

PROBLEMS SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS FACED DURING THE PANDEMIC OKUL YÖNETİCİLERİNİN PANDEMİ SÜRECİNDE YAŞADIKLARI SORUNLAR

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of this study is to examine the opinions of school administrators about the problems they have experienced in the course of the Covid-19 pandemic to reveal the administrative problems and make suggestions to improve the process during the crises. The research was carried out with a qualitative research method: a case study. The study group of the research consists of 12 school principals working in primary, secondary and high schools. The research data were gathered through online interviews and a semi-structured interview form was used during the interviews. The content analysis was applied, codes and themes were determined from the gathered data and findings revealed four main themes: Coordination problems between the ministry and the provinces, communication problems between the school administrators and other education stakeholders, problems related to technology and institutional problems. The research revealed the problems that can be experienced in the decision, planning, communication and coordination processes of the education administration during the crisis. In this respect, the research is important as it provides insights for future implementations in case of a crisis.

ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı, okul yöneticilerinin Covid-19 pandemisi sürecinde yaşadıkları sorunlara ilişkin görüşlerini incelemek, yönetsel sorunları ortaya çıkarmak ve krizler sırasında süreci iyileştirmeye yönelik önerilerde bulunmaktır. Araştırma nitel araştırma yöntemi olan bir durum çalışması ile yürütülmüştür. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu ilkökul, ortaokul ve liselerde görev yapan 12 okul müdürü oluşturmaktadır. Araştırma verileri çevrimiçi görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmış ve görüşmeler sırasında yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılmıştır. İçerik analizi uygulanmış, toplanan verilerden kodlar ve temalar belirlenmiş ve bulgular dört ana temayı ortaya çıkarmıştır: Bakanlık ile iller arasındaki koordinasyon sorunları, okul yöneticileri ile diğer eğitim paydaşları arasındaki iletişim sorunları, teknoloji ile ilgili sorunlar ve kurumsal sorunlar. Araştırma, eğitim yönetiminin kriz dönemlerinde karar verme, planlama, iletişim ve koordinasyon süreçlerinde yaşanabilecek sorunları ortaya koymuştur. Bu bağlamda araştırma, bir kriz durumunda gelecekteki uygulamalar için fikir verici olması yönüyle önemlidir.

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Introduction

The deadly virus was first seen in Wuhan, China spread quickly and affected a great number of countries in a few months. The disease caused by this virus called as COVID-19 has created chaos in the world by affecting the lives of millions deeply. With these staggering results, it was declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organization as of March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2020). Looking at the educational dimension of the pandemic, it is seen that almost in all countries education is suspended due to Covid-19 and each country has offered different practices and various resources for students, teachers and parents (Eken, Tosun & Tuzcu-Eken, 2020). Nevertheless, the typical reaction of the countries against the pandemic was closing the schools temporarily and applying the strategies of distance education, because distance learning is a form of teaching in which the learner and the instructors are located at different times and places and the interaction between them takes place through electronic communication means (Aydın, 2005). The restrictions between learners and educators and learning sources can be removed through distance education (Bozkurt, 2017). The fact that distance education is independent of time and place has provided an advantage during the pandemic. In addition, in distance education, students can take initiative, manage the process according to their learning speed and level of understanding (Özdoğan & Berkant, 2020). So it has been considered as the best alternative way of education to block the spread of the virus in densely affected countries (Telli-Yamamoto & Altun, 2020).

In schools, as in all organizations, decision-making and problem-solving are the main reasons for the existence of administration. Like all social institutions, schools are affected positively or negatively by changes, developments and crises. Adapting schools to these changes is among the duties of the school administration (Çınkır, 2010). With the distance education practices, school administrators have had a more unifying role among teachers, students and parents. They have established a bridge for all stakeholders by informing them about new arrangements, designing interaction channels between teachers and parents, leading educational programs, and organizing training for educators. They have had significant responsibilities to plan and carry out the distance education, however, they have also had problems and challenges. In this respect, it is very crucial to find out their experiences, challenges and opinions to reveal how adaptive a school system can be during crises. School administrators play a major role in the uninterrupted continuation of education and training even in times of crisis. This research aims to shed light to the views of education administrators. There are limited studies in the literature that deal with the administrative difficulties experienced by school administrators during the pandemic, and this study is important in this respect as well. In the research it is aimed to reveal:

- What are the administrative problems school principals have experienced during the pandemic, in terms of decision making and fulfilling responsibilities?
- What are the administrative problems school principals have experienced during the pandemic, in terms of communication and governance?

Turkiye's Education Strategy during the Pandemic

From the date of 11th of March 2020, on which the first Covid-19 case was detected, the Ministry of Education started to take action. Primarily, schools at all levels were closed temporarily to protect against infection among education stakeholders (Özer, 2020a). According to the calendar announced at the beginning of the academic year, the interim holiday, which was planned to be implemented on 23-27 March, was drawn on an earlier date of 16-20 March. (MEB [MoNE], 2020c). However, with the rapid increase in the number of cases and the recommendation of the council of the Ministry of Health and Scientific Committee, which was constituted after the outbreak, the period was extended until the end of May (Özer, 2020a). During the break, arrangements were completed and as of March 23rd, distance education was put into practice. On April 13th, live virtual classroom courses were started to be given for 8th graders, high school preparatory classes and 12th-grade students. The range of the courses was extended to all grade levels a week later (MEB, 2020c). In this process, the central exam dates for placement were also rescheduled. These decisions ceased the educational activities at schools and approximately 18 million students remained out of their classes (Özer, 2020a).

