

## **A qualitative study of home learning during the Covid-19 pandemic in Turkey: A focus on home environments**

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This phenomenological study aimed at exploring home learning experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic by focusing on the home learning environment after school closures during the early days of the pandemic in Turkey. The purposively selected sample included parents (n=16) of 6-13 years old primary and elementary school students and classroom teachers (n=18). The findings revealed that educational inequalities and family socioeconomic characteristics, support, and interest affected home learning experiences and the transformation of homes into learning environments. System-level constraints decreased the contributions of remote learning.

### **Introduction**

As an unprecedented global crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused profound, somehow irreversible, effects on all aspects of life. It has broken new ground for a novel phenomenon called *new normal* as part of the discourse of the pandemic, signalling striking transformations. The pandemic has hit all countries worldwide, and as a striking change that occurred due to the crisis, most schools were closed to contain the spread of the coronavirus. Educational disruption affected about 1.6 billion students around the world (Miks & McIlwaine, 2020) and 25 million students in Turkey (Bozkurt, 2020). Enacting a similar policy, governments decided to switch to remote learning to ensure the continuation of education based on the capacities of educational systems (Can, 2020; Telli-Yamamoto & Altun, 2020), and Turkey was not an exception.

The pandemic has required educational actors to reconsider, re-plan, and renovate their practices. School shutdowns have caused challenges, uncertainties, and inequalities because schools are expected to serve as an equaliser that mediates the differences in family backgrounds, and online education cannot replace the functions schools play in society (Zhao, 2020a). Education is significant for human relationships and interaction which cannot entirely be accomplished in isolation or with social distancing (Nóvoa & Alvim, 2020).

The challenges of attending online learning during the pandemic have made educational inequalities more apparent (Can, 2020; D'Orville, 2020; Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020). Meade (2020, p. 1) pointed to a complex and troubling reality faced during the global crisis: "local encounters with this crisis, as with so many others, are being mediated by profound inequalities in power, resources, and visibility". Most emergency remote teaching activities were carried out through the Internet and computers, which has made the existing digital divide more explicit and widened the gap between those who own them and who do not (Bozkurt, 2020). The pandemic has made the existing inequalities more recognisable rather than generating new ones and demonstrated how educational inequalities can adversely affect the quality of education (Sahlberg, 2020).

## **Education during the Covid-19 pandemic in Turkey**

The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) decided to close schools to cushion the effects and spread of the coronavirus on 16 March 2020 and continue education in a remote mode. The MoNE made an agreement with the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) to continue education nationwide (Özer, 2020). Through this agreement, three TV channels of TRT started to provide education for primary, middle, and secondary education levels (Can, 2020) on 23 March 2020. TRT provided an alternative platform for remote teaching which was used by students who did not own smartphones and an Internet connection (Mısırlı & Ergüleç, 2021). Basic courses, as well as sports activities, storytelling, and design activities, were offered via these TV channels throughout the day and repeated twice for students who might have missed the courses (EBA, 2021). Students were provided with 8 GB of Internet data to attend the live courses on the portal (Özer, 2020). The live courses that started on 13 April 2020 facilitated the synchronous interaction of teachers and students and were initially provided for 8th and 12th graders, as they required preparation for national high-stakes exams. Courses were offered to all K-12 students during the 2020-2021 academic year (Durmuş & Eryılmaz Toksoy, 2022). Despite these measures and actions, there were some inadequacies during the process. Education offered via EBA and TV was one-way and massive, which hindered the establishment of student-centred learning environments and the provision of practice-based courses (Can, 2020).

### **The problem statement**

The transition to online learning became thorny for developing countries with inadequate educational facilities and systems (Sanhadi Rahayu & Asanti, 2021). Despite a burgeoning body of research on education during the pandemic, Bozkurt et al. (2022) called for more research on the impacts of the pandemic in the field of education, because teaching and learning had been profoundly affected by the pandemic. This study, therefore, may contribute to the growing body of international research on the effects of the coronavirus on education. By providing findings from a Turkish context, the study may help gain nuanced insights into national and local encounters with the crisis and how parents and teachers experienced home learning during the lockdown. This is important because, as Bubb and Jones (2020) propose, countries should learn from each other by sharing their experiences of remote schooling and take the stock to improve schools. Our research, therefore, aimed at depicting the perspectives and experiences of primary school teachers and parents on home learning with a focus on the home learning environment during the pandemic in Turkey. The following research questions guided this study.

