

Research

Gifted Students' Perceptions of Distance Education in the Covid-19 Epidemic

Enver Türksoy¹ & Rıdvan Karabulut²

Abstract

Epidemics have been seen to be effective in decision making processes of social structures and governments during the course of the Covid-19 epidemic, a global epidemic in 2020. In this process, countries had to make changes in their education policies and decided to continue the formal education process via distance education. The Turkish Ministry of Education has decided to implement this process through the education information network (EBA) training module. The decision covers elementary, middle, and high school levels. No module or training has been provided on EBA for students who have been diagnosed as gifted. This research aims to describe the impact of distance education, which is formed by a deceleration of formal education during the Covid-19 process, on gifted children. The research is patterned by the basic qualitative research method. Among the purposeful sampling methods, criteria sampling and snowball sampling methods were used as base while determining the participants. The research participants consist of the parents of the elementary school students who were diagnosed with superior ability and are present in formal education. Research data were collected by structured interview form. The data obtained were analyzed descriptively. Although the findings of the study indicate that the formal education process is more efficient, it has been observed that the curfew affects the students the most negatively. There are also views supporting that the process is beneficial in terms of socialization and self-development. Other findings are included in the research findings

Key Words: Covid-19, online education, EBA, distance education, gifted students.

Introduction

Today, multifaceted recognition and evaluation are important in recognizing an individual (Ford, 2011). However, intelligence and abilities still continue to be restricted with higher-level mental skills, which are addressed with more dynamic and formable structures, through dedication to learning, qualified structuring, targeting, and implementing basic mental functions. The gifted students draw attention in many areas, such as the development of their potential mental abilities in their late ages, the focus on activities in a stable and motivated manner, and the academic ability. Considering the mental functions in two different directions, fixed mindset and developing mindset, leads practitioners to different approaches in understanding the characteristics of superior abilities. The fixed mind makes use of the inherent abilities, while in the developing mind, there is a belief that each individual can and will develop better than the ones they already possess. The

¹Corresponding author, Assist. Prof., Ahi Evran University, Faculty of Health Sciences, Kirsehir, Turkey, enverturksoy@ahievran.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0003-4321-3017

² Assist. Prof., Ahi Evran University, Faculty of Health Sciences, Kirsehir, Turkey, ORCID: 0000-0002-6682-2520
© Talent; ISSN 2717-7122 <http://talentjournal.net>

individual is evaluated with the view that the human brain can develop with plasticity and rearrange the individual's abilities to the extent of their abilities (Doidge, 2007; Dweck, 2012).

In this context, addressing a wide range of characteristics of gifted individuals from an early age, rather than focusing on their mental abilities, will make them noticeable. Superior abilities progress conceptually in terms of the age. The gifted individuals were stated to be individuals with high level technical and special knowledge, who enjoy difficult or challenging or complex works, set high standards for projects they are involved in, and appear as a new source of thought and knowledge within the class (Karabulut, 2010).

This epidemic has forced some changes in education. The Epidemic of Covid 19 in 2020 coincided with the midterm of the spring semester of the formal education in Turkey. The Ministry of National Education took a radical decision on March 13th, 2020, and decided to convert education towards online education (MEB, 2020). In line with this decision, it has been decided to carry out the education remotely, i.e. online. It has been decided to carry out the process primarily through EBA TV and digital antenna, and then through the education information network (EBA), i.e. MEB education portal.

EBA is an online learning portal established by the Turkish Ministry of Education. (MEB, 2020). The concept of online learning is now intertwined and interchangeable with the concepts of distance learning and e-learning (Moore, Dickson-Deane, and Galyen, 2011). The concept of e-learning in general is defined as internet-based learning (Clark & Mayer, 2016; Lee & McLoughlin 2011; Mayer, 2005). Online learning, however, refers to the education that is entirely on the internet, where there is no classroom environment (Anderson, 2008). We preferred the concept of online learning among these interchangeable terms. During this extraordinary period, it is thought that the transition from formal education to online learning affects the students, who are the essential elements of learning. The gifted students are thought to be affected by this situation as they are more likely to experience their emotions more intensely than normal students. In line with the situation mentioned above, it has been aimed to describe the Effect of Distance Education Studies on Gifted Children During the Covid-19 Epidemic. For this purpose, the answer has been sought for the question of "What is the impact of teaching environments on the learning process of gifted students?" In line with this main question, answers for the following questions were sought.

- What is the effect of distance education on the development of a gifted child?
- How are distance education and formal education perceived by parents of gifted children?

Method

Research Design

This research, aimed at describing the Effect of Distance Education Studies on Gifted Children during the Covid-19 Epidemic, was designed with the basic qualitative research method. Basic qualitative research is a type of research that explores participant experiences and the meanings that participants attribute to their experiences (Babbie, 2013; Worthington, 2013). In this research, it is aimed to examine the observations and experiences of the parents of gifted children about the

experiences of the students during the distance education process. The reason for meeting with parents rather than students during the research process is that there are national constraints, and that the idea of being able to obtain more information from parents remotely.

