

## Being a Social Studies Teacher and Student in the COVID-19 Period

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the views of social studies teachers and their students about the education offered during the pandemic period, as well as their problems, if any, and their suggestions for that education in particular. The study sample consisted of 10 social studies teachers working in schools affiliated to Erzurum Provincial Directorate of National Education and a total of 30 students taking the classes of those teachers. The data required in the study were obtained with semi-structured interview questions prepared by the researcher, upon which the available data were analysed by content analysis. As a result of the data analysis, all teachers and students were found to have stated that they had experienced certain problems during the pandemic. Some problems experienced during distance education included the issues of students' absenteeism in online classes and technical problems. Behavioural problems of students, ineffective lessons, and lack of communication with students appeared to be among the outcomes recently specified in the face-to-face education period. Nevertheless, this study also concluded that social studies teachers had improved their digital literacy skills during the pandemic.

**Key words:** Views of Social Studies Teachers, Views of Students, Pandemic

### INTRODUCTION

Coronaviruses are commonly seen in the society, just like the common cold, with many symptoms varying from self-limiting mild infections to severe respiratory failure syndrome and other severe clinical conditions that may lead to mortality. There are many types of coronavirus detected in bats, pigs, cats, dogs, rodents, and poultry (The Council of Higher Education [YÖK], 2021). The disease caused by the new type of coronavirus was named the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). In the acronym- COVID-19-, 'CO' stands for corona, 'VI' for virus, and 'D' for disease (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2022). Coronaviruses are single-stranded, enveloped RNA viruses with rod-like spikes on their surface. The name coronavirus (crowned virus) was named after the Latin word 'corona', which means crown, as the spikes on the surface of the virus look like a crown (YÖK, 2021). The new coronavirus was revealed on January 13, 2020 as a result of a clinical study conducted on a group of patients who developed respiratory symptoms in Wuhan, China, in late December 2019. Initially detected in the seafood and animal market in the Wuhan Region, this disease spread to other cities in Hubei Province as well as other countries all around the world (Ministry of Health, 2022). Due to its close genetic relationship with severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), coronavirus (SARS-CoV) was later renamed as SARS-CoV-2

by the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (Bursa Uludağ University, Department of Environmental Engineering, 2020).

The most common symptoms of the novel coronavirus disease include fever, cough, fatigue, and loss of taste or smell, while less common symptoms include sore throat, headache, joint pain, muscle pain, abdominal pain, aches, diarrhoea, skin redness, and discoloration of fingers or toes, rashes, as well as red or irritated eyes. The most serious symptoms of this disease are difficulty in breathing or shortness of breath. Moreover, other symptoms such as loss of speech, confusion, chest pain, heart palpitations can also be seen in many patients (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). When it comes to the neurological symptoms of the coronavirus disease, however, the symptoms include difficulty in thinking, concentrating, sleep problems, dizziness, tingling sensation, changes in smell or taste, depression and anxiety (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2022).

Affecting the whole world, the coronavirus outbreak was seen for the first time in Turkey on March 11, 2020 (Ministry of Health, 2022), and the risk of contracting the disease caused by the outbreak brought various difficulties, restrictions and unknowns to people in many different areas. The COVID-19 pandemic, which adversely affected health conditions, in particular, as well as many other areas such as economy, transportation, tourism and social life, unfortunately

exerted a great impact on education. Due to these negative effects, all public, private, formal and non-formal education institutions (Ministry of National Education [MEB], 2020) were suspended on March 16, 2020, along with higher education institutions on March 23, 2020, and distance education started within the scope of coronavirus measures (YÖK, 2021). The 2019/20 academic year was completed through the use of the Education Information Network (EBA) and Live Classroom Applications (Primary, Secondary and High School) without any face-to-face education due to the COVID-19 pandemic and in line with the measures taken (MEB, 2020). Vaccination against COVID-19 started in Turkey on January 14, 2021 and the first shot was given to the Minister of Health (Ministry of Health, 2021). Following the vaccination, adaptation training for preschool and first grade students was carried out on 1-3 September 2021, and on September 6, full-time face-to-face education started at all levels for five days a week (MEB, 2021).

### Objectives

This study aimed to establish the views of social studies teachers and their students concerning the education provided during the pandemic, their problems, if any, and their suggestions for the education given during that period. This study covered the period when schools were closed temporarily by switching to distance education due to the COVID-19 pandemic, until they were reopened to restart face-to-face education despite the on-going pandemic. In addition, this study is of great importance in terms of giving an idea about the education offered during the on-going COVID-19 pandemic.

### Research Questions

To meet the aforementioned objective, the following research questions were posed:

1. During the pandemic, did the social studies teachers and their students encounter any problems? What were their problems?
2. Did the pandemic contribute to social studies teaching? What are the opinions of social studies teachers and their students who think that the pandemic had a contribution?
3. How did the pandemic affect the students who took the social studies course, in academic terms?
4. How did the pandemic period affect students' attitudes towards the social studies course?
5. What was the tendency of the social studies teachers and their students in relation to whether they preferred distance education or face-to-face education during the pandemic period?
6. What are your suggestions for the Ministry of National Education to carry out more qualified education and training activities during the pandemic period?

### Scope and Limitations

Teachers and students participating in this study were assumed to have honestly and objectively responded the

semi-structured interview questions in a way that included their opinions on the education implemented during the pandemic period. This study is limited to the data obtained through the use of a semi-structured interview form, and to 10 social studies teachers working in Palandöken and Yakutiye Districts, Erzurum, Türkiye in the 2021/22 academic year, and to 30 students attending the classes of the said teachers.

