

IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON TURKEY

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1. Introduction

COVID-19 emerged in late December 2019 in Wuhan, China. This disease has been defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a new type of coronavirus. (Wang, Wang, Chen and Qin, COVID 2020). The virus, which showed a high contagiousness, spread all over the world, especially in Europe, in a short time. (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). The pandemic, with symptoms such as cough, fever and severe acute respiratory tract infection, had fatal consequences and threatened the world. (Ministry of Health, 2020). According to research, 80% of cases have survived the disease without requiring serious medical attention. However, in severe cases, the disease can turn into pneumonia and artificial respiration methods may be needed. However, in serious cases, it has shown that the disease can turn into pneumonia and artificial respiratory methods may be needed. It has been observed that one out of every five people in contact with the disease has a severe illness. It has been determined that individuals with chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, lung and heart diseases and elderly people are in the risky group. Apart from the elderly, children and young people are also likely to get the infection and spread it to their environment. There have been cases where people in this age group also had a severe illness. (Johns Hopkins, 2020; TR Ministry of Health, 2020b). The negative effects of the global epidemic have been seen in many areas such as economy, sociology, psychology, education, starting from the field of health. The extent of this negative effect has increased day by day and has given concern. The rate of transmission and spread of the infection caused by the 2019-nCoV virus is much faster than other viral infections seen in the history of the world. (Ergül, Altın Yavuz, Gündoğan Aşık & Kalay, 2020).

Governments had to take radical measures such as social distancing (social isolation), quarantine practices, martial law, travel and education restrictions to control the spread of the epidemic. (Bourouiba, 2020).

The first case in Turkey was detected on March 11, 2021. (Dikmen&Bahceci, 2020). After the first case of COVID-19 was seen in Turkey, priority was given to health and safety measures, and it was decided to suspend education in all schools and universities. (MEB, 2020). As the spread of the epidemic within the country and its consequences worsen; all domestic and international flights were suspended, scientific, cultural, artistic and similar meetings and activities were postponed, employees in public institutions and organizations were either given administrative leave or were given the opportunity to practice flexible working methods, (remote working) inter-city travels are subject to the permission of the governorship, a curfew has been declared for individuals over the age of 65 and under the age of 20, and a curfew has been declared at regular intervals for all individuals living in 30 metropolitan cities. (TC Official Newspaper, 3 April 2020, no: 89780865-153). With the "Additional Circular on Parks, Recreation, Picnic Places within the Scope of Combating the Coronavirus Epidemic" published

by the Ministry of Interior, from 28-29 March 2020 until the spread of the virus have been prevented; All kinds of activities carried out by the citizens on the beaches, recreation areas and picnic areas in the settlements on weekends have been prohibited. It has been reported that these measures can also be applied on weekdays by looking at the effectiveness of the bans and the province-district situations. (Çınar and Oğuz, 2020: p. 7).

Since June 2020, some measures have been applied by stretching, but since the beginning of 2021, the measures have been tightened again. (Erdoğan Koçoğlu, Sevim, 2020). As in the whole world, these measures taken in Turkey have affected both social life and sectors such as education, economy and health.

2. Education During the Pandemic in Turkey

After the first case was announced in Turkey on March 11, 2020, face-to-face education was suspended in universities and all schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education. While a holiday was announced for a few weeks in educational institutions at the beginning, it was foreseen that schools would not be able to open in the spring term, with the increase in the number of cases added to the news of death. In order not to interrupt the education and training process, the distance education process has started in Turkey as in many countries. In order to manage this process and the crisis, the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) took action quickly and took decisions in terms of transforming the education process into distance education in the spring term of 2020. (YÖK, 2020a; YÖK 2020b). With these explanations, face-to-face education was suspended at all education levels, it was decided to switch to distance education, postpone local and central exams, and introduce web-based exams in measuring and evaluating student achievement.

Distance education started on March 23, 2020 in primary and secondary education institutions. Cooperation between the Ministry of National Education and the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) was established. With the cooperation of these two institutions, three different television channels were created to support distance education. In addition, the Ministry of National Education increased the capacity of EBA, the education platform in Turkey, and provided support to distance education. (Ozer, 2020). Education in Turkey was carried out by using different applications through distance education. In higher education, education was interrupted for a short time in the first place, then it was reported that the spring semester would be completed with distance education in 2020. (YÖK, 2020).

For EBA TV, 3 different channels and 6 different frequencies were broadcast on TRT, and lesson videos were broadcast on the basis of branches suitable for each class. (EBA, 2020). Thus, distance education started with “EBA TV Primary School”, “EBA TV Secondary School” and “EBA TV High School”. Classes are planned as 20 minutes each, with a 10-minute activity zone in between. As of Monday, 13 April 2020, online classes were applied to 8th and 12th grades via the EBA platform, and implemented in all grade levels as of April 23, 2020. (MEB, 2020). In online class application, teachers and students had the opportunity to exchange class online.