After the lockdown decision, MoNE announced that education services would be provided as distance education through the digital platform of Educational Informatics Network (EBA), and Türkiye Radio and Television Corporation (TRT). Protocols have been signed with TRT in order to facilitate the access of students to distance education via television. With its human resources, MoNE produced the course contents needed for distance education in a short time and these contents were made available to students through EBA and TRT

(Özer, 2020a, 2020b). In other words, distance education was carried out through two main means; the first one is EBA, which aims to provide digital learning materials that can be updated; the second one is a TV channel presenting video lessons parallel to the designed education program (Çelikdemir, 2020).

Educational Informatics Network (EBA)

EBA is a digital learning portal developed in 2011 and has been used by students and teachers since then. It includes educational materials that support the curriculum such as videos, e-books, tests, documentaries and activities related to school subjects. This portal provides both teachers and students from pre-school to high school level with various learning materials and activities so that teachers can give assignments to students via it. The portal is also appropriate for self-study, it provides students with tasks that are proper for their academic needs, in this way, students are free to select the topics on which they want to focus and follow online courses. Due to the fact that the portal allows uploading video recordings of courses, it has been an effective means for distance education. The courses have been designed and structured in a way that students can follow easily without any conflicts (Özer, 2020b).

Turkiye Radio and Television Corporation (TRT)

TRT is a Turkish national television channel owned by the state and it has played a critical role during the process of compulsory suspension. EBA TV which broadcasts educational programs is embedded into TRT and it has been presenting course videos about school subjects (Zan & Zan, 2020). EBA TV is provided as an option for students who don't have an internet connection and the technological devices necessary to follow online courses (Özer, 2020b).

The crisis created by the pandemic has also given way to some positive developments, vocational and technical education has come to the fore with their remarkable contributions to meeting the needs of society. Research and development activities were accelerated and the capacity was increased in educational institutions where medical production was carried out; thus, cooperation between the education and health sectors was strengthened. The production of the disinfectants and cleaning materials was carried out in the vocational and technical education institutions and the cleaning needs of more than 50.000 schools were provided with these productions (Özer, 2020c).

Methodology

Research Design

This study was conducted in a qualitative design in order to reveal the problems faced by school administrators during the pandemic. The study is also a case study since it particularly focuses on the problems experienced by school administrators during the pandemic period. Case study is a qualitative research approach in which the researcher examines one or several situations in depth and reveals the themes related to these situations (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano & Morales, 2007).

Before starting the research, the ethical approval was taken from the university's human research ethics committee in order to ensure ethical compliance. During the whole process, ethical principles were taken into consideration and the participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time they want.

Study Group

The study group of the research consists of 12 school principals working in primary, secondary and high schools in the province of Nigde, in the 2020-2021 academic year. The maximum diversity sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used while the study group was formed. The aim of maximum diversity sampling is to create a small sample and increase the diversity of the people involved in the research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Accordingly, the school principals participating in the study were selected from different education levels; primary school, secondary school and high school. The participants were given code names as A1, A2, A3 etc. to refer participants and A stands for administrator.

Table 1. Demographic features of the participants

Participant	Gender	Educational level	Professional experience
A1	Female	Primary School	10
A2	Male	Primary School	18
A3	Male	Primary School	22
A4	Male	Primary School	20
A5	Female	Secondary School	12
A6	Female	Secondary School	17
A7	Female	Secondary School	15
A8	Male	Secondary School	12
A9	Male	High School	21
A10	Male	High School	16
A11	Male	High School	19
A12	Male	High School	23

Data Collection Tool

After having a certain level of the previous study about the research topic, semi-structured interview form was prepared in the light of previous knowledge and within the frame of the interview guide. The interview guide provides a focused structure for the discussion and covers the main topics (Barriball & While, 1994). Before the interview form was finalized, expert opinion was taken and the suitability of the questions was confirmed. Due to the fact that study group of the research includes school principals, expert opinion is asked from two faculty members who have a doctorate degree in educational administration. In this study, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, however, to confirm the coverage and relevance of the content of the interview questions a pilot testing was carried out. It is a small –scale trial of a larger piece of research (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). Harding (2013), states that before embarking into the study, it is beneficial to pilot the interview questions and do necessary adjustments. In the piloting process, two school principals were included in the interview. After the testing phase, necessary changes and adjustments were done to fit the questions to the research aims. Repetitive questions that aim to ask similar points and questions out of context or redundant were omitted. Then main research was started. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed for analysis, all interviews were organized as word documents. Then, these documents were sent to the interviewees via e-mail. At this point, the interviewees were asked to review their statements. Thus, the participants reviewed the statements that they wanted to correct, that could cause misunderstanding, or that they thought were missing. Finally, after the necessary corrections, the transcripts approved by the participants were included in the analysis process.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was used to analyze the data, firstly, audio recordings were transcribed. In order to obtain a general perspective, intermittent readings were made several times. To identify the codes in each section, the data obtained were divided into sections in the context of sub-problems. The answers given by each participant regarding the sub-problem were gathered together and the coding process was started by the researcher. The data were divided into meaningful sections and descriptive names were given to these sections. These names formed the codes of the research. A code list was created by examining all data. The codes were re-evaluated during the data analysis process and updates were made regarding the codes. The common aspects between the codes were identified, categorized, and finally the themes were reached.