1. How do parents and teachers evaluate the remote learning process and practices during the pandemic?
2. What are parents' and teachers' perceptions and experiences of home learning and home learning environment during the pandemic?
3. What factors affect the home learning environment during the pandemic?
4. What may the experiences during the pandemic imply for the post-Covid era?

## Methodology

We opted for a qualitative phenomenological approach as it allows ‘acquiring accurate knowledge about experiences’ (Giorgi, 2005, p. 82), understanding and describing by accessing the inner world of these experiences (Christensen et al., 2014). The phenomenological approach adopted in this study enabled our examining of home learning experiences and learning environment under the conditions of the pandemic.

### Participants and recruitment

A total of 16 parents (female=12, male=4) and 18 teachers (female=14, male=4) were recruited through convenience sampling to participate in the study (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic features of participants

Teacher pseudonym	Age	Gender	Seniority	Grade taught	SES
Meral	28	Female	5	1st grade	Low
Ali	27	Male	4	4th grade	Low
Hale	27	Female	1	2nd grade	Medium
Nilhan	27	Female	1	4th grade	High
Cemile	27	Female	2	Multigrade	Medium
Nida	26	Female	4	Multigrade	High
Hasan	55	Male	34	3rd grade	Medium
Onur	27	Male	3	1st grade	Medium
Fadile	33	Female	5	2nd grade	Low
Ahmet	26	Male	2	Multigrade	Low
Cansu	27	Female	5	2nd grade	Low
Kamile	43	Female	19	2nd grade	Low
Eda	38	Female	15	2nd grade	High
Ecrin	43	Female	21	3rd grade	Low
Sevgi	25	Female	1	3rd grade	Low
Gizem	38	Female	15	4th grade	Low
Raziye	33	Female	13	2nd grade	Medium
Hatun	27	Female	4	4th grade	Low
Parent pseudonym	Age	Gender	Educ. level	No. children	SES
Sedat	48	Male	Undergrad	3	Medium
Aslı	32	Female	Undergrad	1	Medium
Filiz	40	Female	Undergrad	3	Medium
Rana	41	Female	High school	2	Medium
Ayşe	30	Female	High school	2	Medium
Bilge	38	Female	Undergrad	2	Medium
Zeynep	40	Female	High school	4	Medium
Yavuz	37	Male	Undergrad	3	Medium
Nazan	41	Female	High school	2	Medium
Nil	34	Female	Associate	3	Medium
Burak	39	Male	Undergrad	3	Medium
Bade	39	Female	Undergrad	2	Medium
Berra	27	Female	Middle school	2	Medium
Erva	30	Female	Primary school	2	Medium

Eymen	40	Male	Graduate	2	Medium
Şeyma	39	Female	Undergrad	2	Medium

As demonstrated in Table 1, eight parents (50%) held an undergraduate degree; one held a masters degree and one held a two-year college degree. Of the rest, four (25%) were high school graduates, one primary school graduate, and one middle school graduate. They all had children (from 1 to 4) and specified their socioeconomic status (SES) to be medium, with ages from 27 to 48 years. Four parents were living in rural areas, the rest were living in urban settings. Teachers' seniority ranged from 1 to 34 years, with ages from 25 to 55 years. The SES of the school environment was noted to be low (n=10; 55.6%), medium (n=5; 27.8%), and high (n=3; 16.7%). Teachers taught different grades.

### Data collection tools and procedures

The semi-structured interview protocols used to gather the data from teachers and parents are given in Appendix A. We used individual telephone interviews and benefitted from the guidelines used in the Glogowska et al. (2011) study to reduce participant uncertainty: Interviews were conducted at appropriate times during 20 April to 5 May 2020. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary and confidential conditions, the questions to be asked, data analysis and use, ethical issues considered in detail, and their consent was obtained for participation in the research and for audio-recording.

### Data analysis

Each interview was transcribed verbatim and thematic analysis was applied. Lochmiller (2021, p. 2030) explained the aim of thematic analysis as "to consider how the reported information addresses a specific research question or invites a new conceptual or theoretical understanding". In thematic analysis, the researchers develop codes and salient themes through a close examination of the recorded research data inductively (Neuendorf, 2018). The raw data were read carefully and coded to construct meaningful units. The initial coding cycle revealed many codes, and we formed themes and subthemes by considering similarities and differences between the participants' perspectives and experiences. Illustrative quotations were translated into English by the researchers as the research was conducted in Turkish.

## Findings

### Remote learning process and practices

Teachers' and parents' perceptions and experiences yielded a comprehensive evaluation of the remote learning process and practices that were categorised as *general evaluations, monitoring the process, management of the process, the problems faced, the contributions of remote learning, and things to do for effectiveness*.

