

**TEACHERS' OPINIONS ABOUT THE PROBLEMS IN THE SPECIAL  
EDUCATION CLASSES DURING THE DISTANCE EDUCATION  
PERIOD**

UZAKTAN EĞİTİM DÖNEMİNDE ÖZEL EĞİTİM SINIFLARINDA  
YAŞANAN SORUNLARA İLİŞKİN ÖĞRETMEN GÖRÜŞLERİ

**Oktay UÇAR**

Okul Müdürü, MEB  
School Principal, MEB  
oky-344@hotmail.com

**ORCID ID:** orcid.org/0000-0002-7319-1499

**Rahmiye Nur ATEŞ**

İngilizce Öğretmeni, MEB  
English Teacher, MEB  
rnurates88@gmail.com

**ORCID ID:** orcid.org/0000-0003-3239-5847

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## TEACHERS' OPINIONS ABOUT THE PROBLEMS IN THE SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSES DURING THE DISTANCE EDUCATION PERIOD

### Abstract:

The teachers' views on the problems observed in special education classes during the distance education process were summarized qualitatively through content analysis in the study. 17 special education teachers working voluntarily in different parts of Turkey formed the research group. The data of the research were collected with semi-structured online form questions and the case study method was used in compiling the obtained data. At the end of the study, the opinion that distance education is not efficient for special education students was frequently expressed by the teachers. In addition, it was stated that usage or access of internet, technological infrastructure, the target audience's inability to focus and socialize in the virtual world, inequality of opportunity in education, and students, parents and even teachers were stuck in adapting to distance education in the first period of the epidemic. As a solution proposal, the thought that distance education is not a suitable way for special education and that it would be appropriate to follow the ways that take this situation into account, was expressed by special education teachers.

**Keywords:** Distance education, Special education, Pandemic.

## ÖZEL EĞİTİM SINIFLARINDA UZAKTAN EĞİTİM SÜRECİNDE YAŞANAN SORUNLARA İLİŞKİN ÖĞRETMEN GÖRÜŞLERİ

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### Öz:

Bu araştırmada uzaktan eğitim sürecinde özel eğitim sınıflarında gözlenen problemlere dair öğretmen görüşleri nitel olarak içerik çözümlemesi yoluyla özetlenmiştir. Türkiye'nin farklı yerlerinde görev yapan 17 özel eğitim öğretmeni gönüllü olarak araştırma grubunu oluşturmuştur. Yarı yapılandırılmış çevrimiçi form soruları ile araştırmanın verileri toplanmış ve elde edilen verilerin derlenmesinde durum çalışması yönteminden faydalanılmıştır. Çalışma sonunda uzaktan eğitimin özel eğitim öğrencileri için verimli geçmediği görüşü öğretmenlerce sıkça ifade edilmiştir. Ayrıca internet kullanımı ya da erişimi, teknolojik alt yapı, hedef kitlenin sanal alemde derse odaklanamaması ve sosyalleşememesi, eğitimde fırsat eşitsizliği ve salgının ilk döneminde öğrenciler, veliler ve hatta öğretmenlerin uzaktan eğitime uyum sağlama noktasında tıkanıklıkları görüşleri dile getirilmiştir. Çözüm önerisi olarak uzaktan eğitimin özel eğitim için uygun bir yol olmadığı ve bu durumu dikkate alan yolların izlenmesinin isabetli olacağı düşüncesi özel eğitim öğretmenlerince dile getirilmiştir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Uzaktan eğitim, Özel eğitim, Pandemi.

