real place to implement education. During the pandemic, we have understood the effectiveness of teachers and students in education will be beneficial only in the classroom and school environment. Distance learning carried out through cell



phones, tablets, computers, and digital activities, has not been replaced and cannot replace the real school atmosphere. When schools start, real education will also start. Besides this, all the good-intentioned attempts are far from being fruitful... School, classroom, teacher, and student. When we see them all together the right education will be possible.” (Nemrutdağı)

Despite the best attempts, education has been struggling to continue and not all citizens have not been able to benefit from it equally. This is conflicting for a country in which equality and fairness lie at the root of the education system. While accessing education and technical issues are an important dimension of the inequality of opportunity, they are not the only ones.

## 2.2 STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: WHAT ABOUT US?

Shifting to distance learning too fast has caused problems in the education of students with special needs. Particularly the lessons broadcasted on TV, which are mostly prepared on average student level, were not regarded as satisfying and suitable for students with special needs. Obviously, they need different teaching methods than other students do. As a result of demands coming from the public, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [Ministry of National Education] has started to produce new educational materials and contents and it was released for the special needs students and their parents.

It's been announced by the Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [Ministry of National Education] that a brand-new free application has been established called Özelim Eğitimdeyim [Special Education for Special Ones] for special needs students (Türkten, 2020). According to the Ministry of National Education, this latest app has some lessons such as social studies, social activities, communications, mathematics, daily life tips, etc. that are essential for disabled children. Also, this new app has some academic articles, educational videos, and activities that would support special talented students' social, academic, and emotional developments. Despite the improvements, some negative comments concerning the adequacy of distance learning materials for special needs children have been posted on social media. For instance, H, S. who has a disabled son, states his negative thoughts (Salman, 2020):

“There are several lessons for senior students on EBA but those lessons aren't suitable for my son's level. My kid is struggling because the system mainly focuses on children who experience standard development.”

Moreover, another parent of a disabled child S.A, claims that lessons on EBA aren't sufficient for her child and continues (Demirçeviren & Kantarlıoğlu, 2020):

“I have an autistic son. We used to get special education by having one to one. We are having a very hard time because our center has been closed. Lessons on EBA are not suitable, nor efficient for us. Our students need to have lessons one to one.”

Also, another parent and administrator Demet Ayşe Uyar from a non-governmental organization named Otizm Güçlü Aile Derneği [Autism Family Foundation] states that (Güngör, 2020):

“Although it has been shifted to online education those lessons are insufficient for autistic children. Maintaining online education is very difficult for us. As long as the schools stay closed parents have to take more responsibility. If parents are uneducated and not ready for these circumstances, then they may not have many educational materials and opportunities to offer. Any attempts given from parents to their kids may be very inconsistent and wrong because students and teachers cannot be in the same place.”

Even though there have been some negative comments spoken out loud there are also new positive developments that have emerged. For instance, in this rough period to increase cooperation between government and foundations, these foundations have supported the distance learning process as collaborating with the government to contribute citizens' educational requirements. One of these foundations, Tohum Otizm Vakfı [Tohum Autism Foundation] has created the largest online [education portal](#) free for the parents who think EBA contents aren't suitable for their autistic children. Also they have organized webinars for parents via the [foundation's social media accounts](#). Furthermore an app named İçimdeki Hazine [[The Treasure in Me](#)] has been developed for parents to continue educational activities with their children at home. It can be seen in the comments section that most of the user comments about the app are positive, however, some of the users do not approve the app for their children's sake.

So far to minimize the individual differences to a negligible level in distance learning some steps have been taken, however it's been known that there are still some students that cannot access distance learning contents. As an example it can be said that getting access to distance learning materials other than EBA TV, might be difficult especially for some of the students in risk groups such as students of Gypsy origin, temporary agricultural workers, and children of Syrian refugees. [Turkish Lessons for Integration] for refugee students via EBA and Suriyeli Çocukların Türk Eğitim Sistemine Entegrasyonunun Desteklenmesi Projesi (Project on Promoting Syrian Kids into the Turkish Education System [PIKTES]) [Youtube channel](#) that has been live since 30<sup>th</sup> March can be regarded as reassuring for Turkey which is one of the most refugee-hosting countries in the world (PIKTES, 2020). Yet there is not any solid information about these lessons' effectiveness or how many refugee students have accessed them. It's rarely shown that just having a TV doesn't mean having access to distance learning contents. Moreover, by my personal experiences and observations as a teacher, whose students are mostly children of Gypsy origin, I can tell that I have not seen any students of Gypsy origin in my virtual lessons so far. The main reason for the indifference to the virtual lessons can be parents' lower socio-economic levels and illiteracy. Since the family's top priority is to make their living, the education of their children is disregarded as it was before the pandemic. To sum up, several actions have been taken to continue to educate in pandemic days but not all students have benefited from it equally. Parents also think that there are problems with distance learning.

