Primary school students' views on online education

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Abstract

After the global pandemic, it seems that solutions found during the period have made people accept the idea that the school is not confined to four walls and that teaching services can be carried out in every environment. Identification of the problems related to this new teaching method, which is particularly unfamiliar to primary school students, and its positive aspects, will help education stakeholders to be informed about the points to be considered in their work with students with similar or newer education-teaching methods and in environments that might be adopted soon. The aim of this research is to examine the distance education activities of the 4th grade students studying in public primary schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education of Turkey during the global pandemic period and their views on the problems they experience in this process in two different socio-economic environments. The research design is qualitative and phenomenological. Qualitative interview method was adopted while taking opinions of the students. A structured interview form was used while collecting the data. Study group of the research consists of 8 4th grade students who receives online education in primary schools in Antalya. In the analysis of the data, descriptive analysis method was preferred. Of the negative aspects recorded in the research, technology-related ones are prominent. It was found that internet connection problems for online education were on top of the ones faced by students.

Keywords: Online education, Distance Education, Primary school students

1. Introduction

Within the pandemic period, countries have had to take some restrictive measures in almost every area that concerns the society. Measures such as restriction of cultural and artistic activities, lock down of workplaces, cafes and restaurants have become quite common. Similar measures like lock down of schools or reducing the duration of schooling have been taken in the educational field. Approximately 1.6 billion students are thought to be affected by such practices (UNESCO, 2020). In order to reduce the effects of these

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kinds of blocking on education systems and students, distance education methods that were carried out through television and the internet have emerged as methods that most countries resort to in order not to disrupt education during the pandemic period (OECD, 2020). In Turkey, distance education method has been adopted in education to cover all education levels (except for kindergartens and nursery schools for a period).

Although distance education is an educational method used before 2019, its use in all education levels, including pre-school, was both a widely unknown and not preferred method. Even so, it was practiced to cover all education levels as a result of a necessity that emerged during the pandemic period. Such kind of a sudden transformation and necessity has brought out some positive and negative issues. Some positive aspects that emerged during the pandemic period in the field of education are; developing new ways of communication, rethinking the schools of the future, reviewing the function of schools, providing healthier school conditions, and creating policies that emphasize teacher and student health (Sarı & Nayır, 2020). In addition to these, it may be suggested that distance education has offered some advantages during a global pandemic such as staying away from negative health problems for individuals, gaining educational attainments at the home environment, and being able to watch video-based trainings over and over.

It is obvious that distance education processes have had advantages as well as disadvantages (Table 1). One of them is that the mental health of individuals has been negatively affected. The OECD (2021) reports that in most countries, mental health problems of individuals aged 15-24 have increased by a factor of two; that in the USA, Belgium, and France, young individuals showed signs of depression or anxiety in the range of 30-80%; that school support for mental health was impaired; and that the closure of schools kept individuals' mental health away from protective factors (OECD, 2021).

Table 1. Problems arising during the covid 19 period

Problems – Sub Themes	Unesco	OECD	World Bank	Themes
Interruption of learning	X	X	X	Problems related to learning-teaching process
Undernutrition	X	X	X	Health problems
Confusion and stress for teachers	X			Problems arising from stakeholders
Distance education and parents and teachers caught unprepared for it	X	X		Problems arising from stakeholders

Challenges in creating, maintaining and developing distance learning	X	X		Problems related to lerning-teaching process
Gaps in childcare	X			Other
Costly economic activities	X		X	Other
Increasing pressure on schools and school systems that remain open	X			Other
Increase in school dropout rates	X		X	Problems related to lerning-teaching process
Teachers, students and parents feeling uneasy, bad	X	X	X	Health problems
Increased exposure to violence and exploitation	X			Health problems
Social isolation	X		X	Health problems
Difficulties measuring learning	X	X		Problems related to lerning-teaching process
Inability to communicate with parents		X		Problems arising from stakeholders
Technological inadequacies		X		Technological problems
Inadequacies in curriculum		X		Problems related to lerning-teaching process
Lack of access to technology		X		Technological problems
Teacher's technological inadequacies		X		Technological problems
Inequality in accessing education			X	Problems related to lerning-teaching process
Shortages in students' learning		X	X	Problems related to lerning-teaching process

Reference: Sarı & Nayır, 2020.