Validity and Reliability

Validity is related to the extent to which the findings, results, and interpretations of the researcher reflect the truth, for the research to be valid, the data obtained by the researcher must reflect the real situation (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In order to increase the validity of this research, participant confirmation was asked in the study. After the interviews were transcribed, the participants were contacted again and asked to confirm the contents

of the interview. This method is called as participant validation (Long, Johnson & Rigour, 2000) or member reflections (Tracy, 2010). It a process in which original respondents are asked to check the accuracy of the study in the areas of descriptions (Bloor, 1978; Creswell, 2002; Slettebø, 2020). This helps researchers improve the trustworthiness of the study.

Also, during the interviews, the researcher reminded the participants of the confidentiality policy of the research at every stage to prevent the participants from hiding their true thoughts and experiences. The researcher also avoided comments and explanations that could affect the views of the participant during the interviews. Researchers should avoid being subjective (Myers, 2000), be careful not to include their own values or attitudes in the research findings (Sharts-Hopko, 2002). Reliability in qualitative research means that the research process and findings are presented in a clear and understandable way so that external evaluators can check the consistency of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, the research; pattern, sample determination method, information on data collection tools and analysis process are presented in detail. Within the framework of the process approach, codes, sub-categories and categories were created. In order not to add bias to the research, quotations that reflect the whole are included and the research process has been described in detail. The researcher used researcher diversification to ensure internal reliability. Expert opinion was taken during the development of the data collection tools and the analysis of the data. In the analysis of the data, the data source was coded separately by the researcher and a different expert in the field, and the consistency between the codings was compared.

Findings

The research findings were presented in line with the sub-problems. The interviews conducted and the documents examined were the source of the research findings. The themes and codes obtained as a result of the content analysis are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Themes and codes

Themes	Codes
Coordination and organization problems	Ineffective planning of the process Lack of uniformity in implementations
Communicational problems	Delay in official correspondence Obsolete contact information
Technological Problems	Insufficiency of internet and distance education infrastructure Technological incompetency of educational stakeholders
Institutional Problems	Hybrid learning environment difficulties Hygiene and safety problems

Coordination and organization problems

With the closure of schools and the transition to distance education, teachers and students started to participate in educational activities at home, but school principals and vice-principals were on duty in their offices at the school buildings. The ministry became the sole and most authoritative institution to determine how the process would proceed, and all education administrators were responsible for passively waiting for decisions to be made.

Although school principals had no direct influence on the decision-making, they were held responsible for coordinating the crisis process. In this context, school administrators think that implementations were started without effective planning, especially in the first months of the pandemic. The necessity of making quick and effective decisions created by the crisis environment caused some decisions to be taken without an adequate exchange of ideas so that the decision process could not be carried out effectively and caused confusion from

time to time. Due to the confusion, the decisions made by the ministry became difficult to understand and interpret correctly, resulting in the emergence of different practices based on the same decision. The lack of detailed explanations regarding the implementation caused the school administrators to disagree on the same issue in the beginning.

Ineffective planning of the process

With the announcement of the pandemic, the MoNE had to intervene in the education system immediately. In this process, very rapid decisions were taken by the ministry in a short time. This situation caused difficulties in the implementation of the decisions taken and similarly, there were not enough planning opportunities, for instance, it was difficult to transmit the decisions taken at the ministerial level to schools and to express expectations clearly. There were changes in the decisions taken from time to time during the implementation process, in this respect, most of the participants emphasized the importance of planning before taking action.

We have a saying “make it up as you go along” and this is exactly what happened during the pandemic. The constant change of the decisions taken has exhausted us. In this sense, it would have been much healthier to make solid planning first and then implement it. (A3)

With the closure of the schools, a number of decisions were announced however, the responsibilities of school principals in this process and the practices demanded got increased and constantly changed. The first three months of the pandemic were very stressful and tiring for school administrators.

The most challenging thing for me in this process was instability. I would like to explain this by giving an example. The MoNE decided that the assessment would be face-to-face at schools. Then we were given a lot of instructions to prepare our schools for exams. Our priority was providing safety and security at schools. We worked really hard for a couple of days to make the necessary arrangements. But then what happened? The exams were canceled. It was a total waste of time and energy. (A11)

The panic environment created by the pandemic affected all stakeholders of the education system. In this process, school principals who are obliged to inform students, teachers and parents felt tension due to the uncertainties experienced in practice.

