# EXAMINATION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION PRACTICES OF PRIMARY EDUCATION TEACHERS DURING THE PANDEMIC PERIOD

## *EXAME DE PRÁTICAS DE EDUCAÇÃO A DISTÂNCIA DE PROFESSORES DE ENSINO PRIMÁRIO DURANTE O PERÍODO DE PANDEMIA*

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to examine the practices of primary school teachers who carry out the teaching-learning process through distance education during the pandemic period and to determine their recommendations for the distance education process. In this study, single holistic case design, which is one of the qualitative research designs, was used. The study group of the research consists of 40 primary school teachers. A semi-structured interview form consisting of 7 questions was used to collect the research data. Content analysis was also used in the analysis of the data obtained, the data were divided into categories, and examples from the views of the teachers were presented from time to time. As a result, teachers argued that the principle of equality in education did not materialize in distance education and that educational institutions should discover ways to consider the principle of equality in order for distance education to be efficient and to increase student motivation and achievement.

**Keywords:** Distance Education. Primary Education. Method and Technique. Tools and Equipment. Knowledge and Skill.

**Resumo:** O objetivo deste estudo é examinar as práticas de professores do ensino fundamental que realizam o processo de ensino-aprendizagem por meio da educação a distância durante o período de pandemia e determinar suas sugestões para o processo de educação a distância. Neste estudo, foi utilizado o desenho de caso holístico único, que é um dos desenhos de pesquisa qualitativa. O grupo de estudo da pesquisa é composto por 40 professores do ensino fundamental. Para a coleta dos dados da pesquisa foi utilizado um formulário de entrevista semiestruturada, composto por 7 questões. A análise de conteúdo também foi utilizada na análise dos dados obtidos, os dados foram divididos em categorias, e exemplos a partir das opiniões dos professores foram apresentados de tempos em tempos. Como resultado, os professores argumentaram que o princípio da igualdade na educação não se concretizou na educação a distância e que as instituições de ensino devem descobrir formas de considerar o princípio da igualdade para que a educação a distância seja eficiente e aumente a motivação e o desempenho dos alunos.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação a Distância. Educação Primária. Método e Técnica. Ferramentas e Equipamentos. Conhecimento e Habilidade.

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## Introduction

It is seen that with the pandemic, teaching-learning process is being conducted today through distance education rather than face-to-face. Although distance education has been carried out for many years, both teachers and students have entered a different process with the pandemic.

Distance education is a systematic form of education that provides individuality, flexibility and independence to the parties in terms of space, time and place, where the student and the instructor are in different places in the learning and teaching process (UŞUN, 2006). In the most general sense, distance education is defined as a teaching method applied based on the active use of information technologies for the processing of classes and facilitating learning, since instructors and students are in different times and places (VALENTINE, 2002).

Mankind has always been in learning activities in terms of his nature, and for this purpose, he has tried to find regular learning methods for years in the light of various developments. Today, distance education is becoming more and more important due to reasons such as the inadequacy of traditional methods, the insufficiency of quality education, and the fact that technology encompasses every stage of our lives (GİRGİNER, 2002). In cases where appropriate space, time and conditions are not possible, distance education becomes necessary in order for every student to receive quality education and to be able talk about equality of opportunity in education (ŞEN et al., 2010).

It is known that before the pandemic period, distance education was applied at various grade levels in our country (BOZKURT, 2017); however, this is the first time it is used especially at elementary school level nationwide. This situation brings several positive and negative results and opinions for education stakeholders such as teachers (ALEA *et al.*, 2020; BAKİOĞLU and ÇEVİK, 2020; BAYBURTLU, 2020; DEMİR and ÖZDAŞ, 2020; MAREK *et al.*, 2021), students (ADNAN and ANWAR, 2020; PEREZ-LOPEZ *et al.*, 2021; SİREM and BAŞ, 2020) and parents (İNCİ KUZU, 2020; YILMAZ & GÜNER, 2020; YILMAZ *et al.*, 2020; ZACCOLETTİ *et al.*, 2020). Although some studies have been conducted on primary school teachers during the pandemic period, no studies have been found that address the practices and recommendations of primary school teachers. The aim of this study is to examine the distance education practices of primary school teachers who have been performing teaching-learning process through distance education for at least a year and to determine their recommendations for distance education.