## Introduction

In some periods throughout human history, epidemics such as black plague, sars, swine flu and the struggle against these epidemics have been witnessed. Outbreaks are essentially bacterial (caused by bacteria) or viral (caused by viruses). Finally, the Coronavirus, which has spread to all areas of our lives, is a member of the virus family. Covid-19 was diagnosed for the first time in Wuhan, China in December 2019, and because of its rapid spread, it entered the literature of the World Health Organization (WHO) on January 13, 2020 and was evaluated within the scope of pandemic (global infectious disease) (İmamoğlu, 2020). The mode of transmission is from person to person through respiratory secretions produced by actions such as coughing, saliva, sneezing. In addition, the disease is transmitted when individuals are in contact with respiratory secretions spread by people who are infected with the virus, such as talking, sneezing, coughing (T.R. Ministry of Health, 2021). The pandemic process has touched a period of our lives with various restrictions. Vaccination requirement, asking for test results in official or private workplaces, measures for masks, gloves, hygiene and social distance rules, travel restrictions and even curfews have been experienced (AA, 2021). Delivering education from a distance was one of these measures for the first time in this period. Distance Education is a teaching system in which the learner can access educational resources and content synchronously or asynchronously, without the limitation of time and space, where the learner participates in teaching activities using rich communication technologies as well as printed materials. Education is a need that needs to be met, as is the need for shelter and food. Many countries had to stop face-to-face education and switch to distance education during these times (Yamamoto and Altun, 2020).

### 1. Literature Review

In fact, it is seen that distance education, which dates back centuries thanks to communication tools such as letters, has become very widespread since the 1980s with the development of technology. This expansion has manifested itself on an institutional basis, many distance education institutions have emerged, distance education has spread to large masses, different learning demands have been tried to be met by applying distance education and modern teaching methods. It can be said that the inadequacy of traditional education methods to meet the needs is the main factor that makes distance education so widespread. Information devices such as the Internet, TV, and computers are technological developments that play a key role in making distance education an effective and mass method (Arıkan et al., 2021). In the literature, there are many opinions that the effectiveness of distance education will continue to increase in proportion to the demand and developing information technologies. (Aydın, 2020). Distance education is a systematic and interdisciplinary educational activity that can offer the

learner alternative education ways that are organized through written or digital tools, independent of time and space (Altıparmak et al., 2011). Distance Learning; It can also be defined as the learning and teaching process implemented by an organization in an organized way, where the learner and the teacher are not in the same place and communication is provided by technology (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). It is widely believed that distance education activities, which continue with the internet, television and computer education devices, which are a part of most people's lives today, first started with written tools such as mail, newspaper and even letters. It can be said that in these ways, distance education allows individuals who cannot spare time for their personal and educational development and even non-formal education to be included in the education process in some way. The rapid progress in technology has brought with it the spread of distance education. The duties and qualifications of the learner and the teacher, the level of interaction, the materials and methods used are developing and changing with the technological progress. As a matter of fact, in distance education, learners and teachers interact with some technological devices. Distance education is an important source of advantage in terms of providing flexibility to learners and teachers in terms of education space and time (Özbay, 2015). In the literature, there are many views that emphasize the interaction between the learner and the teacher and argue that this interaction has evolved thanks to technological advances (Aydın, 2001). According to Keegan (1996), the theoretical foundations of distance education, about which many new approaches have been produced over time, were laid in the 1970s. On the theoretical foundations of distance education, Garrison and Anderson, Holberg, Wedemeyer, Baath, Daniel, Moore, Paulsen and Peters are the names frequently encountered in the literature. Delling, on the other hand, is the person who first introduced the theory of distance education (Gökmen et al., 2016).

Kurt et al. (2021) defined distance education as a form of education in which the teacher and the learner interact with each other without being physically present in the same environment. According to them, distance education learners carry out the learning in their responsibilities, and the teachers perform the teaching in their responsibilities independently of the place (Özçelik, 2022). According to Kiryakova (2009), distance education; It is a form of learning in which there is an organic link, that is, interaction, between the student, teacher and the curriculum, and the process is managed by the student.

The period when distance education was first heard dates back to 1728. In these years, the announcement that distance education would be made by letter for "Shorttoman Lessons" was published in the Boston newspaper (Çoban, 2013). In 1840, Isaac Pitman's stenography teaching by letter was recorded in England as a distance education activity. Langenscheid language

school, which was founded by Charles Toussaint and Gustav Langenscheid in Germany in 1856, was also a private institution that was a distance education practitioner at that time. As a matter of fact, it is accepted by most circles that the first organized activity of distance education was the Berlin-based Langenscheid language school. Although distance education initiatives in France date back to 1907, it can be said that the first official initiative was the distance education center established in 1939. The first country to start distance education in primary and secondary education was Australia as of 1910. Spain, which carried distance education to the undergraduate level, implemented the distance education university in 1972. The legal identity of distance education was realized as the teaching law in Japan in 1948. When we look at the starting point of distance education, it is seen that it is aimed to serve the people with limited access to education and to train the soldiers. Over time, distance education has been frequently encountered in other levels of education (Antalyalı, 2004). In addition to countries such as European countries, USA, Canada, Japan, Australia, which have already set out and gained experience in the field of distance education, formal education services are insufficient in most developing countries.