### 3 WHAT DO PARENTS THINK ABOUT DISTANCE LEARNING?

Since schools were shut down suddenly, students and parents were not informed appropriately about how distance learning would be implemented which has caused ambiguity. Some of the parents have struggled to adjust to the new situation because of the lack of information and technology skills, while some parents have started taking more responsibility. At first, parents had shown superficial interest in their kids' education such as giving basic support for homework. As a social studies teacher my personal experiences show that most of the parents have now started to lose their interest and motivation on distance learning and they share the same pessimistic thoughts. One of my student's parents stated that:

"I deeply believe that we are not going back to school this year. We have lost our hope on that. Even if schools start in a few weeks, I will not send my kid until the pandemic ends. Distance learning is not as efficient as formal education. I hope our lack of education will be compensated next year."

Similarly, a recent study conducted with 25 thousand parents shows 83.5% of participants think that formal education is more effective than distance learning (Fison, 2020). This approach increases the workload for teachers because now they do not only have to motivate students but also their



parents who lose their hope and give up on their responsibilities in distance learning. Looking from the social studies perspective, we can infer that the parents' indifferent attitude also decreases the effectiveness of social studies education. Since the purpose of social studies is to raise responsible individuals with citizenship awareness, it is not possible to achieve it without parental support. However, the lack of parental support is not the only problem that social studies teachers encounter during the distance learning process.

#### 4 TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES DURING CORONA DAYS

The pandemic has affected social studies education from different angles, but this effect was not directed towards the content of the course. Although one of the main topics of the course is society and the virus has affected society so much, our personal experiences lead us to the fact that social studies teachers do not give enough space to the topic in their lessons. The main underlying reason for it is the intensive common standardized of the social studies curriculum and teachers' anxiety about completing the topics in it. For this reason, the impact of coronavirus in social studies education is more visible on how teachers teach rather than what they teach. We think that the low interaction between teachers and students has seemed like the most dramatic change in social studies teaching. Due to the nature of social studies, discussing, exchanging ideas are the essential parts of the lesson which require high interactions from the participants. However, it seems like distance learning has impacted the interactions between students-students/ students-teacher negatively because, in virtual classroom environments, teachers and students cannot communicate as easily as they would in the formal education. In virtual lessons, since students are not obliged to turn on their cameras or microphones, teachers cannot even make sure whether they are present in the lesson or not. This also leads to problems with classroom management. Some of the social studies teachers especially those who have limited experience with technology, struggle more to find online teaching materials, or manage the classroom. In addition to all these, coronavirus has also influenced citizen participation which is quite significant for social studies education.

Along with the pandemic there have been some changes in citizen participation rituals that have been going on many years. In particular, it is possible to see these changes during national festivals such as 23rd April National Sovereignty and Children's Day and 19th May the Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth, and Sports Fest. These important days have been celebrated in schools, streets, and governmental institutions for many years to keep national consciousness alive. Moreover, these festivals have been important in terms of carrying fundamental civic values such as respect, diligence, and tolerance (Açıklan & Kılıç, 2017). For these reasons, these festivals have been celebrated in different ways such as singing patriotic songs, reciting poems, performing traditional dances, etc. On the other hand, Covid-19 has precluded Turkish students from celebrating the said festivals like usual. This has directed people to find alternative solutions. Students were encouraged to celebrate these festivals on social media. For instance, commercials starring celebrities were aired to promote children all over the country to decorate their house for 23rd April, to celebrate "their day" by performing activities such as [dancing](#), [playing](#) the violin, and [reciting](#) a poem on the internet. Children from all over the country posted videos and pictures on the internet celebrating the National Sovereignty and Children's Day at their homes (Picture 3).

**Picture 3: Examples from 23rd April celebrations**



This became the first Children’s Day in the history of Turkey that was celebrated completely on the internet. It is also worth noting that not only children but also other people showed great interest in the celebrations. President Erdoğan invited all children and people to sing the national anthem from their balconies in his [tweet](#). This call was welcomed by society and found place itself in the diary of one of the authors too:

“When it was 9 p.m. everyone was out of their windows and balconies. We sang the national anthem altogether. Despite the curfew, some of the neighbours were in the streets to sing the anthem. When we finished singing, there was a burst of applause that had lasted for minutes. Then one of the neighbours played songs about the day using her speakers.”

