School Administrators' Views on Distance Education during the Covid-19 Pandemic Process

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ABSTRACT

Schools are among the most important educational organisations where education and training activities are carried out. Along with the impossibility of the continuation of face-to-face education during the COVID-19 pandemic, the distance education process has affected schools' abilities to continue educational activities. School administrators, who are among the most important sections responsible for properly carrying out education and training services in schools, have played a significant role in continuing distance education during the present COVID-19 pandemic. Although school administrators have carried out schools' general activities within the framework of social isolation rules, they have done all kinds of work to efficiently continue the distance education process. This study aimed to determine school administrators' views on distance education activities during the COVID-19 pandemic process. The study results are considered important since they will provide information on school administrators' perceptions of distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic process. The study was designed according to the qualitative research method. 46 school administrators (Principal or Deputy Principal) working in Elazığ province. A structured interview form was used as the data collection method. The "content analysis" was performed in the study. The responses in all interview forms were tabulated under common codes to form categories (themes). The study's most remarkable results were that school administrators indicated that distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic process generally had positive and negative aspects. Furthermore, the situations such as Internet access, lack of technical infrastructure, and computer/tablet shortage were the most determined problems during the pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, distance education, school administrator, school

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INTRODUCTION

Humanity has had to fight against many epidemics throughout world history. While some of these epidemics have had regional effects, some epidemics have caused massive deaths worldwide. One of them is the COVID-19 pandemic which is called the New Type of Coronavirus. Like each epidemic, the COVID-19 epidemic has also caused problems in human life in many ways. The COVID-19 epidemic that emerged in China at the end of 2019 has affected the whole world since 2020. When this virus started to be effective in more than one country and even in continents later in 2020, it was characterised as a pandemic by the World

Health Organisation (WHO) (Temel and Ertin, 2020). There has been great uncertainty about the effects of COVID-19, the damages it would cause in the body, and how long the pandemic would last. It has psychologically and negatively affected people (İbiş, 2020). The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are not limited to its effects on people. Each country and community have considered the measures required to be followed by the WHO.

Nevertheless, each country and community continue to take new measures according to their current conditions. These measures include isolation of countries from other countries by locking themselves down, quarantining in regions with coronavirus, paying attention to social isolation by staying at home, cancellation of activities (such as arts, sports, and concerts that are important for the whole world and in which people are closely interested in), curfews that continue regularly and include certain age groups, curfews on certain days (that last several days) for everyone, closure of workplaces where people may coexist, living by social distancing rules, travel restrictions, obligation to wear a mask, and implementation of online education instead of face-to-face education by closing education institutions (Acar, 2020). Many life situations have changed, and innovations that will affect individuals at the least level have been made. The importance of social isolation has been understood. Along with the importance of social isolation, the rate of socialisation has decreased. The decrease in social life, fear of health, and uncertainties have affected health anxiety and have started to affect people psychologically. With the arrangement of social life, many changes have also been made in the educational systems.

The measures taken with COVID-19 include changing the way education is provided. The face-to-face education system has continued through distance education (Telli Yamamoto & Altun, 2020). Since education in the school environment is considered to increase the risk of virus transmission, almost every country has preferred to close schools. However, this situation endangers education and training activities (Telli Yamamoto and Altun, 2020). Therefore, many students and educators have disagreed on how the education style should be. Therefore, countries with infrastructure and sufficient equipment have started to try different education methods. In Turkey, education administrators have carried out many activities to ensure the continuity of education, have established distance education platforms that support students in every aspect and can be easily accessed, and have attempted to provide all kinds of activities needed (Özer,2020).

Along with online education, it has been attempted to ensure sustainability in education. However, some students cannot benefit from the distance education system due to shortcomings (computer, internet, connection problems, etc.). Therefore, some students have experienced interruptions in their educational lives. Face-to-face education and learning by doing are very effective in the field of education. However, due to the current pandemic, they cannot be carried out, and educational efficiency decreases. The fact that technology is involved in a large part of our lives leads to a prediction that distance education will continue instead of face-to-face education in the future. Everything will be done in technological environments and through digitalisation (Telli Yamamoto & Altun, 2020).

Steps have been taken to adapt to these developments in many fields (due to technological developments), various breakthroughs have also been made towards education problems. Usual education has been approached from a different perspective, and a new dimension has been added to the distance education process (Eygü & Karaman, 2013). In this context, it has been stated that education is a new field in the digital environment (Zengin, Şengel & Özdemir, 2018). Research emphasised that it is necessary to recognise the individual effectively and progress with new developments in this process (Ergül, 2005). It is known that distance education is much more cost-effective than face-to-face education (Aslantaş, 2014). Distance education is a form of learning that learners carry out from a distance. With another definition, it is a corporate education activity where students take the course offered by the instructor by bringing them together through teaching materials and communication technologies, regardless of the time and place they choose (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright & Zvacek, 2009).