Especially in distance education research carried out at primary school level, it is frequently reported that students encounter some negative situations such as access to the internet (Yurtbakan & Akyıldız, 2020), difficulties in finding suitable learning tools, as well as positive experiences. An assessment of Table 1 within the scope of the research indicates that some of the problems that students may experience are addressed. These

may be listed as interruption of education, difficulties in maintaining distance education, increase in school dropout rate, social isolation, technological inadequacies, inequality in access to education and learning losses.

Among the research conducted in the field of distance education during the pandemic period in the literature, ones dealing with problems experienced by primary school students are quite limited. For this reason, it is seen important to address distance education practices at the level of primary school students.

Aim of this research is to investigate the distance education activities carried out by the 4th grade students studying in public primary schools affiliated to Turkey's Ministry of National Education during the global pandemic period and their views on the problems they experience in this process.

In light of this aim, answers to the following questions were sought in the research;

1-Through which ways did the students participate in distance and online education?

2-What are the problems experienced by students while teaching distance and online courses?

3-What are the processes or practices that students want to be different or corrected in distance education courses?

2. Method

The research is characterised by qualitative and phenomenological properties. According to Merriam (2013), the ultimate goal of qualitative research is to create an understanding of how people make sense of their lives, to outline the process of making sense, and to describe how people interpret what they experience. What is meant by qualitative research is that it is about human perception and understanding (Stake, 2010). Creswell (2007) defines the main purpose of phenomenology as reducing individual experiences to a universal self-definition (Creswell, 2007). The philosophy of phenomenology draws attention to the experience itself and how this experience turns into consciousness (Merriam, 2013). In phenomenology, researchers can focus on issues that they are aware of but do not have in-depth knowledge of. According to Patton (2014), researchers are interested in how people make sense of that phenomenon, define it, and feel and evaluate it. In this context, phenomenological approach was preferred for the research.

Qualitative interview method was adopted while taking the opinions of the students. Purposive sampling method was preferred within the scope of the research. In this context, students involved in distance education processes in Antalya provinces were included in the research. Study group of the research consists of 8 students at the 4th grade level who receive online education in Antalya province primary school.

A structured interview form was used for the research. After this form was prepared by the researchers, it was presented to a faculty member, two doctoral students and a Turkish teacher for feedback. The interview form took its final form in line with the feedback received. Written consent documents were taken from the parents of the students before the interview. The students were asked to convey their opinions in writing via a structured form. Interview forms were applied by two different teachers.
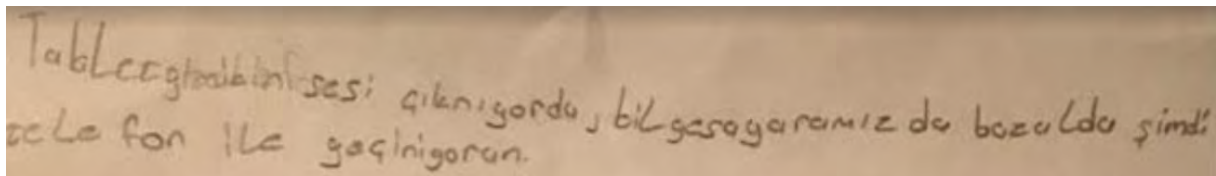
Descriptive analysis method was preferred while analysing the data in order to clearly reveal the problems experienced by the students. The data were evaluated in accordance with the stages of the descriptive content analysis method. Content analysis takes place by following the coding, classification and definition stages of the obtained data (Glesne, 2012). The interview forms were read by two different teachers and a consensus was reached on the content of the text. Then, the text contents were transferred to the computer environment and reported.