*General evaluations*

Both teachers and parents considered the remote learning process to be professional, effective, and useful. As there was an emergency need for developing a way to continue education after school closures, the participants perceived it to be a well-considered solution to provide education through TV broadcasting across Turkey. A teacher, Nilhan, commented:

Remote education is a great chance for primary school students. I think students do not stay away from their lessons; they can watch the lessons on TV or on computers. I consider it an advantage; students can track their courses from their homes.

That said, however, there were some concerns about all students' access to education on TV. This concern was stressed mostly by teachers as they believed that all students could not have a TV in their homes. Some parents, on the other hand, criticised the courses provided on TV as they found them ineffective in terms of the duration and reinforcement of what is taught. A mother, Rana, argued that:

Students get bored at home. There is not enough time to get feedback for homework. Students cannot understand in 20 mins. Some topics could be taught in more detail. Children cannot understand in that duration.

*Monitoring the process*

Monitoring student learning during the remote education process was found hard by all participants. Parents had to monitor the process through personal strategies such as listening to the courses together, studying with their children, and supporting them in their studies. As revealed, some teachers communicated with parents to help them manage the process at home. The lack of a monitoring system forced parents to undertake such a role, and teachers stressed the importance of this role for student learning in their contact with parents. A father, Yavuz, said:

Well, I do not think my child participates in the courses on the EBA effectively. Everyone knows his/her child. I also know my child. I would like the monitoring of participation effectively, but there is no such thing. No teachers communicated with me, and no feedback.

*Management of the process*

The transition and further stages of the remote learning process were considered to be timely, prompt, and successful. The participants believed that the top echelons of education did their best to plan and activate the remote learning system by taking some earlier and additional measures to make the process better. However, not having such an experience engendered continuing challenges during the process. One teacher, Hale, underlined that:

... They are doing their best... MoNE is trying to help students, parents, and teachers. The MoNE is attempting to help children in many aspects. It is developing the EBA (portal) to have teachers support students more or help students not to get bored.

*The problems faced*

Technical, adaptation-related, and system-related constraints were encountered during remote learning. Both teachers and parents underlined the technical problems during the process: broken TVs and telephones and unstable Internet access. Remaining at home for a long time induced intensive use of the Internet during the process nationwide, it was, therefore, sometimes impossible to access the EBA portal, as one teacher, Sevgi, asserted:

The EBA is beneficial for children who have opportunities. However, in the place I work, it is not used that much due to the Internet problem. The Internet provided can be used to enter the EBA, but it cannot be used for the live courses.

Furthermore, there were students who were seasonal workers, and they remained away from the education process. This issue was also underlined by some teachers as an inequality.

Most of the challenges mentioned were related to the adaptation of parents and students to the new process. Parents found it thorny to channel students to study their lessons and keep them away from the damage of technological tools. The system-related problems were mostly stressed by parents. Among the criticisms were the non-interactive nature of the learning system, the lack of feedback, inadequate course content, and the difficulty of designing the learning system based on variations in student characteristics. A father, Yavuz, stated that:

... Our mode has fallen due to the lockdown day by day... We all have had learning purposes in remote education, but we could not do this as required.

*Contributions of remote learning*

Remote learning helped to develop self-regulation and motivation in students, offered an opportunity to continue education, and prevented the waste of time at home. Some parents and teachers noted that remote learning prevented students from “falling into a void” after school closures. Parent-student communication strengthened during the process. Two teachers argued that:

Parents learned how to communicate with their children, help them do their homework, and understand the necessity of their help for doing homework. (Meral)

Disruption of education entirely could cause students to get away from the school, lose their motivation, and stop the provision of courses. (Ali)

In remote learning it was essential to make students understand that it was not a holiday and that they had to undertake responsibilities for learning. This was also linked with the transition to school life after the reopening of schools, as a mother stressed:

My child had difficulties in adapting to the school and courses when she started school. This time, not getting out of education entirely may prevent experiencing similar difficulties. (Rana)

*Things to do for effectiveness*

Participant perceptions centred around two aspects to make the remote learning process more effective: system-related and home-related issues. The use of more advanced

technologies in remote learning, the provision of technological tools to those who do not own them, the addition of a mechanism for tracking, feedback, and motivation, guidance for parents, and re-planning course schedules were among the suggestions. One teacher said:

More activities should be developed to make the process more enjoyable and attractive and spend time well. (Ahmet)

A father, Yavuz, stated:

It should be interactive. There should be continuous tracking, I mean being in regular communication.

