

Teaching Literacy in First-Grade of Primary School During COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract. Along with the COVID-19 pandemic, a new era had to be passed in education. The education process in Turkey has been maintained entirely or partially in the form of remote or distance education, or partly face-to-face since the outbreak in the process of being face-to-face education opportunities. This research seeks to examine in-depth how literacy teaching in the first grade, one of the essential processes of primary school education, took place during the pandemic. The research applied a case study, one of the qualitative research methods. In addition, the participants in this research were determined based on criterion sampling. The data were collected using semi-structured interviews with teachers and parents of students and the observations made by one of the researchers in online lessons. The data obtained were analyzed through content analysis. The findings are presented under the themes of "the teaching process, the stakeholders, and the factors that make the teaching process difficult". The conclusion reveals that the pandemic negatively affected the literacy teaching process, as well as every field. In other words, teachers could not get enough support from parents and MoNE so that teachers and parents were anxious.

Keywords: COVID-19, first grade, primary school, reading, writing

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INTRODUCTION ~ COVID-19 has affected all areas of life, including education. The rapid transmission of the virus in the community has resulted in the closure of schools and the education transition to distance education. With the adoption of complete distance learning in Turkey in March 2020, the education and training process was carried out with Education Information Network (EBA) and with the partnership with Turkey Radio and Television (TRT) institution until the end of the school year. With the decrease in the number of cases, face-to-face education has been started gradually in the 2020-2021 academic year. With the start of the term, first graders started school, students in each class were divided into two groups and enrolled in one day a week, then this period was increased to two days a week for first graders, and distance education was continued on other days (MoNE, 2020). During the pandemic, the duration of learning is reduced to 30 minutes by applying five lessons per day. In this process, first-grade students went to school two days a week and received distance education one day. Schools closed in November 2020 with the increase in the number of cases in Turkey, and distance education has restarted (MoNE, 2020).

Reading is one of the necessary skills that an individual should acquire. This is because reading plays a significant role in individuals' participation in education, social and economic life, or in their success in participating in society (Asser & Poom-Valickis, 2002; N'Namdi, 2005). In this respect, educational life begins with teaching the ability to read and write. Another important point of starting education life with teaching reading and writing is that if individuals do not have these skills, they will have problems in learning other disciplines such as mathematics and science (World Bank, 2019).

Another basic skill that an individual must acquire, besides reading, is writing. In addition to being a specific way of creating a text or conveying a message, writing also strongly influences achievements in subjects of all skills and also affects the student's self-expression in all areas of his adult life (Asser & Poom-Valickis, 2002; Chartrel & Vinter, 2008; Graham & Perin, 2007). For this purpose, writing education, which started in primary school, is extremely important. This is because it has been stated that the primary school period is a critical period for teaching literacy skills (Güneş, 2013). Children who do not have sufficient literacy skills at this age will have difficulty acquiring these skills in the coming years. Literacy teaching, which is among the first objectives of the curriculum, is an important indicator of the psychomotor and cognitive development of the individual, as well as an indispensable dimension for academic success (Karadağ Yılmaz & Erdoğan, 2019). For these reasons, the importance of teaching literacy in the first grade of primary school stems from the fact that reading and writing play a key role in learning.

Teaching reading and writing is a long and comprehensive process. This process is stated by Akyol (2012):

- a) Preparation for literacy teaching: It consists of a two-week process such as warming up to the classroom and school environment and the development of small muscles.
- b) Beginning teaching reading and writing: At this stage, the students feel and introduce the sound, writing and reading the letters, syllables from letters, words from syllables, sentences from words.
- c) Free reading and writing.

Considering this whole process during the reading and writing teaching, the teacher must take care of the students one-by-one, share the same environment with them, and must be in physical contact with the students when necessary. Therefore, literacy education is considered a sensitive and difficult time for first-grade students and teachers. However, it is also clear that the first graders, in which basic and critical skills such as reading and writing teaching are tried to be acquired, were negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this research aims at examining deeply how the first literacy teaching process took place in the COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey.

METHOD

This research has been designed in accordance with the qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is defined as the collection, analysis, and interpretation of detailed narrative and visual data in order to gain in-depth information about a particular phenomenon, situation (Gay et al., 2012). This research aims at examining deeply how the first literacy teaching process is carried out in the first grades of primary school during the COVID-19 epidemic. In accordance with this purpose, the research applied a case study. A case study is a type of research aimed at examining a current phenomenon in depth without leaving the real-world context, and four types of it are mentioned (Yin, 2017). In this context, a holistic single-case design is preferred.