There was complete chaos in the pandemic. The decision taken the day before was changed the next day, or a different decision was made within hours. Such uncertainty worried the school principals more. Because they could not fully understand what they were supposed to do... Sometimes I felt inadequate to meet the teachers' questions and concerns. (A5)

Another participant emphasized the tension created by the uncertainty about the procedure and their role as a school leader.

I encountered so many questions at the beginning of the pandemic that I couldn't answer them. Everyone was very panicked and hoped to find answers to their questions in the school administration. Parents, teachers, and students were all anxious. However, as we were not well informed, we could not provide them with accurate and sufficient information. (A1)

In this process, school administrators were expected to adapt to new practices in a short time. However, school administrators, like other education stakeholders, needed time because they were faced with new and different implementations.

Teachers and students were at their homes, but we were at school. There were tasks requested from us and we were expected to respond very quickly. However, it was forgotten that we also needed an adaptation process. (A7)

Lack of uniformity in implementations

At the beginning of the pandemic, the school administrators interpreted the directives given by the ministry in different ways, so there was no unity in the practices. This situation caused anxiety in school administrators.

During the first months of the pandemic, I was very anxious. There were times when I couldn't quite understand exactly what to do. To clarify the situation, I phoned other schools and asked what was done in those schools. I felt as if I constantly needed to have my actions confirmed. The thought of “Did I do it wrong?” bothered me constantly. (A6)

Another participant drew attention to the positive result of this situation. The ambiguity of the instructions encouraged school principals to communicate more and act collaboratively.

In the beginning, what was wanted to be done seemed open to different interpretations. School administrators were asking each other what to do in a panic. Social media became a useful tool at this point. There was an exchange of ideas in the groups in which the principals were included... School administrators have never been as cooperative as they are now. I think this situation has increased cooperation and sharing. (A2)

Formal and informal social media groups were established among school administrators. In these channels, school administrators were able to ask questions to each other about issues they could not understand or didn't master enough.

I needed approval. Since I didn't want to make mistakes, I was always communicating with other schools. The instructions were unclear and open to different interpretations. (A12)

Communicational problems

Since face-to-face meetings were stopped during the pandemic, telephone and social media applications, electronic information systems have become more important than ever. School administrators were supposed to use all these communication means to follow updated information about their jobs. They were also supposed to be a contact person for parents, students and teachers. While they were acting like a problem-solving agent, they had to deal with some communication problems. These can be classified as problems with official correspondence; problems with contact information; technological barriers to communication.

Delay in official correspondence

Since the Turkish education system consists of a centralized structure and organization, official correspondence is carried out by following the hierarchy. There is an official correspondence flow from the ministry to the provincial directorates of national education, and from the provincial directorates to the school principals. In this context, correspondence is carried out within a certain system, but the functioning of this system during the crisis was not healthy enough. During the pandemic, official correspondence took longer to reach schools and there were occasional delays, which interrupted the process.

We heard the decisions taken at the ministerial level on television and social media. Similarly, parents, students and teachers, who learned about the developments from television and social media, expected us to take action immediately, but it took time for official correspondence to reach the school. We had to wait for these correspondences to proceed and deal with impatient stakeholders. (A8)

During the pandemic, to reduce social contact flexible working hours were determined for employees, and the opportunity to work alternately was provided for school administrators. One of the participants stated that they waited for the official correspondence to reach the school in order to benefit from this opportunity, but that happened quite a long time after the decision was taken.

There are four vice principals at our school. We could not switch to flexible working arrangements for a long time. It took a long time to have official correspondence. We did not want to take an action before getting the related correspondence so we lost time. (A9)

Obsolete contact information

School administrators, who were on the job at the school since the beginning of the pandemic, acted as a coordinator and tried to bring teachers, parents and students together. However, one of the most challenging situations for the administrators in this process was the inability to reach parents and students.

Especially reaching and informing parents was a problem. We call, but either the number was wrong or it was no longer used. It was difficult to reach some parents and get feedback from them... (A3)

In this context, school administrators emphasized the importance of keeping contact information up-to-date and pointed out that is even more important in times of crisis.

This situation raised my awareness about the necessity to update the contact information of the parents. Now I plan to ask parents for their current phone numbers and home addresses at least every 6 months. Because parents do not inform the school when they change their address or phone number. (A1)

Technological Problems

One of the innovations that the pandemic has brought to our lives has been digitization in all areas. Before the pandemic, there was an education community not very familiar with distance education practices. This new situation has created different degrees of difficulties for everyone. The most painful period for school administrators in the transition to distance education was to create curricula for teachers with limited internet and applications or less capable to use them. Not every teacher could respond to this digitalization process with the desired speed and efficiency. The teachers needed support at this point, and it was the school administrators who were responsible for providing solutions. On the other hand, some of the children, the most important component of the education system, did not have the technological means to follow distance education.

Insufficiency of internet and distance education infrastructure

Turkiye is a large country with a population of 82 million. The digitalization process that came with the pandemic has strained the country's internet infrastructure. EBA, created within the scope of a national project, has greatly benefited the country's transition to distance education. The pre-establishment of such a system has facilitated the transition to distance education. However, it started to give an error when the system was overloaded. Faced with constant system error warnings, school principals had great difficulty in creating weekly course schedules for teachers. This situation has created more problems, especially in schools where the number of teachers and students is high. Participants stated that they worked hard to create weekly course schedules on time. They stated that this workload and stress negatively affected their well-being.