### METHOD

This study was carried out with the basic qualitative research design as one of the qualitative research types. In this method, the researcher tries to understand the meaning of a phenomenon according to the participants involved in that particular phenomenon. Researchers are concerned with how people interpret their lives, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they add to their experiences. The whole point is to clearly understand how people conceive their lives and experiences. In addition, basic qualitative studies can be seen in all disciplines and practice areas. Data are collected by interview, observation, or document analysis (Merriam, 2018).

### Study Sample

Convenient sampling was used to determine the study group. This sampling method adds practicality and speed to the research. In this sampling, an easy-to-access situation is also selected (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). The study sample consisted of 10 social studies teachers working in schools in Palandöken and Yakutiye Districts, which were affiliated to Erzurum Provincial Directorate of National Education in the 2021/22 academic year, and a total of 30 students attending the classes of those teachers. All the students were randomly selected from among those studying in the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade.

### Data Collection Tools

The data required in this study were collected with semi-structured interview questions prepared by the researcher. The questions were shown to three field experts (a professor, an associate professor and a doctoral lecturer in the field of social studies), in order to take their opinions within the scope of the subject to be measured, and the questions were finalized after the necessary corrections were made. These questions consisted of 6 open-ended questions about the pandemic period. Furthermore, a voice recorder and notebook were used to collect data during the interview. Prior to the implementation process, a pilot study of the data collection tool was conducted with two social studies teachers and three students.

### Implementation of the Study

Interviews were conducted with 10 social studies teachers working in Yakutiye and Palandöken Districts of Erzurum and 3 students of each teacher at the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade. Prior to starting the interviews, teachers and students were informed by the researcher in detail about the subject, purpose and reason

for conducting the present study. Before the study was conducted, the "Participation acceptance form" was signed by the teachers who would participate in the research. A "Parent Consent Form" was sent to the parents of the students participating in the study and necessary permissions were obtained. In addition, it was reported to the teachers and parents of students who participated in the study that participation in the study was based on volunteerism and that the data obtained would only be evaluated by the researchers. Moreover, the teachers and students were assured that their names would never be used so that they could give more objective answers to the questions posed. In this way, it was aimed to enable the teachers and students participating in the study feel more comfortable. The interviews were conducted by the researcher in an environment where the participants would not be influenced by others and could freely express their views.

### Data Analysis

The data were analysed by content analysis. The basic process in content analysis is to gather similar data within the framework of certain concepts and themes, and to interpret them by arranging them in a way that a reader can understand (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). Audio-recorded data collected from teachers and students in the course of interview sessions were recorded on the computer and read several times by the researcher. In order to increase the validity of the study, the recorded data was sent to the participants via WhatsApp Messenger to obtain the confirmation of the participants. In this strategy process, i.e. participant validation, the data is transmitted to participants to ensure that the perception of the data and the accuracy of the interpretations made based on the given data are checked by the participants (Merriam, 2018).

The data obtained through the interview were independently analysed and coded, based on which the categories were created by two different researchers in order to ensure that the data analysis would yield reliable results. The inclusion of more than one researcher in the same study is likely to increase the agreement between the researchers and the acceptance rate of the study for others (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, as cited in Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

The data obtained in line with the purpose of the study were interpreted by creating frequency and percentage tables and enriched by direct quotations with the responses given by the teachers and students. In presenting the direct quotations, the teachers and students were given pseudonyms. In calculating the percentages for the questions with more than one opinion, what was considered numerically was not the number of teachers and students, but the opinions expressed on that subject matter.

## RESULTS

### Teachers' Problems during the Pandemic Period

Did You Experience Any Problems While Teaching During the Pandemic Period? (n=10).

According to the results of the first research question, all of the social studies teachers who participated in the interview stated that they had experienced certain problems during the pandemic process.

As can be seen in Table 1, the problems such as students' absenteeism during distance education, experiencing technical issues, and behavioural problems in the face-to-face education period are those with the highest frequency.

Some teachers' opinions were presented in relation to the problems such as students' failing to attend classes during the distance education period and experiencing technical errors caused by the Internet, sound, and system. While the teachers with the pseudonyms Kadir, Yusuf, Ece, and Arif stated that the students had very little participation in the lessons, the teachers represented as Ahmet, Cihat, Kadir, Ece, and Arif stated that they had experienced technical errors originating from the Internet, sound and system. Kadir, for example, stressed having experienced problems in terms of providing Internet connections and using the program during the distance education and that there was very little student participation in the course. Yusuf, on the other hand, stated that many students lacked computers and tablets, and that they had experienced difficulties in attending the lesson, which led to decreased efficiency. Likewise, Ece stated that student participation in distance education was very low, so they could not get much feedback and that some students did not even turn on their cameras in addition to other problems such as sound problems. Yusuf also pointed out that due to these problems, students could not comprehend the lessons well. In relation to such issues, some teacher opinions included the behaviour problems of the students, the inability of the students to adapt to the school environment, and the students' indifference to the lesson during face-to-face education period. Moreover, the statements of teachers who had problems with students on the use of masks, classroom management and compliance with classroom rules were also included. As another example, Selda stated that children had experienced problems adapting to school and obeying the rules. Cihat, on the other hand, pointed out that students developed behavioural problems after face-to-face education and that they had difficulties in targeting academic achievement due to this. Furthermore, Zeynep stated that students were distracted from lessons and school due to digital activities, inevitably leading to a lack of attention, and that they became prone to violence, had an increased habit of yelling at each other and oppressing each other, and that they seemed to have learned such behaviour from TikTok and social media. Unlike the given opinions, Ömer stated that students had difficulty in wearing masks inside.

### Students' Problems during the Pandemic Period

Did you have any problems during the pandemic period? (n=30).

According to the results of the first research question, all of the students who participated in this study stated that they had experienced problems during the pandemic.

