

Adaptation Process to School After Pandemic in Turkish Context

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze the post-pandemic school adaptation process, the existence and/or effectiveness of adaptation programs, the obstacles encountered during this process, and thoughts and solutions for dealing with the difficulties. Two different surveys were delivered to schools via Google form, with 3,625 students and 1,822 teachers filling them out. According to the findings of the study, 86 percent of students were excited to return to school. Despite this, high academic demands of family and teachers, bullying, failure to manage time, the danger of being covid, teacher and friend relationships, and failing examinations are among the primary concerns of students. Teachers, contrary to student statistics, believe that students' adaptation to school after the pandemic is moderate. Teachers report that students struggle with following school rules, demonstrating constructive communication skills, emotion control, age-appropriate academic competencies, social skills, and life skills.

Keywords: adaptation, post-pandemic, student, school, teacher

INTRODUCTION

The global spread of COVID-19 raised the need for adaptive processes at different societal levels and organizations. The World Health Organization defined the outbreak as a pandemic in March 2020, and by late April of the same year, 166 countries had introduced national school closures, affecting 84.5% of all enrolled learners worldwide. (The World Bank, 2020). As of March 2021, twenty-six countries faced nation-wide school closures and Turkey was one of them. In Turkey the entire population was in lockdown and education at all levels were carried out through distance education in the second semester of 2019-2020 and the entire 2020-2021 academic year. During this time, all stakeholders of the education system, teachers, students, school administrators and parents have been away from schools. In line with the decision taken by the government, face to face K12 education started as of 6th September, 2021.

Although digitalisation in schools has attained prominence, and online education took place amid a wider ICT transformation process in educational systems, such education was not widespread and well established in K12 education (Selwyn, 2012; McFarlane, 2019) and limited research exists on how to promote effective K-12 teaching and learning in online environments (Bai, 2019; Means et al., 2009). That's why, the pandemic posed unprecedented challenges requiring teachers and students to adapt to online education. Despite previous educational projects and investments on the use of digital tools in education in Turkey, such as the Fatih project, digital technology and effective implementation had to be rediscovered as an ally in the teaching-learning process during the pandemic. After the initial period of confusion,

in which contents, materials and methodologies were reorganized both by the schools and Ministry of Education, school managers, teachers, students and parents managed to systematize working conditions so that the academic year could be completed.

As education professionals adapted to meet the education, social, and emotional needs of students, there are a range of services for students that continue to be disrupted (for example, food/nutrition, healthcare, extracurricular activities, family/community collaboration, and mental health services); thus, reducing the scope of student support services. Additional challenges for children during the COVID-19 pandemic included disruption in academic learning, social isolation, family financial concerns, greater childhood adverse experiences, trauma, grief, and increased screen time (Golberstein et al., 2020).

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A review of literature has shown that studies conducted during the pandemic mainly focused on the anxiety and motivation of students (Ayanoglu, 2020; Bayindir, 2021; Burç and Karakuyu, 2020). Studies also revealed that teachers were increasingly exhausted during the early part of the pandemic (Sokal et al., 2020), were concerned about safety and equity in students' learning (Trinidad, 2020), and experienced heightened stress, confusion and uncertainty because of school closures and transition to remote learning (Kim & Asbury, 2020). Teachers also have concerns about student health, student academic development, personal health, and student mental health.

It is clear that Covid-19 pandemic has affected education directly and indirectly in many ways, and strategic planning was necessary to ensure effective continuity in education. The present study aimed at examining the post-pandemic school adaptation process. Adaptation to school has been defined as a multidimensional concept associated with school success as well as social influence and social behaviors from the side of students (Önder & Gülay, 2010). It was foreseen that students would need some interventions such as group counseling sessions, social and emotional support and academic support to feel ready for the schooling after a long period of separation (Bulut, Çakıcı, & Yazgan, 2020; Kocabaş, Koru, Ardakoç, Kültür, Çelik, & Karataş, 2021). However, only a limited number of schools in Turkey had taken actions for the adaptation of the students and teachers to school.

