



| Research Article / Araştırma Makalesi |

What Happened at Home During the Emergency Remote Teaching? A Phenomenological Study on Experiences of Turkish Parents

Acil Uzaktan Eğitim Sırasında Evde Neler Oldu? Türk Ebeveynlerin Deneyimleri Üzerine Fenomenolojik Bir Çalışma

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Abstract

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were forced to suspend all face-to-face classes around the world and education occurred at home. Millions of students and their parents had to adapt to 'emergency remote teaching' (ERT) without any prior knowledge or preparation. This study, using a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach, was designed to understand parents of primary school students' experiences during the ERT during the COVID-19. The data were collected through 15 semi-structured interviews with parents in Turkey. After content analysis, four major themes emerged: (a) parent experiences, (b) problems, (c) support, and (d) family relations. The results indicated that parents experienced various changes in their routines at home, roles and responsibilities related to their children's education, and family relations.

Öz

COVID-19 salgını nedeniyle, okullar tüm dünyada yüz yüze eğitime ara vermek zorunda kalmış ve eğitim evde devam etmiştir. Bunun sonucunda da, milyonlarca öğrenci ve ebeveynleri, herhangi bir ön bilgi veya hazırlık olmaksızın acil uzaktan eğitime uyum sağlamak zorunda kalmıştır. Bu çalışma, ilkökul öğrencilerinin ebeveynlerinin COVID-19 dönemindeki deneyimlerini anlamak üzere nitel bir çalışma olarak tasarlanmıştır. Veriler, Türkiye'deki ebeveynlerle yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme yoluyla toplanmıştır. İçerik analizi sonucunda dört ana tema ortaya çıkmıştır; (a) ebeveynlerin deneyimleri, (b) sorunlar, (c) destek ve (d) aile ilişkileri. Sonuçlar, ebeveynlerin evdeki rutinlerinde, çocuklarının eğitimiyle ilgili rol ve sorumluluklarında ve aile ile ilişkilerinde çeşitli değişiklikler yaşadıklarını göstermektedir.

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INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused a global crisis and forced approximately 1.5 billion students to change their formal education (UNESCO, 2020). According to Williamson et al. (2020), this pandemic has caused a serious transformation process in social, cultural, economic, and other societal areas, in addition to being a serious health crisis. Global education systems have also had to transform, and schools have been among the institutions most affected by this process. These unanticipated school closures affected all stakeholders in teaching and learning, including students and their parents. Because of the pandemic, schools in Turkey were also forced to suspend all face-to-face classes and transition to distance learning to continue teaching and learning.

Aydin (2011) defines distance learning as a learning process in which learners are separated from one another but continue to interact and learn through information and communication technologies. According to Bozkurt and Sharma, distance learning gives students autonomy, responsibility, flexibility, and choice. What is being done during the pandemic is restricted to delivering content to remote learners. Therefore, distance learning and the educational practices during the pandemic should be separated from each other. Educational practice during the pandemic is referred to as emergency remote teaching and it is defined as a method of instructional delivery by educational institutions (Hodges et al., 2020). As a result, it should be regarded as a temporary solution to the pandemic, as opposed to distance learning. The transition to emergency remote teaching has introduced new challenges at a social and technological level, influencing both children's and parents' physical and mental health (Misirli & Ergulec, 2021).

Parents' Experiences during the Emergency Remote Teaching

When parents accompany their children, they become one of the most important stakeholders of teaching and learning during emergency remote teaching (Misirli & Ergulec, 2021). Parents became teachers and schools expanded into homes. According to Dong et al. (2020), during the emergency remote teaching, parents' beliefs and attitudes toward distance learning were found to be controversial. On the one hand, parents have begun recognizing the value of digital devices and have become more comfortable with their children's use at home, as well as supporting the appropriate use of digital devices for learning. Parents, on the other hand, were concerned about the dangers of unrestricted digital use, as well as the impact of digital use on children's social and physiological development (Plowman et al., 2012). According to Dong et al. (2020), parents with young children in China had fewer positive beliefs about the value of distance learning. Only a small proportion of participants believed that distance learning has better learning content (18.4 %), better learning outcomes (11.0 %), and is more efficient (12.6 %) than traditional methods. Furthermore, the parents believed that traditional methods were superior to distance learning in terms of creating a learning atmosphere that resulted in better learning outcomes. Weaver and Swank (2021) stated that parents believed that some students struggled with distance learning. Also, some parents expressed their concerns that teachers assigned "busy work" in distance learning, which, according to studies, can be damaging to students' academic performance (Snelling & Fingal, 2020).