As can be seen in Table 2, there are a number of problems during the distance education period such as experiencing

**Table 1.** Problems experienced by teachers (n=10)

	Responses	Frequency
Distance Education	Students' absenteeism	8
	Internet, sound and system-related technical issues	8
	Having ineffective lessons	7
	Lack of communication with students	6
	Students' lack of computers and tablets	5
	Students' deliberately not turning on their cameras	4
	Inability to supervise students	4
	Students' careless behaviour	3
	Students' distraction	3
	Students without Internet access	2
	Teachers' lack of knowledge about distance education	2
	Parents' insensitive attitude	2
	Students' lack of academic anxiety	2
	Teachers and students' being kept away from school	2
	Negative impact on teachers' private life	1
	Inability to do homework checks	1
	Students' inability to use technological tools	1
	Negative effects of the internet (applications such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram) on students	1
	Unreliable assessment and evaluation	1
Face-to-face education	Students' observable behaviour problems	5
	Students' experiencing problems in adapting to the school environment	4
	Students lack of interest in the lesson	4
	Problems in classroom management and compliance with classroom rules	4
	Problems regarding the use of masks	3
	Distraction in students	2
	Failing to complete the course subjects on time	2
	Lack of motivation in students	1
	Teachers' having problems in adapting to the school environment	1
	Decline in academic achievement during the pandemic period	1

technical errors, poor understanding of live lessons, and students and family members' contracting the COVID-19. Some student opinions regarding the above table are given below. Some students Selin, Buğra, Samet, Arda, Nehir and Nida emphasized that they themselves and their family members contracted the COVID-19 virus. In addition, Nazlı mentioned the loss of some close relatives due to the COVID-19. Furthermore, Mehmet, Şule, Burak, Emre, Enes, Arda and Metehan all stated that they had failed to understand the live lessons due to technical and Internet-related issues.

The data for the first question indicated that all of the teachers and students in the study had experienced certain problems on the whole.

In addition, the given data also shows that many of the problems are common. The answers given by the teachers and students include some common aspects such as technical issues related to the Internet, audio and video, inefficient classes, students' lacking computers or Internet access, their spending too much time in the Internet environment, problems in the use of masks, lack of motivation in students and problems about classroom management.

### Teachers' Views about on the Contribution of the Pandemic Period to Social Studies Teaching

What do you think about whether the pandemic period had any contribution to social studies teaching? (n=10)

Given the opinions of the teachers about whether the pandemic as a period contributed to the teaching of social studies, 3 teachers were found to have said that it contributed, 3 teachers said that it did not contribute, and 4 teachers said that it both contributed and did not contribute.

As can be seen in Table 3, the teachers, who stated that the pandemic period contributed to the teaching of social studies, had opinions that they had improved themselves in terms of technology and digital literacy. On the other hand, teachers who stated that the pandemic period never contributed to social studies teaching had particular opinions to emphasize the negative aspects varying from students' absenteeism, students and teachers' being negatively affected, teachers' inability to be able to directly communicate with students, students' becoming alienated from the school environment and their being indifferent to the lesson.

**Table 2.** Problems experienced by students (n=30)

Responses	Frequency
Experiencing technical difficulties due to the Internet, sound, electricity and system	21
Inability of students to understand live lessons well	11
Students and family members contracting COVID-19	8
Problems with mask use	7
Students' lack of computers and tablets	7
Poor economic situation of the family	3
Decreased academic achievement of students during the distance education	3
Students' lack of knowledge regarding certain subjects during the distance education	3
Students with chronic illnesses	3
Students with no Internet access	2
Students' lack of motivation	2
Lack of a systematic distance education program	2
Students' socialization problems	2
Students' loss of family members from COVID-19.	1
Home environment being not suitable for listening to lectures in live lessons	1
Students' thinking that COVID-19 will harm family members	1
Students' spending too much time on the Internet	1
Noise in the classroom while teaching in face-to-face education	1
Students with chronic diseases requesting distance education	1

**Table 3.** Teachers' views on contributions (n=10)

	Responses	Frequency
It contributed	Opportunity for teachers for self-development in terms of technology and digital literacy	5
	Some subjects becoming easier to learn	2
	Opportunity for teachers to have easy access to information from the computer	2
	Online activities attracting students' attention	1
	Opportunity for teachers to do more research	1
	Opportunity for teachers to gain experience in distance education	1
	Students' absenteeism during the distance education period	2
It did not contribute	Its negative impact on students and teachers	2
	Inability to communicate directly with students during the distance education period	2
	Students' ending up being alienated from school	2
	Students' becoming uninterested in the face-to-face education period	2
	Failing to supervise students during the distance education period	1
	Distance education becoming ineffective	1
	Lack of computers, phones and tablets	1
	Lack of Internet access	1

Some teachers' views on this subject can be presented as follows: Kadir talked about having learned to use many programs at that time and about being able to access resources, adding that the pandemic process had technological benefits. In addition to these, Kadir further said that the pandemic period provided many benefits in terms of digital literacy. Selda, on the other hand, stated that the period contributed to accessing information from computers immediately and improved digital literacy. Selda also added that students understood concepts such as "freedom of travel and quarantine" better. In a similar sense, Cihat stated that the use of

technology improved a little more due to practicing the use of Web 2.0 tools. In addition, Ahmet emphasized the chance of improvement in terms of using digital tools, adding that it became possible with games and web 2.0 tools in digital environments. However, when it comes to the statements of the teachers who believed that the period had not contributed at all, the views of teachers such as Ömer, Arif, Ece, Merve and Kadir drew attention in this regard. For example, Arif stated that the alienation of students from the school and classroom environment reduced their interest in the lesson. Ece further mentioned that students could not socialize with each other

and communication with them was hard during the distance education period. Merve, on the other hand, pointed out the problem that the students could not attend the lesson due to their limited opportunities.