Education is a process that continues throughout an individual's life. Societies that have understood the importance of education have started to look for new alternatives to provide more qualified education systems. One of them is distance education (Hızal, 1982). The most frequently used materials while carrying out distance education are computers and the internet. Nowadays, the rapid changes in technology have also brought along changes in education as in many other fields (Ekici, 2003). Distance education, which aims

to meet the educational needs of groups of certain ages with different interests, abilities, and learning styles, to enable them to learn on their own and help students develop their ability to give and take responsibility by giving a large part of the responsibility to them (Kaya, 1996), is a practice that takes into account individual differences in learning (Holmberg, 1989). The increasing demand for education, the large number of classes, lack of materials, and differences between individuals can be listed among the reasons that make distance education necessary (Çavaş & Adıgüzel, 2001).

Distance education is important for ensuring equality of opportunity in education. It can be said that distance education is beneficial for those who cannot go to school due to various reasons and want to improve themselves at any age (Yıldız, 2004: 2001). Distance education has some limitations, such as the lack of continuous and timely education for students, the lack of social activities outside the course, the lack of technological materials, and students' inability to control their time efficiently (Özyürek, Begde, Yavuz & Özkan, 2016). Regarding the success of the education system, it is important to design and utilise distance education programs well for the system's success (Kışla, 2016). Studies demonstrated that students' satisfaction levels with the learning environment affected their success level in the courses (Yalman, 2013). As a result of the education and training activities carried out through distance education, determining individuals' views on the education system is an important step for the system's successful progress (Şahin, 2007; Altan & Seferoğlu, 2009). One of these steps is the views of school administrators on the distance education process. It is necessary to benefit from distance education activities by maximising efficiency for its benefits and adapting to today's conditions. Many internal and external factors may affect the distance education process. It would not be wrong to state that the distance education process has been used more than ever due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has shown its effect in every field and has affected the whole world. As required by the measures taken in this process, education and training activities are continued by avoiding interaction through social isolation. School administrators have significant responsibilities in planning and conducting distance education, making school administrators competent to determine the problems experienced in distance education or the advantages of distance education. In this regard, this study, which aimed to determine school administrators' views on distance education activities carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic, is important for the distance education system's future. Following the aim of the study, answers to the following questions were sought.

As a School Administrator;

- As a school administrator, how do you evaluate the distance education process during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What are the problems you experienced in the distance education process during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What are your recommendations for making the distance education process carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic period more efficient?
- What are your views on the future of distance education processes after the COVID-19 pandemic?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Model

The phenomenology design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in this study to determine administrators' views on the distance education process carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic. Phenomenological design is a qualitative research design that aims to feature individuals' perceptions and experiences according to their perspectives (Ersoy, 2016). Phenomenology is a method that focuses on evaluating lived experiences (Jasper, 1994). Phenomenology draws our attention to the facts we are aware of but we have no grasp of and are not superficial. These appear in different ways. Furthermore, while phenomenology is not completely unfamiliar, it is a qualitative research approach suitable for investigating the facts of situations which cannot be fully understood (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). To this end, it was attempted to feature administrators' perceptions and experiences on distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Study Group

The study group was determined by the maximum variation sampling method, one of the purposive sampling methods. Using this method reflects the diversity of people who may be a party to the sample group's problem at the maximum level. In purposive sampling, this method may be preferred to find out whether there are varying conditions among the participants and whether there are thoughts and facts shared between these conditions (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018). The sampling method selected enabled the emergence of different dimensions regarding the problem situation through school administrators' views. Accordingly, in the 1st semester of the 2020-2021 academic year, 46 people working in Elazığ province constituted the research study group.

The participants consisted of 38 male and 8 female individuals. When the school type of the participants was examined, it was found that 17, 19, and 10 of them were working in primary schools, secondary schools, and high schools. Furthermore, according to their educational status, 25 and 21 of the participants were principals and deputy principals. According to their duties in the education institutions, 33 and 13 of them had a bachelor's degree and a master's degree. According to administration seniority, while 7 individuals had 1-5 years seniority, 18 individuals had 6-10 years seniority, 24 had 11-15 years seniority, and 7 individuals had 16 years and more seniority. As shown in the table, participants were homogeneously distributed in ‘school type’ and ‘duty in the institution’ variables.

Data Collection Tools

The structured interview form, which was prepared to determine school administrators' views on the distance education process during the COVID-19 pandemic, consisted of two parts. While the first part of the form included information about the participants' demographic characteristics, five questions about the distance education process were prepared in the second part. The questions were determined to be appropriate and relevant to the distance education process's theoretical framework during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview form was evaluated by four academicians who are domain experts, and it was delivered to the participants after it was finalised before the application. Some of the participants were asked to record their answers to the questions as voice records. Both voice records and the structured interview forms were asked to be delivered to the researcher through electronic media since the COVID-19 pandemic continued. In necessary cases, explanations were made through electronic media communication tools in case of unclear information. Thus, the comprehensibility of the questions was ensured. The voice records and structured interview forms were considered as the main data sources of the study.

