

## OPINIONS OF UNIVERSITY, SECONDARY/HIGH SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS, TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ON EDUCATIONAL POLICIES IN TRNC VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL SCHOOLS DURING COVID-19

Oya Erdođdu DENİZER

oyadenizer@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1601-2113>,

TRNC Ministry of National Education, National Education Supervision and Evaluation Board, Inspector

### ABSTRACT

The crisis created by the coronavirus around the world continues to have negative effects on our social, financial, spiritual lives and education, especially on health, and it does not seem possible to say anything clear about when it will end. The coronavirus has created a serious crisis around the world, and this crisis has put on our agenda that open and distance education applications are actually indispensable as a basic learning resource in solving the problems faced in education. The problem is not regional but global, and if the right steps are not taken in education at this point, the pandemic process seems to cause serious educational disruptions around the world. For this reason, it is clear that the education system needs functional touches that will reduce the negative effects of the pandemic on education and disperse the dark clouds on education, both on a global scale and on a national scale.

Significant movements are observed in the texture of the Turkish Cypriot society, in its demographic structure, in the quality of the family, in its understanding of consumption, in human rights, in the political field, in science and technology. In this context, from the education itself; It is expected that every child will continue to develop, socialize, transform democracy into a way of thinking and life, ensure vertical mobility in society through equal opportunities and meet the demand for labor in the economy.

Regarding the current and future education policy of students, teachers, secondary/high school administrators and universities in the current and future education policies of the TRNC National Education System against covid-19, vocational technical, secondary/high school schools, current and future education policies in the TRNC during the Covid-19 process. Future expectations and the views of students, teachers, administrators and academicians from universities in education policy are emphasized.

**Keywords:** Vocational Education, Teacher-student, Administrators, Education Policy

### INTRODUCTION

Vocational and technical education aims to develop necessary skills and create desired behaviors by providing a suitable learning environment for the youth of the society (Alkan, Dođan, & Sezgin, 2001). Vocational and Technical Education Schools and Institutions, which ensure the training of qualified workforce for social development (Çađlar and Reis, 2007, p. 152), are also defined in the Vocational Education Law (1986) as “secondary education institutions leading to diploma in the field of vocational and technical education and vocational and technical education institutions. higher education institutions providing technical education and formal and non-formal education institutions of all types and degrees where document and certificate programs are applied.

Evaluations are made on the TRNC education policies during the covid-19 process, to shed light on the problems experienced in the education system in the TRNC, to describe in detail what the problems are, to evaluate the problems in the context of the effects of different segments (administrators, parents, etc.), to raise awareness about the causes of the problems and possible solutions. .

The main purpose of education is to give personality to the individual, to increase the welfare of the society and the level of well-being of the individual. For this reason, education can be seen as a process that increases the production capacity of the country's political, social, economic and scientific institutions.

From an individual point of view, education is the process of changing the behavior, knowledge, abilities and motivation of the personnel in order to increase the success of reaching the goals. Education is a management tool that aims to improve the current success of the organization in terms of effectiveness and efficiency (Yüksel, 1990).

Contemporary education is a form of education aimed at raising versatile, participatory, creative and sensitive people. In other words, the aim of modern education is to ensure the development of the individual not only mentally but also physically, socially and emotionally. Contemporary education should give importance to individual differences, wishes and interests of the person, and should strive to make him more ready for adult and business life (Üçcan, 1992). Contemporary education is the whole of the policies, organizations and methods

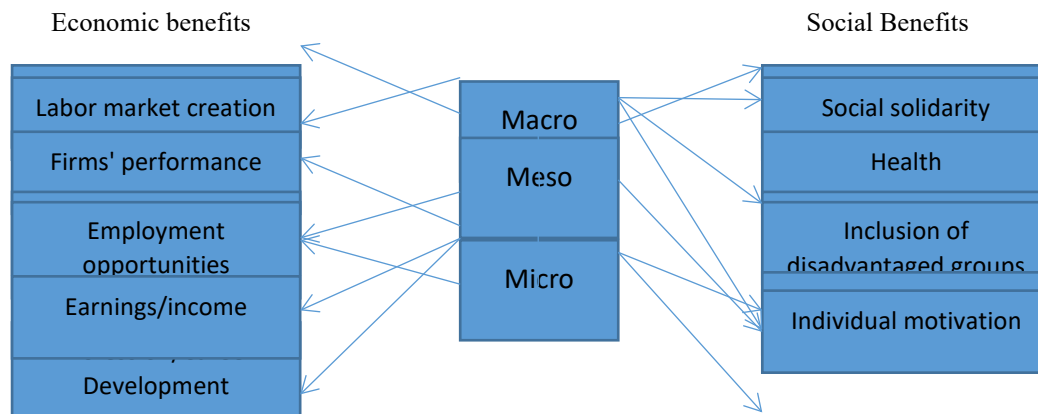
that lead them to produce new information and technologies that will create the era in the near future, while transferring the existing knowledge efficiently and effectively to new generations in order for societies to reach contemporary welfare measures. According to this definition, today's education systems have to have a dynamic, not a static structure, an innovative rather than a traditional structure. Like every institution, the educational institution produces the outputs (in the form of goods and services) that the society needs from the input (human - material) from the environment in which it is formed. As long as the outputs of societies have more value than their inputs, the educational institution can survive by functioning. Otherwise, the modern education function will not be able to be fulfilled at the level desired by the modern society (Sağlam, 1992).