### Student Views about on the Contribution of the Pandemic Period to Social Studies Teaching

What do you think about whether the pandemic period had any contribution to social studies teaching? (n=30).

In relation to the second question, when asked about whether the pandemic period had any contributions in terms of social studies teaching, 5 students stated that the pandemic period contributed to it, whereas 25 students stated that it did not contribute.

As seen in Table 4, students who stated that the pandemic period did not contribute to social studies teaching presented such reasons as their inability to understand live lessons and their decreased academic achievement. Significant opinions of such students as Mehmet, Beyza, Ceyda, Nehir, Eyup, Mustafa, Buğra, Gamze, Emre, Ali, and Fatma stood out, given the statements of the students who believed that the period had not contributed at all. For example, Beyza stated that the pandemic had no contribution and they lagged behind in terms of the intended goals of the course. Ceyda, similarly, emphasized that the subjects were not understood because there was no face-to-face training. In addition, Nehir, mentioned a sense of loss for the fifth grade due to live lessons.

Students who expressed a positive opinion about the pandemic period, on the other hand, stated that there were some contributions such as learning how to use a computer during the distance education period, better teaching by teachers and lack of noise in live lessons. Some students also gave answers such as “We understood the value of the past”, or “I spent time with my family”, which are not included in Table 4 since they are irrelevant to the question. Furthermore, some of the students who stated that the pandemic period did not contribute at all failed to give any explanation as to why it did not contribute. The statements of some students on this

subject are presented below. For example, Zehra stated that devices teach people something in terms of technology, adding that she did not know how to use a computer in the past, but now she knows how to use a computer. Another view that differs from this belongs to Enes, who pointed out that the teachers started to teach better. In addition, Metehan emphasized that he could learn more during the distance education since the environment was quiet, adding that the classroom is often noisy in face-to-face education.

When compared, the Tables prepared about the second question and the answers received from teachers and students revealed that some data were common or parallel to each other. As an example, responses such as the lack of computers, tablets and phones, the alienation of students from the school environment, the inability of students to understand the live lessons are the answers given by teachers and students in common. The responses related to students’ views indicating that they had learned to use computers and to teachers’ views indicating self-development in technology are among those that show similarities when it comes to the contributions of the pandemic period.

### Teachers’ Views on the Effect of the Pandemic Process on the Academic Success of Students

What kind of an impact do you think the pandemic period had on the academic achievement of the students? (n=10).

All of the teachers who participated in the study stated that the students’ academic achievement declined considering the impact of the pandemic period on the students’ academic achievement.

As shown in Table 5, having stated that students’ academic achievement decreased during the pandemic period, the teachers presented such reasons as the students’ absenteeism during the distance education period, their lack of academic anxiety, and inefficient classes. Some relevant teacher opinions on this subject are as follows: Kadir, as an example, stated that the pandemic had a negative effect on students since they got alienated from the lessons too much, and that participation decreased since distance education reduced

**Table 4.** Students’ views on contributions (n=30)

	Responses	Frequency
It did not contribute	Inability of students to understand live lessons well	5
	Students’ decreased academic achievement	5
	Students’ experiencing problems in socializing	2
	Students’ being alienated from school.	1
	Problems in the use of masks	1
	Dislike for distance education	1
	Experiencing technical issues due to the Internet, sound, electricity and system	2
	Lack of computers, phones and tablets	1
	Students with chronic illnesses	1
	It contributed	Students’ learning how to use computers
Better teaching by teachers		1
No noise problem in live lessons		1

**Table 5.** Teachers’ views on academic success (n=10)

Responses	Frequency
Students’ absenteeism during the distance education period	3
Students’ lack of academic anxiety in the distance education period	3
Inefficient courses in the distance education period	5
Inability of reliable assessment and evaluation in distance education period	2
Students’ careless behaviour during the distance education period	2
Students’ alienation from school during the distance education period	2
Students’ lack of interest in the lesson during the distance education period	2
Experiencing the problem of supervising students during distance education	2
Problematic communication with students in the distance education period	1
Lack of thorough explanation of the lessons during distance education	1
Students’ spending a lot of time on the computer during distance education	1
Students’ being negatively influenced by the pandemic period in psychological terms	1

interest. Merve, on the other hand, emphasized that although the grades increased during the pandemic, the success decreased a lot, adding that the students passed to the next class without understanding and acquiring even very simple information. In addition to these, Cihat stated that students got away from being disciplined. In addition, Ahmet emphasized that students had gone through many psychological problems.

**Student Views on the Effect of the Pandemic Process on Their Academic Achievement**

What impact do you think the pandemic period had on your academic achievement? (n=30).

Considering the impact of the pandemic period on the students’ academic achievement, we conclude that the academic achievement of 13 students decreased in the distance education period, while that of 2 students went down in the face-to-face education period. However, 8 students stated that their academic achievement decreased in general. On the other hand, 7 students in the face-to-face education period and 6 students in the distance education period emphasized that their academic achievement had increased, whereas 3 students stated that their academic success had not been influenced.