Participants

Among the purposeful sampling methods, criteria sampling and snowball sampling methods were used as base while determining the participants. Criteria sampling is defined as the method by which research participants or subjects are determined according to a specific criterion (Bryman, 2016; Patton, 2016). The criteria of the study are parents of students diagnosed with giftedness in the basic education process. Snowball sampling is a sampling method that starts with one participant and reaches other participants according to the participants' advice (Bryman, 2016; Patton, 2016). In this context, for structured interviews with 29 research participant parents, three parents were first reached out, and then the other parents were interviewed according to their references.

Materials

Research data were collected by structured interview form developed by the researchers. Pre-determined questions are included in the structured interview process and the research does not go beyond them (Büyüköztürk et al., 2011). The structured interviews were preferred since the current constraints do not allow for face-to-face interviews, and due to the descriptive nature of the research, the concern is not to investigate the current situation in-depth but to describe it in general terms.

Structured Interview Form. Key elements for the research are distance education in the Covid-19 epidemic, gifted children, and the changing teaching process. This concept consists of 6 main questions and three probe questions under these questions by researchers to cover the three basic elements. The probe questions included in the research are based on the idea that the participants' responses to the research are limited due to the lack of a face-to-face possibility of the interviews. Possible questions that may be asked via the field literature survey conducted in accordance with the purpose of the research were determined by the researchers. The draft form contains 26 questions. The researchers came together and grouped the questions. The groups and questions were re-evaluated and reduced down to eight questions. The eight-question interview form was then evaluated by two academicians in terms of language, expression, and meaning. According to the evaluation, eight questions were narrowed down to six questions, and corrections were made in terms of language and expression. The edited form draft was filled out by one of three parents identified as the reference person at the start of the research. The participant was then interviewed by phone and asked the meanings they had taken out of the questions, and then it was tried to determine their suitability for the purpose. After the interview, the draft form was completed and filled out by the other participants. The interview form consists of two parts. The first part is the form instructions, and the second part is the interview form questions. The interviews were collected via Google Forms. The questions in the interview forms were designed as open-ended questions.

Procedure and Data Analysis

In this study that utilizes snowball sampling method, the interview form links were sent to three participants and they asked to fill out the interview form. The other participants were then reached out with the guidance of these initial participants. Although 39 parents were communicated within the scope of the research, 29 parents participated in the research.

The interview form links were not sent to ten parents because they did not want to participate in the research. Each question in the forms is defined as obligatory. This is because the participants were expected to respond each question fully.

The research data were collected via Google Forms, and the MAXQDA 2020 qualitative data analysis program was used for data analysis. The data analysis procedure is summarized in the Figure 1.

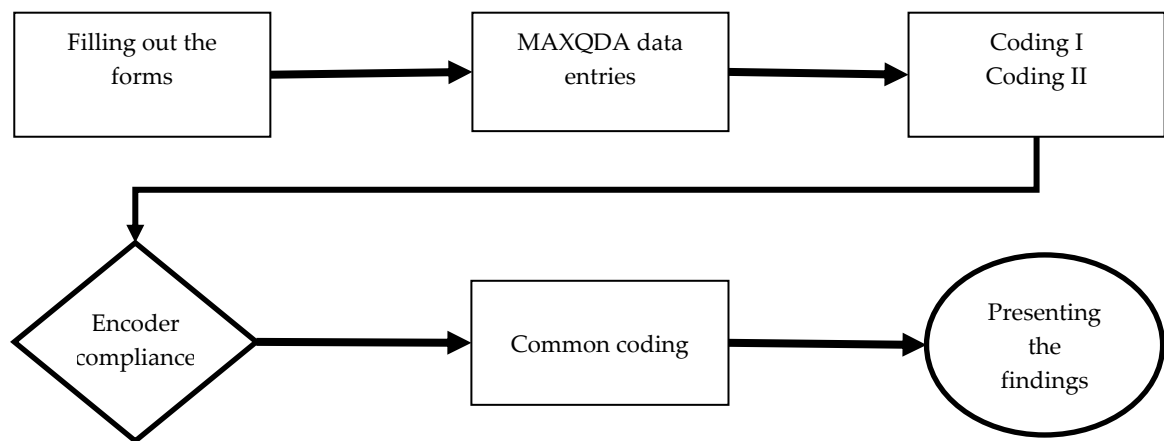


Figure 1. Data Analysis Procedure

The figure above is an overview of the data analysis process. The completed forms were analyzed on a question basis and the current situation was described. Research data were encoded at different places and times by the two researchers. The data sets were encoded by the researchers on the program, and the coder compliances were determined. Incompatibility regarding 19 codes was observed among the researchers. Then the researchers argued among each other, ensuring inter-code compliance.

The research was not thematized. Each question was evaluated within itself and the findings of the probe questions in the prepared interview form were presented together. The reason for this is that the basic qualitative research and the descriptive analysis of the research do not have the concern of forming a theory, and that the aim is to define the current situation as it is. One-to-one quotations in the data representation use aliases instead of parents' real names.