Online classes were defined by school administrators at certain times and announced to teachers and students, ensuring that students and teachers were ready during the online classes. With the

"whiteboard" application displayed on the screen during the online class, teachers were able to teach using the blackboard and share documents with their students. In addition, they were able to share tests, videos, messages or other documents with students through the EBA platform. (MEB,2020)

Crisis management features were observed when the applications made in the field of education management in Turkey during the COVID-19 process. Following the school closures, to ensure teachers, students, parents and administrators were least affected by the crisis, the following were done. Information guides for adults were prepared to help children in order to maintain psychological stability during pandemic period. A psycho-social support line was set up and online activities were done. (MEB, 2020). The infrastructure of the existing digital education platform EBA (Education Informatics Network) was strengthened, and distance education activities were supported through this platform and online classes were implemented. In addition, in order to support students' access to this education portal, cooperation with GSM operators was provided to students up to 8 GB of free internet access. (Ozer, 2020). This showed that the pandemic crisis reduced the impact on the educational organization and that crisis management plans and practices were made in education management.

3. Health Services During the Pandemic in Turkey

With its geographical location at the transition point between Asia and Europe, Turkey could not escape being affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, which spread through social contact. The late arrival of the pandemic in Turkey enabled the government to benefit from the experiences of other countries, thus strengthening the hand of the relevant actors in combating the disease. Turkey, with the transformation in health since the beginning of the 21st century, has made serious progress in the field of health, started to take precautions before the pandemic started, and met the disease with various plans. While many countries suffered from shortages of drugs, medical supplies and medical devices with the pandemic, Turkey helped many countries with these materials. It showed a successful state reaction against the pandemic with the domestic respirators it produced and the health facilities with the capacity of a significant number of intensive care patient beds, which it completed in a short time. In particular, the public coverage of health expenditures originating from Covid-19 and the provision of state assurance against the disease were another aspect of the success of Turkey's pandemic management. (Yorulmaz, Kırarç & Aydoğdu, 2021: p. 166).

Various action plans were prepared in order to take the necessary precautions in the field of health in our country, reference hospitals that played a special role in this process were established, and isolated rooms were arranged in these hospitals. A sufficient number of materials such as masks and disinfectants that may be needed for virus protection were provided. The local virus diagnosis kit has been developed and it has been possible to detect the virus in 1.5 hours (Duran, 2020: p 16).

Turkey is one of the countries with the lowest death rate per million people. The countries with the highest number of recovered patients are Turkey, Australia, China, Luxembourg, Germany and Austria. and South Africa. However, the countries with the highest test averages per million

inhabitants are Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Portugal, Russia, Belgium and Spain. (Tekin, 2020 p.347).

Since March 11, 2020, when the COVID-19 virus was detected in the country, healthcare professionals have played a very important role in the diagnosis and treatment of the disease with a combative, self-sacrificing, solution and help-oriented approach. During the epidemic, hospitals became the most risky institutions in terms of health and safety. These risks can be expressed as physical, chemical, biological factors and psycho-social structure, which are the natural consequences of the working environment. As health workers were directly related to human health as a requirement of their work, their stress and anxiety levels increased intensely. (Yılmaz et al., 2021: p 977-978).

Within the scope of the precautionary policy throughout Turkey, the practice of “stay at home” became active. This practice, which was carried out voluntarily at the first times when the virus spread, later turned into a curfew at regular intervals, covering 30 metropolitan cities and Zonguldak provinces, and entrances and exits to these cities with private vehicles were prohibited. (Kutlu, 2020: p. 335). Certain restrictions were introduced in order to make the stay-at-home practice operative: Measures such as holding sports competitions without spectators until the end of April, then postponing all competitions, adjourning cases that were not urgent in judicial proceedings, and restricting visitors to hospitals that have a high risk have been taken. The temporary postponement of activities such as national and international scientific congresses, meetings and conferences that would be held in April and May greatly benefited in preventing the spread of the virus among the masses. (Çınar and Oğuz, 2020: p. 6).

4. Economy During the Pandemic in Turkey

Almost all countries in the world, whether developed or developing, had to take a series of protective measures in order to contain the rapidly increasing spread. These strict measures, ranging from the ban on travels, the closure of workplaces, social isolation to curfews, brought most sectors of the economy to a standstill, and even caused some to come to a standstill. All sectors, mainly domestic and international flights, transportation services, railway services, sports, education, trade and service organizations, were adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The economies of most economically strong countries faced the threat of high inflation and rising unemployment due to excessive spending on the treatment and rehabilitation of COVID-19 patients and their families, as well as support for struggling businesses. This pandemic in the world led to a recession that negatively affected many interconnected sectors such as agriculture, commerce, industry, transportation, finance and banking, health, airlines and energy markets.