Participants

The research involved seven first-grade teachers and six parents as participants. The determination of the study group used the criterion sampling method, which is one of the sampling methods frequently used in qualitative research. Criterion sampling is a method of determining the criteria set by the researchers (Gay et al., 2012). In this research, the criterion was determined as being first-grade teachers for the teachers participating in the study and having children attending the first grade for parents. In order to keep the identities of the participants confidential, while presenting the findings, teachers were coded as T1, T2... T7, and parents as P1, P2... P6. Information on participating in the research is shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Information About Teachers

Participants	Gender	Professional Seniority	Place of Work
T1	F	1	District
T 2	F	12	City
T 3	F	14	City
T 4	M	6	City
T 5	M	4	City
T 6	F	5	Village
T 7	F	4	Village

Table 2. Information About Parents

Participants	Gender	Socio-Economic Level
P1	F	Upper
P2	M	Middle
P3	F	Lower
P4	F	Lower
P5	M	Lower
P6	M	Upper

Data Collection Tools

Since the research was designed as a case study, multiple data collection tools were used. First of all, in September, just before the school opened, a semi-structured interview was held to learn about their plans, concerns and expectations about the education process. Then, one month after the educational activities started, a semi-structured interview was held again on how the process progressed and whether it went as planned or not. The interviews lasted an average of 25 minutes. Due to the COVID-19, students continue most of their education at home with their parents, compared to the time before the pandemic. Therefore, parents were involved in this research and interviewed. The interview process with parents lasted an average of 20 minutes. Finally, one of the researchers worked as an observer attending the online first literacy lessons of the first-grade teachers participating in the research. In this context, the researcher conducted observations for eight lesson hours in four weeks. The result of observation focused on teaching activities and the problems occurred during teaching learning process.

Data Analysis

Since semi-structured interviews with parents and teachers as well as observation notes of the researcher were used as data collection tools in the research, content analysis was to analyze the obtained data. Content analysis is carried out by coding the data obtained to find answers to the research questions, group the codes, and create themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To ensure validity, the research process was described in detail but direct quotations from the findings were included. Another method used to ensure validity in the study is participant confirmation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researchers received participant confirmation from some parents and teachers in the study group to share the research findings. To ensure the reliability of the research, the researchers presented the data collection process and data analysis in detail.

RESULTS

In this research, which aims at examining deeply how literacy teaching is carried out in the first grade of primary school during the COVID-19 pandemic process, four themes were reached at the end of the data analysis process. They consisted of anxiety, benefits of distance education, stakeholders, and factors that make the learning process difficult. These themes are shown in Figure 1.

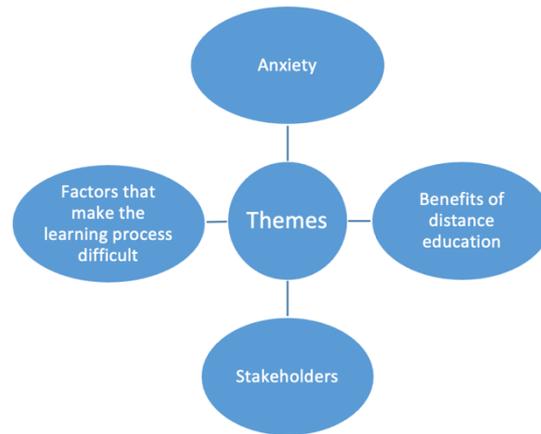


Figure 1. Themes

Anxiety

In the interviews with the teachers before the school opened, T3 stated that they were in more schools before the pandemic, but the number of days decreased during the pandemic. This situation created a concern that he would not be able to capture the program. In addition, he states that parents were also concerned about the educational activities that would take place during the pandemic:

"It will definitely affect it, the parents are very worried. We were spreading the pre-pandemic curriculum to five days, during the pandemic period, students will come to school one day at the beginning of education. This created anxiety for me not to be able to complete the curriculum. ... If the child cannot learn, the student and parents will experience anxiety... I am very worried."

Teachers thought that the limited opportunities of face-to-face education of students would negatively affect their loyalty to their teachers and school and their social relations. S5's views revealed this situation:

"In terms of the continuity of children, their low school attendance will negatively affect their commitment to their teachers and the school."

On the other hand, teachers working in rural areas stated that they could not do online lessons due to insufficiency, and even if they connected online, first literacy education was not very suitable for distance education in terms of some elements. T6 expressed this situation as follows:

"Since I am a village school teacher, I could not contact my students with live lessons during this period, so I think face-to-face education will be better. With distance education, efficiency cannot be achieved in many subjects that are taught for the first-grade students such as to feel the voice, to hold a pencil, etc."