## **2.The Problem and The Sub-Problems**

In this study, the thoughts of special education classroom teachers about distance education, the problems they encounter and the solutions they bring for these problems are examined.

Within the scope of the problem statement, the following sub-problems were answered by the special education class teachers:

1. How do you think distance education contributes to education in special education classes?
2. How was your distance education process in your special education class during the pandemic period?
3. What are the problems you encounter in distance education applications in special education class? (Internet, technology, administrators, parents, students, education portals, curriculum, assessment, access to education, etc.)
4. What are the solutions you would suggest for these problems you experience in distance education in special education classes?

## **3. The Purpose of the Research**

It is true that distance education has become very widespread with the pandemic. Distance education is also a method that was put into practice long before the pandemic (Özçelik, 2022). This method has been a part of our lives with mandatory transitions during the epidemic period. In our study, the place of distance education in special education and the problems encountered were determined in the light of the opinions of the educators and it was aimed to contribute to a more efficient distance education process by suggesting solutions.

In the literature review, studies on the thoughts of classroom teachers during the epidemic process were encountered, but more specific studies involving special education teachers regarding the problems experienced and solution suggestions were not found. We think that this study is important to determine the strengths and weaknesses of distance education, which is compulsory during the epidemic process, especially in special education. As a matter of fact, when it comes to entering a similar compulsory distance education process, it will be possible to pass this process more efficiently by identifying and strengthening the weaknesses of distance education in special education.

#### **4. The Considerations and the Limitations**

The assumptions in this study can be summarized as follows:

1. Interview forms were received with the assumption that the opinions of the special education teachers participating in the research would be objective and would contribute to the process.
2. Since the teachers who contributed to the study filled out the interview forms on a voluntary basis, it was accepted that their answers were sincere and correct.
3. It is assumed that the scientific method chosen for our study is appropriate to achieve our aim.

This research is a specialized study to determine the efficiency of distance education in special education. It is limited to 17 special education teachers working in Türkiye provinces. There are inferences obtained from the literature review and the answers of the teachers to the open-ended questions.

#### **5. Method**

In this part of the study, the research model, study group, data collection tool, tables used in data collection and analysis are included.

##### **5.1. Model of the Research**

In this study, which aims to summarize the thoughts of special education teachers working in primary schools about distance education during the epidemic, a qualitative research method known as phenomenology design was chosen.

Cases in our daily life that we are aware of but do not have an in-depth idea about can be investigated with phenomenological design (Kocabıyık, 2016). In this research, qualitative research design was used to reveal the experiences and thoughts of the special education teachers working in the primary school about the distance education activities during the Covid-19 pandemic process.

The research data were obtained through online surveys conducted with semi-structured questions, which were prepared to determine the opinions of

the teachers regarding distance education during the epidemic, the problems they experienced and the opinions of the volunteers about the solution proposals.

## **5.2. Scope and the Sample**

The scope of this research; It consists of 17 volunteer special education teachers working in different parts of Turkey in the 2022-2023 academic year and determined by sampling the most diversity.

The names of the special education teachers who formed the participant group of the research were hidden within the scope of ethical principles and each of them was given a code name. Accordingly, the 1st participant was coded as K1, the second participant as K2, the third participant as K3, and they were all listed in this way, and the last participant was coded as K17.

## **5.3. Data Collection Tool**

This study was prepared using semi-structured interview technique and online form. The form consists of asking four pre-prepared questions to the participants and the answers given by the participants to these questions. The questions to be asked to the participants were prepared, expert opinion was sought, the content of the interview questions and the number of questions were determined with the expert opinion. In the form, a total of four semi-structured open-ended questions were asked about the opinions of special education teachers about distance education, the problems they experienced and their solution suggestions. The questions in the data collection tool are given below.