The effectiveness had a home-related aspect that required the arrangement of the home environment suitable for learning. Without arranging this environment at home, overhauling the remote learning system would be not possible only via system-level amendments. A father made a recommendation:

A space should be arranged at home in which the students can study their lessons and that is far from the crowd, silent and isolated. (Sedat)

### **Home learning experiences**

Delving into home learning experiences implicated a tripartite perspective during the pandemic: *homes*, *parents*, and *teacher suggestions and contributions*.

#### *Home as a learning environment*

Participants' views on homes as learning environments differed. Most of the teachers did not believe that every home turned into a learning environment, due to the varying order of each home, the resources available, parental attitudes, and student behaviours. One group of parents reported being successful in ensuring the learning environment by studying with their children, arranging required materials like tables and a personal room, and providing a silent space. However, the other group could not ensure such an environment mostly due to their children's lack of motivation, concentration, and enthusiasm, students' entering into a holiday mood, and parents' not having enough space to arrange for their children. Two parents argued that:

Homes have turned into stressful environments. Students are stressed, so we are. Our relationships have deteriorated. (Zeynep)

As our home is small; unfortunately, we could not construct a suitable learning environment for our children. (Berra)

Parental attitudes and support, home environment, family socioeconomic status, and students' attitudes played a significant role in the construction of a learning environment. Two teachers stressed that:

I see that everyone is in a holiday mood. Everyone is continuing his/her normal life. No one is helping children. (Nida)  
 Parents who have financial constraints and a low level of education could not provide a suitable environment. (Hasan)

#### *Student-parent interaction*

The nature of student-parent interaction differed between families. Some parents had a strong interaction with their children and learned about their children's interests, motivation, and attitudes toward lessons. Working with their children closely helped them explore their children's potential and give feedback about their progress. A mother, Bade, said:

Our interaction and communication have become stronger... We can do more things together. We have better interaction, and I believe we can sustain this interaction... We are always together and do things together.

However, some parents were uninterested and unsupportive of their children, which caused a weak interaction between them and their children. "It-is-holiday" mentality was common among these uninterested parents and their children. Parents' interest seemed to be critical in constructing a strong interaction. One teacher commented:

Parents have had an opportunity to see their children during the process. They can track their children with regard to their interests, motivation, and/or attitudes toward lessons. (Ali)

#### *Parental roles in home learning*

As understood from the participants' views, caring and supportive parents arranged the home environment to help students concentrate on their lessons by providing required materials and technological tools, removing distractors, ensuring silence at home, involving in the learning process, doing extra activities with them, motivating and reminding them of their lessons and tasks. A mother, Nil, stated that:

I print sample worksheets for my child to better understand the topics. I have her watch the lesson videos in the EBA. We enter the portal daily.

However, not all parents were willing to support their children at home. Parents' interest, willingness, education level, and SES seemed to be effective. Two teachers commented:

Some parents do not take education seriously... Parental attitudes are important. For example, I send homework on *WhatsApp*, but some of the parents leave the group. (Sevgi)

Two families have set up a great environment for studying. They sent me a photo; they arranged a room like a classroom, in front of the TV. I liked it a lot. (Cansu)

#### *Teacher suggestions*

Teachers underlined the criticality of communication with children during home learning and made suggestions for strengthening parent-student communication. Encouraging and



motivating students, tracking their homework, and constructing a classroom atmosphere and a suitable learning space were among the suggestions. Two teachers argued that:

I told the parents that it is not a holiday, they should not let their children free too much, and students should do their homework as usual at school. (Eda)

I told them to have a plan and program based on course hours. For instance, if the Turkish course is at 12 p.m., students should watch the course and do the homework I give... I told students that they should study but not get bored. If they feel bored, they can play with their siblings. I told the parents to arrange this; I am in continuous contact with the parents. Students may get bored quickly as they are at home. (Nilhan)

Among the suggestions about children's development were children having breakfast, playing games with children, buying books for reading in leisure time, and concealing telephones and tablets while students were studying. Other suggestions covered planning students' day, guiding students to study, sharing information with teachers, and being careful about learning time and other household tasks. Another teacher, Cansu, stressed that:

I wanted the parents to arrange a suitable environment if their children do not have a learning space and a study table. I wanted them to encourage and support their children in their lessons.