## Methodology

This study was carried out according to the principles of qualitative research method and was designed with a single holistic case study. Here, there is one subject, only the relevant people are selected, and the subject is examined in depth (CRESWELL, 2007).

The study group consisted of 40 primary school teachers who conducted their courses through distance education in the fall and spring semesters of the 2020-2021 academic year. In the study, the opinions of teachers who have worked in both public and private schools for at least 5 years and gained experience were applied. During the selection of the teachers in the study group, convenience sampling was used, which is one of the purposive sampling methods.

In the development of the data collection tool, an interview form consisting of 8 questions was first created by the researcher. Then, the opinions of 2 primary school teachers and 2 educational science experts were consulted. In line with the common opinions of both the researcher and the teachers and experts who were consulted, 2 of the 8 main questions were removed as they were similar to the other questions, and 1 new question was added to the interview form. As a result, an interview form with 7 questions was created to collect the research data.

The questions in the interview form are as follows:

1 - Which methods and techniques do you mostly apply in the classes you teach with distance education?

2 - Which tools and materials do you mostly use in the classes you teach with distance education?

3 - What are the most common problems you encounter in the classes you teach with distance education?

4 - What could be the reasons for the problems you encounter in the classes you teach with distance education?

5 - What do you do to measure and evaluate the knowledge and skills gained through distance education?

6 - Which deficiencies have you identified most as a result of the measurement and evaluation you applied in distance education?

7 - What would you recommend to make the distance education classes more efficient?

Content analysis was used in the analysis of the research data, and the data were analyzed by dividing them into certain categories. In the research, the expressions of the participants were used to give their opinions and direct quotations were made from them. In the analysis of the data, the inter-category reliability study was conducted by taking the opinion of a different faculty member together with the researcher. Participant opinions were presented as T1, T2, T3 [...]

## Findings

### Findings on the most widely used methods and techniques in distance education courses

As a result of the answers given by the teachers, the methods and techniques they mostly apply in the distance education classes are given in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** The methods and techniques mostly applied in the distance education classes.
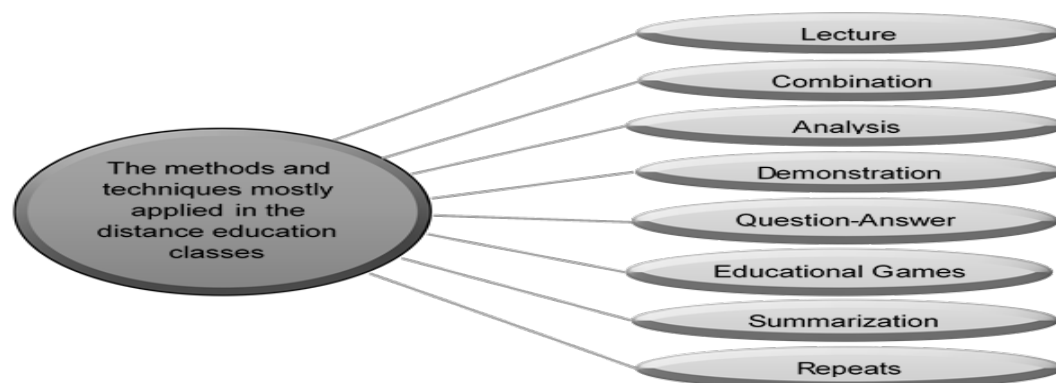


**Souce:** Author.

According to Figure 1, teachers mostly use methods and techniques of lecture, combination, analysis, demonstration, question-answer, educational games, summarization, and repeats in distance education classes.