On the other hand, T7 stated that the absence of teaching and learning activities during the pandemic would lead to forgetting what has been learned:

"While the literacy teaching process is already long, the pandemic will extend this period and the forgetting of the subjects will increase."

It stated that some electronic software was used in the first literacy process before the pandemic, and they could be used in online education, and with the support of parents, the process would not be interrupted in writing skills.

"Teachers were transmitting voices to students digitally through applications such as Morpa and okulistik.com. Teachers would go to the students and support them by holding their hands, in other words, they were supporting them sensually. I think this can be done by the parents. I do not think that literacy teaching will be delayed too much, if the teacher provides sufficient resources to students online."

Anxiety about Distance Education

In the interviews with the teachers, they stated that the number of students would be divided into two and progressed gradually during the education process, and the groups would come to school two days for each. Teachers working in the village school stated that they could only conduct the lessons face to face due to technical problems. In addition to this, the teacher working in a private school stated that they started accepting students in advance compared to public schools because they were private schools, and stated this situation as follows:

"With the bending of the system by the MoNE, students started to be accepted in private schools. I have a small number of students, there are eight students in my class. That's why they all come together. Our lesson hours have decreased. It was a full day before, and now we are working for half a day."

T2 stated that they would not be able to contact students due to the pandemic, in this case, it would cause problems such as teaching the students to hold the pencil for writing, but this situation could also be solved with the support of families:

"I have 34 students. Half of them will come a day, there will be an online course on Wednesday, and the other half will come on Tuesday. I did not prepare a very different plan, as we will do linework for two weeks and then move on to the sounds, and we will do it face to face. I think there might be a problem during their hand-holding while writing and organizing the notebook. In that case, I will ask for photos from WhatsApp one by one from the families. I think the main thing is reading and understanding. I think the writing process can be compensated in other years."

T7, who works at the village school, stated that she could only teach the first literacy education with the face-to-face education due to technical inadequacies and that a shortage of this time would negatively affect the literacy process:

"In this process, I only teach first literacy education with face-to-face education by going to the school on days determined by the Ministry. I cannot provide distance education due to the conditions. I do not think that will be enough either."

Benefits of Distance Education

One month after the education process started, they interviews were made with the teachers about how they took place. The teachers stated that since the students came to the school in two groups during the pandemic process, the number of students was low, which positively affected the teaching of first literacy.

"The advantages of dividing children into two would be very good if the number of children in normal education was like this. I had 10 students in one group and nine

students in the other. I can have a lot of chances to take care of the children individually. The time is limited, but the number of students is good."

In another observation form, it was stated that the teacher developed special methods to avoid noise in the online education process as follows:

"The teacher muted all the students in the zoom program and showed them how to turn their voices up. The students comply with this if the answer is yes for in yes or no questions, the students raise their hand if the answer is no, they extend their hands to the side."

The teachers stated that they preferred to do the first literacy education through face-to-face education and that they taught other lessons in online lessons as much as possible. It was stated that the teacher (T4) at the private school, where the less attendance of students slowed down the process, supported the students by making them purchase electronic software, and other teachers supported them with homework

"We did not make the first literacy education with distance education. We bought the Morpa campus for each of our students. We have prepared homework packages on this system in order to make the things learned at school permanent. My student repeated it from there and it was much more reinforced. This is how I conducted the voice teaching."

In addition to the teachers who stated that the short duration of the lessons positive affected the teaching process, some teachers thought that shortening the lesson times made the teaching more efficient because the attention time of the students was low due to their age and that they progressed in a way similar to the program used in the pre-pandemic period.

"Our lesson time is reduced to 30 minutes. This situation was an advantage. Because the attention span of the students was good in the lesser lessons. I saw that they were able to focus more. Although there is less time as a planned program, we go parallel to the plan. The low number of students in this and the 30-minute lesson duration has a great contribution."

On the other hand, P6 stated that since his child was familiar with the sounds and numbers in the pre-school education received, and this case made positive contributions to the education given during the pandemic process:

"My child went to kindergarten last year, and he learned a little more about sound and numerals there. I have all the possibilities, such as the internet, printing out and so on. I do dictation work except for the homework given by the teacher. That's why we go ahead according to their friends."

Stakeholders

Teachers' Expectations from Parents Before Starting the Education

During the interviews with the teachers at the beginning of the education process, the teachers were asked about what their expectations were on the basis of parents, school administration, and the ministry.