Results

The research findings will be presented from general to specific, and an answer will be sought to the main research question. The main research question was described as "What is the impact of

teaching environments on the learning process of gifted students?" First, the findings on the impact of distance education on the development of gifted students will be presented.

Developmental Effects of Distance Education

Within the scope of the research, the student's development was evaluated in terms of cognitive, emotional, physical, social, and creative development. Findings are presented in the following headings.

The graph regarding the contribution of these findings to cognitive development is given below (Figure 2).

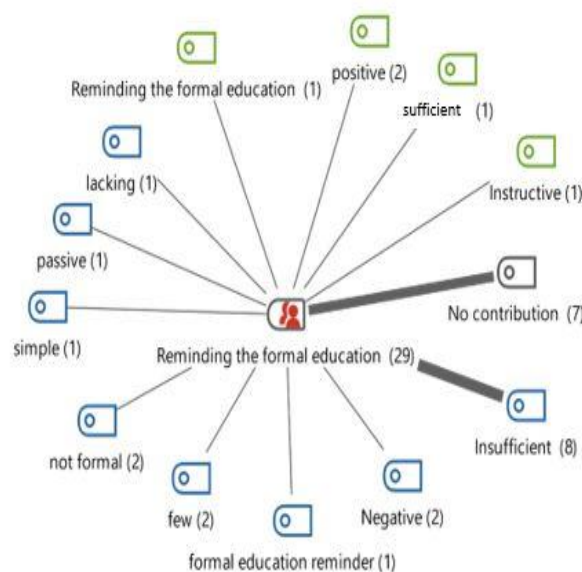


Figure 2. Cognitive Contribution Codes

The table above shows that parents reported a total of 29 views. The letter in parentheses next to each word refers to the repetition occurrence of the code. For example, in the phrase "no contribution (7)", it is observed that 7 parents expressed the opinion that distance education does not contribute to the cognitive development of the student. In addition, the lines indicated in bold indicate the states most commonly expressed by the participants or the most commonly obtained codes. The most repeated codes in the study are inadequate (f: 8) and non-contributing (f: 7). The positive expressions are expressed in green and the neutral expressions are expressed in gray, while the negative expressions are indicated in blue.

In terms of cognitive development, 15 views are completely negative, seven views have no contribution (f:7) neutral, and six views are positive. Below are the opinions of three parents.

Ali: "It is far from the education in the school..."

Ayşe: "Very limited information... I don't believe there will be much progress."

Ahmet: "My daughter is very open to learning on her own, so she takes every opportunity and does her best to increase her level of knowledge..... She just couldn't make progress with EBA TV or EBA content alone."

In the above view, it is stated that distance education is far behind formal education in terms of

cognitive development. The participant, code-named Ayşe, states that the knowledge is limited and the content is insufficient for the gifted children. This means that there will be no contribution to the cognitive development of the student.

The user, code-named Ahmet, states that the progress made by the student is through the efforts of the student. He also states that there will be no development if the student utilizes only the content of distance education.

Öner: "I think that knowledge is developing by taking classes from different teachers who have different perspectives."

Hatice: "Your child also states that he/she learns things that he/she did not know via the EBA system."

The user, code-named Öner, states that taking classes from different teachers helps students to acquire different perspectives. The user, code-named Hatice, states that the student acquires new information.

Influence in terms of Affective Development

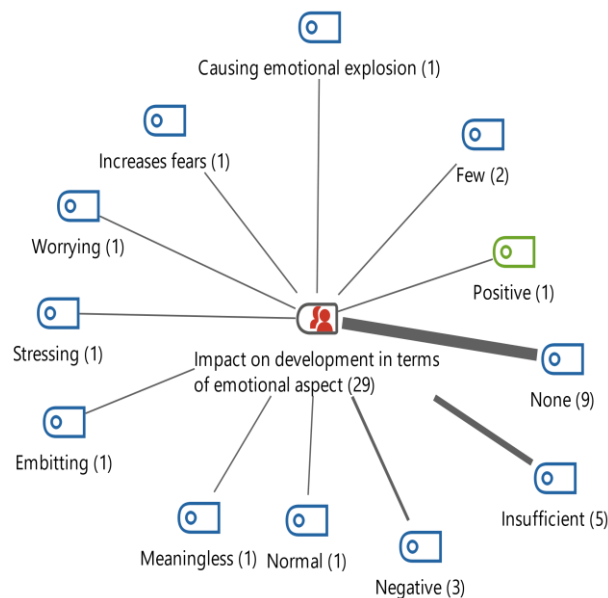


Figure 3. Emotional Codes

When the Figure 3 is examined, the most common opinions are no opinions (f:9) and insufficient (f:5). One positive opinion has been reported in terms of affective development. This view states "he/she listened to himself and he/she was positive." The expression here is evaluated in terms of student's rest, i.e. not going to school. Below are some of the opinions of the participants:

Seher: "The children are confined indoors, they became lonely. ...They're home now, and the problems are domestic... Therefore, this can cause emotional outbursts."