Additionally, a reason why the parents have unfavorable beliefs toward distance learning is their changing routines. Emergency remote teaching also changed parents' daily routine, which is important to establish a sense of normalcy and foster a positive learning environment (Weaver & Swank, 2021). Nearly 90% of parents reported that their lives had changed since the COVID-19 pandemic, with 44% reporting a significant change (Pew Research Center, 2020). When parents are forced to fill their children's time at home, without contact with peers or teachers, it creates a slew of surprises, tensions, and conflicts, necessitating a different organization of daily activities and frequently making everyday life difficult (Parczewska, 2020). During the pandemic, children were required to study at home in a new routine, and parents spent more time with their children. Sometimes, parents become teachers. According to Trzcinska-Krol (2020), most parents exert control over their children's work by monitoring their children's learning, homework, and test taking. When the children's performance fell short of their parents' expectations, it led to disagreements and a negative impact on the parents' attitudes toward distance learning (Wu et al., 2020).

Last but not least, during the pandemic, parents experienced increased levels of mental distress, according to Patrick et al. (2020). Since March 2020, 27% of parents have reported worsening mental health and 14% have reported worsening behavioral health in their children. Depression, anxiety, and stress were significantly higher in parents (Wu et al., 2020). Because of these problems, during the emergency remote teaching, many countries have increased support to parents, including the establishment of a dedicated educational TV channel for parents on how to be teachers at home, particularly for early childhood education (UNESCO, 2020).

To summarize, it can be concluded from the literature that students and their parents may not have enough time to prepare or receive adequate support for emergency remote teaching. Despite the fact that there is parental support available, we know little about the transition process of parents to emergency remote teaching, what issues they faced, how they were supported, and how they overcame the problems they faced. As a result, this study investigates ERT experiences from the perspective of parents in Turkey during the COVID-19.

Context of the Study

Turkey, as many other countries, followed strict protocols and shut down schools. There were approximately 18 million students and 1 million teachers in compulsory education levels in Turkey. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) of Turkey also decided to transition to emergency remote teaching in March 2020. Services for elementary,

secondary, high school, and special education students were offered through the Education Information Network (EBA), which is a distance learning platform that can be accessed through the internet, as part of the MoNE's measures. Furthermore, the MoNE developed a free television channel called EBA TV to provide lessons within the framework of the daily curriculum to elementary, secondary, and high school students (Mengi & Alpdogan, 2020).

Turkey is regarded as a developing nation. According to Gürmen and Kılıç (2022), women's employment in Turkey was 25.3% in 2002 while was 28.2% in 2021. In 2016, 70.7% of women stated that being preoccupied with housework was a reason for not working. However, the family structure in Turkey today is changing as women gain economic independence and move away from the traditional caregiver role.

Although all students needed support during the transition, specifically elementary school students and their parents in Turkey may need extra help due to children's developmental stage and lack of school experiences. As a result, we saw the need to investigate ERT through the experiences of families with primary school-aged children throughout the pandemic and to explain the importance of emergency remote teaching during COVID-19. Knowing about the experiences of parents who have had ERT can be beneficial for future pandemic-like events in terms of family relations and educational effectiveness, and it can supplement the limited literature.

METHOD

This study describes the essence of ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic by exploring ERT from the lived experiences of parents who have children at elementary school in Turkey during the 2020–2021 school year. For this purpose, answers to the following research questions were sought:

1. What were the experiences of parents during ERT?
2. How did parents deal with the issues they experienced during the ERT?
3. How was the family relation affected by the emergency remote teaching?

To answer these questions, this study is designed as a phenomenology, which is one of the qualitative methods in education. Phenomenology is an interpretive methodology that focuses on accessing participants lived experiences by using semi-structured interviews (Patton; 2015; Van der Mescht, 2004). In other words, phenomenology is a qualitative method of investigation in which researchers attempt to discover the meaning of human beings' lived experiences as they exist in the world (Chamberlain, 2009).