Analysis of Data

The content analysis, which is the most used method in analysing qualitative research, was used to analyse data based on the participants' views. Both voice records and the structured interview form statements were rearranged for evaluation electronically and were made suitable for content analysis. In the content analysis, codes were determined so that the participants' views were related to the questions asked within the research problem's scope. The data were analysed in four stages. In the first stage, the data were coded. Coding determines and identifies the participants' views in a meaningful, comprehensive way in small word/words by evaluating them in a multi-dimensional way (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Miles and Huberman, 2016). In the second stage, the categories (themes) of the encoded data were determined. The codes representing common views were taken into account while determining the categories. Furthermore, the categories should be created by combining at least two of the resulting codes (Cresswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Then, the categories formed by the combination of the codes were arranged in dimensions. In the final stage, the results of the themes were defined and interpreted. For the study's validity, it is important to discuss this process in detail and state what was done at which stages (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018).

As another method, member checking was done to increase the study's validity and contribute to its reliability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The codes and the relevant categories that emerged in line with the participants' views were sent to them, and they were asked whether their views were compatible with these codes and categories. When participants' feedback was evaluated, it was found that there was a compliance of about 93%. The repetition of the codes was calculated as frequencies, and their place in the category was

calculated and presented with percentage expressions. Participants' remarkable views on the themes and categories were included under the results and comments with direct quotations. Thus, it was attempted to emphasise the integrity between the codes and categories and the views that led to their emergence. The participants were given code names to be valid from the beginning to the end of the views' analysis process (administrator: A1, A2, A3, ...). The researcher constantly checked the integrity and significance of the obtained findings. To this end, the newly created codes, categories, or themes were constantly compared with those created previously. To determine the study's reliability, expert opinions were consulted to determine whether the codes represented the category or theme belonged there. Accordingly, a domain expert researcher was asked to place them in the specified categories to match all answers. Then, the matches made by the domain expert and the matches made by the researcher were compared. As a result of this comparison, the number of matches with consensus and dissensus was determined. The study's reliability was calculated using Miles and Huberman's (2016) Reliability=consensus/consensus + dissensus formula. The compliance between the domain expert and the researcher should be at least 90%; it was concluded that a 92% consensus was reached. This result can be considered sufficient for the reliability of the study. Thus, the internal validity of the study was ensured. The sample of the study was selected to allow generalisation to ensure the external validity of the study.

FINDINGS

In this study, in which it was attempted to determine school administrators' views on distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic, the answers given to the questions in the interview form were analysed, interpreted, and presented in this section. The administrators' views on the question "How do you generally evaluate the distance education process carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic?" were evaluated by discussing two separate titles as 'positive' and 'negative'. The coded evaluation titles are presented in Table 1, and the word clouds are presented in Figure 1.

Table 1. *Theme 1: Administrators' evaluations of the distance education process*

S.N.	Coded evaluation titles	f	%
	Codes on positive evaluations	19	41
1	Ensuring Continuity in Education	14	
2	Preventing the increase in the number of cases	12	
3	Causing an increase in technological competence	8	
4	Decrease in spending on education	6	
5	Providing time flexibility	5	
6	Being easy to control	3	
	Codes on negative evaluations	27	59
1	Not being efficient enough (compared to face-to-face education)	26	
2	Requiring technical infrastructure	25	
3	Inadequacies of distance education platforms	19	
4	Low interest of students	16	
5	Causing additional workload for the administration	10	
6	Ignoring social interaction	9	
7	Causing security problems	6	
8	Non-completion of the curricula	4	

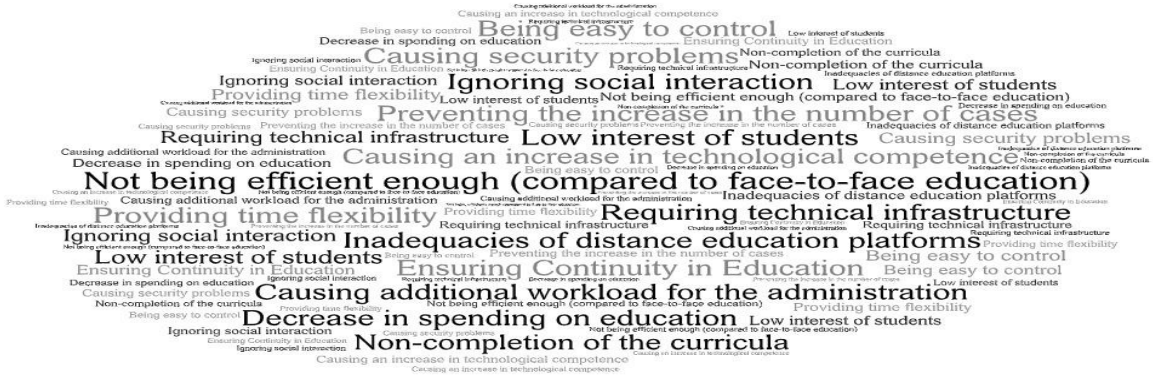

Figure 1. *Word Cloud on the Administrators' Evaluations of the Distance Education Process*

While 19 of the school administrators expressed 'positive' views on distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic period, 27 expressed negative views. Considering the positive views of administrators on distance education carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was observed that the title "Ensuring Continuity in Education (f=14)" had the highest frequency among the coded evaluation titles. It was determined that "preventing the increase in the number of cases (f=12)" was another coded evaluation title with a high frequency. These determinations indicated that distance education activities during the COVID-19 pandemic have had positive effects in terms of continuity in education and preventing the increase in the number of patients. Other coded evaluation titles were "Causing an increase in technological competence (f=8)", "Decrease in spending on education (f=6)", "Providing time flexibility (f=5)", and "Being easy to control (f=3)".