As is seen in Table 6, there are reasons such as ineffective distance education and technical issues related to the Internet to affect students’ academic achievement during the pandemic period. Some students’ views on this subject

**Table 6.** Students’ views on academic success (n=30)

Responses	Frequency
Distance education becoming ineffective	9
Experiencing technical issues with the Internet	2
Fear of being infected with COVID-19	1
Students’ lack of academic anxiety in the distance education period	1
Teachers’ contracting COVID-19	1
Students’ fear of being unable to learn the lesson in distance education	1
The negative impact of the pandemic period on students psychologically	1
Students’ being away from their friends during distance education	1
Students’ inability to reach their teacher during distance education	1
Students with chronic illnesses	1
Students’ failing to study	1
Having silent class atmosphere during the distance education period	1

were presented as follows: Şule, for example, mentioned that she was poor in lessons when taught from the EBA and her general achievement became much better when face-to-face education restarted. Burak, on the other hand, pointed out that his current success was better than that in the distance education period, adding that he did not understand the lessons because the Internet was not available. Furthermore, Nida stated that she experienced a decline in the fourth and fifth grades, but then started to recover, and that the reason for the decline was her feeling bad mentally. Contrary to these views, Buğra stated that distance education was good, but that he became ill when face-to-face education restarted since his allergic asthma started, and that his success in classes declined considerably. Nazlı, on the other hand, stated that her academic achievement did not change.

When compared, the tables for the third question have shown that there were some common answers given by the teachers and students in that the distance education period was inefficient, the students did not have grade anxiety, and the students were affected negatively in psychological terms. In a similar manner, the statements that the students were separated from their friends, they became alienated from school, the communication with the student was problematic, and the students could not reach the teacher whenever they wanted during the distance education period, seemed to be in conformity with each other.

**Teachers’ Views About on the Effect of the Pandemic Process on Students’ Attitudes Towards the Lesson**

What impact do you think the pandemic period had on the attitudes of the students you instructed in the social studies course? (n=10).

Half of the teachers who participated in the study stated that there was no change in the attitudes of the students towards the social studies course. Regarding the distance education period, 3 teachers and regarding both education periods, 1 teacher said that the attitudes of the students were negatively affected. In addition, there are 2 teachers claiming that the face-to-face education period had a positive effect on the attitudes of the students, and likewise, 1 teacher who stated likewise for both education periods.

As can be seen in Table 7, students' spending a lot of time on the computer, absenteeism, lack of interest in classes, and being kept away from school during the distance education period seem to have negatively affected their attitudes. According to the table, the teachers' attempt to increase the interest in the lesson and the use of different activities and games during the distance education period had a positive effect on the attitudes of the students. The views of some teachers on this subject can be presented as follows: Kadir mentioned that children had developed lack of motivation and problems of focusing, and emphasized that students' interest as well as the importance of school decreased. Ahmet stated that the students did not have positive attitude toward distance education when compared to face-to-face education. Unlike such views, Yusuf mentioned about doing a lot of activities during the distance education period to attract the students' interest. Cihat and Arif, on the other hand, stated that there was not much change in the course on the whole.

### Student Views on the Effect of the Pandemic Process on Attitudes Towards the Lesson

What impact do you think the pandemic period had on your attitude towards social studies course? (n= 30).

When it comes to the impact of the pandemic on students' attitudes towards the social studies course, 13 of the students who participated in the study stated that there was no change in their attitudes. In addition, there are 6 students who said that distance education had affected them negatively, and there are 4 students who said that the pandemic had a negative effect in both education periods. It is also seen that there are 5 students who stated that both education periods had a positive impact on their attitudes, while 4 students said that their attitudes changed positively after they had started face-to-face education. One of the students stated that distance education had a positive impact.

As can be seen in Table 8, disliking distance education and having boring lessons are among the negative reasons with the highest frequency on students' attitudes. The factors of liking the teacher and the teacher's being good at teaching the subject appear to have positively affected the attitudes of the students. However, some students did not give reasons why their attitudes did or did not change. The opinions of some students can be presented as given below: Şule, Emre and Eren stated that their attitudes towards the lesson did not change, while Büşra stated that the general interest towards the lesson increased when face-to-face education restarted. Unlike these views, Zehra stated that the pandemic as a period had a positive influence due to its being helpful in terms of technology. Burak, however, emphasized that the lessons became boring with the pandemic.

**Table 7.** Teachers' views towards on student attitudes (n=10)

	Responses	Frequency
Negative	Students' spending too much time on the computer	2
	Students' absenteeism during distance education	1
	Students' lack of motivation	1
	Students' lack of interest in classes	1
	Students' concentration problems	1
	Students' being kept away from school	1
	Positive	Teachers' increasing the students' interest in the lesson
Teachers' including different activities and games during the distance education		1

**Table 8.** Students' views on their attitudes towards the lesson (n=30)

	Responses	Frequency
Negative	Disliking distance education	5
	Boring lessons	3
	Problems regarding the use of masks	1
	Less activities due to social distancing	1
	Fear of failing to learn	1
	Positive	Liking the teacher
Teachers' being good at teaching the subject		2
Students' focusing more on the lesson		1
Learning how to use technological tools		1
Relating lessons to daily life		1
The course topics being interesting		1
	Not knowing the reason	1

As shown in Table 7 and Table 8, liking the teacher, the teacher's being good at teaching the subject, and at increasing interest in the lesson can be considered as parallel expressions.

### Education Preferences of Teachers During the Pandemic Process

In the pandemic period that we are going through right now, if you had the opportunity, would you prefer face-to-face education or distance education? (n=10).



Based on the data obtained from the interview regarding the fifth question, all the teachers seem to have preferred face-to-face education.

As can be seen in Table 9, some reasons for teachers to prefer face-to-face education included better supervision of students, better interaction between students and teachers, and better assessment and evaluation. The answers received from some teachers on this subject are given below: For example, Yusuf stated that student participation was higher in face-to-face education as opposed to many students who did not have the opportunity for online education, besides the insensitivity of parents in distance education. Furthermore, Cihat stated that children learned how to behave towards people at school and improved themselves in communication skills. Ece emphasized that they could read children's reactions in face-to-face education and they were more coordinated in exams. Similarly, Arif mentioned that the distance education period was exhausting and they had many problems in assessment and evaluation.