On March 18, 2020, with the Economic Stability Shield program, measures were taken against the shrinking markets, while at the same time, measures were started to be taken for commercial activities that allowed the spread of the disease and require contact. Between 15-18 March 2020, 149,382 workplaces temporarily suspended their activities across the country. In this way, it was possible to provide service without allowing customers to sit. With a circular dated March 24, 2020, the working hours of the markets and the number of customers shopping in the

markets were regulated. With the Economic Stability Shield Package dated March 18, 2020, a number of measures were taken. (Turan&Çelikyay,2020).

In our country, the number of visitors in the first two months of 2020 increased in January (16.11%) and February (3.78%) compared to the same periods of the previous year. This trend created an expectation that the 2020 season would be more intense compared to previous years. However, the first case of the unexpected global pandemic COVID-19 was detected in our country on March 11, 2020. In parallel with the increase in the number of cases both in our country and in other countries, travel bans entered into force one after another throughout the World. (Atay, 2020: pp. 168-169). In our country, the effect of the pandemic in provinces such as Antalya, Muğla and Nevşehir, whose economy is largely dependent on tourism, was much more negative than in other provinces. The tourism establishments and the people employed in these provinces were adversely affected by the process. The post-pandemic process needs to be managed very well by the public and private sectors, especially in destinations whose economy is dependent on tourism. It was necessary to take steps to minimize visa and similar travel barriers, facilitate travel opportunities, and encourage travel to our country. (Atay, 2020: p. 169).

5. Conclusion and Discussion

Many countries adopted various methods of intervention to prevent the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. The rapid policy decisions taken by our country included the most effective and exemplary implementations of these interventions for other countries. (Çetin,2020)

During the pandemic process, schools and universities rapidly implemented distance learning systems, but schools with little or no experience in distance learning, as well as schools and especially teachers who did not prepare distance learning resources, faced difficulties in using online applications. (Zaharah and Kirilova, 2020). In countries that wanted to continue education uninterrupted, it was seen that teaching opportunities supported by different technological infrastructures were used and distance education was used as the main source of learning. (Can, 2020).

Since the first months of 2020, all countries of the world have taken a series of measures in order to continue their education activities effectively despite the Covid-19 pandemic. With the recommendation of the Scientific Committee and the decision of the Ministry of National Education, distance education was started all over the country in order to prevent the spread of the pandemic. Especially in Turkey, with the break given to face-to-face education on March 16, 2020, the distance education process, which started on March 23, 2020, changed the communication and interaction of teachers with students , the way teachers conducted their lessons, and there was a transition to an online-based education. In this process, teachers, like students and parents, tried to keep up with digital education. It can be said that important developments regarding the technological and pedagogical field knowledge and experiences of teachers emerged, with many teachers turning to internet programs that enabled them to reach their students, such as online meeting tools, during the pandemic process. (Red Red, 2020).

From the very beginning of the distance education process, technical problems that prevented distance education from working effectively took up a great place. Since the whole process started very quickly without extensive preparations, it was inevitable to experience some problems with EBA when millions of students and teachers started using it. Due to the technical problems experienced in EBA and the inadequacy of the lessons on TV, some private schools started to continue their education on their own digital platforms. (Akbulut, Şahin, & Esen, 2020).

Distance education negatively affected the interactions between students-students / students-teacher. Because in virtual classroom environments, teachers and students could not communicate as easily as in formal education. In virtual lessons, teachers were not even sure if students were present in the lesson, as students did not have to turn on their cameras or microphones. Despite the efforts made, there were students who could not get full efficiency from distance education. (Akbulut, Şahin & Esen, 2020).

It was observed that there were many problems in the education made over EBA TV. The problem became more serious than we thought and affected a student body of 18 million and their families. (Şimşek, 2020).

Despite the efforts of all education stakeholders trying to keep up with this process, which covered all education levels, from pre-school to higher education; The process brought with it some problems on the basis of students, teachers and families. These problems (Impey, 2020; Oyedotun, 2020; Panesar et al., 2020) primarily affected students on a global scale. (UNESCO, 2020).

The uncertainty created by Covid-19 and the slowdown in economic activity continue in 2022. However, the pressure on the economy has weakened compared to March 2020. Nevertheless, the risks associated with such situations that may arise in the future must be properly evaluated. (Münyas, 2021).

When evaluated in terms of the Turkish economy, especially the movement restrictions economic activity have created a serious burden on the Travel restrictions ended passenger mobility, distance education module was introduced in education, sports and artistic activities were suspended, and the accommodation industry came to a standstill. In terms of the labor market, the remote working module was introduced, the physical working system of the market was changed within the framework of social and physical distance rules, and production was suspended at some production points. Contraction in export revenues and tourism revenues, changes in household consumption behaviors, contraction in industrial production index and gross fixed capital formation signaled a contraction for the next quarter. In short, COVID-19 has affected all aspects of social life, especially economic and social, and brought the processes other than basic services to a standstill. (Noble, 2021).