A few studies have explored the adaptation of students and teachers after the pandemic (Bulut, Çakıcı, & Yazgan, 2020; Yılmaz, Yılmaz, and Savaş, 2021). Thus, the present study will contribute to the literature by focusing on both students and teachers' adaptation process after the pandemic in a detailed way. With the study, it is aimed to analyze the post-pandemic process in detail by examining the adaptation processes of the students and teachers to the school after the pandemic, the existence and / or effectiveness of the adaptation programs inside and outside the school, and the difficulties and difficulties encountered in the process. Within this aim, the research questions were;

- How do K12 students feel about returning to school after the pandemic?
- What is the level of students' and teachers' adaptation to school after the pandemic?
- What is the motivation level of students' after the pandemic?
- What are the concerns and needs of students after a pandemic?
- What are the topics that the teachers have difficulty in struggling with after the pandemic?
- What are the concerns of teachers for the future of education after the pandemic?

METHOD

A descriptive quantitative design was employed in this study. The population of the research consists of students from 4th-12th grades, teachers from all levels and branches, and data were collected in the 2021-2022 academic year, right after the school opened. The sample involves 3,625 students and 1,822 teachers from 65 different cities in Turkey and they were both from public and private schools by using convenience sampling. Convenience sampling can be defined as the sampling carried out on individuals who are in the immediate vicinity, easy to reach, and willing to participate in the research voluntarily (Erkuş, 2009). The demographic information regarding the sample can be seen Table 1;

There are 3625 students who filled out the questionnaire, of which 1910 (52.7%) are girls and 1715 (47.3%) are boys. Data were collected from all grade levels starting from the 4th grade to the 12th grade. Since there are preparatory classes in private schools, this class level was also included in the study. When we look at the class level with the highest participation, it is seen that 6th grade students are 592(16.3%).

Considering the teachers, a total of 1822 teachers, 1468 women and 354 men, participated in the survey. The majority of the participating teachers (97.9%) work in private schools. It has been determined that approximately half of the teachers trying to determine the age ranges are between the ages of 25-34 and their experience is between 5-9 years. The branches of the teachers who filled the questionnaire vary and it is seen that there are more classroom teachers (15%) and English teachers (18.6%). Table 2 shows the demographics information of the teachers participating in the research.

Table 1: Demographic information of students

		Frequency(f)	Percentage(%)
Gender	Girl	1910	52,7
	Boy	1715	47,3
Grade	Grade 4	552	15,2
	Grade 5	572	15,8
	Grade 6	592	16,3
	Grade 7	470	13
	Grade 8	333	9,2
	Prep Class	65	1,8
	Grade 9	353	9,7
	Grade 10	301	8,3
	Grade 11	212	5,8
	Grade 12	175	4,8
Total		3625	100

Table 2. Demographic information of teachers

		Frequency(f)	Percentage(%)
Gender	Woman	1468	80,6
	Man	354	19,4
Age	18-24	67	3,7
	25-34	976	53,6
	35-44	588	32,3
	45-54	124	6,8
	55-64	60	3,3
	65+	7	0,4
	Branch of Teacher	Math Teacher	173
Turkish Teacher		114	6,3
Science Teacher		97	5,3
Social Science Teacher		60	3,3
Primary School Teacher		274	15
English Teacher		339	18,6
Visual Art Teacher		40	2,2
Music Teacher		38	2,1
Coding-Robotic Teacher		44	2,4
Preschool Teacher		95	5,2
School Counselor		161	8,8
Gym Teacher/Physical Education Teacher		59	3,2
Chemistry Teacher		43	2,4
Biology Teacher		33	1,8
Physics Teacher		33	1,8
Geography Teacher		16	0,9
History Teacher		19	1
Turkish Filology Teacher		43	2,4
Philosophy Group Teacher		13	0,7
High School Math Teacher		9	0,5
Other	119	6,5	
Total		1822	100

