

Chapter 13

Public Education Policies in Turkey in the COVID–19 Crisis

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 was declared a pandemic on March 11, 2020. With the COVID-19 crisis, new problem areas have appeared in many areas such as business, trade, social life, education, and the health sector in countries where it is effective. One of the areas where this limitation and new problems arise is the field of education. States have imposed restrictions in education and training to reduce the rate of the pandemic's spread and have suspended face-to-face education. Firstly, Turkey closed the schools for a while and then the government announced "distance learning" efforts. However, distance education has not been fully settled in both the learners and teachers. This study aims to handle education policies in Turkey during the COVID-19 pandemic and try to examine possible solutions for problem areas, which existed because of the pandemic. For this purpose, with a descriptive method, the subject was examined. Because of the changing spirit of the pandemic, this study focused on the education policy from March 1, 2020 to March 1, 2021.

INTRODUCTION

Education is an important policy topic to increase knowledge of societies and solve problems related to everyday life. Because the power of education in this regard is more significant than in other systems (such as economics, politics), the return of education investments to society is also greater. For this reason, the creation and implementation of the wrong policies in the field of education mean that all other systems are negatively affected. These adverse effects can cause countries to pause and even decline. Today, developed countries owe their status to the education policies they have implemented in the past (Babaoğlu & Kulaç, 2021b, p. 10; Yalçınkaya, 2015, p. 26). Because it primarily shapes the individual and society together with the individual, education is the fundamental element of the human profile and social structure that needs to be built. Thus, education policy determines how to create an education system that shapes people and society, what is brought to the fore and what is pushed back

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(Çakır, 2017, p. 44). Therefore, education policy can be defined as a general plan that covers opinions and judgments appropriate to them, considering dynamic social and economic factors, prepared to be the basis for decisions that an educational institution or society will make to achieve its pre-determined educational goals (Uysal, 2018, p. 42).

Education means increasing the individual's knowledge and, accordingly, society, changing the ways and ideas of behaviors, and developing the individual's abilities for himself and the society he lives (Calcali, 2019, p. 451). As can be seen from this definition, education is a concept limited to the individual and a broad concept that includes the society formed by individual individuals. Because of this importance, education is one of the oldest public services offered by the state. Because education is essential in ensuring human development, increasing the sensitivity and adaptation of the individual to the society and the world in which he lives, and providing the individual with the capabilities and equipment required by national and international labor markets. Education policies as a public policy need to be used effectively and efficiently (Çakır, 2017, p. 43).

Education is a concept that provides continuity for students during the school period and provides continuity outside the pre-determined holiday intervals. However, social events such as war, natural disasters and epidemics can disrupt the educational process. One of the crises that disrupted the educational process was Covid-19, which was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020. According to UNESCO, as of March 22, 2021, schools are fully open in 112 of 210 countries due to the pandemic, 72 are partially open, and 26 are closed (Tedmem, 2021). For this reason, the pandemic has impacted the education system in a context that is rare worldwide.

In Turkey, the first case appeared on March 11, 2021. One of the launched applications to avoid the spread of the epidemic has been the interruption of education. Therefore, it has been decided that students should continue with distance education. The most talked-about issues in Turkey after schools were vacated due to the pandemic are the state of schools, how education will take place, what tools to use, inequality of opportunity and how students and families should act. For this reason, it is crucial to examine the education policies during the pandemic period in Turkey.

This study aims to determine the current state of Turkey's education policies; to discuss the impact of the pandemic on education, activities aimed at continuing education in the epidemic process, deficiencies, and possible solution proposals on this issue, and to examine what threats, opportunities and externalities the epidemic embodies in the field of education and training. In his study, which examined the short-and long-term effects of the pandemic on education, Balcı (2020) stated that students studying during this period due to the pandemic may have problems with their employment and may be unfair in the future evaluating their abilities. Can (2020), on the other hand, emphasized that society understands the importance of open and distance education during the pandemic period but that it is necessary to increase not only quantity but also quality in distance education. During the pandemic period, changes in assessments or detected current situations in such periods are faster than in regular periods. Therefore, in the pandemic process, this study is limited to March 2020 and March 2021.

The first part of the study will focus on education policies in Turkey before the pandemic. In this context, information about the historical background of education policies and education expenditures will be given, followed by a general evaluation of education policies. In the second part, the effect of the pandemic on education in Turkey, the state of Turkey's preparation for distance education, the deficiencies in distance education in the pandemic process and the opportunities, threats and externalities associated with distance education will be examined. Finally, in conclusion, recommendations to educational deficiencies in the pandemic process will be included.

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