Teachers' views on the foregoing are given below:

> The method I use most in distance education classes is the instruction method. I think that a subject cannot be taught without the instruction method (T36).
>
> I have benefited from the combination method while dealing with many subjects. I used this method a lot in Turkish and mathematics classes. For example, I asked them to form meaningful sentences from the given words (T14).

I used the analysis method to see if they understood the text they read in Turkish classes and to have them solve a problem I gave in mathematics (T2).

It is a well-known fact that grammar and mathematics cannot be taught without the "show-and-have it made" method. In distance education, I first showed it to the students, and then I asked them to do it (T19).

When I saw that the students were very bored in the class, I tried to increase student motivation with educational games from time to time (T38).

I used the question-answer technique in every class. At the end of my classes, I summarize the topic that I covered that day and ask if there is anything that the students did not understand (T32).

Even if not face to face, I can predict whether my students understand a subject in front of the screen. At such moments, I tell the subject again. I use the repetition method on the day I cover any subject, and I also use it to repeat the subject I explained earlier in my next class (T11).

## Findings on the most widely used tools and equipment in distance education courses

As a result of the answers given by the teachers, information on which tools and materials are mostly used in distance education classes is given in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** Information on which tools and materials are most widely used in distance education classes.
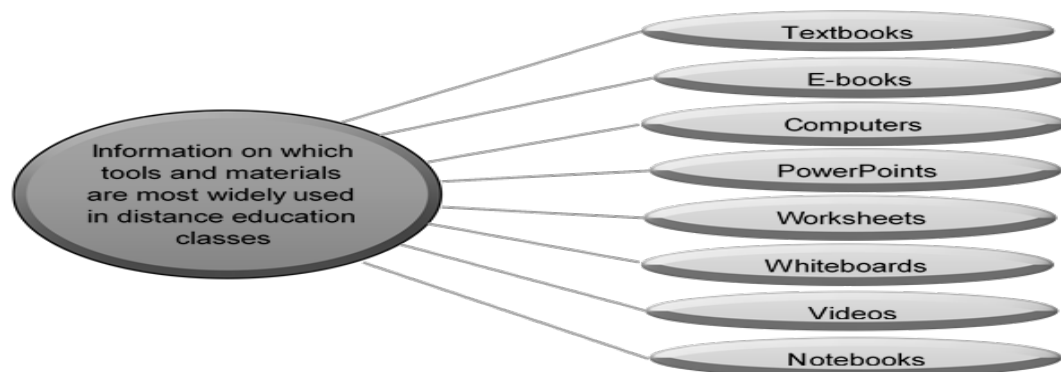


**Source:** Author.

Looking at Figure 2, it is seen that teachers mostly use tools and materials such as textbooks, e-books, computers, PowerPoints, worksheets, whiteboards, videos and notebooks in distance education courses.

Teachers' views on this subject are shared below:

In education and training, books are the only resource that we cannot give up. With the help of books, the subjects are handled in a planned way. For this reason, I told my students to always have their books with them in the classes I teach with distance education as in the classroom (T9).

I benefited a lot from e-books in distance education because I

wanted to see how students read what they saw on the screen and how much they understood what they read. Thus, I think that I have contributed to their acquisition of screen reading skills (T13).

The computer, which I rarely use in face-to-face education, has become one of my indispensable devices in distance education. I have seen that students can gain many knowledge and skills through computers if desired (T27).

In my 10 years of teaching, I have never used PowerPoint so much. In face-to-face education, I am a person who teaches by using the board. In distance education, I preferred the straight lecture method in my first two classes. But most of the students did not understand the topics. Afterwards, I created PowerPoint presentations for each of my classes. I am of the opinion that distance education cannot be performed without PowerPoint (T25).

I used a lot of worksheets to measure whether my students understood the subject I explained. At the end of each class, I sent worksheets as homework (T12).

In order not to use the same tools and equipment all the time, I used Whiteboard in my distance education classes (T3).

I think that distance education tires students too much. After a certain time, I could see that the students were distracted. For this, I used to present videos about the subject I explained several times a week or to help students acquire various values (T19).