Teachers stated that one of the essential stakeholders in the first literacy education during the pandemic process was parents, and for this purpose, he held a meeting with parents about sound learning and said that he expected support from them:

"Our most important supporter in this process is parents. We had a meeting with parents to give information about sound teaching and to do sound exercises with their children for at least 1 hour during their 5-day holiday and send these studies to us via WhatsApp."

T6, who works at the village school, stated that the parents were not very interested in the normal period as well, with the following statements:

"I teach in the countryside. Parents are actually almost nonexistent. It is my wish to see parents who support the students and teachers who take responsibility."

T7 stated that parents are important in terms of both helping teachers and students' mental states in this process as follows:

"In this process, parents have a great responsibility. Those taught at school in a limited time should be ensured that they are not forgotten at home with repetition. They should support the students with activities and games to keep their morale motivation high."

Another factor expected from parents is that they should improve themselves technologically and help their children in the use of educational technology, and they stated that they gave information to the parents about it.

"I wanted them to be more interested in tech stuff. They have not entered the systems related to education very much. Today, we gave this education so that they could support students in entering EBA. I stated that if there will be lesson hours in distance education, they should help students to feel this seriousness. We wanted them to listen to lessons together."

Teachers' Expectations from School Management before Starting the Education

Teachers who took part in the study stated that they had expectations from the school administration, which is another stakeholder, that parents should not be allowed to enter into the school, appropriate communication should be established with parents, and that the school and classrooms should be clean.

"Classes have been set up, we expect a lot of attention on cleaning supplies and I have an expectation from them to provide material support. This process is a period when teacher-parent-school cooperation should be much more."

T4 stated that in addition to expecting technical and material support from the school administration, they also have expectations in terms of informing parents in this process:

"We wanted the technical equipment of the school. They also made work about them. We requested that our course numbers be reduced. They also provided this."

Similarly, T2 stated that she expected the school administration to transfer the information from the ministry to the parents and to provide the necessary tools for providing cleaning materials.

"I expect the school administration to support me in this process. I expect them to provide the necessary mask, hygiene, and explanation to the parents." T2

Teachers' Expectations from MoNE before Starting the Education

In the interviews, they expressed their expectations from the ministry as a stakeholder. It was stated that students should be at the face-to-face education at the beginning of the process because they were in first grade. In addition, it was stated that equal opportunity is expected to be provided as an important element in education by the teachers working in village schools. T6 stated her views on this situation as follows:

"We expect the MoNE to support village schools by improving inadequate conditions, at least by introducing internet facilities. It can be difficult to continue education due to technical and physical inadequacies. We want to fix this and continue equally."

T7 also stated that she had expectations in terms of ensuring equal opportunity, in addition to this, she also expected works to improve the mental state of teachers as follows:

"The Ministry should also work to keep teachers' morale motivation high."

T4, on the other hand, stated that reading and writing skills are important and face-to-face education is important as well in acquiring these skills as follows:

"We told that first-grades should not receive online education without knowing their teachers in distance education because I think that children will not take the teacher seriously in the first literacy process in the face of an adult they do not know. Because it is a critical skill in the context of first literacy, we may want some reductions in some areas which cannot be seen as desirable critical skills."

Teachers' Expectations from Parents after Starting the Education

Teachers stated at the beginning of the process that they mostly expected the parents' support for teaching literacy. Some teachers stated that they received the parent support they expected, while other teachers stated that they could not get the support they wanted. The teacher working in the private school stated that students' parents did not support their children in terms of education and that they only have expectations from the school in this sense.

"At the school where I work, parents' profile leaves the student to the school, and they do not interfere with much school-related business. For this reason, I could not get much support from the school. They did not contribute much to the technical problems experienced in online interviews."

Teachers stated that some of the student's parents were illiterate and therefore could not support their children, and some could not provide support because they did not have sufficient opportunities.

"Some of the parents are illiterate so they cannot be very helpful."

On the other hand, T6 stated that she could communicate with parents who have technical and physical opportunities and that she received support from parents in this way. T6 expressed her thoughts on this situation as follows:

"I cannot say that all my parents have supported because as I have always stated, I am in contact with parents where the conditions are suitable. I remind them that they should be supportive. Supporters help in situations where children find it difficult to make homework or watch the videos I post."

It has been stated that parents are worried about the situation in schools due to the pandemic, and therefore, they are more concerned with their children. On the other hand, it was stated that the parents followed the lessons and realized their own learning about how the sound teaching method was realized and helped their children in this regard.

"The parents were more interested. They are more devoted to their children. I think they are anxious and therefore put in more effort."

