

DISTANCE EDUCATION IN THE PANDEMIC PROCESS: LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Elif BARDAK

Elif.Bardak@aoa.edu.tr,

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5800-7852>

ABSTRACT

The pandemic declared due to the COVID-19 epidemic has been effective all over the world in 2020. From this process, health, economy, tourism, trade, sports, entertainment and so on. areas were adversely affected, as well as educational activities. Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, almost all educational institutions had to suspend face-to-face education and switch to distance education activities in this process. Although the concept of distance education is not a new phenomenon in the literature, it has become a subject that has been discussed and researched with the transfer of education to online environments due to the pandemic. In this study, it is aimed to investigate the limitations of the distance education subject in the pandemic process and the proposed proposed due to the pandemic that has affected the whole world and the importance of distance education activities. In the study, in which the document analysis technique, one of the qualitative research methods, was used, the literature for the purpose of the research was examined. As a result of the research, inadequacy of information and infrastructure problems in the transition process to distance education were revealed, and among the suggestions presented, it was revealed that students should be encouraged to actively participate in the course and support should be provided especially in terms of mental health in this process.

Keywords: Distance education, limitations, recommendations, pandemic

INTRODUCTION

Developing technology and the rapid change of knowledge have made it necessary to activate the passive student, unlike the traditional teaching approach, to raise individuals who discover, construct the knowledge they discover, and think creatively. Depending on social developments, the authority prevailing in traditional classroom management models has left its place to interaction with students. As a result of the interaction, various methods have been developed to attract the attention of the students (Tertemiz, 2003). With a good and effective education, students can gain the desired qualifications in physical education lessons (Ünlü & Aydos, 2007).

At the end of December 2019, unexplained cases of pneumonia were detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province of China, and these cases were determined to be caused by the new coronavirus (2019-nCoV) (Zhu et al., 2020). Recently, cases of 2019-nCoV (2019 novel coronavirus) began to appear outside the Wuhan region and then outside the People's Republic of China (Wang et al., 2020). The World Health Organization defines the new virus, which was declared an epidemic on 11 March 2020 due to the increase in the number of cases and deaths, as COVID-19 (WHO, 2020a; WHO, 2020b). While the virus is spreading through close contact between people, the public health measures taken can be listed as canceling public meetings, closing schools, working remotely, staying at home and activating online health services (Heymann and Shindo, 2020).

With the declaration of Covid 19 as a worldwide pandemic, education has been moved to digital platforms, and the continuity of the courses has begun to be maintained with distance education applications. Students of such education and training environments; It is a meeting point with different features and requirements in terms of teachers and teaching programs. For this reason, it is emphasized in the literature that it is a platform where different priorities and strategies aiming at providing and continuing learning beyond sharing basic teaching materials are approached (İpek, Aydın, Çelikdemir, & Sunar, 2020; Akkoyunlu & Bardakçı, 2020). Some of the characteristics that teachers, who play an important role in the acquisition of content by learners, must have in order to be able to work effectively in remote and online environments during the pandemic period that unexpectedly emerged in an unexpected time and form, are using technology, communicating effectively with students, facilitating/supporting learning, assessment of learning, developing pedagogical strategies, and having the ability to develop digital learning resources (Farmer & Ramsdale, 2016; Bawane & Spector, 2009; Ally, 2019). The aim of this research is to reveal the limitations and suggestions for distance education during the pandemic process.

DISTANCE LEARNING

The distance education system is one of the methods of acquiring and teaching knowledge, skills, acquisitions and equipment applied with many different methods. If it is to be described from the most comprehensive point of view; It is a system in which they establish the interaction between the transmitter of instructive knowledge, skill, experience in different places and the recipient of that knowledge, skill, experience with the help of technology (Yadigar, 2010). The effect of communication technologies on space and time conditions has

revealed some changes in people. While some processes have no legitimacy related to current conditions, some processes have been harmonized with communication technologies, and some processes have turned into different appearances (Elitaş, 2017).

No matter how far they are from each other, the process that proceeds in coordination with the person who will transfer the information by acting for the same purpose and the person waiting to receive the information, generally using any of the information technologies (computer, smartphone, tablet, etc.) is called distance education. The teacher and the student can be very far from each other, or they can be very close. The fact that there is an interaction away from all kinds of external influences in distance education is very important for both the efficiency and quality of education (Bozkurt, 2017).