EBA was constantly giving system error warnings. But there were lesson schedules we had to prepare for the week. Imagine that you are logging in to the system and cannot do anything and you are running out of time. This was really stressful. We were working at night when the entries to the system were reduced. It was really tiring. (A5)

Ensuring information entry into the system and preparing each teacher's syllabus without conflicting with someone else's added extra work to the school administration.

Weekly course schedules had to be prepared and the system was constantly causing problems. We had to work at night. When I came to school one morning, I witnessed that the vice principal had spent the whole night at school. Only in this way was he able to complete the task. (A8)

The inefficiency of the internet and system infrastructure caused school principals to receive numerous complaints and questions. Education stakeholders who could not enter the system waited for the school administration to solve the problem, which created psychological pressure on school principals.

When distance education was put into practice, teachers and parents who could not enter the system started to call us for help. At that point, I felt very incompetent and clumsy. Frankly, I was not able to help and that was making me feel bad. (A4)

Another problem related to the students, all of the participants expressed, was the lack of internet. Most of the students had difficulty in connecting to the online courses because they either didn't have internet infrastructure where they lived or they didn't have enough internet quota. In some cases, they had internet access but they didn't have the necessary electronic devices.

Our school has a dormitory and most students returned to their homes due to the pandemic. Most of them live in villages. Internet is not available in some of these villages; therefore, it was not possible for those students to attend online classes. (A12)

Some participants expressed students' lack of hardware equipment or software, emphasizing the socio-economic background of them.

Some students connect to online classes with their parents' phones. However, when there is more than one child at home, the internet quota is not enough. Children either do not have computers or necessary hardware or do not have internet. Access to distance education is a problem, especially for students from lower socio-economic classes. (A4)

Technological incompetency of educational stakeholders

Distance and hybrid education approaches have brought together programs such as Zoom, Microsoft Team, and Google Meet, which bring teachers and students together. However, these new applications were complex and difficult to use for some teachers, students, and families. In the EBA system, it was difficult to create lessons and assign students homework, especially for senior teachers with little technology experience. Similarly,

students and families who encountered these practices for the first time also experienced difficulties and needed support.

In the beginning, our teachers had difficulties and were waiting for our help. We had to figure out that and guide them immediately. However, it was very difficult for some senior teachers. I told one of our teachers how to use the app five times and then he could only do it. (A6)

Some of the participating administrators stated that they organized remote seminars to train teachers on new Technologies to overcome problems of technology usage.

Since our school is a school in the city center, our staff consists of very senior teachers. Initially, they had a hard time using distance education tools. These practices were too complex for them and they were reluctant to adapt to this new order. With the help of the computer and informatics teacher in our school, we trained teachers on how to use these applications. (A3)

Families who could not connect to EBA at home also called school administrators and asked for support. In addition, families with more than one student at home expressed their problems to the school administration.

Families often phoned the school administration. This sometimes happened because they could not enter the system, sometimes to complain about the teacher and sometimes to complain about their own children. I was trying to comfort them both as a school administrator and as a parent. Some families were overly worried about their children. (A7)

Participants expressed that students were also inexperienced and could not use the system effectively.

In the beginning, students could not use distance education applications very effectively. They were making noise, sometimes inadvertently sabotaging the lesson. Over time, we all got used to it. (A8)

Institutional Problems

Institutional problems include securing the school building against Covid-19 and arranging a hybrid learning environment. Depending on the course of the pandemic, the MoNE proposed the transition to hybrid education for the agenda. However, this decision didn't include all grade levels. Priority is given to classes that will take the central exam. In hybrid education, it was made clear by the MoNE that classroom size would be divided as two parts to make social distancing possible. In the same way, during the break teachers would be responsible to apply social distancing rules as much as possible (Çetinkaya, 2020). With hybrid education, some of the students switched to face-to-face education. With this new regulation, the hygiene and cleanliness of the schools came to the fore.

Hybrid learning environment difficulties

Classes and desks were organized for hybrid education, and lists of students who would receive face-to-face training were determined. School administrators prepared the school for the new conditions. However, with the hybrid training, risks increased, more and more students and teachers were infected with Covid-19. Teachers and students who were infected with the virus were quarantined. Those in contact were reported to the relevant institutions by the school administration. School administrators stated that they had difficulty following infected or contacted students.

Students who were in contact with infected people could not be detected, and these students brought the virus to the school environment and infected other students and teachers. (A5)

School administrators, who took measures to prevent the disease, expressed that they could not do anything for individuals who did not apply to the health institutions for tests and who were carrying the virus.

Nowadays, the state is trying to prevent infection with a health code that notifies individuals' state of health. However, before that students who carried the virus and didn't take health tests or showed symptoms came to school and infected the virus to others. (A10)

With the hybrid education, more classrooms were needed and the workload of teachers and school administrators increased. School administrators had to constantly remind social distance and hygiene rules and monitor students and teachers in this context. When teachers became infected, the need for some other teachers emerged. School administrators had to deal with all these problems. In addition, when teachers were asked to give the same course both face-to-face and online using technology in the classroom, teachers had difficulties and it was left to school administrators to train teachers in this context.