1. How do you think distance education contributes to education in special education classes?
2. How was your distance education process in your special education class during the pandemic period?
3. What were the problems you encountered in the distance education applications in the special education class, and what are they still doing? (Internet, technology, administrators, parents, students, education portals, curriculum, assessment, access to education, etc.)
4. What are the solutions you would suggest for these problems you experience in distance education in special education classes?

## **5.4. Data Collection**

The data of the research were collected using a semi-structured online interview form. In the study, semi-structured online interviews were conducted with 17 teachers in order to determine the opinions of the classroom teachers regarding distance education, the problems they experienced and the solution proposals during the epidemic period. First, the

participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and it was also stated that direct quotations would be made from the analyzes and codes would be used without giving the name of the cited participant.

### **5.5. Analysis of Data**

Content analysis, which is one of the qualitative data analysis techniques, was used to analyze the opinions of teachers about distance education in special education classrooms during the epidemic, the problems they experienced and their solutions. In content analysis, the data can be organized according to the themes created by the research questions, or it can be presented by focusing on the questions or dimensions used in the interview process, and direct quotations are often included to reflect the interviewees in a striking way. The data obtained through interviews were defined and interpreted. Themes are created and themes are divided into categories. Opinions of the direct participants about each category were expressed as they were.

### **6. Findings**

In this section, the opinions of the special education teachers who applied distance education during the epidemic period, about the distance education activities, the problems they experienced in this process and the findings obtained in line with the opinions of the teachers about the solution proposals for these problems are expressed.

#### **6.1. The Opinions on the Distance Education Process in Special Education Classes in the Pandemic**

Table 1 shows the participants' "How do you think the contribution of distance education to education in special education classes?" answers to the question are shown.

Table 1. Special education teachers' "How do you think the contribution of distance education in special education classes to education?" Answers to the question:

<b>Code</b>	<b>Opinion</b>
K1	Less than other units.
K2	It's not very high.
K3	It has no contribution.
K4	Hardly any.
K5	I am of the opinion that distance education is not suitable for students with special education needs.

K6	The virtual environment for students is restrictive and not accessible.
K7	Not so well.
K8	Distance education is not very useful in special education due to the inadequacies of the individual. Only the variety of materials is increasing.
K9	Students can access information more easily in the home environment. He can also receive immediate family support.
K10	I don't think it's too bright. Still, of course, it was more effective for some students to have it than not to have it at all.
K11	I think distance education is mediocre.
K12	I don't think it contributed.
K13	We have seen that there will be no distance education in special education.
K14	Hardly any.
K15	Very little.
K16	It has no contribution. It is impossible to keep children in front of the screen.
K17	Needless to say, not much has been contributed.

## 6.2. Opinions of Special Education Teachers on Distance Education

"How was your distance education process in your special education class during the pandemic period?" answered by teachers working in special education classes. The answers to the question are as in Table 2.

Table 2. "How was your distance education process in your special education class during the pandemic period?" answers to the question

Code	Opinion
K1	More inefficient than face-to-face training
K2	Hard
K3	Inefficient
K4	It's been tough.
K5	I don't think it's very efficient.

K6	Mostly, it was limited to a single student and sometimes 2 students in line with financial opportunities.
K7	It went well but not very productive
K8	It was not very useful due to the limited access of students to information tools.
K9	It was a difficult process. All students could not attend the class due to lack of opportunities. As we could not support the lessons as in face-to-face education, we could not provide much concretization.
K10	Exhausting boring.
K11	It was very inadequate.
K12	There was not enough communication with the students.
K13	Pretty inefficient.
K14	It was not very efficient.
K15	Did not have.
K16	More inefficient than face to face.
K17	Inefficient.

### 6.3. Opinions of Special Education Teachers on the Problems Experienced in the Pandemic

Answered by the teachers working in special education classes, "What have been and are the problems you encountered in distance education applications in the special education class? (Internet, technology, administrators, parents, students, education portals, curriculum, assessment and evaluation, access to education, etc.)" The answers to the question are as in Table 3.