I believe that a student cannot learn without writing. For this reason, I wanted my students to have their notebooks with them in order to write down what I showed in the class in distance education (T5).

## Findings regarding the most common problems in classes taught via distance education

The most common problems faced by teachers in distance education courses are given in Figure 3.

**Figure 3.** The most common problems in distance education classes.
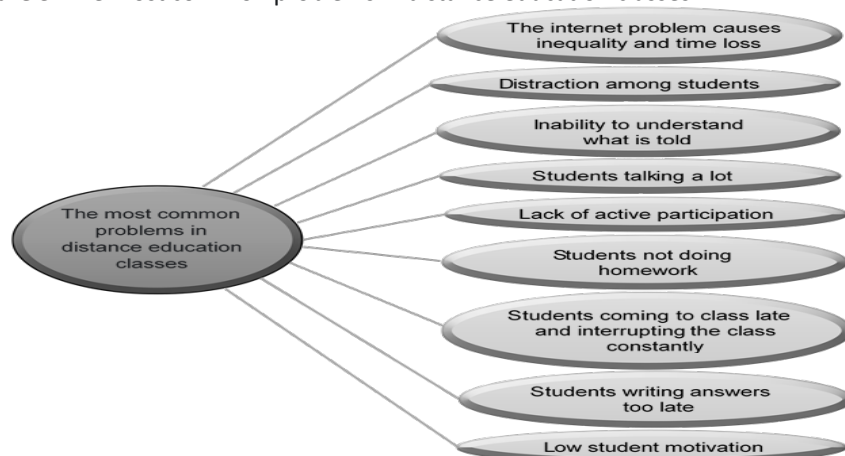
According to Figure 3, the problems that teachers encounter most in distance education courses are discussed in nine categories. One of them is general and the other eight are problems caused by students. These are as follows: the internet problem causes inequality and time loss, distraction among students, inability to understand what is told, students talking a lot, lack of active participation, students not doing homework, students coming to class late and interrupting the class constantly, students writing answers too late, and low student motivation.

The opinions of teachers about the foregoing are given below:

Since many students had internet problems, they could not attend classes at all or had to attend classes late. Because of this, my classes were always interrupted (T18).

When students are asked questions, we can see that some students hesitate to speak, while others talk about many extracurricular topics. Since eye contact was not easily established, it was not possible for those who did not speak effectively to participate in the class, nor for those who spoke a lot to remain silent (T29).
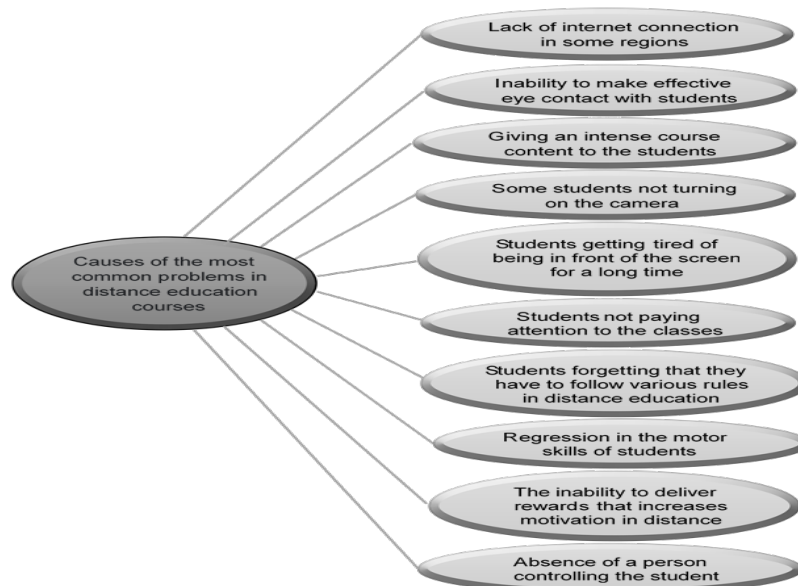
Although the topics were mostly covered in the book, it was determined that many students had difficulties in understanding distance education courses. For this reason, it was requested to note the important things in the notebook, but at that time, as many students wrote very slowly, time was lost in the classes (T30).