T3, chose one of the parents as a representative and stated that she communicated with the others in this way and that they have important support in teaching literacy as follows:

"I got good support from parents. I contacted a parent, he passes the things on to other parents. In this sense, it is easy."

In his online observation, the researcher stated that the parents of the students also attended the classes for support purposes, but in some cases, they made wrong interventions.

"Some of the parents tried to intervene quietly from the side so that their children would not make mistakes, and the teacher warned them."

Parents' Views on the Beginning of Education

In the interviews with the parents, they stated that they are in contact with the teachers, and they take care to do what they want, in addition to that, they are satisfied with their teachers.

"Our teacher asked us, as parents, to help with our children's homework and reading."

P3, on the other hand, stated that the teacher did not give clear information about how to support, but that he was satisfied with the teacher in this process:

"The teacher did not clearly tell us what to do, but just told us that we should support. We are very pleased with our teacher."

P6, who is stating that his socio-economic situation is good, stated that this situation supports the student's being more advanced in learning literacy than his friends.

"I have all the possibilities, such as the internet, getting print out, etc. I do dictation work except for the homework given by the teacher. That's why we go ahead according to his friends."

Parents' Opinion about School Management Activities

In the interviews with parents, some of the parents stated that the school administration did not support the parents in this regard in any way, and some stated that the school supported them by making the school a hygienic environment.

"The school administration supported both our teachers and us when necessary."

Some parents also stated that the school administration was not interested in how they experienced the process with them. P3 and P4 shared their views on this issue as follows:

"The school did not support us in any way. Only the teacher supported. The school never asks what we are doing or about our problems."

Parents-Teachers Opinions on the Activities of the MoNE

Finally, they stated that the MoNE, another stakeholder of the process, provided electronic support and did not prepare a teaching plan suitable for pandemic conditions.

"The Ministry has created support over EBA and TRT, but we did not use it much."

Teachers working in village schools stated that the ministry was not supported in any way, that a program suitable for the pandemic was not sent, in addition to that, they expect technological assistance to continue the education process of the students.

"No program has been sent. Unless face-to-face education is provided, we cannot do online education anyway because of our conditions, it is debatable to what extent children will benefit from these books. As teachers, our expectation from them is to reach the children in village schools as well. To provide students with materials such as internet, computer, tablet, etc. in order to make them participate in this process."

In the interviews with the parents, some of them stated that they could not receive any support from the MoNE. They stated that they could only communicate with the teacher on behalf of the Ministry, and their children's access to education was a problem, especially due to technical reasons and lack of materials. P4 expressed their views on this situation as follows:

"MoNE certainly did not manage well. There was no support. They said that we will reach every single student. No one even called me from school. The internet is very weak, and we are having difficulties connecting. No tablets. They do not take it into account, and they do not. They leave the children alone with the teacher."

In addition, they stated that it is important for the school to be face-to-face for the first grades because the teaching is easier, and the students at other grade levels are literate, where literacy teaching addresses the basic skills of children.

"I think it would be nice if the MoNE only opened the first grade. The school was a very safe environment. First-grade is a challenging process because it is important for them to acquire basic skills such as reading and writing because the students in other classes can read and write."

Another parent stated that the ministry is working well enough and doing its best in terms of education. P1's views reveal this situation as follows:

"It is difficult to do some things in our country, where there are so many students and educators, but I think the MoNE did its best."

They stated that the MoNE is trying to advance this work in parallel with the world, but financial inadequacies are a problem for some students, and that they take advantage of the internet defined for EBA. P2's views on this situation are as follows:

"The internet is according to our budget, we buy, it is a problem for those who do not buy it, they could not buy a tablet because they did not have any opportunities. The Internet came from EBA, but we could not see any benefit from it. It would be better if there is a school day for only first graders a week. Because other classes can read and write. Since 1st graders do not know, it is difficult for them to learn other lessons. Maybe we will experience this problem in the future."

Factors that Make Teaching Difficult

In the interviews with teachers at the beginning of the process, the teachers stated that the reduction of the course hours and days compared to the pre-pandemic period made it difficult for students to learn sounds. This led to the prolongation of the first literacy teaching process. It has been stated that as the time allocated to students in sound learning decreases during the pandemic process, it made it difficult to grasp sounds. T5's views reveal this situation as follows:

"Less repetition of sounds or less time to process sounds will create negativity in children's."

It has been stated that another factor that made the teaching process difficult was the use of masks. It seems that they were worried about how the sound teaching took place as long as the mask is on.

"Children come to school with masks, it is necessary to remove the mask in activities that require movement or sound demonstration. It is necessary to remove it for a short time to learn the sounds."