Table 3. Special education teachers' "What were the problems you encountered in the distance education applications in the special education class and what are they?" answers to the question

Code	Opinion
K1	Student has trouble adjusting
K2	Internet, communication with students
K3	The application is difficult because the student's reluctance to participate, lack of motivation, contact and modeling are

	required. The student has a very difficult time concentrating and focusing.
K4	Internet technology student parent assessment assessment.
K5	I frequently encountered parent-student technology and internet problems.
K6	Internet access and absolutely no access to technology
K7	Student curriculum assessment
K8	Information technologies and infrastructure deficiencies. Adaptation deficiencies in education portals.
K9	Lack of internet, not being able to embody, not being able to present enough material, lack of family interest, not being able to get the attention of the student,
K10	Having parents without internet, difficult access
K11	insufficient motivation
K12	We could not reach students due to lack of access to education and technological infrastructure.
K13	Since special education requires one-to-one closeness, we could not get efficiency from distance education. Our job became more difficult when the insufficient internet connection was added.
K14	Student
K15	There was no special education student
K16	Unfortunately, assessment and evaluation could not be made on the student. Definitely the biggest problem in special education is that distance education cannot be done in a healthy way.
K17	Special needs students already have difficulties in perception. It's hard to gain anything remotely.

#### **6.4. Teachers' Solution Suggestions Regarding the Problems Experienced in the Distance Education Process**

Answered by teachers working in special education classes, "What are the solutions you would suggest for these problems you experience in distance education in special education classes?" The answers to the question are as in Table 3.4.

Table 4. What are the solutions you would suggest for the problems you experience in distance education in special education classrooms? answers to the question

Code	Opinion
K1	There is no suggested solution. Special education is not remote.
K2	Distance education is not suitable for special education.
K3	Special students did not have the necessary opportunities for distance education.
K4	Curriculum can be arranged for special education students with education portals, especially on the demand and Internet, that students can use.
K5	I think that distance education with special education students is not very productive, if possible, it should always be face-to-face because distance education with these children is difficult.
K6	Distance education provides very limited benefits in special education classes.
K7	Providing families and students with a sufficient level of informatics proficiency, meeting their internet and tablet needs, providing sufficient digital data for distance education...
K8	Distance education should not be done
K9	No distance education
K10	Before a decision about education is taken, I want the necessary infrastructures for that decision to be adequately prepared. Education cannot be managed with the logic of "The caravan lines up on the road".
K11	I cannot offer a solution because special education cannot be done remotely.
K12	Since the student profile will not change in special education, distance education cannot be efficient.
K13	I think it would be appropriate for children who expect special attention on their name.
K14	Don't do it. Distance education should not be done in special education.

K15	There is no suggested solution. Special education is not remote.
K16	Distance education is not suitable for special education.
K17	With special education, the gains are inefficient, and when distance education is added to this, the output becomes more inefficient. If we have the opportunity and we have to, we can continue with face-to-face education.

## 7. Conclusion and Recommendations

In this part of the study, the findings produced from the data obtained within the scope of the research were transformed into conclusion statements and suggestions.

### 7.1. Conclusion

The period of compulsory transition to distance education in the pandemic has revealed experiences that we have not encountered before, as in almost every field, in education as well (Arıkan, 2022). Distance education, which is preferred in order not to interrupt the continuity in order to continue the education without interruption and with the least damage, is frequently questioned in the literature in terms of its advantages and disadvantages. According to Özbay (2015), distance education, which provides education opportunity independent of time and place, will become a phenomenon that we will encounter more often with the assumption that epidemics and diseases will take place in our lives in the future (Başaran et al., 2020).

The problems, solution suggestions, results, and efficiency level of distance education in special education applications, which are compulsory due to the epidemic, are among the questions of this research. With the forms applied in this study, special education students were asked to convey their views and experiences about distance education applications without any direction. "What do you think is the contribution of distance education to education in special education classes?" The question was answered completely by the participants. Approximately 89% of the participating teachers expressed the opinion that the contribution of distance education in special education is very little or not.