I witnessed distraction in students. The fact that they do not do the given homework shows that their motivation decreased in distance education (T38).

## Findings on the causes of problems encountered in courses taught via distance education

Based on the opinions of the teachers, the causes of the most common problems in distance education courses are given in Figure 4.

**Figure 4.** Causes of the most common problems in distance education courses.



Causes of the most common problems in distance education courses
- Lack of internet connection in some regions
- Inability to make effective eye contact with students
- Giving an intense course content to the students
- Some students not turning on the camera
- Students getting tired of being in front of the screen for a long time
- Students not paying attention to the classes
- Students forgetting that they have to follow various rules in distance education
- Regression in the motor skills of students
- The inability to deliver rewards that increases motivation in distance
- Absence of a person controlling the student

**Source:** Author.

According to Figure 4, the teachers listed the reasons for the most common problems in distance education courses as follows: lack of internet connection in some regions, inability to make effective eye contact with students, giving an intense course content to the students, some students not turning on the camera, students getting tired of being in front of the screen for a long time, students not paying attention to the classes, students forgetting that they have to follow various rules in distance education, regression in the motor skills of students, the inability to deliver rewards that increases motivation in distance education, and absence of a person controlling the student.

Below are the opinions of the teachers:

Due to the internet problem in many regions, it is seen that students cannot attend some classes at all, or even if they do, they cannot attend classes efficiently because the internet is gone from time to time (T37).

It is not possible to teach all the subjects that will be discussed in the classroom environment to students through distance education, because the student gets tired and distracted when he/she is in front of the screen for a long time. For this reason, activities aimed at understanding the given subject are given more space (T1).

While it is observed that students follow many rules in the school, unfortunately, we see that they do not follow some rules in distance education, no matter how much you warn them (T19).

In order to save time in distance education courses, many course materials were sent to them ready-made. Unfortunately, this situation caused the motor skills of the students to deteriorate (T40).

In the classroom environment, the teacher could control what the student was doing and intervene. It is not possible to do this in distance education (T8).

I believe that awards raise student motivation to the highest level. Although you give reinforcements such as well done, very nice to the students in distance education, low student performance becomes evident because you cannot give rewards (T23).

## Findings on the activities performed to measure and evaluate the knowledge and skills gained through distance education

Figure 5 shows the activities performed to measure and evaluate the knowledge and skills gained through distance education.

**Figure 5 -** Activities performed to measure and evaluate the knowledge and skills gained through distance education.
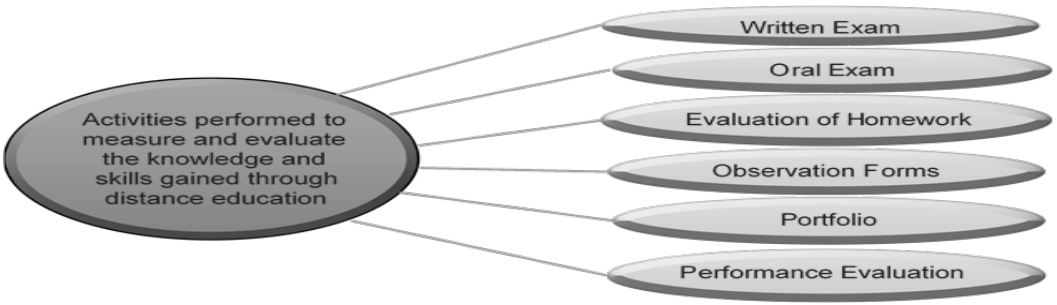


**Source:** Author.

According to Figure 5, teachers used written exam, oral exam, evaluation of homework, observation forms, portfolio and performance evaluation to measure and evaluate the knowledge and skills gained through distance education.