Among the 'negative' coded evaluation titles, the title "Not being efficient enough (compared to face-to-face education) (f=26)" was mostly repeated by 19 of the school administrators. Furthermore, school administrators also indicated that distance education had negative aspects such as "Requiring technical infrastructure (f=25)", "Inadequacies of distance education platforms (f=25)", "Low interest of students (f=16)", "Causing additional workload for the administration (f=10)", "Ignoring social interaction (f=9)", "Causing security problems (f=6)", and "Non-completion of the curricula (f=4)". Although most administrators had negative perceptions of distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic process, the number of administrators who expressed positive views was undeniably high. Some of the statements of the participants regarding the positive or negative evaluation titles of distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic are as follows (A: Coded administrator):

> *"The suspension of schools during the pandemic process has caused great deficiencies in education. These deficiencies has been eliminated to some extent along with the transition to distance education. In this respect, distance education has ensured the continuity of education (A26)".*
>
> *"Health is the most important factor in the process. Human health is first and foremost. Under this perspective, our schools were suspended. It is clear that the number of patients infected with the virus would increase if the schools had remained open. The opportunity of distance education has prevented the increase in the number of patients by paving the way for schools to be closed (A8)" .*
>
> *"The distance education process has been involved in our education system as an obligation. In this regard, our staff with low computer and internet use skills had to deal with technology more closely with the necessity of carrying out all education and training activities at a distance, which contributed to the self-improvement of our staff from technological aspect (A41)".*
>
> *"Distance education has become a must of our education system during the pandemic process. However, the technological infrastructure of our education system and the fact that the internet network is not widespread, especially in rural areas in our country, have caused distance education to fail to achieve its purpose. (A4)".*
>
> *"In today's conditions, it is not possible to achieve the efficiency provided by face-to-face education in distance education. Considering the conditions of the existing epidemic period, distance education has caused many positive effects. However, the problems experienced in the process and the failure to achieve sufficient efficiency have shown us that distance education cannot replace face-to-face education (A:34)".*
>
> *"The fact that distance education was not started within a specific plan and program led to somewhat uneven progress of the works, which caused an additional workload for school administrators by obliging them to make new plans and programs (A:29)"*
>
> *"It was not possible to control the effectiveness of the processes in face-to-face education since it may take a long time. In this sense, distance education has created a more auditable and controllable environment for us as administrators. We can follow all developments in reports through the system (A:18)"*
>
> *"Internet is the most important element of distance education. Especially during the epidemic period, individuals' more tendency to the Internet has also mobilised some malicious circles, which started to pose cyber security threat. In this sense, it has become a necessity for distance education environments to take security measures against these threats (A:36)"*
>
> *"Schools are places where students not only grow up cognitively but also become socialised. The pandemic period has negatively affected many social structures, which also negatively affected children's socialisation. Furthermore, the fact that distance education platforms ignored this socialisation had paved*

the way for students to experience a problem such as not being able to socialise in the future (A:23)".

"Conducting courses in the form of distance education as an obligation of the pandemic process has been beneficial for the teacher and the student in terms of time. The distance education activities in this period have allowed courses to be conducted within the most suitable time period (A:3)"

School administrators' views on the question "What are the problems you experienced during the distance education process during the COVID-19 pandemic?" were evaluated under a single coded title. The coded evaluation titles are presented in Table 2, and the word clouds are presented in Figure 2.

Table 2. *Theme 2: Administrators' evaluation of the problems in the distance education process*

S.N.	Coded evaluation titles	f
1	Technical infrastructure (in terms of access to the Internet)	42
2	Economic opportunities	36
3	Lack of computer/tablet	33
4	Lack of planning	26
5	Teacher Competencies (Technologically)	22
6	Students' indifference	18
7	Difficulty of assessment and evaluation	14
8	Not allowing implementation	11
9	Insufficient course contents	10
10	Low motivation	7
11	Lack of communication	4