The study of consciousness and the content of conscious experience, such as judgements, perceptions, and emotions, is known as phenomenology (Balls, 2009). Researchers conducting phenomenology want to know what it was like to live the experience, not just how the person reacted to it (Moustakas, 1994; Munhall, 2007). Therefore, this is the strengthening of phenomenology, and it is a good fit for this study, as this study describes the essence of ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic by exploring ERT from the lived experiences of parents who have children at elementary school in Turkey.

Participants and Data Collection

In phenomenology, participants are purposely selected based on the basis of experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Van der Mescht, 2004). Participants of this study were parents with children in the elementary school and experienced emergency remote teaching at least one semester. When recruiting participants for the research, the purpose was to choose parents with at least one kid at the elementary school and participate in emergency remote teaching at home. We interviewed 15 parents whose children were in elementary school during the 2020–2021 school year. Participants are between the ages of 35–43, middle-income group, and college graduates. We only included elementary school students' parents in the study because elementary education plays a critical role in people's lives as one learns reading, writing, and arithmetic, and enhances social emotional development at this level. Therefore, parents' experiences and views on ERT became significant during the pandemic.

Before the study, an application for research permission was submitted to and approved by the institutional review board. Following that, an invitation link was created through Google forms, including the purpose of the study, and the link was distributed in various social media platforms. Parents who were interested in participating in this study filled out the form by indicating their interview preference and availability. Based on their preference and availability, the data were collected with semi-structured interviews via video or phone calls. We did not receive a large number of responses, and some of them later changed their minds and did not participate in the study. As a result, we contacted the majority of the parents who responded.

Interview protocol was developed prior to the interviews and was used during the interviews. According to the protocol, interviews began with the main research questions and continued with related questions based on participant responses. Both researchers joined the interviews. Before the interview, participants' consent was obtained, and the purpose of the study was explained. It was also highlighted that participation was entirely voluntary and that they could prefer out of the study at any time. They took about 20 minutes on average.

Reliability of the Study

Both the researchers took part in conducting interviews, transcription, and coding processes. The data were analyzed via content analysis. The validity and reliability of qualitative research can be ensured using a variety of approaches (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Golafshani, 2003), and researcher triangulation is one method (Denzin, 2017), which refers to the use of multiple researchers from different backgrounds. To accomplish this, one researcher with a background in online education and the other in counseling categorized the interview transcripts and created themes on their own. Finally, they collaborated to develop shared themes.

FINDINGS

The current study sought to investigate parents' experiences with emergency remote teaching (ERT) during the COVID-19 pandemic. After the analysis, the following four major final themes emerged: (a) parent experience, (b) problems, (c) support, and (d) family relations. Figure 1 depicts the sub-categories for each main theme. The findings on these themes are given below with verbatim quotes of the participants.