#### *Teacher contributions*

Although education was offered on TV at the beginning, teachers made personal efforts to help students continue their education. Personal endeavours included sending homework through *WhatsApp*, forming a homework blog, sending videos about learning topics, arranging a call day to contact each student and parents, arranging spaces in their homes to prepare videos and activities for their students, giving feedback on homework, and giving morale to students. Kamile said:

I have formed a homework blog for my class. I give homework daily, page by page. Students take a photo of their homework after 5 p.m. every day. I keep them in a different file. I evaluate each homework as (+) and (-).

Parents also stressed teachers' contributions to children's homework, clarifying the topics not understood by students, and communicating with them. A parent stated that:

Classroom teachers have such a contribution: we send them the questions that children cannot solve through the *WhatsApp* group. The teachers solve the question and give feedback. (Burak)

### **Factors affecting home learning experiences**

There were a number of factors that affected the transformation of homes into learning spaces and home learning experiences.

*Inhibitors*

Parents' characteristics like education level, low SES, indifference, and inability to help students set barriers to the effectiveness of the process. The (inadequate) physical capacity of the home, conflicts at home, having more than one student at home, and having many children also impacted the process negatively. The lack of necessary technological tools and means, students' being passive and having no interaction with peers, being affected by the news on the pandemic, and getting infected made it hard to benefit from the process. According to parents, there was no discipline as students were comfortable at home. One parent commented:

Children are very comfortable at home. There is no one who controls. They do not have to give feedback to anyone. (Zeynep)

One teacher described the impact of lacking the Internet:

In online education, the teacher can send homework to students, students can print the homework. We can send activities but the Internet is needed for all of these. (Meral)

The home environment was affected by many stimuli and distractors, and it became a monotonous place without accountability to and monitoring by an external mechanism. A mother, Berra, argued that:

No matter how far I take his younger sibling; when she cries, he hears it and is affected by it.

*Facilitators*

Participant views indicated the factors that facilitated the transformation of the home into a learning environment: the availability of required tools, materials, and means such as the Internet and technology, ensuring a suitable learning space/personal room, parents' being at home and supporting children, parent's education level and interest, having older siblings, and teachers' external support. One teacher explained that:

Having a personal room, technical tools, a television at least, and ensuring a silent environment are the facilitators. (Fadile)

A father, Eymen, noted that:

It is all about the responsibility of parents. The more responsible you feel, the more you act.

**Parental support at home**

Most of the parents attempted to support their children's learning at home by making arrangements in the course of daily life and providing help during their studies.

*Arranging the course of life*

Parents made arrangements in their daily life which consisted of organising bedtimes, playing hours, and meal and breakfast time by taking into consideration the course schedules along with physical arrangements. The remote learning process shaped some daily activities. Two mothers stated that:

We complete everything 15 mins before the course starts. I or sometimes her father prepares the books and the topics to be learned. (Aslı)

We arrange the hours according to the courses, such as wake-up time. We arrange the meal and playing time in line with online education. (Şeyma)

*Providing help for learning*

Some parents tried to support their children's learning by attending the courses with students, studying with them, standing by them to do their homework and re-teach the subjects when needed. A parent, Sedat, explained that:

We support our child by checking the results without bothering him and taking care of the homework that he cannot do.

Teachers confirmed parents' attendance in the lessons with their children, but as understood from parents' perspectives, they provided support in different ways.

*Inability to support*

Some parents did not support their children due to being uninterested, unwilling, and not open to support. However, some parents could not support their children, due to their low education level and inability to manage the process. Being busy with housework during the day and working at a job hindered some parents to support their children. Some parents complained about students' reluctance, low motivation, and lack of adaptation. A father, Yavuz, commented:

Yes, I am trying to provide all kinds of support for the lessons. Could I be of help? No. Because everything is mutual. No matter how much I want, if my child does not want it, it does not happen.

**Lessons learned during the pandemic**

The lessons learned were related to developing new understandings, emotions, and values, how student learning takes place, and the importance of school education.

*Values, emotions, and understandings*

Responsibility, patience, solidarity/unity, strong communication, raised awareness, empathy, a sense of sharing, readiness for negative events, discipline, knowledge, and self-regulation were among the values, emotions, and understandings that participants argued to develop during the process. A mother, Bade, underlined that:

I have realised something about the interaction between me and my child. It was not sufficient. I have improved my interaction with him.

Parents underlined that they understood the importance of interaction and communication between peers and teachers, as a teacher argued:

Because children do not receive only education at school. They would spend time with their friends. They were socialising... Children are deprived of this now. (Kamile)

They also pointed out the need for developing the use and dissemination of technology for students and more collaboration between parents and teachers.