Esin: "The student has receded emotionally, and the concerns have increased, unfortunately. The fears are heightened."

Cansu: "They learn how to cope with difficulties. The life is not all lavenders and roses. They realize that, and it makes them a bit ill tempered, I think."

When the above opinions are examined, it is seen that, due to staying at home, distance education negatively affects the emotional development of the students. Among the results obtained from

the interviews is that the current situation increases the students' anxiety because it is a necessity.

Influence in terms of Physical Development

Due to the epidemic, children had to receive homeschooling. This situation is thought to affect children physically. For this purpose, the effects of the process on physical development were examined. Among the interviews, the title that obtained the minimum amount of codes is the title of physical development. Nine codes have been obtained under this title. One participant did not express an opinion on the issue. The figure for the analysis is given below (Figure 4).

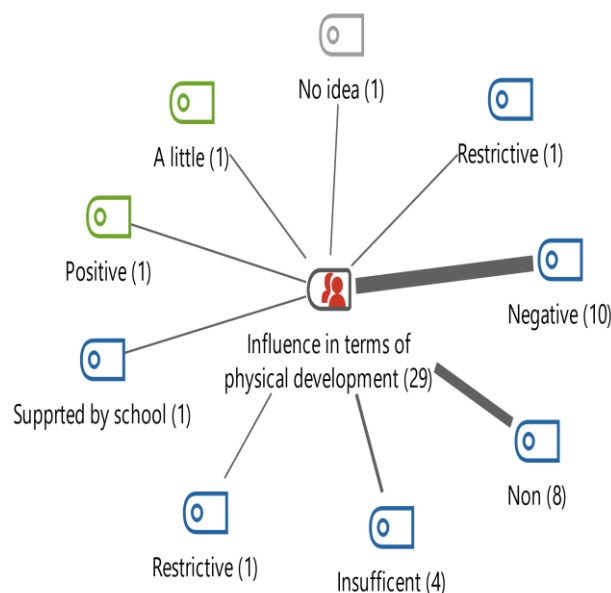


Figure 4. Physical Development Codes

When the figure is examined, it is seen that ten participants responded negatively, and eight participants reported that it had no effects on physical development. The participant, code-named Fatma, who expressed a positive opinion, said: "It was positive as the student transitioned into a more comfortable life, from a physical point of view, and does not get too tired now." It is understood from this response that the student has expressed such an opinion because he/she experienced less fatigue. Some of the opinions of the other participants are given below:

Meryem said: "I think it increases physical laziness."

Poyraz: "They need to be on the move, they need to take out their energy. They already love activities."

Adil: "Having him/her on a computer all the time negatively affects his/her physical development."

When the above opinions are examined, it is thought that the reason for the negativity lies in the fact that students are prohibited from going out due to Covid-19. Generally, criticisms go beyond the restriction on going out, and focus on the effect of distance education.

Summary of Developmental Impact

When the section is examined, it is seen that the effects of the epidemic outweighed especially in the topics of physical development and emotional development. One reason for this is thought to

be the curfew practice imposed on individuals aged between 0 and 20 during the Covid-19 epidemic. Another reason is the lack of infrastructure in distance education. It is thought to affect the views of parents on this issue. The insufficiency of EBA content is seen as the most common cause among the criticisms in terms of a developmental perspective.

Impact on Social Communication

The positive opinion rate on social communication is lower than negative as in the other topics mentioned above. The majority of the assessments made under the research appear to be related to the ban on going out due to Covid-19, as previously stated. The figure for the findings is below.

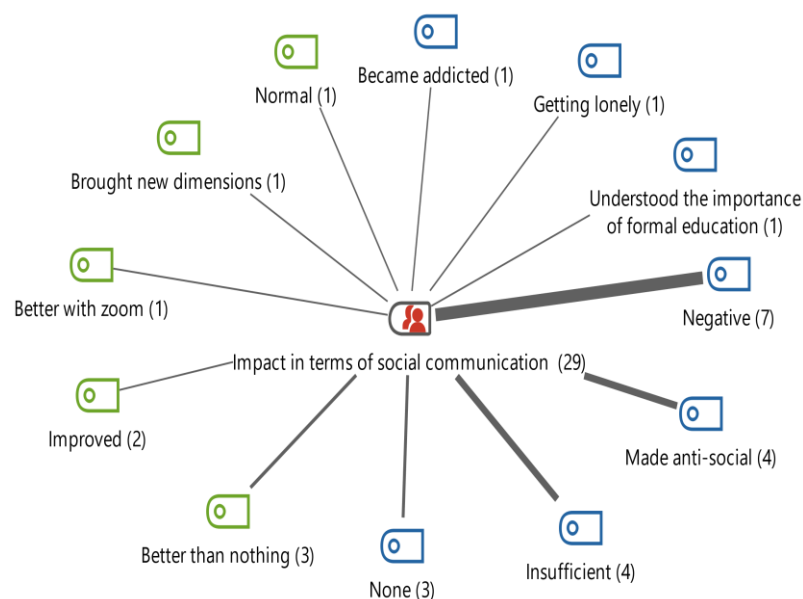


Figure 5. Social Development Codes

When the figure is examined, it is seen that negative expressions are more common. The most widely viewed titles are negative (f: 7), anti-socializing (f:4), and insufficient (f:4). The following are some of the responses considered to be remarkable among the comments.