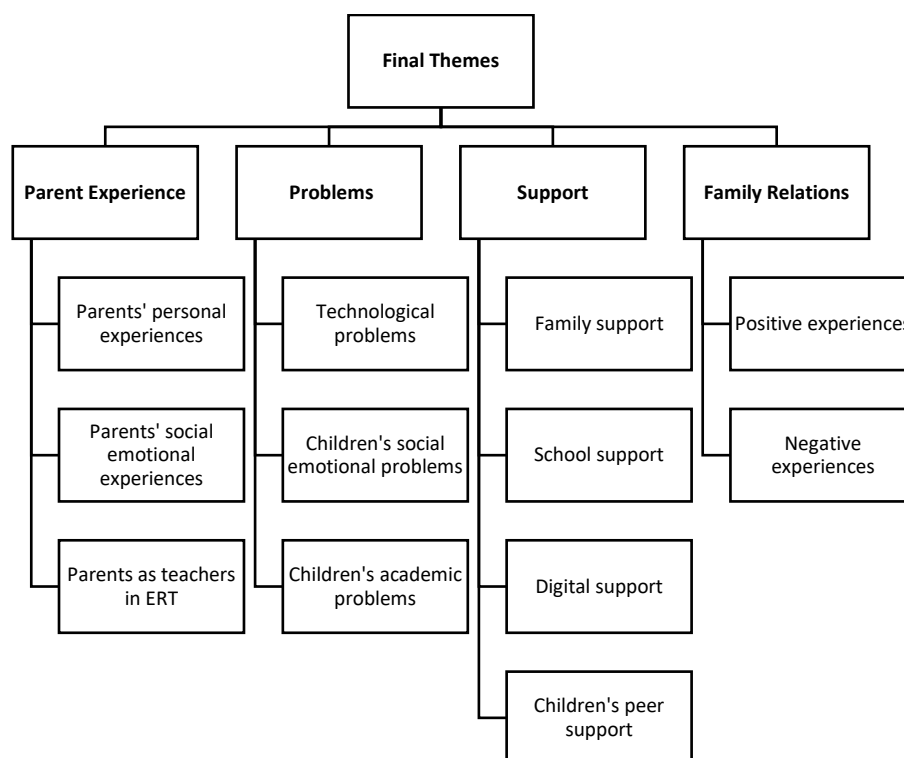


Figure 1: Themes

Parent Experiences

COVID-19 pandemic and ERT led to radical changes in parents' lives, and many parents and children experienced unique challenges with drastic changes. Our participants shared their experiences of how ERT impacted their own lives as well as their children's lives at home. The first theme, parent experience, had three categories: parents' personal experiences, social emotional experiences, and parents as teachers in ERT.

In terms of parents' personal experiences, all participants shared that their personal lives transformed in one way or another. Due to ERT, participants reported having a busy schedule with their children and needed to develop a new routine at home. For instance, P14 stated that "We tried to be careful about carrying our routine at home including getting up early in the morning, having our breakfast, and then going in front of the screen for classes." All participants except P3 shared that their work situation impacted how they reorganized their new routine. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a radical change occurred in how much people work from home. P9 described that their routine included a balance between ERT and work requirements, and stated "We wake up at the same time in the morning and after we have our breakfast, the day starts. My daughter's online lesson starts. I mean, her class starts at 9:00 am. After that, the classes continue until 11:30. We are working on the same desk. While my daughter attends [her] classes, I work on my job with her. Then, we have lunch and later we have dinner...This is almost a routine for us"

Participants also expressed their emotions and how tiring this period was. Ten participants (P1, P2 P3, P6, P8, P10, P11, P12, P13, and P14) shared their conflicted feelings about being extra busy and feeling safe for their family. For instance, P13 stated that "So, it was more tiring for us. You go home; you must work at home... We prioritize our children, so that their homework needs to be finished first, and then we must run errands." P6 also mentioned that "...Even when I was at work, I was constantly checking the time and my children's class schedules. I was worried that they would miss their online classes." Additionally, P12 reported

having mental health problems and stated that “I work in a high school and teach classes for 26 hours a week. As a result of teaching my own classes and keeping track of my children’s classes, my mental health began to deteriorate.” However, P13 shared positive emotions about the change as their children were at home due to ERT and not facing the risk of having COVID-19 by stating “Since our children did not go to school during the pandemic, we felt better, frankly, there was no fear of meeting a sick child or a teacher.”

Nine participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P8, P10, P11, P14, and P15) shared that due to the ERT, parents owned new responsibilities such as being a teacher at home; because they feel responsible for how much their children learned. P3 shared that “Some of our roles have changed. The parents became teachers” P2 supported this notion and shared that “Sometimes he gets distracted and misses what the teacher is saying, then he does not understand the subject. ... When he does not understand, the burden is on us. We are trying to explain.” Parents also felt responsible for helping children with attending classes and completing homework on time. P10 reported that “I feel like it’s up to me to teach. I need to understand the homework, check the homework, and help with the parts that my child did not understand. These are all on me because of remote learning.”

Problems

Transition to mandatory ERT may be uneasy for many individuals. Considering the pandemic - related problems such as lockdowns and social isolation, the transition became more problematic for many families. In our study, participants reported their ERT - related problems under three categories: technological problems, children’s social emotional problems, and children’s academic problems.