After singing the national anthem, people posted their [videos](#) on social media with hopeful messages towards the future. This shows us even under difficult circumstances, Turkish people try to continue the celebrations to keep national unity and consciousness. In addition to national celebrations, the pandemic has also affected the way children use their rights. For example, a ten-year-old kid called the gendarmerie to order soda and crisps saying that due to the curfew for citizens under 20 years old, it is his legal right to ask for help from the authorities to meet his needs (Picture 4).

**Picture 4: Ten-year-old kid receiving his orders**



Besides all of this, citizen participation in terms of benefiting society also showed itself in various ways. Plenty of vocational high schools-[lise] have started to produce face masks, face shield, and antiseptics to help health workers and people in need. For example, one of the high schools in Hatay province produced ventilators for Coronavirus patients (Picture 5). Similarly, to meet the needs of

**Picture 5: Teachers giving pose with ventilator**

people who are over 65 years old, a group called Vefa Sosyal Destek Grupları [Allegiance social support groups] was established by volunteers including teachers, police officers, health workers and other civil servants. These groups had worked during the pandemic to deliver medicines, foods, cleaning supplies to old people who cannot go out due to the curfew. It is obvious that the coronavirus has affected and changed citizen participation ways in Turkey.

## 5 CONCLUSION

For a country that has entirely shifted to distance learning for the first time in its history, it is not surprising that Turkey has experienced some issues in establishing the distance education process. Inequality of opportunity appears to be the core problem. Despite the efforts made, there are still students who do not benefit from distance learning efficiently. While we appreciate the state's efforts to reach out to all students, we think that more work needs to be done especially on fairness and equality of distance learning. We also think that inequality in education conflicts with the main principles of the Turkish education system.

Moreover, the issue of coronavirus, which has affected society so much, has not been included in social studies lessons because of the boundaries of the national curriculum are precisely predetermined. It is a deficiency that an event that directly affects social relations and citizen participation does not find enough space in the Social Studies course. This suggests that a more flexible curriculum is required for social studies teachers to include actual topics in their course.

It is also remarkable how people have shown great interest in national celebrations. Even during lockdown, these celebrations have united people to a great extent. Despite the sharp political divide in Turkey, many people from different political views sang the national anthem all together and expressed similar hopeful messages. This shows us that the real value of national celebrations is the power to unite people even though they are not physically together. Additionally, these celebrations motivated people in difficult times where most were forced to self-isolate at home flooded by gloomy Coronavirus news.

The rapid change in citizen participation is another important element that the pandemic has affected. The fact that citizen participation manifests itself in different ways during a short period shows us that it is a dynamic process. Correspondingly, we argue that citizenship education should also have a dynamic structure and should take shape quickly in the face of changing conditions.

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## PICTURES

Picture 1: EBA TV timetable for 1-5 June 2020. <https://cdnvideo.eba.gov.tr/programlar/01-05-haziran.pdf>

Picture 2: Salamon. La educacion en tiempos de pandemia [Education in times of pandemic]. 22 April 2020. <https://m.facebook.com/salomoncartoon/photos/a.614999305198843/3149503421748406/?type=3>

Picture 3: Anadolu Ajansı [Anadolu Agency]. Evde 23 nisan heyecanı [23rd April excitement at home]. 23 Nisan [April] 2020. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/evde-23-nisan-heyecani/1815445>

Picture 4: Birgün Gazetesi [Birgün Newspaper]. Evden çıkamayan çocuk, ‘yasal hakkım’ diyerek jandarmadan cips istedi [The boy, who was unable to leave the house, asked the Gendarmerie for chips, saying: ‘I have a legal right’]. 17 Nisan [April] 2020. <https://www.birgun.net/haber/evden-cikamayan-cocuk-yasal-hakkim-diyerek-jandarmadan-cips-istedi-296959>

Picture 5: Anadolu Ajansı [Anadolu Agency]. MEB'in in Hatay'da üretilen ilk solunum cihazı tanıtıldı [Ministry of National Education's first ventilator device manufactured in Hatay was introduced]. 16 Nisan [April] 2020. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/saglik/mebin-hatayda-uretilen-ilk-solunum-cihaz-tanitildi/1807079>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank reviewers for their thoughtful comments and efforts towards improving our manuscript.

<sup>2</sup> Ekşi sözlük literally means sour dictionary and it is one of the most popular social media platforms in Turkey. <https://eksisozluk.com/>