Hygiene and safety problems

In July 2020, a cooperation agreement between the MoNE and the Turkish Standards Institute was made to open schools in better conditions and to adapt education services to the new normal. With this protocol, *the Guide for Improving Hygiene Conditions in Educational Institutions and Prevention of Infection* was published (MEB, 2020b). The school administrators were required to design their school building according to guidelines and provide hygiene in classrooms, restrooms and inside the building. Schools that meet the conditions specified in the guide would be inspected and then would receive *School Clean Certificate*. The guide, which includes many items such as providing physical cleanliness and hygiene of the school and purchasing disinfectants and medical masks for students, exhausted the school administrators both financially and in terms of workload.

There were many tasks we had to fulfill to get "school clean certificate". However, the school's budget was not sufficient to purchase the materials specified in the manual. For this reason, we sought sponsors for our school and got financial support from them. (A12)

School administrators consider *School Clean* initiative as unsustainable. They stated that they had difficulty in meeting the need for hygiene and cleaning products even in hybrid education; therefore, they think that this practice will not be feasible when face-to-face education is started.

The School Clean project is a very expensive one. I don't think it can be applied in crowded schools in the long term. (A4)
When face-to-face education is started, I do not think the project is sustainable. It is difficult to maintain the hygienic rules specified even in hybrid education. If the implementation is to be continued, schools will have to get support from families, which is not a desired approach by the ministry. (A1)

Discussion and Conclusion

In the study, the problems faced by school administrators during the pandemic were investigated and four main themes were identified. These are the coordination problems between the ministry and the provinces; communication problems between the school administrators and other education stakeholders; problems related to technology and institutional problems.

With Covid-19, a crisis environment has occurred in the world. In these crisis times, education management became more centralized in order to make quick decisions. The authority was gathered at the ministry level so that the actions to be taken could have been carried out more easily. The Ministry tried to react as quickly as possible from the first moment of the crisis (Sarı & Sarı, 2020). Although the centralized approach made it easier to react faster, it created more bureaucracy and led to a lack of planning and coordination. School administrators got crucial information via social media and television, and official correspondence about these decisions reached schools much later; therefore, implementation of the decisions was delayed. In addition, in the centralized approach, the right of initiative of school administrators decreased, the administrators who were supposed to wait for official correspondence and act according to those correspondences were exhausted by frequently changing decisions. The decisions taken without planning were changed according to the spread of the pandemic. This environment of uncertainty caused stress and anxiety on school administrators. The canceled or changed decisions caused the school administrators to waste effort and time, and caused them to feel burnout towards the job. Uncertainty and unclear decisions led to different applications, because school administrators interpreted these decisions differently. Months after the onset of the pandemic, unity was achieved in the implementations.

In this period, distance education applications became the mandatory choice of countries to ensure the continuity of education processes (Özer & Suna, 2020). However, both education personnel, family and students were caught unprepared for the distance education practices which were totally unfamiliar to them. Even some teachers resisted in transitioning to distance education, so it took time for them to adapt to this new system (Taşar, 2021). Güreş, Tekinarslan and Yavuzalp (2016), assert that feeling inadequate may cause a resistance to adapting to new conditions. In addition, during this period, no training was given to school stakeholders on distance education practices. As such, school stakeholders could not achieve the desired efficiency in distance/online teaching applications. School administrators, like other stakeholders, were also affected by this inefficiency. The personal and professional activities of school principals were adversely affected by this

situation (Taşar, 2021). Teachers had difficulty in classroom management in online courses (Arslan & Şumuer, 2020) and it is still challenging for teachers to communicate with their students effectively (Sintema, 2020). This new system also raised many questions. Teachers, parents, and students sought help from school administrators to find answers to these questions. However, school administrators also stated that they felt incompetent from time to time, as they did not have clear information about how the process would work. School administrators became a bridge between teachers and families with the transition to distance education. However, during this process, disinterested families, as well as panicked families, gave rise to communication problems. The wrong contact numbers of some families made it impossible for administrators to contact families and students. Families who had a contact address but did not have internet access or could not use social media effectively created difficulties in terms of communication.