3. Results

3.1. Finding on devices by which students participate in distance education

It was found that students participated in distance education courses with computers, tablets and phones in the distance education period. Students stated that they mainly used computers, tablets and phones, respectively. Phone use, however, remains as the minority.
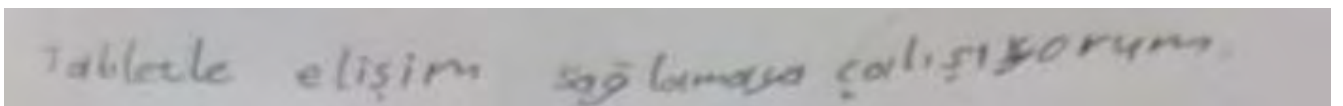
Sample1: Participant 1.

-There was no sound on the tablet, our computer was also broken. Now I'm trying to manage with the phone.
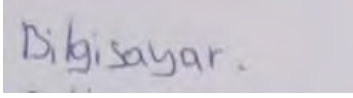
Sample 2: Participant 3.

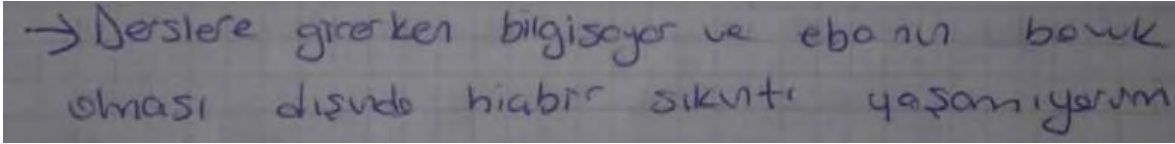-I am trying to access with tablet.

Sample 3: Participant 7.

-Computer.

3.2. Findings regarding the problems experienced by students in distance education periods

During the distance education applications, the students mainly addressed the connection problems. In addition, they also stated their problems in accessing the EBA portal. In other words, it is understood that the most common problem experienced by the students is technology-related. Some students stated that such problems caused them to fall behind the course subjects.
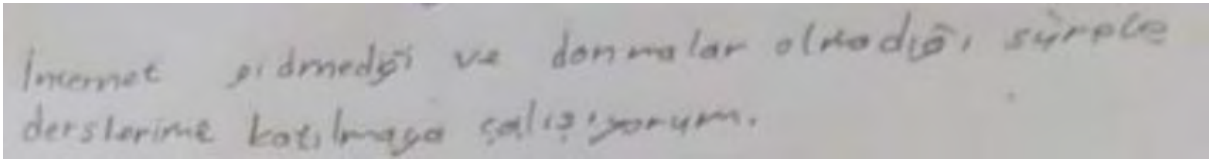
A second prominent problem is staying away from school and friends. Still, two students stated that they did not encounter any problems.

Sample 4: Participant 2.

-I do not have any problems, except that the computer and EBA are broken when entering the classes.

Sample 5: Participant 3.

-As long as the internet is not down and there are no freezes, I try to attend my classes.

Sample 6: Participant 5.

- I missed my school, I missed my friends a lot, I missed my teacher a lot.

I stayed away from the activities I loved. I have had a lot of insufficiencies. I think that distance education is not very productive and instructive.