Data Collection Instruments

Data for the present study were collected by means of a survey prepared for different groups, for students and teachers. Both sections started with demographic questions, followed by likert type, yes/no and open ended questions. In the yes/no questions the participants were expected to justify their answers. The survey completed by students aimed to explore students' perceptions regarding their adaptation to school whereas with the teacher survey we tried to investigate teachers' opinions about students' level of adaptation and the challenges teachers had during this process item type of questions. In the student survey there are eight questions in total. In the yes/no question, students were expected to justify their answers with at least three reasons. There are two likert type questions about students' adaptation and motivation level. There are two open-ended questions that ask things that students have difficulty in adapting and their suggestions for enhancing their adaptation to school. In the other one for teachers; a demographic part and items part. In the items part there are three yes/no questions and teachers are asked to write reasons or explanations for their answers after these questions. There are four open-ended questions that ask for the things students and teachers have difficulty in adapting and the concerns of teachers about the future of education. In total there are ten questions for the teachers.

The questionnaires were prepared by the researchers and sent to three teachers to get feedback about the content of the questions. After their feedback, the questionnaires were revised and prepared as Google Form and sent to teachers and students in cities. The cronbach alpha value for the student questionnaire is .86 while the teacher questionnaire is .89.

Data Analysis

Questionnaire data were analyzed by means of descriptive statistics methods, frequency (f), percentage (%) and arithmetic mean (X) analysis were used for close questions. The open ended questions are coded by using a content analysis method. The basic goal of content analysis is to figure out what concepts may be used to define the data and what links exist between them (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). All the open-ended answers are read one by one and are organized as categories. Finally the results are presented as tables.

FINDINGS

As a result of the analysis, it was found that 86% of the students were happy to return back to school (Figure 1). When asked about the subjects that made them happy within the scope of the study, the answer of the majority of the students was their friends. A student said "I can play with my friends, the lessons are more enjoyable and it is very boring to attend online training where we are." Another subject that the students stated that they were happy to return to school was determined as face-to-

face lessons. One of the students said, “The fact that the lessons are face to face makes me understand better, I missed my friends, it makes me happy to see them and play games with them, it makes me happy to see my teachers live and communicate with them.” Despite this, students stated that they were anxious in many ways. Among the main concerns of the students are; high academic expectations of families and teachers, bullying, inability to manage time, the possibility of being covid, teacher and friend relations, and failing in exams.

Through the questions asked, students’ adaptation to their school and their motivation levels were determined. Percentages obtained from the answers given to the questions are given in Figure 2 and Figure 3. 97.2% of the students stated that their school adjustment is high. However, students underlined that they had difficulties in adapting the school and course array, school rules, dressing and food. They emphasized the need for transferring the flexibility of home to school. These were the subjects of the students: “The food is bad, I am hungry, my breaks are short, I can’t bring fruit to school” and “It was better to be at home, I eat and drink as I want, I act as I want.” obtained from such sentences. While 94.7% of the students stated that their school motivation levels were high after the pandemic; however, they declared that they need

enjoyable lessons and activities that will enable them to get in touch with their friends and make them socialize, and provide them to share their feelings and thoughts. While emphasizing the subject of socialization, the students said, “Doing social activities, holding motivational meetings”, while on the subject of the fun lesson, “Lessons are fun, not writing all the time, and making mathematics easier”.

On the other hand, 45.2% of teachers think that students’ adaptation to school after the pandemic is moderate. According to the teachers, the students mostly have difficulty in obeying the school rules, difficulty in showing positive communication skills, emotion control, age-appropriate academic competencies, social skills and life skills. According to the teachers, another point that students have difficulty with is self-control, and one of the teachers expresses this issue as follows: “Since there are problems with self-control in this process, it is not possible to comply with the school rules. Naturally, this adds social skills, respect and behavior.”