It was stated that this situation was caused by students' writing skills due to reasons, such as the need for contact due to their age, difficulty in classroom control in online education, and receiving feedback later than face-to-face education.

"The dialogue we have with children between online education and face-to-face education is very different. There is classical classroom management, which emphasizes the importance of face-to-face education. There are contact techniques in classroom management. It is not possible to follow children in distance education after a while, all teachers mute them all. I think it will affect the teaching of the first literacy negatively because we had to get feedback from students very quickly in face-to-face education. We need to be able to get quick feedback about making the sound felt and which part of the sound is in, so that the child does not have a break. Even sound transmission in the online platform is a mess due to technical problems."

On the other hand, T3 stated that she gave more importance to the teaching of first literacy, therefore, she allocated less time to mathematics and life sciences lesson and preferred to teach first literacy especially face to face with the following expressions:

"We have six hours of lessons a day. MoNE stated that we plan three or four hours of this in the Turkish Language and others in mathematics and life sciences. Unfortunately, I cannot do life science and mathematics. I can do these lessons in online classes on Wednesday. Since the duration of the lessons is reduced to 30 minutes, the lesson ends until we say something. We are trying to move forward with more homework."

T1 stated that, unlike this situation, the student spent more time away from school than before the pandemic, so he forgot what he learned:

"We cannot fulfill the gains sufficiently because we divide the class into two due to the pandemic, and the lesson times are also reduced. Since the child comes to school for two days, we have students who have problems because they are away from school on the other days and because they cannot get enough support at home."

Teachers working in village schools stated that they could not do the lessons due to technical inadequacies, they could only teach face-to-face and not teach in any way as a result of the complete closure of the school with the increase of the pandemic. However, they were able to conduct the lesson with 4-5 students with the help of videos on social networks.

"With the opening of the schools, we started face-to-face education five days a week. I could not teach online, because there was no internet, tablet, etc. for children. With the closure of the schools, face-to-face education ended. Since I cannot give all the sounds to children in this process, I am trying to find solutions as much as I can. My class is 17 people. I learned that only 4 of my students have internet and telephone facilities. I'm trying to deliver the videos via WhatsApp by shooting a video."

T3, on the other hand, stated that they did not have a detailed plan from the MoNE, and that this situation caused confusion and that parents were an important supporter in this process:

"We made a quick start, MoNE did not plan for us. We implemented a compressed plan in two days, and we do not have any data on how it will be. Unfortunately, it does not progress. More parents got on to work during this period."

In addition, the use of the mask will also have negative effects in terms of mutual interaction. T2's views on the process are as follows:

"Seeing smiling faces are important for children. The mask prevented them too. It was difficult because of the mask to convey the emotion and capture the emotion of the child."

Another factor that the pandemic negatively affected the teaching of first literacy was stated as the decrease in the lesson times and the days of students coming to school compared to the normal time.

"We had a hard time at first. It was a little easier when we switched to face-to-face education. Its limited time and lesson duration affected us. We limited the plan that we prepared. It affected us in terms of time."

In the interviews with the parents, another problem was that they did not know how to teach sound and literacy, and this made the process difficult.

"We cannot give what the teacher gives. Since we cannot replace the teacher, we try to teach something with the direction of the teacher, but it is not enough. He has difficulty combining the sounds and syllables."

The parents stated that they could not help their children much because of their busy work-life, and their children could not learn effectively. They stated that children, especially, could perform reading and writing activities only in the individual stage where they imitate the teacher. P3's views reveal this situation as follows.

"We could not stand by the children because we had jobs at home. He had hard times. My child has never learned. He writes what the teacher said. He cannot do it on his own. He could not learn to read. I'm trying to show it, but we're arguing with my child. We tried to support. We are trying to make him do the given homework, but we cannot be effective."

On the other hand, P4 stated that they helped their children in some way, but they did not know whether what they did was correct or not, and there was nobody to show the proper way:

"We do not know if what we did is right or wrong. It is a situation that continues with our support, I do not think that he will be successful in neither reading nor writing without our support. We teach unconsciously."

In the interviews with the parents, they stated that distance education slows down the process and face-to-face education is more effective, especially when there are problems such as disconnection to the internet, lack of tablets, limited time, and inability to focus on lessons in the home environment, which negatively affects literacy.

"During this period, we experienced the negative consequences of not being able to receive face-to-face education. It caused the literacy process to slow down."