I was never able to connect through EBA and had a lot of difficulty; falling behind made me sad.
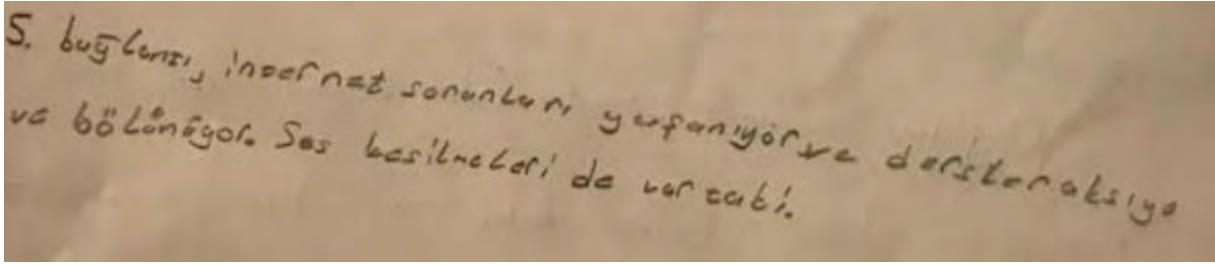
Sample 7: Participant 6.

-EBA freezes a lot, I can't log in. Teachers freeze a lot, too, and I feel sleepy.

Sample 8: Participant 1.

-There are freezes and interruptions when we connect the device. When we reconnect, some of the course has been gone, but I can get an answer by asking the teacher.

-Connection and internet problems occur and classes are interrupted. There are also sound interruptions.

3.3. Findings on the practices that students wanted to change in the distance education process

What students want to change in distance education periods can be grouped under a heading of technology. At the beginning of these, It is possible to specify the problems experienced during the password stage of the EBA application as the most prominent. Secondly, they demanded the freezing problems experienced during the application to be solved. Additionally, one student commented that the screens were small. One student demanded the Zoom application to be used.

Sample 9: Participant 6.
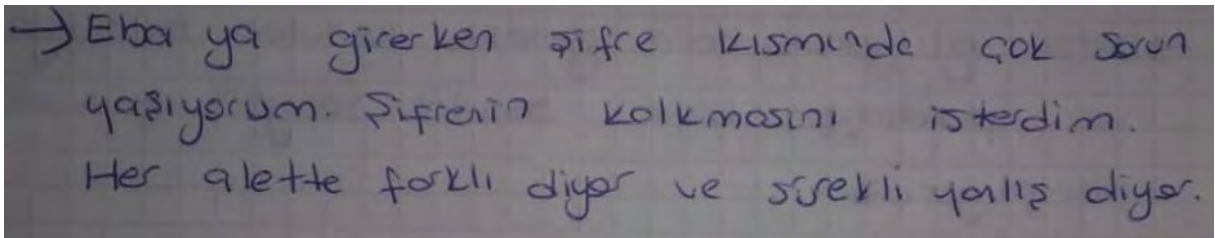
I'm having a lot of trouble with the password part when logging into EBA. I wish the password was removed. It's different on every device and it's always wrong.
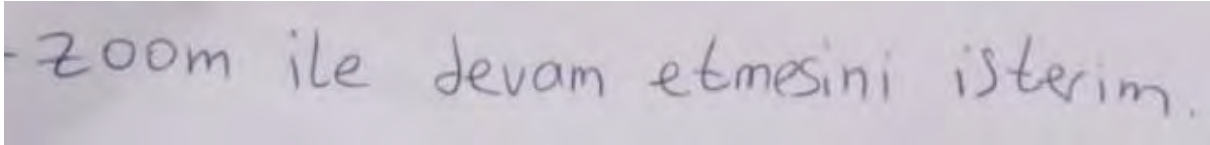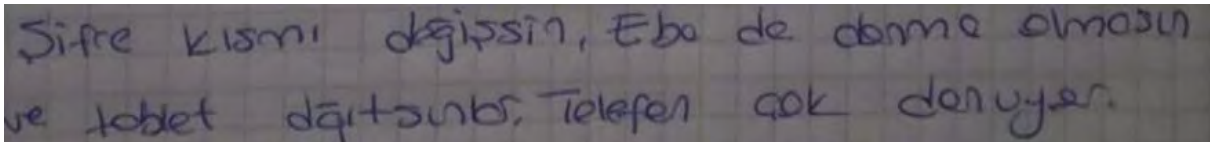
Sample 10: Participant 1.
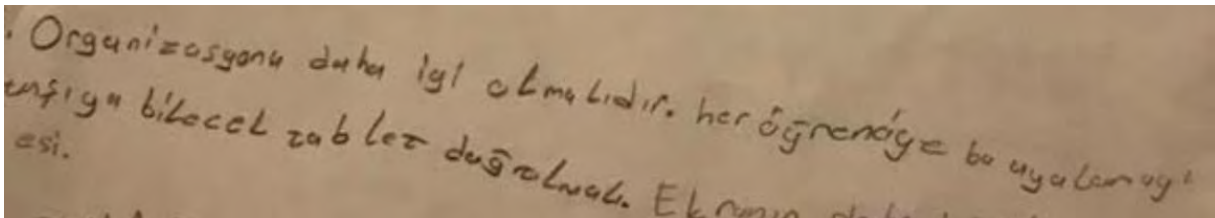
-The organization must be very good. Tablets that can run this application should be distributed to each student. …