Esra: "We think that this is supportive in reaching an international perspective in terms of social communication." It is seen that the participant treats the situation as an opportunity. In the continuation of the sentence, the participant states "I consider it a new leap that is a requirement of the technology era" and considers this situation an opportunity.

Fatma: "I can say that social communication has improved. He/she contacted people from all over Turkey, and even from different countries. He/she had a different experience."

The opinion of the participant code-named Fatma supports the opinion of the participant code-named Esra. It has been observed that the process contributes to the students' orientation to a new field. Even though the researchers' initial expectations were to the contrary, other participants have also reported that this is effective in terms of socializing.

Canan: "Distance education and epidemic measures hamper children's social communication."

Seher: "I don't think social development is present." I'd even say it's a complete setback."

Kemal: "The situation pushed our children into non-communication. Because we made them accustomed to using tech tools. We lacked in terms of controlling as parents, and our children became addicted to technology."

The three views above contradict with those stated before. They express that the situation negatively affects students' communication with their friends and pushes children towards technology. It is thought that the problem arises from the difference of perceptions towards the concept of social communication.

Impact of Distance Education and EBA on Motivation

In this section, the answers to two questions will be compared.

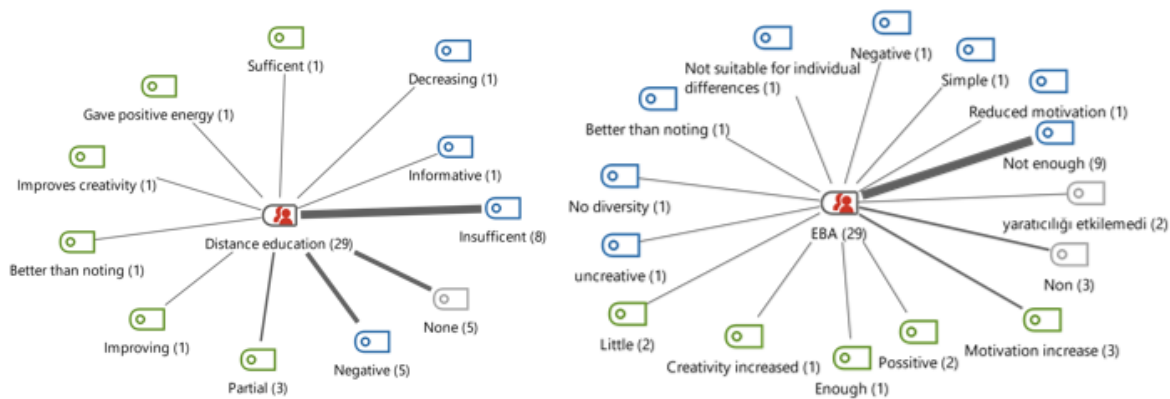


Figure 6. EBA and Formal Education Codes

Kemal: "Without getting in touch with the children, without looking into their eyes, without weighing their reactions, the education cannot have a positive effect on motivation and creativity. Also, it is not possible to provide any level of education by only sending case studies."

Hatice: "We follow the classes on the TV. I can say the teacher is getting better in terms of motivation and creativity."

They state that the participating teachers gain experience in the process, and are effective in increasing the students' motivation.

Fatma: "Distance education enabled children to get their hands on the necessary information faster and effortlessly. It was a great loss, the loss of time... Distance education has provided great comfort and positive energy by avoiding loss of time."

The participants express in their statements that distance education prevents time loss, and that the teaching process is more effective this way.

Seher: "Creativity and curiosity persevere with consulting to other sources or really creative teachers. However, due to both the home environment and the content given by the teachers, motivation is about to blow up..."

The participant emphasizes here that supporting the distance education process via the homework and the activities assigned through the school and EBA system, i.e. having two different processes, will be effective for increasing the teachers' motivation. Otherwise, it is expressed that there will be serious motivational problems, such as that of their own children.

Esra: "I think that the entertaining and informative programs, put in between the breaks, motivate my child but do not have much of an impact on creativity."

Cansu: "Unfortunately, my child cannot be very motivated, but since creativity comes from the heart, he/she designs things in his/her own at home."

Adil: "The EBA content is inadequate. It explains everything in a very simplified way."

Nehir: "There are only drawing activities."

Considering the above comments, the majority of opinions regarding the impact of EBA and distance education on motivation are insufficient (f:7; f: 9). On the other hand, it is observed that the lack of formal education, which is the result of the current situation, has a negative impact on motivation. It appears that there are problems with the content during the distance education process.

Evaluation in terms of Content

Fatma: "Distance education is definitely better as long as it is improved."