It was stated that the free internet coming from the EBA system is not very useful, in addition, it has been stated that being at home negatively affects student motivation. P2's views reveal this situation as follows:

"Internet came from EBA, but we could not see any benefit from it. There is no positive side, the child at home is having trouble for focusing."

Similarly, It was stated that the problems such as the child's staying away from the social environment provided by the school, the absence of a classroom environment at home, technical inadequacies, etc. negatively affect the first literacy. P4 reviews reveal this situation as follows:

"There are many downsides. Our children stay away from school and education. He is careless in-home education. However, there was no responsibility at home for the child. The internet is very weak, we are having difficulties connecting. My child could not attend any classes on time. No tablets. I think my child cannot read most words right now. They are going very fast."

As another problem, they stated that having more than one child at home occurred while attending live lessons. P5's views reveal this situation.

"I just got my internet. I also have a daughter, and I take my daughter and son, who are going to high school, into a separate room. My house has a stove that's why I'm struggling."

P6 stated that the home environment causes problems for children to focus on lessons as follows:

"When the kids are at home, they cannot focus. This affects the situation negatively. He cannot read in front of the live lecture."

The researcher stated the situation regarding this process in his observation notes as follows:

"Being at home and in the digital environment is distracting for the students."

Finally, teachers stated that they do not prefer distance education in their first literacy teaching because they experience problems such as technical reasons. Another reason is that reading and writing, in which speaking and listening skills can be developed from four language skills during distance education, is difficult compared to face-to-face education. In addition, it was stated that the intervention of parents to the students during distance education negatively affected the course.

"In terms of distance education, it is troublesome for the parents to be involved in the lesson and to lead them to memorization. Parents intervene with the child during the live lesson from the sidelines. Saying the sound, etc. When the family intervenes, you cannot find out clearly whether the student knows or not."

It was stated that distance education was negative in terms of the teacher-child relationship, and children who could not attend classes were deprived of learning. In addition, the socio-economic structure of families negatively affected children's participation in online lessons. T5's views reveal this situation as follows:

"The devotion of the children to the teacher and their social environment decreased. Sound repetition does not seem very troublesome in children who can attend the lesson. The biggest problem is that they cannot attend the lesson. There are too many objects to distract the attendees. Because most of the children do not even have their own rooms."

It was stated that teaching reading and writing skills through distance education is more difficult than face-to-face education. T1's views reveal this situation as follows.

"Listening and speaking skills are easier. Reading and writing are getting harder."

T4, on the other hand, stated that listening skills can be gained more easily with distance education compared to face-to-face education, and reading and writing skills can be gained more difficult. T4 expressed his views on this situation as follows:

"Listening skills can be gained more easily. Speaking and giving permission to speak in distance education can be a little more difficult. Reading and writing were more difficult."

T2 stated with the following statements that it is difficult to control writing skills with distance education :

"Their language development has been better for speaking. We cannot see what is written in the notebook in the writing skill."

Finally, it is difficult to get feedback in live lessons because children have technological inadequacies due to the programs used, and this situation negatively affects the literacy process.. T3's views reveal this situation as follows.

"I think it was all difficult, it becomes pointless, when you are getting no feedback. There is noise, and the child does not hear me. They said things such as the internet was frozen, and they could not hear, etc. Little children cannot turn the sound on or off as well. The literacy process is very difficult remotely. I tried to do dictation work in the last live lesson, they feel better while doing it in the classroom environment, I think this does not pass to the children in the camera environment."

The researcher stated in the live lesson observations that the technical problems negatively affected the lesson, especially the teachers had problems in controlling the writing activities.

"Internet systemic errors occur. Classroom management is getting harder because the sound goes late them."

"The teacher is dictating the "ö" sound to his students. The teacher asked them to bring what was written close to the camera to check them, but some of them are not clearly seen."

DISCUSSION

In the COVID-19 process, literacy teaching in the first grade of elementary school is mostly carried out online due to the pandemic conditions. Akyol (2012) stated that the preparation parts for the literacy process were not fully fulfilled due to the pandemic. This situation has made the already long and difficult literacy teaching process even more challenging. For example, while gaining writing skills, children should be taught to hold a pencil correctly (Akyol, 2012). However, since contact was avoided due to the pandemic these skills were difficult to teach. The findings determined that there is a significant difference between socio-economic levels of individuals living in rural and urban areas in terms of access to education during the pandemic process. With the increase of cases as a result of the complete transition to distant education of the schools, the access of children living in rural areas to education has been completely cut-off. Children from families with low socio-economic status also had difficulties accessing education. The socio-economic level is included in the literature as an important variable in access to education and academic achievement. According to De Giusti (2020), while children who could not access education in lower-middle and low-income countries