Sample 11: Participant 5.

-I would like it to continue through Zoom.

Sample 12: Participant 2.

-They should change the password part, EBA shouldn't freeze and they should distribute tablets. The phone freezes a lot.

4. Discussion

In order to be included in distance education applications, students are required to use a technological product. Within the scope of the research, it was found that students mostly connected to distance education applications via computer. It was also found that students attended classes via tablets and phones, too.

This research found that there were both positive and negative aspects of distance and online education applications, which primary school students had to adapt quickly. In the distance education period, problems related to teaching process, stakeholder-related problems, and technological problems emerged as predictable ones (Jena, 2020; Sarı & Nayır, 2020; Yaman, 2021). Of the negative aspects recorded in the research, technology-related ones are prominent. It was found that internet connection problems for online education were on top of the ones faced by students. This is in line with the some researches findings (Jena, 2020; Sarı & Nayır, 2021). Connection problems and the internet appeared as problems that teachers also mentioned, similar to students (Avcı & Akdeniz, 2021). Among the findings was that the students who attended lessons with a phone or tablet expressed negativities such as screen size problems. All these indicate that students who participated in distance education applications from the computer within the scope of the research experienced less visual and auditory problems.

In addition to technology-related problems, two students also stated that they were affected psychologically and socially. A research (Yurtbakan & Akyıldız, 2020) reported

that the students did not encounter any negativity or problems throughout the process, and added that it was positive in terms of making it easier to understand the subjects taught on television and then through the online courses. Similar to these findings, one student in this research also stated that he did not experience any problems during the period. Although Jena (2020) suggests that the closing schools has many implications on the daily routine of students as the meal schemes have shut. As Reimers (2022) mentioned students have no chance to attract each other like face to face education (Reimers, 2022). Additionally, it was found that the educational processes that took place away from anxiety of illness were met positively by the students. In this respect, it may be suggested that distance education provides an advantage to students. It is obvious in this research that the students expressed the problems they experienced due to the password in their EBA logins and they wanted this practice to changed. Again, depending on the problems they experienced, it is prominent that they expect access problems and internet connection related problems to be solved.

5. Conclusions

Distance education, which was put into practice to reduce the problems experienced by students during the pandemic process when they were separated from their schools and the order they were used to, emerges as a process that students are in or have to be in, with its positive and negative aspects. This research reports the students' statements that they mainly experienced technology-related problems. When handled from this point of view, a research in which the views of parents, teachers and psychological counsellors about the difficulties faced by the students in the process of living in addition to the views of primary school students will be useful in terms of revealing the problems experienced by the students more clearly.

It is recommended to conduct studies that focus on primary school problems due to the inadequacy of research on this subject. Since the research is a qualitative one, conducting research that includes quantitative methods in order to reach a more generalizable result will contribute positively to the problems encountered in this process and the efficiency of future remedial studies and students to have a more productive distance education experience.

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