To summarize, we can say that the distance education system is a planned, programmed and systematic education in which the learner and the instructor are in different places, independently of the time and environment, by means of technological tools and equipment, unlike conventional education. It is a very important system when it is considered in terms of ensuring the freedom of people of all ages and cultures to receive education in any place, regardless of the age and education level of the individual who learns through the distance education system (Kırık, 2014).

PANDEMIC AND DISTANCE EDUCATION

The word pandemic is derived from the ancient Greek παν (pan) (meaning all) and δῆμος (demos) (meaning people). The term pandemic usually refers to a contagious disease that spreads widely throughout a country or on one or more continents simultaneously (Honigsbaum, 2009). The definition of the word epidemic in the epidemiological dictionary is as follows: An epidemic that occurs over a very wide area, transcends international borders and generally affects many people. Only certain pandemics can cause serious illness in certain individuals or in entire populations. The characteristics of an infectious agent causing a pandemic include: the agent must be able to infect humans, cause disease in humans, and be able to spread easily from person to person (Porta, 2014).

The Covid-19 pandemic, which emerged in Asia in December 2019, turned into a global epidemic in a short period of four months by affecting the whole world in March 2020. The virus is the cause of pneumonia cases reported on 31 December 2019 and has spread outside of China to Thailand, South Korea and Japan within three weeks (WHO, 2020c). The virus spread all over the world in a short time and is still effective today.

Education is one of the most affected sectors after health. According to the latest data from the United Nations (Zhong, 2020), the closure of schools and universities worldwide has affected 770 million students. Given the relationship between education and students, teachers, parents and all other stakeholders, education serves a large part of the population in many countries. How traditional education services based on teacher-student interaction will progress in schools and during the epidemic has become a hotly debated topic almost worldwide (Daniel, 2020). Many countries have implemented a decision to close schools to keep students away from the threat of contagious disease and reduce the likelihood of the virus spreading to families (OECD, 2020). In the last week of April, 1.6 billion students, 91% of the global student population, dropped out of traditional education due to school closures.

LIMITATIONS ON DISTANCE EDUCATION IN THE PANDEMIC

Although the closure of schools contributed significantly to the prevention of the epidemic, the closure of schools brought serious costs to the country. Many countries were caught off guard to deal with one of the biggest problems facing education in history, so they had to decide to switch to distance education in a short time (Daniel, 2020). This forced transition in education has led to a lack of adequate discussion on the impact of continuing education with distance education solutions. Although it is seen as the best solution to an epidemic that needs to be adapted in a short time, the education process that continues with distance education has brought many problems with it (Shapiro, 2020; Morgan, 2020).

In many countries of the world, due to the epidemic in March 2020, decisions were taken to suspend formal education representing primary and secondary school students and educators and to conduct all education on online platforms. Today, the most prominent problem faced by many educational institutions with these transition or change instructions is the lack of a distance education infrastructure established via the internet or the lack of any preparation. The basic progress is that the only source from which all students can receive education is distance education applications and education is given via TV and the Internet. Daniel (2020) emphasizes that he should work carefully to meet the needs of students at different levels, develop practical

distance education methods, prepare courses, conduct regular assessments and provide useful resources for the management of their education during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, almost all physical activity has stopped worldwide, including educational activities. Therefore, this situation necessitated the conduct of education on online platforms. Although distance learning is not a new education model, this sudden transition to distance education has created difficulties for educational activities in resource-scarce environments, especially in less developed countries, where educational institutions, teachers and students globally are often not ready for it. The unexpected change in traditional teaching and learning methods, digital transformation in teaching activities during the COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it several concrete challenges (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). Some of these challenges are technological infrastructure, educational inequality, digital competence, socio-economic factors, measurement and evaluation, supervision, increase in workload and adaptation of applied education to this process. By its very nature, distance education is dependent on technological devices and the Internet, so much so that if those who learn and teach the education and learning process are not digital experts due to their inexperience or insufficient knowledge, technology is the biggest problem for distance education. Some specific technical issues include lack of knowledge of how to use apps, slow internet connections, outdated communication devices, and incompatible browsers.