According to the findings, another problematic area is the lack of technological infrastructure and using technology ineffectively. With the pandemic, technology has become inevitable, school principals should take technological leadership by encouraging the intensive use of technology inside and outside the school. Thus, they can develop a culture of technology usage in their institutions (Uğur & Koç, 2019). One of the facts revealed by the pandemic is that it is essential to improve teachers' digital literacy levels (ERG, 2020). Teachers needed technological and pedagogical support in the distance education process (Kırmızıgül, 2020). In this respect, school administrators are supposed to train themselves as technology leaders using new information technologies and applications so that they can lead training and seminars that will ensure the development of their staff (Beytekin, 2014). Research revealed that learners and educators who are used to face-to-face education have problems in distance education when they are not competent in using technology. When infrastructure problems are added to this situation, it becomes more difficult to reach the desired results (Telli-Yamamoto & Altun, 2020). Turan (2020), studied the technological leadership of school principals during the pandemic and found out that technical problems, parents' indifference to their children's education, students' economic problems, and teachers' negative attitudes towards distance education, lack of technological equipment prevented the achievement of the educational goals. Similarly, Demir and Kale (2020) investigated the teachers' opinions about distance education and found out that one of the biggest difficulties teachers face in distance education is the lack of internet connection or electronic devices. Külekçi-Akyavuz and Çakın (2020) identified similar problems in their study regarding the opinion of school administrators about the effect of the pandemic on education. The problems experienced by school administrators were stated as lack of communication, technical inadequacy, lack of knowledge, the indifference of teachers and inadequate planning. Especially, communication problems were emphasized in the study. As a matter of fact, activities that could not be carried out face to face with the pandemic became more open to communication problems. Access to education problem of students who do not have sufficient equipment and internet infrastructure is also mentioned in other studies carried out during the pandemic (Bakıoğlu & Çevik, 2020; Günbaş & Gözüküçük, 2020; Türker & Dündar, 2020; Ünal & Bulunuz, 2020). The pandemic process affected teachers and students psycho-socially, as well as school administrators. In this respect, all educational stakeholders should collaborate to have healthy communications and to create a positive learning environment. To reduce the bitter effects of crises, it is crucial to empathize with the others in the education system and provide support for one another.

With the pandemic and technological developments, digital transformation in education has gained momentum. Further studies can be done on digital readiness of schools in terms of infrastructure and digital competence of educators. In this respect, the expectations, needs and suggestions of school principals can be investigated as well. Another issue that needs to be investigated is how the use of technology affects the efficiency of the teaching and learning process. It is not possible to stay away from technology in our age, so it is essential to increase digital skills. How educators can increase the efficiency of their lessons with technology is an issue that needs to be considered in this context.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Dünya Sağlık Örgütü (WHO) tarafından pandemi ilan edilmesiyle birlikte dünyanın pek çok yerinde eğitim kurumlarında yüz yüze eğitime ara verilmiş ve uzaktan eğitim uygulamalarına geçilmiştir. Zamandan ve mekândan bağımsız olarak eğitim hizmeti verme imkânı tanıyan uzaktan eğitim uygulamaları virüsün yayılmasını engellemek için iyi bir alternatif yol olarak benimsenmiştir. Türkiye’de de pandemi ortamının yarattığı riskle mücadele etmek adına eğitimler Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı (MEB) tarafından eğitsel elektronik içerik ağı olarak kurulan Eğitim Bilişim Ağı (EBA) ve ulusal televizyon kanalı olan Türkiye Radyo Televizyon Kurumu (TRT) aracılığıyla yürütülmüştür. Pandemi ortamı ile sosyal mesafe vurgusu yapılmış ve eğitim iş ve işleyişi de çevrimiçi toplantılar yoluyla yürütülmeye çalışılmıştır. Bu yeni düzenin beraberinde getirdiği bazı zorluklar da olmuştur. Eğitim paydaşlarının adaptasyon süreci, dijital yeterlikleri ve bilgi akışı açısından bazı sıkıntılar yaşanmış ve alanyazında öğrencilerin ve öğretmenlerin yaşadığı sorunları ele alan çalışmalara yer verilmiştir. Ancak eğitim yöneticilerinin pandemi sürecinde yaşadığı sıkıntıları ele alan çalışmalar sınırlıdır. Bu çalışmada, okul yöneticilerinin pandemi sürecinde ve uzaktan eğitim uygulamalarında idari ve eğitim odaklı görevlerini yerine getirirken yaşadıkları sorunların tespit edilmesi amaçlanmıştır. Araştırmanın odaklandığı çalışma grubu açısından ve ortaya koyduğu sonuçlar aracılığıyla alanyazına ve uygulayıcılara katkı sağlaması beklenmektedir.

Pandemi sürecinde eğitim yöneticilerinin sorumlulukları artmış ve sürecin etkili bir şekilde yönetilmesinde aktif rol oynamaları beklenmiştir. Araştırmada, okul yöneticilerinin pandemi sürecinde karar verme, iletişim ve koordinasyonu sağlama, yönetsel görevlerini ve sorumluluklarını yerine getirme bağlamında yaşadıkları sorunlar tespit edilmeye çalışılmıştır. Bu bağlamda, araştırma nitel desende yürütülmüştür, çünkü nitel araştırmaların temel amacı algı ve deneyimlerin açığa çıkarılmasını sağlamaktır. Araştırma özellikle pandemi sürecine odaklandığı için nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden durum çalışmasına başvurulmuştur. Araştırmada okul yöneticilerinin pandemi sürecine ilişkin deneyimlerine, görüşlerine ve bakış açılarına yer verilmiştir, bu amaçla çalışma grubu maksimum çeşitlilik örnekleme tekniği ile belirlenmiş ve İl Milli Eğitim Müdürlüğü’ne bağlı okullarda farklı öğretim kademelerinde görev yapan, farklı mesleki deneyim sürelerine sahip 15 okul müdürü dâhil edilmiştir. Araştırmada yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşme formları kullanılmış ve toplanan veriler, içerik analizi yöntemi kullanılarak çözümlenmiştir.