The opinions of the teachers regarding the foregoing are given below:

> I had my students take a written exam with their cameras on. At the same time, I gave homework after each class to see if they understood the subject (T39).

> In my opinion, the best measurement tool in distance education is observation forms, because what the student does in the process is evaluated by observing (T17).

> I benefited from portfolio, performance evaluation and oral exams in distance education (T22).

## Findings about which deficiencies are detected the most as a result of measurement and evaluation applied in distance education

As a result of the teachers' opinions, the most identified deficiencies as a result of the measurement and evaluation applied in distance education are given in Figure 6.

**Figure 6.** The most common deficiencies identified as a result of measurement and evaluation applied in distance education.



**Source:** Author.

As can be seen in Figure 6, teachers stated that the most common deficiencies identified as a result of measurement and evaluation activities performed in distance education are students not paying attention to some rules, misunderstanding questions, having difficulty expressing themselves, using very limited vocabulary, answering questions incompletely, not using the time properly and failing to answer some questions, paying no attention to page layout, and having difficulties in practice questions.

Some opinions regarding the foregoing are as follows:

It was observed that the students did not comply with many rules in the portfolios they prepared, such as page layout, spelling rules, punctuation marks, etc. (T15).

In oral or written exams, students either cannot give the correct answer because they misunderstand the question, or there are too many missing parts in the answers they give. This shows us that students have difficulties in understanding distance education classes (T33).

The students did not have much trouble with knowledge-based questions, but they had a lot of trouble with practical questions. It is seen that they answer the knowledge questions based on rote, but they have a lot of difficulty in the applications related to this knowledge (T36).

Since students do very little writing in distance education, they become unable to express themselves in the assignments given. The fact that the subjects were not dictated but sent to the students in order to save time caused both laziness in them and atrophy of their writing skills (T7).

## Findings on what needs to be done to make distance education classes more efficient

The things needed to make the distance education courses more efficient are presented in Figure 7.

**Figure 7.** The things needed to make the distance education courses more efficient



**Source:** Author.

In Figure 7, teachers made the following recommendations for distance education to be more efficient: Not giving too intense content, including courses that relax students, using different tools and materials in the classes, giving classes with various methods and techniques, making classes interesting with videos and visuals, ensuring that students have a sense of responsibility, informing the parents of those who do not actively participate in the classes, constantly reminding students that school rules are also valid in distance education, teachers regularly checking various work such as homework, creating an observation file for each student, using multiple measurement and evaluation scales, benefiting from both contemporary and traditional measurement tools, making it compulsory for all students to turn on cameras, encouraging all students to attend classes, strengthening sanctions for students to ensure attendance, giving importance to family, teacher and student cooperation, and consideration of the principle of equality in education.

Below are some opinions regarding the foregoing recommendations by teachers:

Due to the fact that students are constantly in front of the screen, it is inconvenient to give a very intense content in distance education (T31).

Since parent support is needed more in distance education, parents should be constantly asked for help and they should be informed about the problems experienced (T4).

It is inconvenient to use a single measurement tool. Therefore, multiple measurement tools should be used (T6).

Written exams may be used in distance education, but besides traditional approaches, contemporary measurement tools such as performance assignments, portfolios, and student product files should also be used (T26).

Students should be constantly reminded that many rules valid in school are also valid in distance education, and discipline should be provided in online classes and students should be instilled with a sense of responsibility (T1).

It will be useful to use different tools and materials in the classes in order to attract the attention of the student (T20).

Students who had problems in distance education applied to their parents because they could not always consult their teachers. While conscious parents provided support to their children, parents who did not have the time or knowledge could not support their children unfortunately. This situation caused inequality among students. In distance education, further steps should be taken by paying attention to the principle of equality (T10).

## Conclusion and Discussion

The following results were obtained in this study, which includes the views and practices of primary school teachers about distance education.