Hatice: "I can say they are the same because they both are within the curriculum."

Nehir: "The curriculum scheme and the content are the same. EBA rightfully taught as appropriate for everyone, but it was way too simple."

Adil: "In formal education, the child learns about life, about how to communicate with people other than the family. Above all, it is very important for the child to get a good job from the teacher and be appreciated when he/she is successful. Distance education lacks these. But in the current situation, the student can continue his/her education. EBA is well crafted."

When the above opinions and the obtained codes are examined, the lack of content specifically made for gifted students, taking into account their developmental characteristics, is seen as the most fundamental problem. Formal education is also observed to be more effective. The evaluations put emphasis on social interaction.

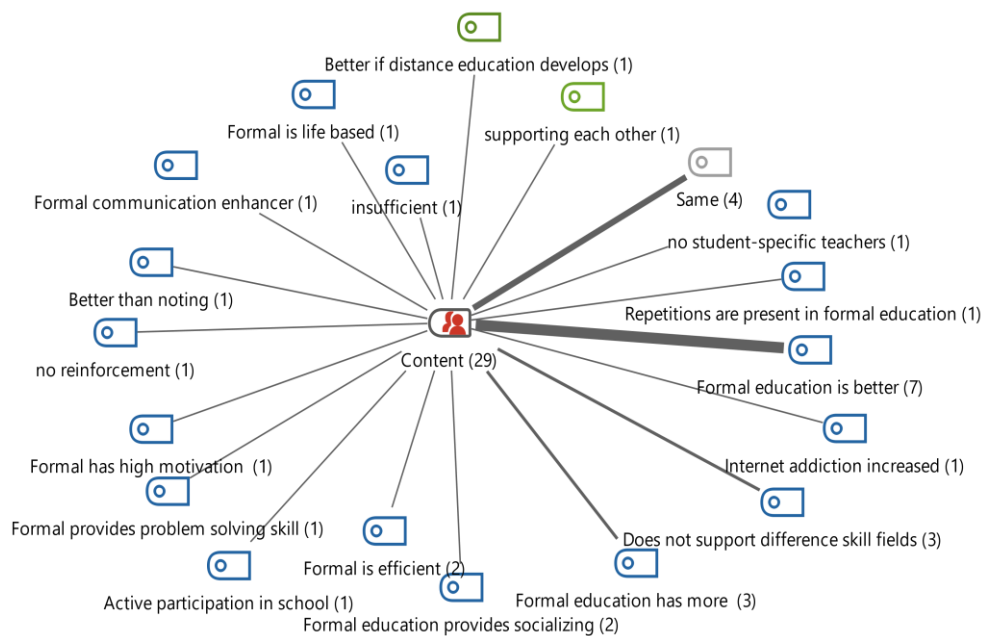


Figure 7. Content Codes

The section where code diversity is minimal is the boredom category. The code with the highest frequency here is boring (f:15). More than 50% of parents have stressed that the process is boring. Only two parents have stated otherwise.

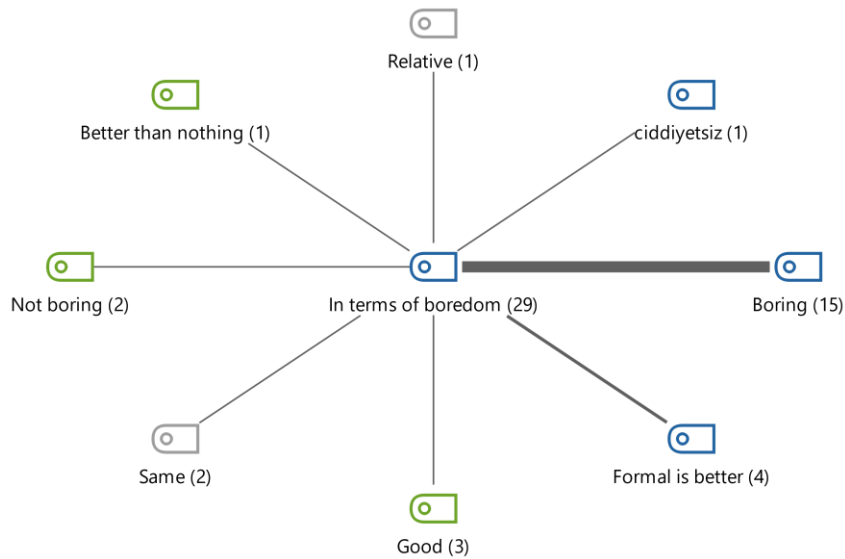


Figure 8. Boredom Codes

Meryem: "My child gets too bored, doesn't take it seriously. It has no effect."

Seher: "Oh, the most crucial point: Boredom. Experts say it's okay for them to be bored. Gifted children get bored after school as well. We can't be there for them all the time. We can help relieve their distress until a certain age, but after that, they will have to do it on their own. Children who are left to their own after boredom can be more creative and happier."

Cansu: "He/she is very bored. He/she is very fond of his/her friends and misses the social environment."