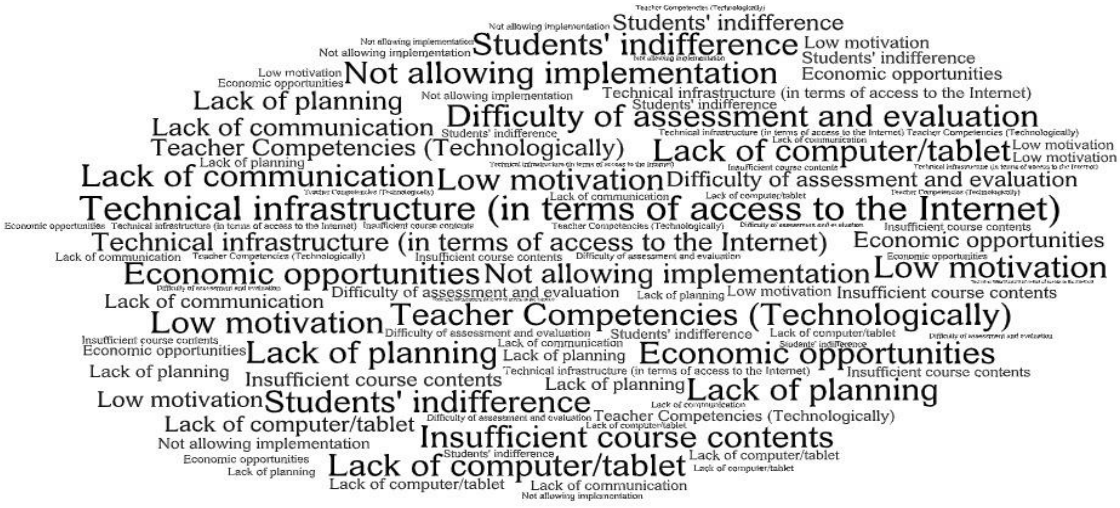

Figure 2. *Word Cloud on the Administrators' Evaluation of the Problems in the Distance Education Process*

When school administrators' views on "the problems encountered in the distance education process during the COVID-19 pandemic" were examined, it was observed that there were 11 different evaluation titles coded. In terms of the frequency of expression, the most experienced problem was "Technical infrastructure (in terms of access to the Internet)" with a frequency of 42. The fact that the internet infrastructure differs regionally and is not sufficient, especially in rural areas, must have had a significant effect on this result's emergence. Nevertheless, when other coded evaluation titles regarding the problems were examined, evaluations were also made under the titles of "Economic opportunities r (f=36)", "Lack of computer/tablet (f=33)", "lack of planning (f=26)", "Teacher Competencies (Technologically) (f=22)", "Students' indifference (f=18)", "difficulty of assessment and evaluation (f=14)", "Not allowing implementation (f=11)", "Insufficient course contents (f=10)", "Low motivation (f=7)", and "Lack of communication (f=4)". It appears that most of the problems experienced in distance education during the pandemic process are the factors that negatively affect the efficiency of the process. Some of the administrators' statements regarding the problems experienced in distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic process are presented below:

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, we also maintained the process through distance education like all schools. However, the fact that the internet network, which is a necessity of distance education, was not sufficient in our region, was our most important problem in this process. In particular, the fact that our students who live in rural areas or have a poor financial situation do not have internet connection has prevented them from participating in distance education (A37)."

"Although the distance education environment requires less administrative and institutional use of resources, this is not the case for students. It is not possible for me to follow distance education without internet, computer or tablet. In this case, you can benefit from distance education to the extent allowed by financial opportunities. I think this is the most important problem (A12)."

"The pandemic process has affected the whole world as well as our education system. In this process, the ministry quickly switched to distance education after suspending the schools. However, it was observed that there was no planning on how to conduct distance education in such an epidemic period. This lack of planning led to a problem by causing disorganisation of the works for a while (A9)."

"Distance education requires a significant amount of technical knowledge. In particular, the skill to use technology affects the efficiency of distance education. You cannot expect each teacher to have the same level of technology competence in this process. Teachers' low technological competence in distance education has brought along some problems in the process (A46).

"Distance education has played a very significant role in preventing the interruption of education during the pandemic process. However, I think it is as useful as face-to-face education. In this case, one of the most important problems is that it is very difficult to achieve students' interest, which is not enough even in normal education, through distance education. Students have a very low interest in courses in the distance education process (A27)"

"One of the most important problems of distance education in the pandemic process is that the evaluation of the courses is difficult. In particular, the feedback we receive from our teachers indicates that there is a problem in this regard (A1)"

"As an administrator working in primary education, I think the most important problem in distance education is that the communication between students or parents and teachers and the school is very poor. While this communication is provided by making parent visits or student interviews in normal education, it is not possible to do this in distance education, so we have problems in distance education in terms of communication (A13)"

School administrators' views on the question "What are your recommendations for making the distance education process carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic period more efficient?" were evaluated under a single coded title. The coded evaluation titles are presented in Table 3, and the word clouds are presented in Figure 3.