#### *Student learning*

Parents learned how to support their children and spare time for their learning. For students, it was contributive as they learned how to learn in different spaces and how to study effectively. Teachers understood the importance of technological tools, support at home, the learning environment, and social activities in the learning process. Two teachers mentioned that:

I have started to consider students' learning paces in this process. I used to consider this in the classroom, but here it has been understood once more. (Cemile)

Learning can happen at home too. Telephones are not only for surfing social media, they are evaluated as a part of education. (Ahmet)

Parents also drew lessons on learning the importance of classroom atmosphere, feedback, face-to-face education, student tracking, home environment, and the continuation of education, as two parents stressed:

In fact, we have realised our responsibilities more. (Aslı)

This process has displayed the importance of the classroom, being with peers and teachers in particular. (Erva)

Some parents engaged in research to contribute to their children's learning, learned what children need to learn, and the subjects that children lagged behind, and thus monitored their children's learning.

#### *Importance of school education*

The process taught the importance of school education for teaching, learning, and student development. The most underlined characteristic regarding schooling was related to the role of schools in students' social and psychological development. A father argued that:

We have understood how effective education in schools is. (Eymen)

The role of peer learning, the friendly environment in schools, play, a sense of tolerance, and the importance of schools for social life, discipline, and motivation were among the prominent findings. A teacher, Hatun, opined that:

The process has displayed the function of schools, their importance... There were many criticisms about teachers; the process has ended these criticisms.

## Impacts and reflections of the pandemic

The pandemic affected children negatively during their stay at home. Participants shared their expectations of schooling and related processes in the post-Covid process.

### *Impacts of the pandemic on students*

The pandemic caused behavioural and psychological problems such as aggression, demotivation, digital addiction, lack of concentration, boredom, lesser interest in learning, depression, intra-family conflicts, neglecting lessons, and being too comfortable as suggested by both parents and teachers. The tendency to digital addiction was highlighted by parents as they could clearly observe the process. Two parents argued that:

My child is playing with the computer too much. He is using the lockdown as an excuse.

(Zeynep)

As my child cannot play, he is getting more aggressive. As the lessons he is watching on TV do not replace what his teacher has taught, he has lagged behind in education a lot. (Erva)

### *Post-Covid expectations*

Although there were some participants who believed that many issues regarding schooling and education would be different, some participants did not think of a transformation in these aspects. According to teachers, parents would become more conscious about their children's education, support them more, and help with their children's homework. One teacher mentioned that:

The home has not turned into a learning environment, but this process has constructed consciousness in terms of that transformation. (Fadile)

As for students, it was argued that students would develop self-study and planning skills, commit to their schools, learn how to learn, and study lessons more productively. A teacher, Hale, argued that:

Parents have become conscious. I think this will continue after we return to school. Parents' behaviours will reflect their children, and children will be more controlled in terms of homework.

Some teachers proposed changes in their approaches to children and their thinking systems in the post-Covid era, apart from using technology more in teaching. Parents were more pessimistic than teachers; some parents did not believe that there would be any changes in parental attitudes toward supporting their children's learning and transforming their homes into learning environments. A father, Burak, said:

No matter how much we try, homes are not suitable for learning... We are patient as we know this is temporary. We won't continue this as a habit.

Although some parents believed that their relationships with and support for their children would be different in the post-Covid era, some others were hesitant about such

positive outcomes, asserting that change would depend on drawing lessons from the process.

## **Discussion**

The findings indicated that most participants considered the steps taken in the remote learning process as quick-fix solutions to an unprecedented crisis and found these steps to be effective and necessary for the continuation of education. Most participants argued that the provision of education during the process showed that it was not a holiday and was necessary for children's adaptation to school after the reopening. The process improved the communication between parents and their children as primary school students had to receive support from their parents. Previous research corroborates these findings. İnci Kuzu (2020) uncovered that parents believed remote learning to be useful and the best solution during the pandemic. Rheyra (2022) revealed that the home-schooling process improved the mother-child relationship positively despite the uncertainties and ambivalence faced during the pandemic. Parents found more opportunities for stronger relationships with family members (Gelir & Duzen, 2021).

Some concerns, however, came to the fore regarding the process. Both parents and teachers stressed the inequality of opportunities between students. The findings implicated that the process was more effective and beneficial for students who managed to access the Internet, TV, computers, and necessary resources. Congruently, Bokayev et al. (2021) found that parents in Kazakhstan faced financial challenges and could not provide technological resources for their children. In Turkey, some students did not participate in remote learning due to the lack of technological resources, the Internet, and educational materials (Kabapınar et al., 2021). The pandemic increased the vulnerability of children due to socioeconomic inequalities (Müderrişoğlu et al., 2023). Similar educational inequalities were reported by Ullah and Ali (2021) in the Pakistani context.