61.9% of the teachers stated that adaptation activities were carried out for the students after the pandemic; 38.1% of them state that no adaptation activity has been carried out. Adaptation activities, which are mostly carried out through the guidance service, include orientation, seminars, presentations,

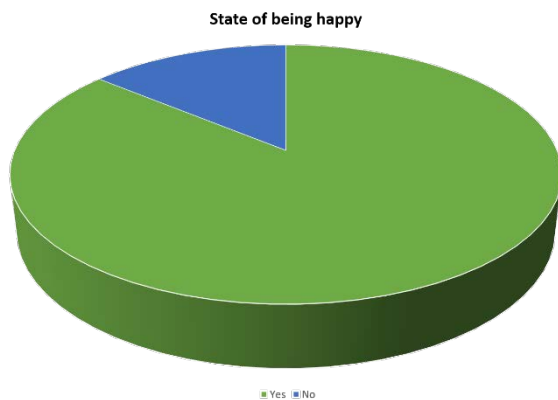


Fig.1: Students’ being happy state

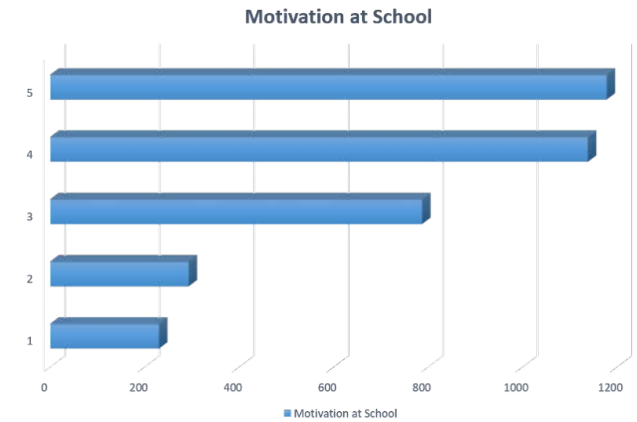


Fig. 3: Motivation at School

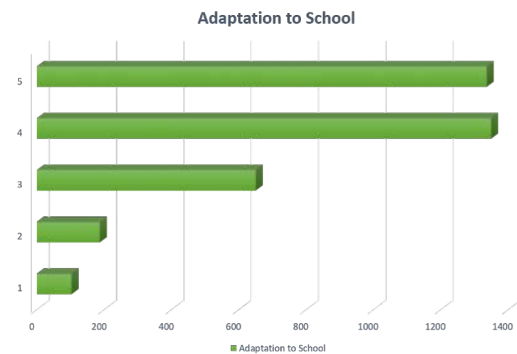


Fig. 2: Adaptation to School

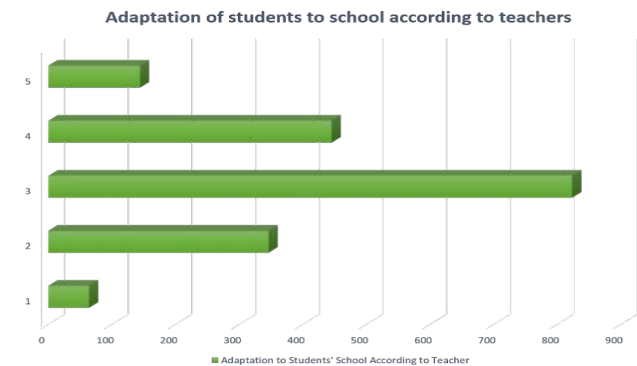


Fig. 4: Adaptation to Students’ School According to Teacher

collective and one-on-one meetings. In addition to these, extracurricular activities such as games, group work, club activities and social activities and parent meetings/information were also included to support the adaptation processes of the students. Regarding adaptation activities for teachers after the pandemic, 66.2% of the teachers stated that adaptation activities were not carried out in their schools. While 33.8% of the teachers stated that adaptation activities are carried out in their schools; these events took place in the form of information meetings such as online or face-to-face seminars, conferences and trainings.

The teachers stated that they have difficulty in coping with the issues after the pandemic such as; students' adaptation to the school environment, obeying school and classroom rules, showing positive social behavior and communication, showing attention, motivation and compliance with hygiene rules. In addition to these, teachers also stated that they had difficulties in teaching by wearing masks and that both students and themselves had problems with emotions such as anxiety and stress management.