**Table 9.** Teachers' educational preference (n=10)

	Responses	Frequency
Face-to-face education	Opportunity for teachers to supervise students	6
	Better interaction between students and teachers	3
	Better assessment and evaluation	3
	Opportunity for students to learn human relations and social rules	3
	Better homework check	1
	More number of students present in classes	1
	Students' being more active	1
	Doing variety of activities	1
	Better understanding of the lessons	1
Distance education	Teachers' experiencing difficulties	2
	Parents' indifference	2
	Physical exhaustion of teachers	2
	Some students' inability to access distance education	1
	Experiencing technical issues with the Internet	1
	Students' deliberately not turning on the cameras	1
	Students' finding distance education boring	1
	Difficulty communicating with students	1
	Students' inability to focus on the lesson	1
	Negative impact on teacher psychology	1
Ineffective distance education	1	

**Educational Preferences of Students During the Pandemic Process**

In the pandemic period that we are going through right now, if you had the opportunity, would you prefer face-to-face education or distance education? (n=30).

Based on the findings obtained from the students regarding the fifth question, it was concluded that 26 students preferred face-to-face education, 2 students preferred distance education, and the remaining 2 students preferred both distance and face-to-face education.

Table 10 shows that the reasons for preferring face-to-face education include the views that the lessons were better understood as stated by 26 of the students, that the students experienced technical problems in distance education as indicated by 12 of them, and that they wanted to spend time with their friends as emphasized by 10 of them. On the other hand, the reasons for preferring distance education are the chronic diseases of the students and the fear of contracting COVID-19. In addition, students who preferred both educational processes put forward reasons such as getting tired in the lessons and the opportunity of reinforcing the subjects.

Below are the opinions of some students such as Mehmet, Burak, Büşra, Beyza, Emre, Samet, Furkan, Enes, Arda, Nehir, Zehra, Ali and Eren, who preferred face-to-face education. For example, Nehir mentioned the poor audio and visual aspects in distance education, adding that there was no distraction in face-to-face learning. Selin and Ceyda were students who preferred both distance and face-to-face education. In particular, Selin emphasized the need

**Table 10.** Students' education preference (n=30)

	Responses	Frequency
Face-to-face education	Better understanding of lessons	26
	Experiencing technical issues during distant education	12
	Students' wishing to spend time with their friends	10
	Students' wishing to spend time with their teachers	5
	Students' wishing to increase their academic achievement	2
	Technology addiction in students	2
	Students' distraction	1
	Inability to communicate with teachers during distance education	1
	Computers' running out of battery	1
	Difficulty of assessment and evaluation in distance education	1
Distance education	Students with chronic illnesses	2
	Fear of contracting COVID-19	1
Both	Student fatigue	1
	Further reinforcement of the topics	1

for both distance and face-to-face education, focusing on being very tired as the reason for this. Ceyda, on the other hand, stated that it is possible to go to school during the day and distance education can be done in the evening to reinforce it. Unlike such views, Buğra stated that he preferred distance education because he was sick. In addition, Metehan stated that the pandemic had been progressing and that he preferred distance education because of his allergies.

When compared, the data related to the fifth question show that all of the teachers and 26 of the students preferred face-to-face education, whereas 2 students preferred distance education and 2 students preferred both educational situations. Better understanding of the lessons and better assessment and evaluation appear to be the common reasons for preferring face-to-face education. Experiencing technical issues and ineffective courses stand out to be the common problems as regards distance education.

### Teacher Suggestions for the Pandemic Process

What are your suggestions for the Ministry of National Education for more qualified conduct of education and training activities in the pandemic period? (n=10).

The table below illustrates the suggestions of the social studies teachers who participated in the study in order to carry out more qualified educational activities during the pandemic period.

As shown in Table 11, teacher suggestions such as continuation of face-to-face education, providing computers, tablets, telephones for students who cannot afford them, and reducing the number of classrooms turned out to be those with the highest frequency. Some teacher opinions on this subject are provided below: Cihat, Zeynep, Selda, Ömer and Ece suggested that schools be kept open. Zeynep, in particular, stated that schools should be kept open and suggested that alternatively morning and afternoon systems be established, adding that extra teaching resources might be prepared. Ömer and Arif mentioned that in addition to these suggestions, technological opportunities should be provided for children and drawbacks of the infrastructure should be eliminated in order to ensure equality of opportunity. Kadir, on the other hand, suggested that distance education could be incorporated into face-to-face education. Yusuf, however, stated that the number of activities within the EBA should be increased.

### Student Suggestions for the Pandemic Process

What are your suggestions for the Ministry of National Education for more qualified conduct of education and training activities in the pandemic period? (n=30).

The suggestions of the students who participated in the study are given in the table below in order to carry out more qualified education and training activities during the pandemic period.

As can be seen in Table 12 given above, 7 students stated that they had no suggestions to the Ministry of National

**Table 11.** Teachers' suggestions (n=10)

Responses	Frequency
Continuing face-to-face education	6
Providing computers, tablets and phones for students who cannot afford them	3
Reducing class sizes	3
Developing the Internet infrastructure	2
Improving sanitation conditions in schools	2
Conducting distance education in a more programmed manner	1
Increasing the number of activities on EBA	1
Carrying out activities for students to socialize	1
Preparing more supplementary learning resources	1
Supporting face-to-face education with distance education	1
Active use of classroom windows by making them suitable for students' safety	1
Distributing free masks to schools	1
Making contactless faucets and soap dispensers for school bathrooms	1
Increasing the number of schools	1
Providing students with free access to the Internet	1
Giving teachers courses on technology use	1

Education for more qualified conduct of educational activities during the pandemic period. In addition, 4 students emphasized the necessity to pay attention to the use of masks, while 3 students mentioned that supplementary courses should be offered related to social studies course.