The pandemic has affected everyone; However, studies have revealed that the pandemic affects people whose jobs are not suitable for working online, those who work in the private sector or self-employed, the poor with low income, low education and women more negatively than others. (Bozkurt,2020) In addition to the policies put into effect by our government against the Covid-19 epidemic, which has completely changed our entire life order, many institutions,

organizations and non-governmental organizations have tried to create awareness to be protected against this epidemic with various studies they have carried out. (Turkoglu & Yilmaz, 2021).

Turkey has shown a successful performance, especially in the health sector, in the fight against COVID-19, and continues to do so. Thanks to the steps taken both in the health sector and through other sectors in Turkey, both the case contamination and the rate of increase have been brought under control, and the diagnosis and treatment processes have been carried out effectively. As a result, the death rate remained at a very low level. (İşlek, Özatkan, Utku, Arı, Çelik & Yıldırım, 2021).

The Scientific Committee and Operations Center were established 31 days before the World Health Organization's virus pandemic declaration, and 1 million boxes of Hydroxychloroquine were taken and stored before the first case was seen. Before the first case was seen, Turkey took all the necessary precautions and measures in a timely manner, preventing huge loss of life. Before the first case was seen, the information about the 14 rules to be followed in order to protect from the virus was broadcast in the media both as a public service announcement and in all news channels, with the participation of the members of the Science Board, the public was informed. Quarantine measures taken on time; Timely home quarantine of people aged 20 and under and over 65 has helped protect those aged 65 and over most affected by the virus against the risk of death. It is among the important decisions that prevent the spread of the virus and prevent great loss of life to stay at home, which can be a hidden carrier in the spread of the virus. Undoubtedly, Turkey has prevented great loss of life with the decisions it took at the first moment of the epidemic in China, and especially thanks to the Scientific Committee it formed and the decisions taken by the committee. (Wrestler, 2020).

The number of daily tests, the distribution and increase of the number of cases, the course of the cases, the intensive care occupancy rates, the number of intubations, the number of deaths were followed up day by day. In addition, these numbers are transparent and accurately recorded on a daily basis, reported to WHO and disclosed to the public. (Akgun, 2020).

6. Suggestions

The most important reason for trying different approaches in universities is that institutions are not ready for distance education processes. In-service training can be given to academics on using computer and internet-based technologies.

Free and unlimited internet service can be offered to all students and parents to be used on certain platforms. Satellite internet can be provided in rural areas where internet is limited. Informative broadcasts and posts can be made to increase parent support. Methods that can be used to motivate students can be announced through publications and shares.

It can be ensured that the distance education system to be used by the institutions is simple, plain, understandable and easy to use. It can be ensured that universities establish a solid infrastructure on distance education support services and provide continuous support to students.

YÖK can develop a national distance education system that can be used by all universities in Turkey. Quantitative and qualitative studies can be designed by taking the opinions of all stakeholders (teaching staff, students, distance education process manager) for the evaluation of emergency distance education at universities during the pandemic period. Training can be given to all stakeholders in distance education in a way that covers certain standards.

Rich content can be prepared in order to increase students' interest in the live lesson. For assessment processes, an exam environment such as face recognition that only the relevant student can access can be created.

With the current situation in Turkey, we can say that four factors are very important in digitalization in education; 1. Technological infrastructure, 2. Developing the online education skills of educators and increasing their capacities, 3. Producing quality online education content, 4. Producing effective assessment and evaluation systems for online education. (Avcı&Mediterranean, 2021).

In order to eliminate the negative effects of the pandemic on the Turkish economy, it may be necessary to use monetary policy together with fiscal policy and other political instruments. Permanent policies should be produced for fragile sectors and programs such as agricultural support packages can be implemented. (Arabcı&Yücel,2020).

The tourism sector is a very important sector for the Turkish economy. Because the share of tourism revenues in GDP in Turkey in 2018 is 3.8%. The number of registered people employed in tourism is over 1 million in 2018. (TUIK, 2020). Therefore, there is a need for an additional economy package for the tourism sector. In particular, the measures to be taken for employment and the intervention of the state in the tourism sector may also positively affect the trust of the people employed in tourism in the sector. (Spring&İlal,2020).

Although the effect of the Covid-19 epidemic has tended to decrease in recent days, the epidemic is not over yet. Even if Covid-19 leaves our country completely, it is necessary to act carefully against the risk of a pandemic that may develop again. In the next period, more importance should be given to preventive and preventive health services in our country, and permanent solutions should be produced that will be an alternative to pandemic control policies with health investments and planning. Studies should be carried out to increase the health literacy of the society. (Turkoglu & Yilmaz, 2021).

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