When the participant teachers were asked about their concerns on the future of education, they stated that they have concerns about academic, social, emotional development of students, concerns about the pandemic and health, and the increment of work tempo. Teachers stated that they were worried about compensating for the loss of learning in the 1.5-year period spent with distance education, that the motivation of the students decreased after this process and that it was very difficult to compensate. They also stated that as a result of the pandemic, students' social and emotional skills were weakened, their sense of responsibility decreased, they became alienated from the school environment, they had difficulty in establishing empathy and controlling their emotions, they were reluctant to communicate, and their ability to work with a group deteriorated. They stated that the technology and social media addictions of the students increased during the pandemic, therefore their thinking skills were weakened, they moved away from the rules. Thus teachers were worried that this situation that these behaviours would turn into a permanent behavior and compliance problem. In terms of health concerns, it has been observed that issues such as the possibility of schools to be closed again due to the pandemic and the interruption of education as cases occur among students. Teachers also stated that they work intensely to make up for academic deficiencies, and that academic deficiencies combined with discipline-related problems make them feel professionally inadequate and exhausted.

DISCUSSION

When the findings of the research are examined, it is seen that the students miss school during the distance education process therefore they are happy to return to face-to-face education. In

the study, 3625 students were asked whether they were happy to return to school. 86% of the students stated that they were happy to return to school. It is seen that the same results are reached in the literature. In the research carried out by Baysal and Ocak (2020), it is seen that teachers, students and parents expressed their longing for school during the pandemic period. In the research of Arık, Karakaya, Çimen, and Yılmaz (2021) which is conducted with 55 secondary school students during the pandemic period, in distance education process, the students' opinions were gathered regarding distance education after the pandemic. 29 participants stated that they do not want to go on the course due to the nature of the course, the learning and teaching environment, negative affective features, lack of communication, teacher inadequacy, inadequacy of learning and teaching, and duration of the course. In parallel studies, students were not satisfied with distance education due to reasons mentioned (Akgün, Güleç, & Topal, 2013; Gillies, 2008; Hannay & Newvine, 2006; Hebebcı, Bertiz, & Alan, 2020). Similarly, in another study conducted with classroom teachers, teachers stated that nothing can replace face-to-face education (Şahan & Parlar, 2021).

On the other hand students stated that they were anxious in many ways such as high academic expectations of families and teachers, bullying, inability to manage time, the possibility of being covid, teacher and friend relations, and failing in exams. The reason for this can be the lack of an adaptation curriculum which students need after the pandemic process. Regarding this topic, it is underlined that by developing communication skills of students, reducing the anxiety, boredom, by making teaching and learning process more appealing, a positive and optimist school environment can be set up (Camacho-Zuñiga et. al.,2021). As a matter of the fact that, students lost some academic habits during the pandemic and they got some new habits instead of it, they were exposed to screen more and this can weaken their work discipline and time management skills etc. In the research of Özyürek and Çetinkaya (2021) it is underlined that students have difficulties in the transition to face-to-face education.

97.2% of the students stated that their school adaptation is high while 94.7% of the students stated that their school motivation levels were high after the pandemic. In other word %2.8 students have problems about adapting school while % 6.3 students have problems about motivation. Also % 57.6 students experienced fear of failing in the exams. It can be said that the main reason for this is learning losses in distance education during the pandemic process. In the study of Engzell, Frey and Verhagen(2021) the students' learning loss is examined across all of the three subject areas: math, spelling, and reading. The size of these effects is on the order of 3 percentile points or 0.08 standard deviation but students from disadvantaged homes are disproportionately affected. Students from less-educated households, the size of the learning slide is up to 60%

larger than in the general population. In different studies the learning loss during the pandemic is strongly emphasized (Skar, Graham & Huebner, 2021; Dorn, Hancock, Sarakatsannis, & Viruleg, 2020). Adaptation to school and lack of motivation are risk factors for learning loss (Burç & Karakuyu, 2020). It can be stated that it is normal for a student who has a lack of motivation due to learning losses to experience academic anxiety. However, students declared that they need enjoyable lessons and activities that will enable them to get in touch with their friends and make them socialize, and provide them to share their feelings and thoughts. As Arik et al. (2021) stated in their study, communication is the key factor in the adaptation process to school.