Technical, adaptation-related, and system-related problems were encountered during the remote learning process. The problem most highlighted by parents was the non-interactive structure of the remote learning system. The inability to get feedback about student progress, no activities for monitoring, and inadequacies in terms of course contents and duration were the most criticised issues. A similar issue was revealed by Fiş Erümit (2021) who argued that the EBA portal needs improvement in line with students' needs, tracking student attendance and learning by teachers. The Internet connection was unstable and problematic, which was reported as a major challenge during remote learning in different countries such as Indonesia (Sanhadi Rahayu & Asanti, 2021), the Philippines (Tocalo, 2022), Jordan (Abuhammad, 2020), and Kazakhstan (Bokayev et al., 2021). Furthermore, teachers encountered communication problems and challenges in getting feedback from students (Bakioğlu & Çevik, 2020; Bayburtlu, 2020).

Most students could not adapt to the process, which caused demotivation; this finding corroborates Bokayev et al. (2021) regarding the decrease in motivation due to social isolation. We found that some parents experienced difficulties in managing the learning

process and channelling their children for learning despite great efforts. Parental difficulties in supporting their children's online learning stemmed from their lacking professional skills, expertise (Gelir & Duzen, 2021), and time (Dong et al., 2020) and undertaking new roles, duties, and responsibilities during the lockdown (Griffith, 2022).

Participant recommendations included a stronger infrastructure equipped with advanced technologies and a well-functioning mechanism enabling measurement and evaluation, interaction, attendance, guidance for parents and students, and re-planned course schedules as well as some recommendations for parents to build an effective home learning environment. Similar recommendations were noted in the Üstündağ (2021) study, such as arrangements about the educational program, learning environment, teachers' problems, online education, home learning materials, and guidance for families. Bayburtlu (2020) reported teachers' recommendations about receiving education for developing digital learning content, the need for the improvement of the measurement-evaluation system, increasing the interaction between the course books and the EBA portal, and strengthening the infrastructure. Teachers made contributions to home learning by providing help for students and parents.

Parent-student interaction seemed to deeply determine the construction and effectiveness of the learning environment in the current study. This interaction was not very strong for all families, as understood from the participants' views. Parents became teachers, were expected to implement the curriculum, and attempted to manage the learning process during the lockdown (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021). Families' individual characteristics have shaped their experiences (Lee & Wenham, 2021).

Parental attitudes and characteristics, student behaviour, contextual situations at home, and isolation were the inhibitors. Contextual situations included the physical capacity of the home, conflicts at home, and the number of children and students at home. Some parents could not arrange a personal room for their children as their homes were small and did not provide the necessary technological tools and means. However, support from older siblings and teachers was reported to have facilitated home learning, and this support was reported by Fiş Erümit (2021) to enhance student motivation during the lockdown.

Most of the parents changed their daily routines and planned the day by considering the course schedules and study time of the students. The availability of the required materials and means, SES, and parental attitudes stood out to be prominent factors also. Concordantly, Schroedler et al. (2022) argued that students whose parents were willing and able to help were more advantaged than others in terms of having opportunities for good contact, regular interaction, feedback, and technology use in teaching.

The process seemed to have developed or evoked different understandings, emotions, and values such as responsibility, solidarity, and empathy. Increased interactions and collective responsibility were among the positive effects during the pandemic (Şenkal et al., 2023). The participants asserted that they understood the importance of communication and technology in education. "Health comes first" was a notion displaying the criticality of

being healthy. Likewise, Aydın (2021) revealed a positive change in children's cleanliness behaviours.

Both parents and teachers grasped the importance of school education for the socio-psychological development of students, namely socialisation, increased interaction, and communication. As reported in prior research, the well-being of primary school children who were lower attaining was adversely affected as these students lost their chances to socialise, play and learn during the school closures (Buchanan et al., 2022). Ensuring discipline in the home environment was reported to be problematic. As concluded by Öz and Bayhan (2022), parents faced challenges in setting rules and boundaries for their children during the lockdown. Also, some parents understood the challenging nature of the teaching profession because undertaking teachers' roles helped parents to learn more about teachers' jobs (Letzel et al., 2022).