Assessment and evaluation are of great importance, whether face-to-face or distance learning. However, measurement and evaluation in distance education activities have become complex during the global epidemic (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). Therefore, it is imperative to introduce new approaches to measurement and evaluation. In the evaluation of distance education, teachers have limited control over students' work. Teachers are required to avoid cheating and enable students to complete evaluation tasks on their own. For educational institutions, the sudden transition to distance learning has increased the workload of creating e-platforms and integrating additional applications into the system in a timely manner. Another critical issue is training teachers and support staff to use new platforms and systems. Teachers, who have an important role in education, have been responsible for transforming their lessons, learning resources, subject content and assessment processes into online platforms, which has created a lot of workload pressure. This sudden increase in workload caused stress and anxiety (Winthrop, 2020; MacIntyre et al., 2020).

The transition to distance learning, cyberbullying, online violence and abuse, difficulties and uncertainties in online learning related to cybersecurity, and concerns about the increase in psychological problems have arisen (Yan, 2020). There are other challenges addressed in research on distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of them, distance education, which has been transitioned due to the pandemic, has caused peers to lose their opportunity to interact with each other and cause more stress, isolation and frustration for them (Daniel, 2020; Gillett-Swan, 2017).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The first of the major changes envisaged in the field of education is the digitalization of many traditional educational processes (Dennis, 2020). Under these circumstances, COVID-19 has given impetus to digital work, which has recently increased in education. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, global investment in digital education solutions and applications increased substantially, reaching US\$18.66 billion in 2019 and expected to reach US\$350 billion by 2025 (Tam and Al-Azar, 2020; Li and Lalani, 2020).

The importance of the education process in the digital environment, what happened during the COVID-19 process, has been proven once again. For this reason, it is expected to invest in technology to enable the transition to distance education when necessary. It is making more research and investment plans to develop new 5G-based education technologies, especially in countries such as China, Japan and South Korea, which are pioneers in the digitalization of education (Tam and Al-Azar, 2020). The fact that the education process will shift to digital platforms even more after this epidemic requires the development of digital literacy skills of students and teachers. The inclusion of digital literacy skills in education after the epidemic and the effective use of digital resources by teachers and students will play a key role in these processes.

Researchers have put forward some suggestions on how to increase the effectiveness of distance education during the pandemic. Naffi et al., (2020) put forward suggestions that universities can provide access to distance learning and equality in this process. These are: selection of appropriate digital technologies; creating accessible materials; recording audio content of lectures and captioned videos; be inclusive; adopting culturally sensitive teaching; understanding student needs; establishing a flexible approach to student participation in the lesson; financial support and the provision of necessary equipment and systemic racism.

In another study, the recommendations for distance education included thinking about how students would navigate in online classrooms; presenting an instruction for the online course at the beginning of the semester; ensuring that all educational materials are accessible; is the addition of alternative alt text to images and graphics shared for students (Leif et al. (2020).

In the study by Martin (2020), suggestions were made for educators to optimize distance education during the pandemic period. The five main points raised are as follows; clear, orderly and well-organized instructions; the content is of high quality and appropriate to the level of the students; self-regulation for motivation, parent involvement, and identifying tasks that separate students from online; establishing interpersonal relationships and adequate face-to-face online instructions through different communication channels; to reach students who need help and to inform them who they can contact when they need mental health support.

Dhawan (2020) has presented various solutions to the problems related to distance education in his research. The solutions offered are that the lectures include pre-recorded lecture videos; making the learning process more interesting, attractive, interactive and dynamic; providing incentives; creating forums for communication using social media and other digital platforms; continuous improvement of the quality of online courses; Allowing students to ask questions and provide feedback.

In addition, it is seriously thought that teachers should be supported with in-service trainings in the process of applying distance education and in the post-epidemic period, especially in terms of psychological, pedagogical and technological field knowledge, in which teachers are deficient in this difficult process and consider themselves inadequate. In educational institutions and before starting their duties, teacher candidates need to be similarly developed and changed through various trainings on the knowledge, skills and experiences required by the digitalized, changing and developing world. At the end of the epidemic process and after this process, students, parents and teachers should be improved by providing psychosocial training in order to reduce the permanent effects of this difficult process and completely eliminate traumas (Kurnaz and Seçemeli, 2020).

The COVID-19 process is an important example of how the productivity of educational institutions and human resources can help fight the epidemic. A crisis management department should be established and prepared for this situation. It should be ensured that the lack of infrastructure is eliminated and that all students have equal education rights.

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