Table 3. *Theme 3: Administrators' evaluations for making the distance education process more efficient*

S.N.	Coded evaluation titles	f
1	Expansion of Internet infrastructure	44
2	Computer/tablet support	38
3	Providing expert technical support	31
4	Planning for courses	23
5	providing financial resources	20
6	Cooperation with families	15
7	Increasing students' motivation	12
8	Considering individual differences	11
9	Providing psychological support and guidance	8
10	Developing reliable software	7
11	Preparing content for applied courses	7
12	Providing training for administrators	5

Figure 3. *Word cloud on the administrators' evaluations for making the distance education process more efficient*

When school administrators' views on "making the distance education process carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic more efficient" were examined, it was observed that there were 12 different coded evaluation titles. Considering the administrators' views, it was observed that the title "Expansion of Internet infrastructure (f=44)" had the highest frequency among the coded evaluation titles. Another coded evaluation title with a high frequency was the title “Computer/tablet support (f=38)”. When both views were taken into consideration, it was observed that they included statements for solving the problems. Along with these recommendations, other coded evaluation titles formed according to administrators' views were “Providing expert technical support (f=31)”, “ Planning for courses (f=23)”, “ providing financial resources (f=20)”, “ Cooperation with families (f=15)”, “ Increasing students' motivation (f=12)”, “ Considering individual differences (f=11)”, “ Providing psychological support and guidance (f=8)”, “ Developing reliable software (f=7)”, “ Preparing content for applied courses (f=7)”, and “Providing training for administrators (f=5)”. These views expressed by school administrators will contribute to the more efficient execution of distance education activities during the pandemic process. Some of the administrators' statements about making the distance education process more efficient during the COVID-19 pandemic process are presented below:

> “*The first thing to do is to improve the internet infrastructure in order to make distance education more efficient. This is especially important to have no problem in access in rural areas (A33).*
>
> *“There are still thousands of students who do not have a computer or tablet in the process that has been ongoing through distance education for almost two terms due to the pandemic. If distance education is desired to be carried out usefully, these students should definitely be supported in this sense (A42).*
>
> *“The sudden increase in the COVID-19 pandemic may justify the absence of central units and us as school administrators' planning for distance education. However, at the point we have reached today, it is necessary to make a very good planning. Planning is important for distance education to continue efficiently (A16).*
>
> *“One of the most important elements of distance education is the student's roles in the process. Although you have a very enriched and technically strong system, it can be difficult to be successful if the student is not active in the process and families do not take responsibility. In distance education, families and students must fulfill their responsibilities in the process (A34).”*
>
> *“During the pandemic process, our students also experience psychological difficulties like all segments of the society. The situations such as worries about the courses, fear of the future, or the risk of contracting this life-threatening virus are the factors that cause these troubles. The distance education system should definitely produce some solutions in this regard. It is necessary to find solutions to this problem by organising more effective activities for psychological counseling and guidance (A40).*

"Distance education activities are maintained through some platforms used by the whole world. It is also of great importance to take security measures on platforms with such a high number of participants. In this process, even the platforms known to everyone have had many problems in this regard. Therefore, it will be useful to pay attention to security measures in order to increase efficiency in the distance education process (A38)."

School administrators' views on the question "What are your views on the future of the distance education process after the COVID-19 pandemic?" were evaluated under a single coded title. The coded evaluation titles are presented in Table 4, and the word clouds are presented in Figure 4.

Table 4. *Theme 4: Administrators' evaluations of the future of the distance education process*

S.N.	Coded evaluation titles	f
1	Hybrid education model (Face to face+distance)	37
2	Increase in usage areas	34
3	Can be used in emergency situations	29
4	Increase in dependence on technology	23
5	Reducing spending on education	19
6	Causing digital transformation in education	17
7	Increase in technical competencies	13
8	Increase in distance education platforms	10
9	Replacing face-to-face education	6
10	Causing weakening of social relations	4
11	Supporting self-improvement	4
12	Changing the curricula	3

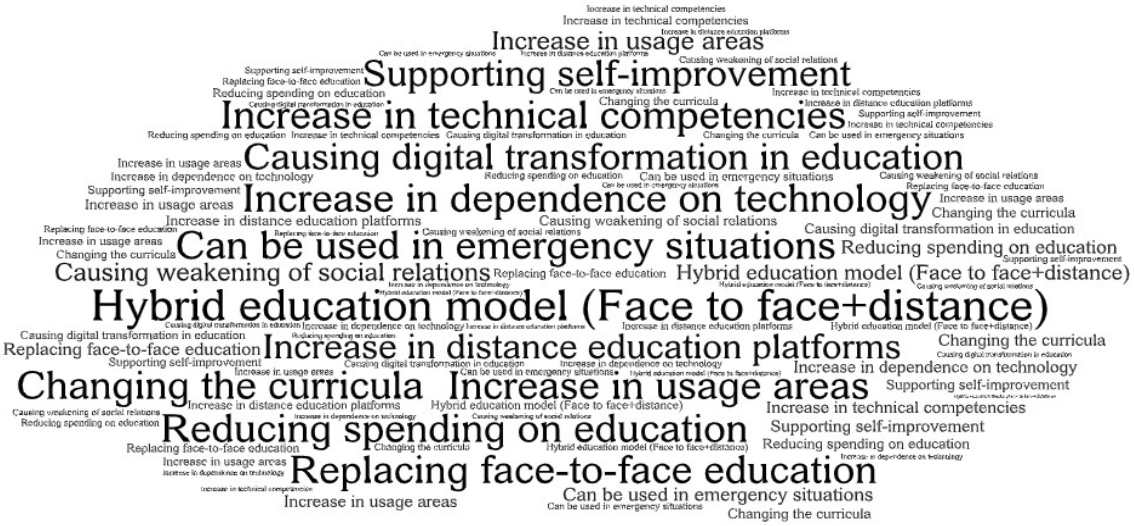

Figure 4. *Word cloud on administrators' evaluations of the future of the distance education process*