Araştırma bulguları okul yöneticilerinin pandemi sürecinde yaşadıkları sorunları ortaya koymuş ve bu sorunlar dört ana tema altında toplanmıştır. Bu temalar, koordinasyon ve organizasyon problemleri, iletişim problemleri, teknolojik problemler ve kurumsal problemlerdir. Kriz anında hızlı karar alabilmek adına eğitim yönetimi daha merkezi bir yaklaşımla yürütülmüş ve tüm kararlar Bakanlık düzeyinde belirlenmiştir. Bu durum ilk andan itibaren en kısa sürede aksiyon almayı sağlarken uygulamada eşgüdüm açısından sorunlara sebep olmuştur. Katılımcılar özellikle Bakanlık ile iller ve okullar arasındaki koordinasyon problemine vurgu yapmış ve planlamanın yeterince sağlıklı olmadığına dikkat çekmiştir. Okul yöneticileri ile diğer eğitim paydaşları arasında da iletişim problemleri yaşanmıştır. Resmi yazışmalarda yaşanan gecikmeler işleyişte sorun yaratırken, okul ve aileler arasında iletişim kurma noktasında zorluklar tecrübe edilmiştir. Ailelere ait iletişim bilgilerinin güncel olmaması okul ve aileler arasında kopukluğa sebep olmuştur. Özellikle yüz yüze etkileşimin olmaması iletişim problemlerini perçinlemiştir. Teknolojik açıdan yeterli alt yapıya sahip olunmaması, internet ve bilgi iletişim cihazlarının eksikliği eğitime erişimde sorunlar yaratmıştır. Bu dönemde, eğitim paydaşlarının dijital yeterlikleri de ön plana çıkmış ve bu yeterliklerin olmaması işleyişte zorluk yaratmıştır. Kurumsal bağlamda hibrit öğrenme ortamlarının yarattığı riskler dile getirilmiş ve hibrit öğrenme sürecinde eğitim yöneticilerinin ve öğretmenlerin iş yükünün arttığına dikkat çekilmiştir. Ayrıca hijyen ortamının sağlanmasına ilişkin zorluklar da dile getirilmiştir. Bu dönemde okulların hijyen ve güvenliğine ilişkin bazı kriterler belirlenmiş ve okul yöneticilerinden bu kriterleri sağlaması beklenmiştir. Bu noktada katılımcıların bazıları finansal anlamda yaşadıkları sorunlara dikkat çekerek sponsor bulmak durumunda kaldıklarını dile getirmişlerdir.

Araştırma bulguları kriz ortamında hızlı karar verme kadar planlama ve koordinasyon sürecinin de önemine dikkat çekmiş ve eğitim yöneticilerinin yaşadıkları sorunları ortaya koymuştur. Alanyazında araştırma bulgularını destekleyen çalışmalar bulunmaktadır. Turan (2020), okul müdürlerinin altyapı sorunlarından, ailelerin teknolojiye olan uzaklığından ve eğitime erişimde araç gereç eksikliğinden olumsuz etkilendiklerini belirtmiştir. Çakın ve Külekçi Akyavuz (2020) tarafından gerçekleştirilen çalışmada da benzer iletişim problemlerine dikkat çekilirken, Dilekçi ve Limon (2020) pandemi sürecinde artan iletişim yüküne ve sorunlarına vurgu yapmıştır.

Okul yöneticilerinin artan görev ve sorumluluklarına, iş yüklerine ilişkin bulguları destekleyen arařtırmalar da bulunmaktadır (Harris & Jones, 2020; Kavrayıcı & Kesim, 2021; Kırmızıgöl, 2020).

Pandemi süreciyle birlikte hızlı bir dijitalleşme süreci başlamıştır, bu bağlamda tüm eğitim paydaşlarının dijital yeterliklerinin artırılması ihtiyacı ortaya çıkmıştır. Eğitim yöneticilerinin birer teknoloji lideri gibi hareket edecek donanıma sahip olması çağın gereği haline gelmiştir. Eğitim yöneticilerinin süreci daha etkin yönetebilmeleri açısından öğrencilerin, öğretmenlerin ve ailelerin de yeterliklerini geliřtirmeleri önemlidir. Kriz zamanlarında ortaya çıkabilecek belirsizlik durumunun yaratabileceği kaos ortamında okulların gelişen yeni durumlara uyum sağlayabilme reflekslerinin geliştirilebilmesi ve güçlendirilmesi gerekliliği ortaya konmuştur. Bu nedenle yönetim süreçlerinin her birinin sağlıklı bir şekilde yürütülmesi gerekmektedir. Eğitim hizmetlerinin aksamaması ve etkin bir şekilde sağlanması için stratejilerin belirlenmesi ve eğitim yöneticilerinin etkili kriz yönetimi noktasında bilgilendirilmesi gerekmektedir. Bu sayede hem merkezi yönetimde hem de taşrada krize hızlıca cevap verecek ve sürecin oluşturduğu sancuları azaltacak bir yaklaşım sağlanabilir.