Some students' views on this subject are provided below: Selin argued that schools should have been suspended totally during the pandemic, though Buğra stressed that distance education should continue. While Nida stated that the number of classroom sizes should be smaller, Mustafa stated that everyone should have Internet access at home. Moreover, Emre stated that students should be helped with technology, making some suggestions about the need for different applications apart from EBA and ZOOM. Rabiya and Metehan stated that face-to-face education should be enhanced by distance education.

As demonstrated in Table 11 and Table 12, improving the hygiene conditions in schools, reducing the class sizes, distributing devices for distance education for free and providing free Internet access for the underprivileged students, improving the Internet infrastructure, distributing free masks in schools, enhancing face-to-face education with distance education and continuing the face-to-face education have turned out to be common suggestions in this regard. Furthermore, suggestions indicating the necessity to improve the EBA system and increase the activities for the EBA system are expressions that seem in conformity with each other.

**Table 12.** Student suggestions (n=30)

Responses	Frequency
No suggestions	7
Paying attention to the use of masks	4
Providing necessary courses for students	3
Improving the EBA system	2
Improving the sanitation conditions in schools	2
Reducing the class sizes	2
Informing students about COVID-19	2
Enriching face-to-face education with distance education	2
Allowing an academic freeze	1
In distance education, courses are only taught through EBA	1
Providing computers, tablets and phones for students who cannot afford them	1
Boosting the Internet infrastructure	1
Encouraging students to keep classrooms clean	1
Supplying schools with extra cleaning materials	1
Teaching in open spaces	1
Continuing the face-to-face education	1
Distribution of free masks and disinfectants to schools	1
Providing free Internet access for students	1
Extending the course hours	1
Continuing the distance education	1
Paying attention to the social distancing rules	1

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study attempted to reveal the views of social studies teachers and the students who took their classes about the education offered during the pandemic period. The results obtained from the teachers regarding the first question indicated that the problems such as the students' absenteeism and their behavioural problems are with the highest frequency. The fact that students have problems such as lack of computers and tablets is among the other remarkable results.

As a result of the interviews with the students, it was concluded that the students experienced technical issues and did not understand the live lessons well. Unlike this result, however, Çok (2021) reported that lessons can be taught easily through distance education. Seyhan (2021), on the other hand, stated that Internet and distance education infrastructures remained insufficient. There are other studies pointing to the presence of technical problems as a drawback in the distance education period (Afşar & Büyükdoğan, 2020; Altunay, 2022; Aydemir, 2021; Kavuk & Demirtaş, 2021; Sertkaya Dinler, 2022).

As a matter of fact, Giannini and Lewis (2020) found in their study that the coronavirus pandemic caused students not to attend classes at schools and universities. Similar to this result, Özalkan (2020) stated that the number of current students attending the courses during the distance education period was less than half. Research has shown that some

similar studies have been conducted in parallel with the result of the behavioural problems seen in students during the face-to-face education period (Duan et al., 2020; Marie et al., 2022; Uçkaç, 2020). Furthermore, some other studies have been found in the related literature, in which such similar results as students' lack of computers and tablets have been reported (Aydemir, 2021; Aydın, 2021; Balaman & Hanbay Tiryaki 2021; Çilek et al., 2021; Çok, 2021; Deli, 2021; Demir & Özdaş, 2020; Karaibiş, 2021; Kavuk & Demirtaş, 2021; Laçın, 2021; Morgan, 2020; Noyan, 2022; Özdemir, 2021; Sertkaya Dinler, 2022; Seyhan, 2021; Tanta, 2021; Toraman & Kayalar, 2020; Wössmann, 2020; Uyar, 2020; Yeşilyurt, 2021; 2020; Yılmaz et al., 2021).

According to the answers given by the students, it was concluded that there were problems such as noise in the classroom during face-to-face education; students with chronic diseases preferred distance education; and some students' families had poor economic conditions. Similarly, Tanta (2021) reported that the factors that were likely to disrupt the lesson in face-to-face education did not exist in distance education. Another similar result is that sick students who could not participate in face-to-face education found distance education useful (Kılıç & Beldağ, 2021). In a similar manner, relevant literature review has revealed the presence of other studies with results similar to those reported in this study particularly indicating that the families' poor economic conditions affected the educational status of the students (Azevedo et al., 2020; Haecck & Lefebvre, 2020; Hammerstein et al., 2021; Tomasik et al., 2021).

The results for the second question clearly showed that the teachers who stated that the pandemic period contributed to social studies teaching added that they improved themselves in the use of technology and digital literacy skills. The teachers who asserted that the given period did not contribute to the lesson cited the reason that the students did not attend the classes. Similarly, Altunay (2022) concluded that teachers had improved themselves in terms of technology literacy. Eken et al., (2020) mentioned that digital literacy should increase during the pandemic period. On the other hand, Aksoy et al., (2021) concluded that as the age of classroom teachers increased, the level of digital literacy decreased. Moreover, Baek et al., (2018) mentioned in their study that it is necessary for the participants to develop themselves in technology related matters. Kılıç and Beldağ (2021), on the other hand, emphasized that social studies teachers' capability to use technology improved with distance education. Research has demonstrated the presence of some studies, concluding that students are unlikely to participate in the courses offered via distance education (Çok, 2021; Sertkaya Dinler, 2022; Uyar, 2020; Zengin et al., 2021).

The students in the present study, who stated that the pandemic period did not contribute to social studies teaching, cited the inability to understand the live lessons as the main reason. Similarly, Özdemir (2021) found that students experienced difficulty in understanding the lessons due to distance education. Those students who expressed positive opinions about the pandemic period, on the other hand, stated that the period had some contributions such as learning to

use computers during the distance education period and better teaching by teachers. Deli (2021) emphasized that some teachers taught the lessons well by using web-based applications actively. Aquilera- Hermida (2020), however, found that students had difficulties in adapting to online learning.