Twelve participants (except P1, P5 and P12) reported experiencing technological problems during the transition to ERT. Participants reported using mobile data to connect to the Internet at home before ERT; however, their mobile data was not enough for their children and Wi-Fi connection became a necessity. P8 reported that “At first, she was attending live classes one day a week. At that time, we were using mobile internet data, which was enough. But then, we had to purchase Wi-Fi at home and a new tablet.” In addition to internet expenses, some participants had to purchase a new tablet or laptop for their children. For instance, P2 shared that “When the ERT first started during [my child’s] first grade, we did not have technological equipment at home. She did not have a tablet, nor did we have the Internet [WIFI] at home. Then, we bought a tablet, and then got the Internet.” After purchasing Wi-Fi and tablets, a few parents still experienced internet connection problems. P14 shared their internet -related problems and stated that “The most challenging part was for me to keep track of her class schedule and control whether she attended or left the class on time without having any problems. I constantly worry about her losing the internet connection and not being able to connect back.” P7 also agreed and shared that “First, we had an internet connection problem. After overcoming the connection problem, we needed to learn the interface of the program [for ERT].” P7, P15 also experienced problems related to online participation in the classes and mentioned “Our major problem was entering the password. The system was asking for a password to connect Zoom, and of course, our child could not enter it.... I had to go back and forth to enter the password for her.”

Almost all participants (except P2, P7, and P15) shared their observations about their children’s social emotional problems during ERT. During the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals are likely to worry about the risk of contracting COVID-19; therefore, they may not allow their children to go out, even if their children need to be active developmentally. For example, P11 mentioned that “Our children were stuck at home during this period...Their desire to play with their friends was being precluded and they were angry...This was a very problematic time in terms of socialization.” Similar to P11, P6 also shared that “Children are already bored because they stayed at home all the time. If the schools were open, they would go out and see their friends. So, it has been pretty tough right now.” Additionally, due to limited socialization, the time that parents monitored their child’s use of digital media was increased. P8 stated that “I should say that [my kid’s] screen time [usage] is increasing in the first place. I am not sure how the increased screen time will affect our child in the future.” P3 also mentioned increased screen time and socialization problems, stating “My child missed his friends so much. He had to spend a lot of time inside the house. Also, it is getting harder and harder to get the phone away from my son.”

Thirteen participants (except P3 and P11) shared their children’s academic problems during ERT. Parents of first-grade students experienced extra difficulty during the adaptation to ERT. P1 shared that “We had a hard time at first, and frankly, she had a hard time adapting to ERT because she is too young. She had difficulty communicating with the teacher through a computer or phone. She also had difficulty doing what he [teacher] said and following the instructions given.” Some other academic problems appeared as a lack of motivation, lack of focus, and learning loss. P8 described the problem as “The problem is the lack of motivation. They [his children] also had trouble staying motivated during online classes.” P6 also reported and shared that “It is very difficult for children to sit in front of the computer or the phone all the time.” When children did not understand the topic, parents looked for ways to help their children academically. P10 shared that “I could not support my child as I wish to and I felt inadequate. Since I felt tired, we arranged private teaching lessons [for our child].”

Supports

Although parents encountered numerous problems during the ERT, our participants reported that the support they received from various sources made the process easier. In this study, participants reported four main sources of support that are family support, school support, digital support, and children’s peer support.

In terms of family support, twelve participants (except P8, P10 and P11) reported receiving support from both their immediate and extended family. P3 highlighted the support she received from her husband and older daughter, stating "Of course, I received some help from my husband.... Also, my daughter helps me when I run out of patience. In that case, she immediately steps in and takes it over. ... My husband may say, let me take it over or I may say that to him." P6 also received help from her older child and stated that "My eldest son helped me a lot in this process. He has been a great help in keeping track of both his own classes and his brother's classes. We were also in constant dialog with the teachers." P1, P2, and P7 stated the significant support they received from their extended family during ERT. For instance, P2, who is a single mother living with her parents shared that "Everyone helps my daughter in our household. Let's say she has a class and we need to go somewhere. We make plans based on my daughter's class schedule."

Several participants have highlighted the importance of school support. Eight participants (P2, P6, P8, P9, P10, P12, P14 and P15) reported needing support from teachers and school counselors with online classes, assignments and general problems related to ERT. For instance, P8 shared that "We asked the teacher what we can and cannot do about our problems. Then, we tried to get help from the school counselor. We asked the counselor what we can do to make our situation better." P9 also shared receiving help both from the teacher and school counselor by stating "We sometimes had problems with homework and asked for help from our teacher. ...Also, the school counseling center provided support and the school counselor listened to our child's problems."

P7, P8, and P12 emphasized the importance of digital support during ERT. Both schools and parents had to provide technology-related support for children. For instance, P7 mentioned that "Currently, I can only provide technical support due to my location. I'm away from home but provide technical support... For example, sometimes there is a problem with the computer or the internet. I can reach her computer online and fix the problem."