Can: "I see a regression since children can move away from the lessons more easily."

Poyraz: "They are very bored. Being in school was a great joy for them."

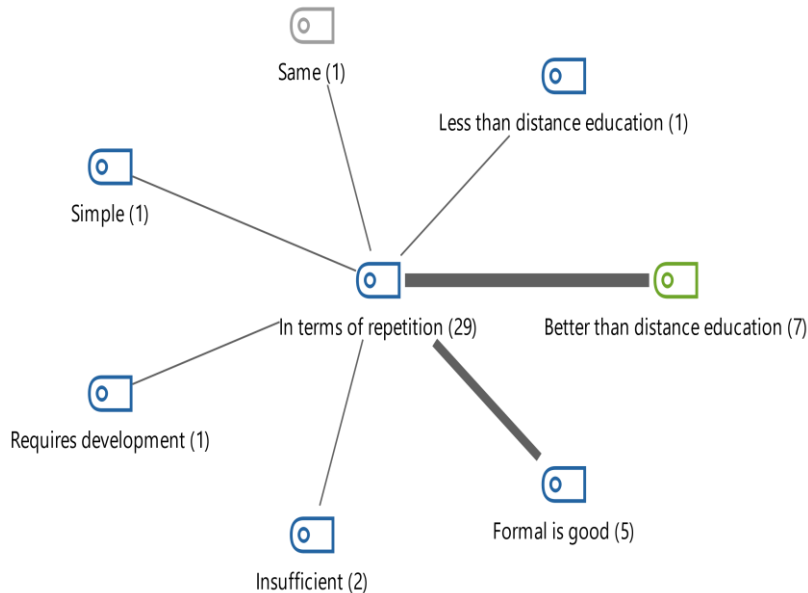


Figure 9. Repetition Codes

Kemal: "Repetition draws more attention in distance education. In fact, there is repetition in formal education as well but since it is given with different examples, children can grasp the subject without realizing the repetition."

Emine: "Distance education benefits completely in the form of repetition of formal education."

Fatma: "Distance education is inadequate but I think it will be more efficient if developed."

It can be said from the obtained codes that distance education is better than formal education in terms of repetition. However, there are requests regarding the development of the process.

Discussion

The research attempted to describe the perceptions of gifted students towards distance education through the eyes of their parents, during the Covid-19 epidemic. 673 codes were obtained from the forms filled out by 29 parents during the interviews. This is also a general evaluation of the online teaching material EBA portal, which is the main element of the distance education process. When the frequencies of the codes obtained for the effect of the epidemic on the students are examined from a developmental perspective, most repetitive codes are insufficient (f:56) has no effects (f:29) and has negative effects (f:28). The word cloud for at least three frequency codes for the frequency of the resulting codes is located below (Figure 10).

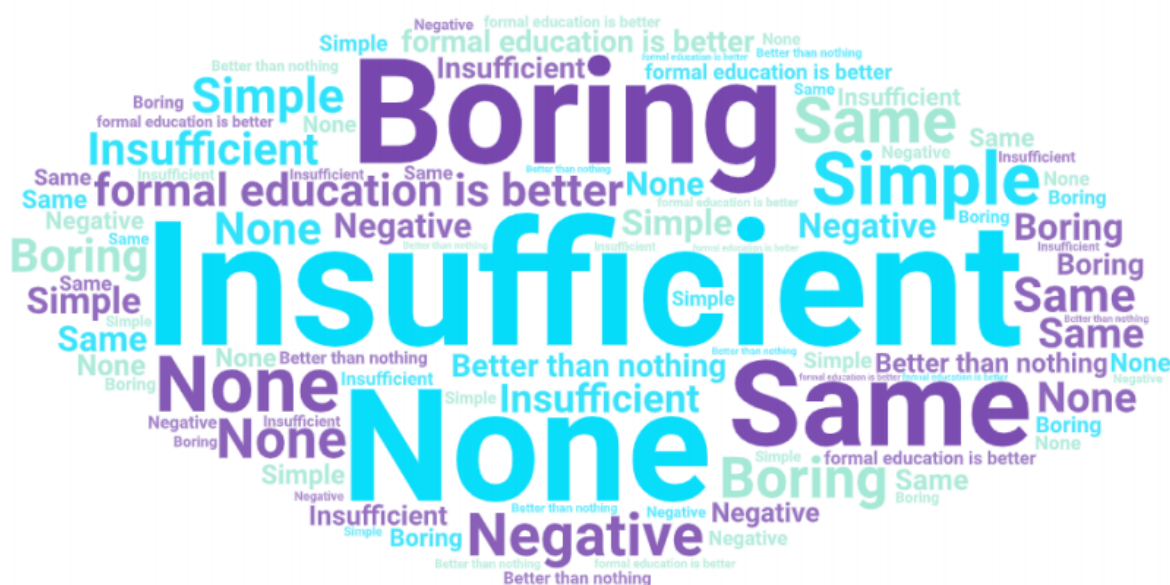


Figure 10. Word Cloud of All Study

In the resulting codeword cloud, the highest frequency codes are shown in large font size and represent the general situation. The interviews contain generally negative statements, indicating that the teaching process has combined with the epidemic and they created a negative perception. The following path (Figure 11) was followed in the evaluation of the results.