It has been determined that teachers mostly use methods and techniques such as lecture, question-answer, repetition and summarization in the classes they conduct with distance education. This result is in parallel with the methods and materials used by teachers, which emerged in the reports of researchers in some other countries (BURKE; DEMPSEY, 2020; MULENGA; MARBAN, 2020; ROY, 2020). In addition, it has been observed that some teachers also benefit from methods such as combination, analysis, demonstration and educational games.

It was found out that teachers stated that they use in the classes they conduct with distance education tools and materials such as textbooks, worksheets, whiteboards, videos and notebooks that they employ in the face-to-face classroom environment, but they also frequently use tools and materials such as e-books, computers and powerpoints in distance education.

One of the most common problems faced by teachers in distance education classes is that internet problems cause inequality and loss of time. Anderson (2020) also made it clear that moving students in the world to the internet creates deep inequalities in the education system due to the lack of devices or reliable internet connections. Although problems are experienced in the classroom environment occasionally, it has been determined that students cannot participate effectively in distance education because their motivation is low and they have distractions, and therefore they have difficulty in understanding what is being told. Teachers were using the advantages of face-to-face education to involve students in the learning-teaching process. The fact that this is not technically possible in the distance education process may have caused low motivation in students and indifference to the class. Similar studies support the results of our study. For example, Yılmaz *et al*. (2020) and Demir (2020) found out that students suffer from problems of lack of motivation. In the study conducted by Doğan and Paydar (2019), pre-service teachers listed among the disadvantages of open and distance education that it is difficult to provide motivation for the class and that it is very limited in terms of teaching methods. In addition to this, problems such as students talking too much, not doing homework, being late to the class, interrupting the class constantly, and writing too slowly were mentioned.

The teachers listed the reasons for the most common problems in distance education courses as follows: Internet not working in some regions, failure to establish effective eye contact with students, giving an intensive course content to the student, some students not turning on the camera, students getting tired of staying in front of the screen for a long time, students not paying due attention to the classes, students forgetting that they have to follow various rules in distance education, regression in students' motor skills, the fact that rewards that increase motivation cannot be given in distance education, and the absence of a person controlling the student. Teachers mostly benefited from traditional approaches such as written exams, oral exams and assignments to measure and evaluate the knowledge and skills gained through distance education. It was revealed that very few teachers benefited from observation forms, portfolio and performance evaluation, which are alternative measurement tools.

The teachers stated that the most widely witnessed deficiencies as a result of the measurement and evaluation applied in distance education are as follows: students not paying attention to some rules, misunderstanding the questions, difficulties in expressing themselves, very limited use of vocabulary, incomplete answers to questions, not using the time properly and not being able to answer some questions, not paying any attention to the page layout, and difficulties in practice questions.

The teachers made the following recommendations for distance education to be more efficient: Not giving too intense content, including courses that relax students, using different tools and materials in the classes, giving classes with various methods and techniques, making classes interesting with videos and visuals, ensuring that students have a sense of responsibility, informing the parents of those who do not actively participate in the classes, constantly reminding students that school rules are also valid in distance education, teachers regularly checking various work such as homework, creating an observation file for each student, using multiple measurement and evaluation scales, benefiting from both contemporary and traditional measurement tools, making it compulsory for all students to turn on cameras, encouraging all students to attend classes, strengthening sanctions for students to ensure attendance, giving importance to family, teacher and student cooperation, and consideration of the principle of equality in education. Yılmaz and Horzum (2005, p. 111) stated that if the right method and appropriate technology that can provide the interaction and communication between the student and the teacher in the desired way is used in distance education, this system can be as successful as formal education and can be accepted by all segments. Research shows that there are problems in the distance education process in terms of insufficient infrastructure and equipment (ABUHAMMAD, 2020, YILMAZ *et al.* 2020).

According to the results of the research, distance education carried out during the pandemic

period has become a new educational process for teachers and students alike. Therefore, more problems have been encountered than face-to-face education, and it has been revealed that the use of new methods and techniques, tools and materials in distance education will be beneficial and increase student motivation and achievement. The most important aspect is that the principle of equality should also be taken into consideration in distance education.

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