

Chapter 21

Challenges Experienced in Distance Education and Solution Suggestions During the COVID–19 Pandemic Period

Hakan Kilinc

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4301-1370>

Anadolu University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

In this study, which was carried out in order to identify the challenges experienced in distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic period and to propose solutions to these problems, the phenomenology design was used. Twelve experts who had experience of distance education during the COVID-19 period contributed to the study. The findings obtained within the scope of the study show that there are challenges such as the unpreparedness of institutions, insufficient infrastructure, increased digital divide among learners, and difficulties in measurement-evaluation processes and support services processes during the pandemic period. Regarding the solution of these problems, solutions such as investing in infrastructure, revising support services, using teaching techniques suitable for distance education, taking responsibility in learning processes, and changing measurement-evaluation techniques have been presented.

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused change and transformation in all areas of society. These transformations in social institutions have affected the daily lives of individuals. After Covid-19, one of the areas affected along with many other areas is education (Kılınç, 2021). With the Covid-19 pandemic, the experiences that can be evaluated utopically in the recent past have been experienced globally since the beginning of 2020. Covid-19 has influenced every area of life and has had consequences that require a reassessment of education. According to UNESCO (2020a) data, schools have been closed in hundreds of countries due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This has affected millions of learners around the world. In

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order to reduce the negative effects of school closures, UNESCO has worked to conduct education with distance education opportunities (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Doghonadze et. al., 2020; Gupta & Goplani, 2020). During the Covid-19 epidemic, approximately 770 million learners around the world have moved away from their schools and have been directly affected by this extraordinary situation (Zhong, 2020). In this context, the distance education approach has been adopted by many countries of the world as the most applicable solution in terms of ensuring the continuity of education. In this period when distance education was started, the use of information technologies in education processes has accelerated. As Vago (2003) points out, the capacity of technology to change both the conditions of human life and the character of social institutions is quite new, and change is occurring at a rapid rate. In other words, the rapidly developing technology has enabled the transformation in education. The current pandemic process has shown that it is necessary to understand the necessity of continuing learning without interruption, to invest more in distance education, and to give importance to alternative learning approaches (especially distance education applications) instead of traditional education approaches. It should not be forgotten that distance education applications have important advantages not only in normal times or to support formal education, but also in some crisis situations (epidemics, wars, disasters, forced migration, etc.) and it should be taken into account by policy makers.

The most important feature of distance education is that it is a form of education in which the instructor guides the learning processes, isolated from space or time (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Distance education carried out during the epidemic period is the temporary transfer of face-to-face education to the technology environment in a crisis and is called emergency distance education. Distance education was never on the agenda for many before the pandemic process, but with the Covid-19 pandemic, local governments are now establishing virtual classrooms and collaboration platforms at an incredible speed. In addition, studies are carried out on which learning platforms to use, how to help instructors in the implementation of online learning, how to reach those with little or no internet access at home, and how to monitor and evaluate learning outcomes (Atchoarena, 2020). The pandemic forces educators, parents and learners to think critically, solve problems, be creative, communicate, collaborate and be active (Anderson, 2020).

According to Giannini & Lewis (2020), school closures help both slow the spread of disease and reduce the impact on health systems that are potentially unable to cope with a large number of diseases. These measures are becoming not only an act of civil solidarity, but also a mandatory measure to protect public health. However, it is foreseen that these measures will increase the existing inequalities especially in the education system. At this point, it can be stated that solutions should be found for inequalities among learners.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the form of education used in almost all of the education applications from pre-school to higher education, from formal education to non-formal education has been distance education. In other words, distance education had to carry out the education processes alone. The fulfillment of this critical responsibility is directly related to the quality of distance education processes. However, it is necessary to monitor and evaluate the educational practices carried out in any period and by any means, by education administrators and policy makers, and to correct any deficiencies immediately (Bircan, Eleroğlu, Arslan & Ersoy, 2018). Otherwise, these deficiencies will lead to many possible

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