In terms of parents' understanding of their children's peer support, P7, P9, and P15 shared that they assisted their children to find a way to keep them interacting with their peers. For instance, P7 arranged online meetings for their child and friends. Additionally, P9 communicated with other parents to arrange regular park gatherings for their children; "To cope with difficulties, we have tried several things. For instance, we talked to a few parents of our daughter's close friends and decided to get them together once a week in a park. So, they could socialize a little bit, but after the curfews, we did not continue."

Family Relations

Emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted various areas, including family relations. Almost all of our participants stated that their family relations were impacted both positively and negatively during this time. In terms of positive experiences, ten participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P10, P11 and P14) shared that their family relations strengthened in this process because of spending more time together. P11 reported that "We were delighted because we started to spend more time together as a family at home. So, we liked it. Her father was also at home. We noticed that we miss each other and fulfilled our longing." P1, a teacher, also reported that "Since we are always at home, we are in constant communication with each other. Previously, when we went to school, we were disconnected at home as we were both tired after school." Additionally, P5 shared that she fulfilled her longing toward her children during this time as she had to go back to work right after her maternity leave by stating "I have worked for the government for 25 years. I have not been did to spend much quality time with my children after my maternity leave. So, I'm happy with being at home with my family."

In terms of negative experiences, ten participants (P2, P3, P4, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13 and P14) reported that they argued with their kids and tension raised from time to time. P9 shared an example and stated that "Problems arose sometimes and there were points where the limits of my tolerance were pushed." Additionally, P10 shared that "My relationship with my child has deteriorated...Of course, there is no problem in our bond of love, maybe we are even more connected, but I think we are worn out at certain points."

DISCUSSION

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, governments took precaution of closing schools in many countries. In Turkey, education in primary, secondary, and high schools were all suspended in March 2020 (UNESCO, 2022), and ERT had started without meticulous preparation for over 5 million primary school students (MoNE, 2021). This study focused on parents' experiences during ERT in Turkey, because primary education is significant for children, as they learn reading, writing, and arithmetic as well as enhance their social emotional skills in those years. Therefore, we designed a study to explore ERT from the perspectives of parents who have children at the primary school level in Turkey during 2020–2021 academic year. After analysis, four main themes emerged (a) parent experience, (b) problems, (c) support, and (d) family relations to answer three main research questions.

With the first research question, we aimed to explore participants' personal experiences during ERT and study participants shared how their personal and emotional experiences were transformed. Due to nationwide lockdown, working from home, and ERT, parents' responsibilities were drastically increased. During the pandemic, children had to stay home and participate in ERT to learn and enhance their skills under their parents' supervision. In this period, participants of this study reported that, as primary caregivers, they felt responsible for their children's academic, social, and emotional developments while keeping their work-related responsibilities. In other words, participants reported that they owned a teacher role to support their children to participate in live/online class sessions and to complete their homework. Misirli and Ergulec (2021) reported that approximately

half of the parents assisted their children with technology and then left them alone during the live class sessions. During the live sessions, 34% of the parents either stood by their children or actively participated in the remote teaching. Our analysis of the interviews contributes to these findings in a way that parents responsibilities were increased. Under such circumstances, parents may need to be prepared for extra obligations, and as a result as Patrick et al. (2020) suggested parents may experience increased levels of mental distress.

We also aimed to explore what kind of problems participants encountered and how they dealt with such issues during the ERT. With the analysis of the interviews, we found that participants experienced technological problems and had to purchase WIFI, tablet or laptop. This might cause financial problems for some families. Additionally, individuals who have limited knowledge on use of tools such as basic programs and internet use could also create issues. Therefore, it is important to consider socioeconomic factors and technological needs of participants in future ERT related studies. Study participants also stated problems related their children's social, emotional, and academic problems. As their children stayed at home and participated class sessions online, parents were able to closely monitor their children's needs in various areas. Similarly, researchers found that parents sharing their children's social needs were somewhat addressed during the COVID-19 pandemic (Misirli & Ergulec, 2021). Furthermore, due to limited socialization, several parents reported that screen time usage of their children increased exceedingly. Likewise, Plowman and colleagues (2012) also stated that parents concerned about the dangers of unrestricted digital use. Participants additionally reported that their children experienced academic problems including attention and focus problems. According to study participants, some children had difficulty staying in front of a screen during classes, and others had difficulty understanding the subject and homework. Although with ERT, children could continue their education during the pandemic, based on our interviews' findings, primary school students were too young to self-regulate. Therefore, parents might need some extra guidance in terms of how to regulate some of the expected problems when they arise. School counselors and educators may address some of these needs arranging online meetings with parents, and creating informative digital materials to distribute. Also, educating parents about how to balance children's screen time and outdoor time by providing practical solutions can be helpful.