The results for the third question demonstrated that all of the teachers who participated in the study stated that their students' academic achievement decreased, while the majority of the students stated that it decreased especially during the distance education period. Research has shown that academic achievement was negatively affected during the pandemic period (Altunay, 2022; Brunborg et al., 2014; Engzell et al., 2021; Sertkaya Dinler, 2022; Zengin et al., 2021). A number of studies, however, contain results related to the increased academic achievement in the distance education period (Ritonga et al., 2022; Sunoto et al., 2021).

The teachers, who stated that their students' academic achievement decreased during the pandemic process, supported their responses with such reasons as the students' absenteeism during the distance education period, their lack of academic anxiety, and allowing the students to pass to the next grade even though the students had not learned the subjects thoroughly. The relevant literature review has demonstrated some studies showing similar results with these results (Avcı & Akdeniz, 2021; Deli, 2021; Laçın, 2021; Noyan, 2022; Özalkan 2021; Wösmann, 2020). It is clearly seen that there are reasons such as ineffective distance education and technical issues related to the Internet to the extent that they affected the students' academic achievement during the pandemic period. Unlike these findings, Sertkaya Dinler (2022) has mentioned that the lessons could be productive as long as activities based on animations, videos and simulations related to the subject of the lesson are used. Laçın (2021), on the contrary, stressed that the distance education period was inefficient. In a similar sense, there are a number of studies reporting the presence of technical difficulties in distance education (Aydm, 2021; Baran, 2021; Çilek et al., 2021; Deli, 2021; Karaibış, 2021; Laçın, 2021; Sertkaya Dinler, 2022).

The answers received from half of the teachers regarding the fourth question seem to emphasize the conclusion of observing no change in students' attitudes towards the social studies course. The answers of the students show similarities with the related teacher views in the present study. Despite this, Noyan (2022) has stated that students' attitudes towards the lesson during the pandemic were negative, just like Zengin et al., (2021) concluding that their attitudes, motivation and achievements were all negatively affected during the pandemic period. Ütkür Güllühan (2021), on the other hand, stated that the participant attitudes towards the teaching of life studies and social studies lessons via distance education turned out to be quite positive.

Considering the data obtained for the fifth question, it is evident that all of the teachers and the majority of the students preferred face-to-face education. The relevant literature review revealed that some studies reporting that face-to-face education was largely preferred during the pandemic period (Akgül & Oran, 2020; Sertkaya Dinler, 2022; Aquilera- Hermida, 2020). Unlike this result, Can (2020)

emphasized that formal education should be enhanced by open and distance education. Garbe et al., (2020), on the other hand, concluded that parents actually support distance education.

When it comes to the reasons for teachers to prefer face-to-face education, it seems that they based their responses on such reasons as better supervision of the students, the difficulties experienced while teaching in the distance education, the physical fatigue as well as the insensitive behaviour of the parents. Some studies are also available with similar results in the literature (Avcı & Akdeniz, 2021; Can, 2020; Aquilera- Hermida, 2020; Yeşilyurt, 2021). According to other results, the reason why students preferred face-to-face education is that they could understand the lessons better and wanted to spend time with their friends. In conformity with these findings, Smith et al., (2021) concluded that students wanted to meet with their peers and teachers after the distance education period. Similarly, Toroman and Kayalar (2020) stated that students could not get enough efficiency from the courses during the distance education period.

The present study also collected some suggestions for the Ministry of National Education in order to be able to carry out the education and training activities of the pandemic process in a more qualified manner. In this context, the teachers suggested that face-to-face education continue, that computers and tablets be provided for students who cannot afford them, that the number of classrooms be reduced, that the hygiene conditions in schools be improved, and that the internet infrastructure be improved. The students, on the other hand, offered suggestions such as paying attention to the use of masks and giving some students some supplementary courses related to the lessons. According to literature review, Sindiani et al., (2020) stated that students preferred face-to-face education during the pandemic process. Similarly, Çilek et al., (2021) Erbil and Kocabaş (2019), as well as Akgül and Oran (2020) reported teacher suggestions emphasizing that equal opportunities should be ensured and the Internet and technological infrastructures of schools should be strengthened. In addition, the results of other studies such as paying attention to the hygiene conditions (Gürel & Er, 2020; Yılmaz et al., 2021) and offering extra courses to compensate for the academic losses of students (Deli, 2021; Sertkaya Dinler, 2022) are among the results that are similar to those found in the current study. Yılmaz et al., (2021), on the other hand, stated that wearing masks is a must to get protected from the COVID-19. In parallel with the result stressing the necessity of reduced class sizes, Yıldız and Şahin (2022) determined that social distance between students could not be maintained, and therefore, normal education should be started with a small number of students in classes.

The following suggestions could be presented based on the findings of the study:

- Computers, tablets and Internet access could be provided to students who cannot afford them due to economic inequalities.
- Better infrastructure systems could be developed related to distance education.

- Related content and applications could be developed in order to achieve more efficient lessons in distance education.
- Psychological counselling and guidance activities could be developed for the sake of students with behavioural disorders related to the pandemic period and anxiety due to this period.
- Relevant activities could be organized for the socialization of students.
- Teachers and students could be provided with necessary training on distance education and computer use.
- It is highly likely to be helpful to ensure sound communication between parents and teachers, in such a way that parents can closely follow their students' achievement and performance.
- The assessment and evaluation system could be made more reliable during the pandemic process.
- Class sizes could be reduced.
- Relevant study programs could be arranged to compensate for students' weaknesses.

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