"How was your distance education process in your special education class during the pandemic period?" The question was answered completely by the participants. Approximately 95% of the participating teachers expressed the opinion that the process was inefficient, difficult and inadequate.

"What are the problems you encounter in the special education classroom and distance education applications? The question (Internet, technology,

administrators, parents, students, education portals, curriculum, assessment and evaluation, access to education, etc.) was answered completely by the participants. Participating teachers stated that the internet and student profile are not suitable for distance education as the most experienced problem. Measurement and evaluation, lack of technological infrastructure, motivation, communication are other problems.

"What are the solutions you would suggest for these problems you experience in distance education in special education classes?" The question was answered completely by the participants. Participating teachers mostly as a solution; expressed the opinion that it would be more appropriate not to prefer distance education within the primary school, and they stated that face-to-face education is more efficient in special education than distance education. In addition, the proposal to improve the opportunities (internet, individualized curriculum, game-based education materials, equal opportunity, tablet) was voiced by the participating teachers.

## **7.2. Suggestions**

In the light of the results obtained from the data of the study, the following suggestions can be made;

Special education teachers stated that the process of distance education activities during the epidemic period was not efficient. During the study, the opinion that distance education and special education are inefficient together, and the suggestion that face-to-face education should be preferred, if possible, were encountered in special education.

Initiatives to increase equal opportunities (internet, technical infrastructure) can be supported.

Improvements to individualized education infrastructure (individual curricula and educational materials) in special education will be a valid study due to individual differences.

In a new epidemic period, it would be appropriate for the relevant units, whether public or private, to conduct a preliminary study on the readiness levels and perceptions of teachers for possible distance education implementation.

Special education students; is a group of students with special needs in terms of attention, motivation, communication and adaptation. Distance education materials prepared can give more space to game-based learning activities and stimulants can be increased in this way.

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## EXTENDED SUMMARY

The Pandemic process, which started in Wuhan, China and shook the whole world, affected a period of our lives with various restrictions. Vaccination requirement, asking the test result in official or private workplaces, measures for masks, gloves, hygiene and social distance rules, travel restrictions and even curfews were experienced. One of these measures was to provide

distance education, which was not used as frequently as this time for the first time in this period.

Distance Education is a teaching system in which the learner can access the educational resources and content synchronously or asynchronously, without the limitation of time and place, and participate in teaching activities using rich communication technologies as well as printed materials. For an individual, education is a need that must be met as much as the need for shelter and nutrition.

Many countries had to leave face-to-face education and switch to distance education during these periods in order to prevent the increase in the number of cases in the epidemic. In this study, which aims to summarize the thoughts of the special education teachers working in primary schools on distance education during the epidemic period, the qualitative research method known as the phenomenology design was chosen.

The research data were obtained through online surveys conducted with semi-structured questions prepared to determine the views of teachers on distance education during the epidemic, the problems they experienced and the opinions of volunteers on solution suggestions. The universe of this research; It consists of 17 volunteer special education teachers working in different parts of Turkey in the 2022-2023 academic year and determined by the most diverse sampling method.

This study was prepared using semi-structured interview technique and online form. The form consists of asking four pre-prepared questions to the participants and the answers given by the participants to these questions. Semi-structured online interviews were conducted with 17 teachers in order to determine the opinions of the classroom teachers about distance education, the problems they experienced and the solution proposals during the epidemic.

Content analysis, one of the qualitative data analysis techniques, was used to analyze the opinions of teachers about distance education in special education classrooms during the epidemic, the problems they experienced and their solution suggestions. In content analysis, data can be organized according to the themes created by the research questions or presented by focusing on the questions or dimensions used in the interview process, and also often include direct quotations to reflect the interviewees strikingly.

In addition, it was stated that the use or access of the internet, technological infrastructure, the target audience's inability to focus and socialize in the virtual world, inequality of opportunity in education, and students, parents and even teachers in the first period of the epidemic were blocked in adapting to distance education. As a solution proposal, the thought that distance education is not a suitable way for special education and that it would be

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appropriate to follow the ways that take this situation into account, was expressed by special education teachers.