In the second research question, we also asked study participants about how they dealt with problems during ERT and our analysis results of the interviews suggested that receiving and providing support was essential ways to overcome problems. Participants shared that most of them received support from their immediate and extended families. Considering individuals live in a collectivist culture in Turkey, family relations may have a protective role. Their partners, older children, and parents provided help to ease challenges. Teachers and school counselors were also reported as main sources of support, which was different to other studies conducted during the pandemic (Dong et al., 2020; Garbe et al., 2020). It might be interesting to sought answer to the same research question in an individualistic culture to better understand the importance of family and school support in different cultures. Additionally, according to the present study findings, parents sought creative ways to support their children. For instance, some participants reported contacting with other families to arrange regular outdoor meetings in playgrounds for children peer support. Thus, one can conclude that during ERT, parents worked extra hard to find ways to support their children as best as they can.

In the third and last research question, we tried to understand the changes in family relations during the ERT. All participants stated that their family relations were affected in both positive and negative ways. On one hand, participants reported feeling happy and grateful to be with their family members in a difficult time such as the pandemic. On the other hand, participants also reported difficulties such as running out of patience from time to time. Difficult times may bring difficult emotions and restrict coping mechanisms. However parents patience might reach their limits and they may need extra support in such circumstances. We did not ask our participants if they receive psychological support to keep the balance in their life and relationships. In future studies, this might be a further concept to investigate.

This study is not without limitation. First, recruiting participants from social media created a sampling bias that parents who did participate were probably much more technology-literate and technology-resourced than parents who were not on social media. Therefore, the findings should be considered with this limitation in mind. Additionally, we included parents with children at primary school level (1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th graders). However, first graders may experience unique challenges as they learn how to read and write during ERT without any prior school experience. Future researchers may design an in-depth qualitative study with only first graders' parents to gain a greater understanding about their unique experiences.

The world is changing and technology is evolving consistently. We may not know when the next pandemic will occur, but we believe that taking advantage of remote teaching and distance education, when necessary, will be considered as an option. Therefore, parents need to be prepared for constant changes in life, and teachers and school counselors should consider what kind of support (digital, face to face, etc.) should be provided to parents in difficult times. We learned that parents may take new roles in a crisis, so schools should be aware of such tendency to ease this transition for parents. With this study, we hoped to provide a snapshot of Turkish parents personal experiences, problems, supports and family relations during the ERT in COVID-19. We also hope that being aware of potential problems, changes in family relations and support mechanisms may provide insights for other parents living in different countries, individuals who work with parents, and future researchers.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Here are some implications for counselors and psychologist in the schools;

Parents developed a new routine to balance work and childcare, so they had to find their way in this difficult time and support their children as best as they could. So, it seems that there is a new gap for psychologists and counsellors in schools to provide guidance and assistance for parents on that new routine and ways to take care of their own wellbeing.

Children's limited socialization became a major problem, as socialization is vital for primary school children. As a consequence of limited socialization, screen time usage of children increased exceedingly. Therefore, psychologists and counsellors in schools should work with students and their parents to teach health ways to utilize technology. For instance, the Digital Citizenship Curriculum (<https://www.common sense.org/education/digital-citizenship>) which is a research based online curriculum can be introduced to families.

Despite the fact that it is insufficient, school counsellors and psychologists were the primary sources of mental health support for parents and children. So, they should enhance their ability to provide digital support by increasing their knowledge about digital mental health services.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Statements of publication ethics

We hereby declare that the study has not unethical issues and that research and publication ethics have been observed carefully.

Researchers' contribution rate

The study was conducted and reported with equal collaboration of the researchers.

Ethics Committee Approval Information

Ethical approval was obtained from Uşak University Social and Humanities Ethical Board on 12/02/2021.

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