


Chapter 24

Educational Policy Actions in the Times of COVID–19 and Suggestions for Future Applications in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Education has been hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, with school closures affecting 87.6% of the world's total enrolled students. Drop-out rates are likely to increase worldwide as a result of this massive disruption to education access. Within this context, coronavirus-related disruption has given educators time to rethink education. Technology has come to the fore and will continue to play a key role in educating future generations. In a world where knowledge is a mouse-click away, the role of the educator has changed too. The present study is aimed to draw from theoretical and pragmatic lessons learned with school closures in response to COVID-19 to address paradigms of education. Within this context, the present study was performed to reveal educational policy actions by the Ministry of National Education in the times of COVID-19 in Turkey and make suggestions for future applications.

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of 2019, a coronavirus type has begun to alarm the human life in Wuhan (China). Owing to the scale of the threat, it is named as a “pandemic” by World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020. WHO made the first pandemic announcement which is caused by a type of coronavirus and WHO alerted all local authorities to raise their health emergencies to maximum level (WHO, 2020a).

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Almost all countries have introduced curfews, quarantines, and similar restrictions (known as stay-at-home orders, shelter-in-place orders, shutdowns/lockdowns). According to the data of the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020b), the pandemic, which was detected in a total of 2,995,758 people in 213 countries or regions around the world as of April 29, 2020, caused 204,987 deaths. The deep effects and reflections of the crisis situation created by the pandemic all over the world on health, economic, psychological, social life and education continue, and there is no definite data on when it will end. Within these circumstances, education was influenced profoundly as one main daily activity of millions of students, teachers and parents around of the world (OECD, 2020; Saavedra, 2020; UNESCO, 2020a; UNESCO, 2020d). In fact, education has been hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic with approximately 1.6 billion students and 63 million of educators and 188 country-wide school closures (UNESCO, 2020a; UNICEF, 2020).

In order to reduce the negative effects of school closures, UNESCO has announced that it will support countries to ensure continuity of education for all through distance learning, asking countries to take measures, especially for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups (UNESCO, 2020c). UNICEF (2020) states that the risk of dropping out of school in the future increases especially for vulnerable and disadvantaged students, as the effects of the pandemic will last. To this end, it states that it is important to take measures to prevent interruption of education and to ensure access to continuous and flexible distance education methods for all children in the home, including those who do not have internet access or live with disabilities.

UNESCO Head of Education Policy Department Chang (UNESCO, 2020h) stated that 58 out of 84 countries where he conducted research postponed or rescheduled examinations, 23 introduced alternative methods such as online or home-based testing, while exams were continued in 22 countries and canceled completely in 11 countries. It suggests that there is a distinct trend towards online testing, but that “not all subjects and competencies can be assessed online or by phone, and it is necessary to assess students’ progress to identify learning gaps, and offer remedial and accelerated learning and assessment opportunities when schools reopen” (UNESCO, 2020e). Due to the pandemic COVID-19 in Turkey, local and central exams and educational activities at all teaching levels were postponed and the assessment and evaluation of student achievement was conducted with online testing.

Education systems around the world face an unprecedented challenge following mass school closures mandated to contain the spread of Covid-19 as part of public health efforts. Government agencies work with international organizations, private sector partners and civil society to provide distance education to ensure curriculum-based study and continuity of learning for all. However, today little is known about how these strategies provide effective and equitable access to quality learning opportunities for all (Hopegood, 2020; UNESCO, 2020f; UNESCO, 2020g). The Covid-19 pandemic reveals that it is necessary to develop more innovative solutions to improve new ways of thinking about the future of education at the global level. In this context, e-learning or online learning comes to the fore. E-learning is a learning activity realized by presenting learning content and materials in electronic environment, and students can experience various learning experiences in electronic environment. With e-learning, students can access learning content and materials at any time and place and interact with other students and teachers. Today, e-learning environments offer many opportunities for qualified student-content, student-teacher and student-content interactions (Clark & Mayer, 2011; Cheng, 2011; Perveen, 2016).

Wentling, Waight, Gallaber, Fleur, Wang, and Kanfer (2000) defined e-learning as the electronic distribution and use of information. They also underline that in order to look at the difference between the concepts of distance education and e-learning, the prominent features of these concepts should be

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