When school administrators' views on "the future of the Distance Education Process after the COVID-19 pandemic" were examined, it was observed that there were 12 different coded evaluation titles. Considering the views of the administrators, it was observed that the title "Hybrid education model (Face to face+distance) (f=37)" had the highest frequency among the coded evaluation titles. Another coded evaluation title with a high frequency was "Increase in usage areas (f=34)". When both views were taken into consideration, most of the school administrators indicated that distance education activities could continue even after the pandemic process, but it should be together with face-to-face education. Furthermore, other coded evaluation titles formed according to administrators' views were "Can be used in emergency situations (f=29)", "Increase in dependence on technology (f=23)", "Reducing spending on education (f=19)", "Causing digital transformation in education (f=17)", "Increase in technical competencies (f=13)", "Increase in distance education platforms (f=10)", "Replacing face-to-face education (f=6)", "Causing weakening of social relations (f=4)", "Supporting self-improvement (f=4)", and "Changing the curricula (f=3)". With these views expressed by the school administrators, they made evaluations on how distance education activities would take shape

after the pandemic process. Some of the administrators' statements about the future of distance education after the COVID-19 pandemic process are presented below:

> *"Distance education will continue after the pandemic period as before the pandemic period. However, the experiences during the pandemic period are serious experiences in terms of how to conduct distance education in the future. I am in favor of conducting distance education together with face-to-face education in the next period. In particular, a distance education system that will complement face-to-face education will contribute to achieving the objectives of education (A22)".*
>
> *" Currently, distance education platforms are used not only in courses but also in many points of education due to the pandemic. I think it will increasingly continue in the future. I think distance education will be used more in the future, from meetings to courses or other administrative works (A7)".*
>
> *"Distance education has fulfilled a very important responsibility during the pandemic process. However, I think that face-to-face education will continue again with normalisation and I do not think that distance education will be preferred except in some cases if there is no extra emergency again (A25)".*
>
> *"While the place of technology in our lives is increasing day by day, distance education will certainly become more common in the future. The number of currently used education platforms will increase. The contents will become richer (A32)".*
>
> *"The COVID-19 pandemic process showed that even if there are deficiencies, education activities can be conducted through distance education. In the future, distance education can be used instead of face-to-face education under normal conditions, with a content enriched in a more planned and prepared way. (A14)".*
>
> *"The format of using distance education in the pandemic process will also exist in the future. Distance education activities will continue, especially in the form of courses or programs that will contribute to personal development (A15)".*
>
> *"It can be said that the distance education system will become more common in the future. During the pandemic process, we have observed that it is clear that students become more socialised and develop their communication skills in face-to-face schools. Along with the widespread use of distance education in the future, I am afraid that there will be problems in socialising and acquiring communication skills in the society (A39)."*

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to determine school administrators' views on distance education activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the findings obtained by analysing the research questions are discussed under this title. School administrators' views were evaluated under four themes, with their answers to the questions combined in the same codes and categories. While some of the administrators generally evaluated the distance education activities positively, most administrators evaluated the distance education process negatively due to the problems experienced. It was concluded that the prevention of the interruption of education processes through distance education during the pandemic process led to a positive perception of distance education among administrators. As a result of a study, it was concluded that schools' closure during the COVID-19 process was a correct practice and led to a rapid transition to the distance education process, which was welcomed by pre-service teachers (Duba & Şen, 2020).

Furthermore, according to another conclusion, the idea that the transmission that may occur in schools was prevented by distance education and prevented the increase in the number of cases was another positive perception of school administrators. It was determined that the distance education process during the pandemic process led to the development of both school administrators and teachers' technological competencies. Along with these results, based on school administrators' views, it was concluded that distance education provided flexibility in terms of time and conveniences in controlling education activities. Along with these positive evaluations, it was also determined that there were school administrators who considered that distance education activities during the COVID-19 pandemic process were not as efficient as in face-to-face education. As a result of this study, the deficiencies in the necessary technical infrastructure and platforms where distance education is carried out were also determined as another factor that caused low efficiency. Similar to this result of the study, one of the main problems encountered in the distance education process was internet connection and technical problems, and these problems would negatively

affect the distance education process (Birişçi,2013). According to school administrators who had negative views on the distance education process, distance education activities caused an additional workload to administrators and required the personal development of administrators in terms of technology. The security problems that may arise due to distance education platforms used via the Internet were determined as another reason for the negative evaluations. As a result of the study, it was determined that there were other studies with similar or different results to these results. In another study conducted with school administrators, it was determined that administrators had various problems during the distance education process. Similar to the results of this study, it was determined that administrators had issues such as technical inadequacies, planning deficiencies, and the lack of communication and information in the distance education process. Most of these problems were caused by communication (Külekçi Akyavuz and Çakın, 2020). It was concluded that teachers considered students' inability to go to school would cause them to experience social and psychological difficulties and be unable to acquire many values and social habits they acquired in face-to-face education (Duba and Şen, 2020).