The Figure 11 is a description of the interaction of the process with one another. The description made here expresses that the epidemic necessitated distance education, along with the necessity of the EBA online education program. The research findings showed that perceptions about measures taken during the epidemic were reflected on distance education. The statements "The children are confined indoors, they became lonely. ... They're home now, and the problems are domestic... Therefore, this can cause emotional outbursts."; "Distance education and epidemic measures hamper children's social communication." in the research support this situation.

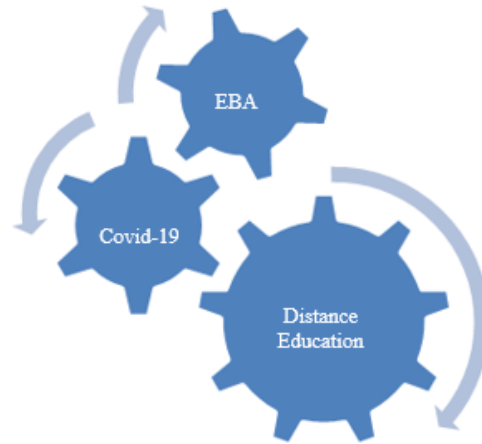


Figure 11. Theoretical Results

From a developmental perspective, the epidemic appears to have a negative impact on students. It is observed that the number of positive responses obtained from the findings in terms of social development is greater than the other development dimensions. The views here express that the students communicating with different teachers and with different students open up the students' horizons.

Similarly, negative responses are more common in the questions that require the separate evaluation of EBA and distance education. But the number of positive responses parents gave to distance education (f:8) is lower than the number of positive responses to EBA (f:9). Furthermore, the variety of codes for distance education is greater than those for EBA. Increased code diversity is thought to indicate a consensus. In other words, parents' shared perception of distance education is more developed than that of distance education.

In terms of content, it is observed that positive perception of formal education (f:19) is higher than that of distance education (f: 1) in the questions asked to parents. One of the reasons for this is thought to be "the lack of support for different areas of capability" contained within the research codes. The reason for this idea is the perception that the gifted students should be subject to a different teaching process.

Research findings showed that distance education is superior in terms of repetition (f:7) than formal education (f:5) within the frequencies of interviews with parents. This is due to repetitions over EBA TV and the students' opportunity to watch the classes online again.

Considering the wide range of research; the content included in the EBA has been found to be few or insufficient. In this respect, EBA is not yet a sufficient portal. In the data of the study, the restrictions of the epidemic are noted, and the criticisms towards distance education run in parallel with the restrictions.

Research shows that the perception of distance education is overshadowed by the epidemic. In this respect, it is considered that the evaluation of distance education under such circumstances is not healthy. In EBA, additional content can be created for the education of gifted children. This situation is thought to be important considering the individual differences of gifted children.

References

- Anderson, T. (2008). *The theory and practice of online learning*. Athabasca University.
- Babbie, E. R. (2013). *The basics of social research*. Cengage learning.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods*. Oxford University.
- Büyüköztürk, Ş., Çakmak, E. K., Akgün, Ö. E., Karadeniz, Ş., & Demirel, F. (2011). *Bilimsel araştırma yöntemleri* [Scientific research methods]. Pegem Akademi.
- Clark, R. C., & Mayer, R. E. (2016). *E-learning and the science of instruction: Proven guidelines for consumers and designers of multimedia learning*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Doidge, N. (2007). *The brain that changes itself: Stories of personal triumph from the frontiers of brain science*. Penguin.
- Ford, D. Y. (2011). *Multicultural gifted education*. Prufrock.
- Karabulut, R. (2010). *Türkiye’de üstün yetenekliler eğitiminin tarihi süreci* (Unpublished master's thesis). Abant İzzet Baysal University, Social Sciences Institute, Bolu.
- Lee, M. J., & McLoughlin, C. (2011). *Web 2.0 based e-learning: Applying social informatics for tertiary teaching*. Information Science Reference.
- Mayer, R. (2005). Introduction to multimedia learning. In R. E. Mayer (Ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of multimedia learning* (pp. 1-24). Cambridge university press.
- MEB (2020). Bakan Selçuk, Koronavirüs'e Karşı Eğitim Alanında Alınan Tedbirleri Açıkladı. Retrieved from <https://www.meb.gov.tr/bakan-selcuk-koronaviruse-karsi-egitim-alaninda-alinan-tedbirleri-acikladi/haber/20497/tr>
- Moore, J. L., Dickson-Deane, C., & Galyen, K. (2011). E-Learning, online learning, and distance learning environments: Are they the same? *The Internet and Higher Education*, 14(2), 129-135.
- Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. Sage publications.
- Worthington, M. (2013). *Differences between phenomenological research and a basic qualitative research design*. Capella University.