throughout the world were around 85% during the pandemic period, this rate remained around 35% in upper-middle and high-income countries. According to UNICEF(2020) report, approximately 150 million children worldwide were in poverty where they could not access education at all. In addition, about 463 million children did not have access to digital and remote education, which negatively affected the lives of children in their future years. In Turkey, the village school in interviews made with 2,000 village headmen, it is stated that 60% of the children, who are students in the village schools, have no materials to reach distance education, and it is noted that some of the teachers working in the village schools made the lessons through WhatsApp (ERG, 2021). Similarly, when we look at other studies in the literature, the biggest problem in front of access to online lessons was stated as the lack of digital material and the internet (Karahana et al., 2020; Sikirit, 2020). . When the findings of this study and other research results are evaluated, the pandemic affects children living in rural areas and children of families with low socio-economic levels negatively compared to their peers. Studies have found that family socioeconomic level has a positive effect on children's literacy success (Duncan & Seymour, 2000; Hemmerechts et al., 2017). First grade is a critical period in terms of gaining basic skills such as reading and writing. The problems experienced by children in gaining reading and writing skills during this period will show negativity in their future lives.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers and students wearing masks emerged in the research findings as another situation that negatively affected the teaching of literacy. Teachers stated that they could not show mouth structures while introducing sounds to students because of their mask, or since they had difficulty communicating with students and sometimes they had to remove the mask. The research findings revealed that students' coming to school for two days also caused problems in learning literacy. Leppanen et al. (2004) stated that children who practice more in literacy teaching read and write are better than their peers. From this point of view, it is seen that without the support of parents at home, children will not be able to practice in the remaining days, and as a result, literacy teaching is negatively affected. Similarly, Bao et al. (2020) stated in their study that more than half of Kindergarten Children will gain fewer literacy skills compared to the normal process, but activities to be done at home, such as reading, every day will be effective in reducing this negative situation.

Another essential piece of data that stands out in the research findings is that parents are considered important stakeholders in the first literacy process. It was revealed that the teachers in the research expected support from parents during the pandemic process. Some teachers explained this expectation in detail, and parents supported them on a planned basis. Bubb & Jones (2020) stated that families, who have even better relations with teachers, are at an important point in contributing to their children's learning process. In this research, the students whose families were related had positive results in their learning to read and write during the pandemic. Studies conducted before the COVID-19 outbreak also yielded results supporting

this situation. In fact, OECD (2012) stated that the reading scores of children who are frequently read by their families in primary school are higher than other students in the PISA study conducted in 2009. Goux, Gurgand, and Maurin (2017) concluded that children's literacy competence is related to families' support for children's education. Saint-Laurent & Giasson (2005) found that literacy skills improved compared to the children of families who did not work at all.

In the research, the parents stated that they expected to get support in the form of equipment to help learn from the ministry, such as tablet and internet support, but they could not receive any support. They also stated that they could not take advantage of the internet packages provided for EBA. On the other hand, teachers criticized leaving this literacy teaching program as it was before the pandemic, and not specifying a specific program for the pandemic. While school administrators meet the expectations of parents and teachers about the cleanliness of the school, it is seen that they are lacking in supporting the parents in the process. Providing training in this direction for parents who do not know how to use the EBA system and zoom program can facilitate the process. It is thought that school administrations' increasing cooperation with parents in this sense will have positive effects. Hampden-Thompson & Galindo (2017) concluded that strong school-family relationships increase the academic success of students in schools, and it is recommended to increase this relationship, especially with parents with low socioeconomic levels. Based on Shelldon (2003), the efforts of schools to include families and society in students' learning can be a useful approach that will help students to be successful in school, especially for students in primary school classes.

CONCLUSION

As a result, it has been determined that COVID-19 negatively affects literacy teaching in the first grade. The reasons for this can be shown as the uncertainty of the process, inequality of opportunity in education which is a dramatic fact, lack of materials, and problems reasoned by parents. In addition to this, it is a positive aspect that education continues in this way in case the education does not continue at all during this process. As a result, the pandemic process is also an opportunity to see our deficiencies in terms of education. Finally, the following suggestions were made as a result of the research:

- In this process, studies should be carried out in the following years in order to see how students, who are in their first grade now, were academically affected by this pandemic, and if deficiencies were determined, they should be compensated
- After the pandemic is over, it is important to include parents in the literacy process in the first grade, thus the process can be more qualified.

- The reasons for the parents at the private school for expecting the whole job to be done from the school and the teacher should be investigated and effective cooperation should be developed.

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