School administrators can be stated as the people who continued to work mostly among all school staff during the COVID-19 pandemic process, which caused school administrators to further deal with the problems experienced in the distance education process. When school administrators' views on these problems were considered, it was determined that the most important problems were the insufficient technical infrastructure and the lack of tools such as computers and tablets used in distance education. All of the teachers involved in the education system cannot be expected to have technical skills in distance education, which has led to some problems (Burke and Dempsey, 2020). Due to the inadequacy of internet infrastructure and the lack of economic opportunities in rural areas, the lack of tablets or computers has caused distance education problems. It is not realistic to expect every student to have a computer or tablet, which is one of the most important problems experienced in the distance education process. This problem can be solved with the state-assisted device aids made in previous years (Kandemir, 2014). In another study conducted with teachers, the problems in distance education were addressed. The lack of technical infrastructure and sufficient interaction in distance education caused teachers to negatively view distance education (Arslan and Şahin, 2013).

Furthermore, considering the administrators' views, the technological incompetence of teachers in distance education and students' low interest in courses were determined as the other problems. It is clear that these problems negatively affect the efficiency of distance education. Another result was that it was difficult to conduct courses based on practice and include laboratory studies. Enriching distance education contents in this regard may be a solution to this problem. Another problem mentioned by school administrators, especially when they considered teachers' feedback, was that it was difficult to perform assessments and evaluations through distance education. The fact that evaluation exams could not be performed multidimensionally, especially the impossibility of performing exams in application-oriented courses, were among the most important reasons for this problem. Another problem indicated by school administrators was that student motivation was achieved by creating an effective communication environment in face-to-face education; however, it could not be achieved in the distance education process during the pandemic process. A study determined that adequate communication could not be established between the students and teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic process, which led to a decrease in the efficiency of distance education (Sintema, 2020). In another study, it was concluded that the most important problems experienced in distance education were related to the hardware and software used, internet connection, and the lack of technical knowledge and devices (Bakioğlu and Çevik, 2020). The lack of devices such as tablets and computers was the most important problem concerning participation in live courses. Especially during live courses, connection problems caused various problems due to time limitations (Bayburtlu, 2020). According to Külekçi, Akyavuz, and Çakın (2020), the technical inadequacies experienced by school administrators, teachers' limited internet access, lack of internet infrastructure in the areas where schools are located, and the lack of devices of students and some of the teachers were determined as the problems that led to the interruption of distance education.

Administrators' general evaluations of the COVID-19 pandemic process and their understanding of the problems caused them to command solution proposals to carry out the process efficiently. In this regard, it was determined that increasing investments in internet infrastructure and helping students by distributing

computers and tablets to make distance education more efficient would have significant positive effects. Future studies could allocate more financial resources for distance education activities during the COVID-19 pandemic; this was determined as other recommendations to increase efficiency. Along with these results, school administrators indicated that students would be further involved in the distance education process, and families will have greater contributions, thus increasing efficiency. The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected students as well as all segments of society. It was concluded that guidance and counselling activities would contribute to the process, especially for students with problems in this sense. These activities will be much more beneficial if they can be planned to consider individual differences. The opportunities offered by the distance education system to students will increase the comprehensibility of courses. In this sense, enriched course contents that take into account the course curriculum will be useful.

Furthermore, conducting distance education in a virtual environment also requires taking cybersecurity measures. School administrators stated that taking cybersecurity measures would also contribute to the efficiency of distance education. Moreover, teachers indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic process caused them to improve themselves technically in distance education and positively affected their use of technology (Bakioğlu and Çevik, 2020).

Finally, the following results were obtained based on school administrators' evaluations about the future of distance education. It was determined that conducting distance education activities as a complement to face-to-face education when the pandemic process ends and life returns to normal will contribute. In this regard, school administrators indicated that hybrid education (face-to-face education, distance education) could be the future education model. Distance education will be included in future education policies, which requires planning studies by taking into account the scientific facts about the distance education process. Solutions could be produced for extraordinary situations that may be experienced in distance education, and reducing spending on education was also obtained by school administrators' views. Other results indicate that the widespread use of distance education in the future will pave the way for a digital transformation in education and increase the dependence on technology, which means that all segments involved in the distance education process should increase their technological competence. Distance education will also cause changes in curriculum in the future. All these situations were evaluated as the views expressed by school administrators on distance education in the future. Students also considered that the hybrid education model would be beneficial. As a result of a study, students reported that they should take their courses through face-to-face and distance education (Yalman, 2013).

It is observed that distance education will become more widespread day by day but will have advantages and disadvantages. School administrators, who are among the basic building blocks of education, should develop their competencies in this process. In this sense, they should have the characteristics to meet the needs of distance education.

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