Unlike student data, 45.2% of teachers think that students' adaptation to school after the pandemic is moderate. According to the teachers, the students mostly have difficulty in controlling behaviors and communication. This can be because of students getting accustomed to a home environment which includes limited rules and requires limited communication when compared to schools. When the literature is examined, similar studies show that teachers have expressed their concerns that communication problems will occur most when face-to-face education is started (Baysal and Ocak, 2020). It has been stated that especially the guidance services have made a great contribution to the transition of the process by conducting seminars, orientation, individual and group meetings in this process in terms of adaptation to school and communication.

61.9% of the teachers stated that adaptation activities were carried out for the students after the pandemic; 38.1% of them state that no adaptation activity has been carried out for the students. Adaptation activities, which are mostly carried out through the guidance service, include orientation, seminars, presentations, collective and one-on-one meetings. In addition to these, extracurricular activities such as games, group work, club activities and social activities and parent meetings/information were also included to support the adaptation processes of the students. In the literature it is suggested to use the models or programs such as Montessori, Tools of the Mind or Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATH) which are more spontaneous, creative, and cooperating activities, rather than specific activities targeted to formal learning (Poletti, 2020).

Regarding adaptation activities for teachers after the pandemic 66.2% of the teachers stated that adaptation activities were not carried out in their schools for teachers. While 33.8% of the teachers stated that adaptation activities are carried out in their schools; these events took place in the form of information meetings such as online or face-to-face seminars, conferences and training. As it is seen with a high rate of teachers underlined that there is no adaptation activities at schools both teachers and students. Especially

for countries like Turkey in which schools are closed for more than one year adaptation activities are a need for students and teachers' rehabilitation. Because the pandemic process itself causes crises for students and teachers such as insecurity, low motivation, lack of self-confidence in individuals (Akmansoy, 2012). For supporting students and teachers in this process, effective communication (Bülbül, 2008), psychological support and anxiety management (Bulut, Çakıcı, & Yazgan, 2020), and professional support for teachers (Bayındır, 2021) are underlined. Therefore students and teachers should be supported in all these topics by organizing an adaptation program or curriculum. As a result of the lack of an adaptation curriculum, teachers stated that they have difficulty in coping with many issues after the pandemic from obeying rules to communication, attention to motivation and compliance with hygiene rules.

When the participant teachers' concerns are handled on the future of education, they stated that they have concerns about academic, social, emotional development of students, concerns about the pandemic and health, and the increment of work tempo. Because teachers are obliged to work more to support students' all these dimensions which means more working load. In a study it is emphasized that there will be challenges facing education after a pandemic; technological, social, political and economical. And to combat this, teachers contact students more, use the technology to support socialization and collaboration, foster critical thinking and make activities to lessen the effects of isolation (Kobylarek, 2021).

Based on these results it can be recommended that;

Schools can prepare and apply an adaptation program for students and teachers which is based on social activities, communication and psychological support

The government can organize a support system for students' and teachers' rehabilitation process after a pandemic

The researchers can design similar studies by focusing on different variables

The researchers can design similar studies by using quantitative approaches to get deeper data after the pandemic process.

LIMITATIONS

In conclusion, students are happy to return to school. Students think that their adaptation and motivation is high. While teachers think that the students' adaptation to school is quite well moderate. While more teachers stated that the school organizes adaptation activities for teachers and students, an important rate of teachers stated that schools organize adaptation activities for students but not for teachers. Besides teachers' have concerns on academic, social, emotional development of students, concerns about the pandemic and health, and the increment of work tempo.

However, a number of limitations can be noted to be addressed in future studies. The current study is limited to the statements and answers of students and teachers to the questionnaire. Future studies can solicit information from various data sources such as observations or interviews to enrich and support the findings. Despite this limitation, insights from the current study can help governments, schools and teachers to craft the educational process and learning setting in line with their students' and teachers' expectations.

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