The pandemic caused behavioural and psychological problems in children, such as aggression, demotivation, digital addiction, lack of concentration, boredom, lesser interest in learning, depression, conflicts, neglecting lessons, and being too comfortable. As reported in past research (Dağ et al., 2021; Erol & Erol, 2020), children tended to overuse digital tools and were at risk of digital game addiction. Aydın (2021) revealed that the coronavirus affected children's daily routines, moods, and social relationships adversely. Gelir and Duzen (2021) concluded that the pandemic changed children's routines, behaviours, and health and that children became sluggish, aggressive, rebellious, bored, introverted and screen-dependent. Children's social interaction, and emotional development deteriorated during the pandemic (Khlaif et al., 2021).

There was a dichotomy between participants' expectations regarding the reflections of the pandemic, post-Covid: While some participants proposed positive changes in parental support and awareness, development of students' self-study and planning skills, commitment to school, learning how to learn, effective studying, and teachers' understandings and approaches to students and teaching, others did not conceive any changes in the post-Covid era. Moss et al. (2020) found that teachers understood the need to adapt the learning tasks in accordance with the characteristics of the home learning environment during the pandemic. Some participants noted that changes would depend on whether lessons are drawn by teachers, students, parents, and policymakers. If lessons are drawn, the pandemic can be viewed as a great chance to re-imagine education to provide the best education practices for all children (Zhao, 2020b).

## **Conclusion**

It was concluded that educational inequalities have become more visible during the pandemic and deeply affected student learning and access to education. The issue of inequalities requires prompt and genuine actions across the system and schools in Turkey. The capacities of schools should be enhanced in this regard to build resilience to cope with crises and risks and address educational inequalities in the post-Covid era.



The importance of parental support and involvement has manifested itself as a critical factor for student learning. The issues related to family background like SES and education levels have affected students' educational experiences at home. This fact highlights the importance of providing more support at school for children of families with low SES and education. Strengthening the school-home relationship may make contributions to learning student needs and home characteristics and substantially provide suitable learning opportunities for students at school.

### Limitations

The current research has certain limitations. The data were obtained through telephone interviews as it was not possible to meet the participants face-to-face due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The results were drawn based on participants' self-reports; using different approaches could have made it possible to see a richer spectrum of home learning experiences. The data were collected during the initial stage and spread of the pandemic. The experiences in the other stages/periods of the lockdown and schooling processes could therefore reveal new understandings.

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## Appendix A: Interview protocols

*Translated from Turkish*

### Teacher form

1. How do you evaluate the remote education practices organised by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) during the pandemic?
2. Do you think the Turkish education system is effective in sustaining educational practices during the pandemic? How ready, sufficient or effective? Could you please share your ideas?
3. Do you think the current remote learning practice is necessary? If yes, in what aspects? If not, why?
4. Do you think homes have turned into learning environments during the quarantine? How?
5. Do your students participate in the learning activities provided through remote education? If yes, how effective is their participation? If not effective, why?
6. How is the interaction of your students and their parents during remote learning? Are parents supportive of their children? How and why?
7. What should be done to turn homes into learning environments? Whose contributions come to the fore?
8. Which factors facilitate learning at home? What are inhibitors, if any?
9. Have you made any suggestions to arrange the home as an environment appropriate for children's learning? If yes, what have you suggested?
10. What issues regarding teaching-learning become more important or influencing during the quarantine? How does the home learning environment affect these issues?
11. Can the experiences regarding education during this process make any contributions to arranging homes as effective learning environments in the post-Covid era? How?

### Parent form

1. How do you evaluate the remote education practices organised by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) during the pandemic?
2. Do you think the Turkish education system is effective in sustaining educational practices during the pandemic? How ready, sufficient or effective? Could you please share your ideas?
3. Do you think the current remote learning practice is necessary? If yes, in what aspects? If not, why?
4. Do you think homes have turned into learning environments during the quarantine? How?
5. Does/do your child/ren participate in learning activities provided through remote education? If yes, how effective is their participation? If not effective, why?
6. How is your interaction with your child/ren during remote learning? Are you supportive of your child/children? How and why?

7. What should be done to turn homes into learning environments? Whose contributions come to the fore?
8. Which factors facilitate learning at home? What are inhibitors, if any?
9. Have you made any arrangements to make the home an environment appropriate for your child's/children's learning? If yes, what have you done?
10. What issues regarding teaching-learning become more important or influencing during the quarantine? How does the home learning environment affect these issues?
11. Can the experiences regarding education during this process make any contributions to arranging homes as effective learning environments in the post-Covid era? How?

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