The aims of Turkish Cypriot national education are to try to be realized not only in formal, open and non-formal education institutions, but also at home, in the environment, in the workplace, everywhere and at every opportunity. All activities related to education are subject to the supervision and control of the Ministry in terms of compliance with the general objectives of Turkish Cypriot national education. It is quite natural for us to experience anxiety, panic and fear as a society due to the pandemic experienced all over the world, but it is not possible for us to exclude children from these negativities.

It is possible for children and adolescents to experience stress or show anxiety reactions in the face of life events such as the pandemic process. It is natural for children, in particular, to have difficulties in understanding concepts such as pandemics or viruses due to their cognitive development levels and limited medical knowledge. In this new order, which contains a lot of uncertainty, there is no doubt that 'Education' is one of the sectors most affected by the process.

Given the devastating impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the world, it is of paramount importance to respond to the educational needs of children and youth in such a time of crisis. This document can be a response to a crisis that will significantly disrupt education opportunities globally, for education administrators at various levels of education administration in public and private education institutions; It aims to support to develop adaptive, coherent, effective and equitable education.

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 Pandemic is first and foremost a public health issue, and mitigating its impact will largely depend on the attitudes of scientists and drug manufacturers to develop a drug or vaccine to prevent or treat COVID-19 infections and ensure their large-scale distribution. will be. In the absence of effective drug interventions, mitigating the impact of the pandemic will depend on actions by public health and government officials that can slow the rate of spread of the infection, such as social distancing.



The pandemic and the necessary approaches taken against the pandemic will affect social, economic and political life. Movement restrictions created by social distancing have severely affected businesses and businesses by reducing economic supply and demand. This effect; It will be more challenging in countries with the weakest health infrastructures and the most vulnerable segments of the country population. Restrictions caused by non-drug interventions such as social distancing have also affected education at all levels.

In addition, differences among students due to their support directly at home or by private educational opportunities by parents, differences in the capacity of different school types to support distance learning, differences between students' flexibility, motivation and skills for independent and online learning may worsen the existing opportunity gaps. In addition, between school systems; Where necessary, differences in the capacity to design and implement effective training will increase opportunity gaps in jurisdictions. As a result, unless planned and effective action is taken in education, the COVID-19 pandemic will likely cause the largest

worldwide educational disruption in a generation. This disruption will affect the livelihoods of individuals and the hopes of communities.

Therefore, it is imperative that education managers take urgent steps to develop and implement strategies to reduce the impact of the pandemic on education. We believe that; collaboration can help in effective training design; The first and simplest collaboration will be to find out what schools, communities and countries are currently doing to preserve educational opportunities throughout the pandemic.

Teachers' participation in professional development activities increases the quality of classroom education and the interest of the student in the lesson. In this context, various development programs are organized in order to support the professional development of teachers in many countries and the participation of teachers is encouraged. According to the data of the PISA 2015 national report (MEB, 2016), it is stated that 50.9% of teachers in OECD countries participated in a professional development program in the last three months during the PISA implementation period. In Turkey, only 24% of teachers attended such training. An even more negative situation emerges when these low rates of professional development programs are examined in the context of vocational high schools.

When the vocational and technical education systems in the world are examined, it is seen that there are significant differences between developed countries such as the European Union, USA, Japan and Australia. The three major economies, also referred to as the driving force of the European Union, are Germany, France and England. There are significant differences between these three countries in terms of vocational and technical education systems. Considering the Asian continent, Turkey, Israel, Korea, and Jordan are among the countries that have relatively increased the number of students enrolled in vocational and technical education since the 1970s (MEB Research and Development Department, 2006 cited by Keating, Medrich, Volkoff, and Perry, 2002).

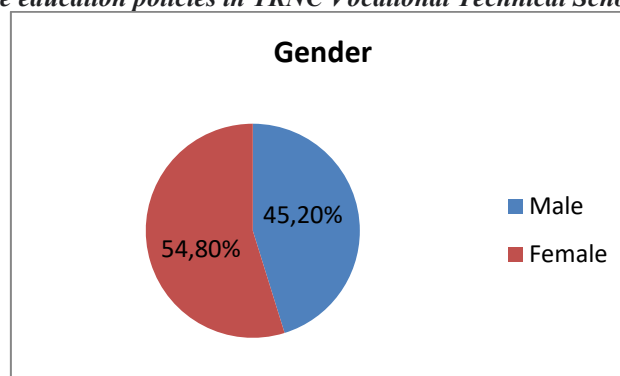
This will continue for at least a few more months, as students and teachers cannot come together physically at schools and universities. A protracted pandemic will limit students' learning opportunities during the period of social distancing due to restrictions on gathering. It is well known that the time spent on learning, or learning time, is one of the healthiest indicators of learning opportunities.

Vocational and technical education is a type of education that all countries attach great importance to according to their own economic growth targets and expectations and criticisms are directed more intensely compared to general high schools where academic education is given (Özer, 2018). The most important reason for this is the multidimensional contribution of vocational education to the social and economic development of the society as well as the personal development of the individual. From this point of view, vocational education is not only an educational activity aimed at providing individuals with some vocational and technical skills, but is considered as a much broader concept that includes the individual, society and the country's economy.

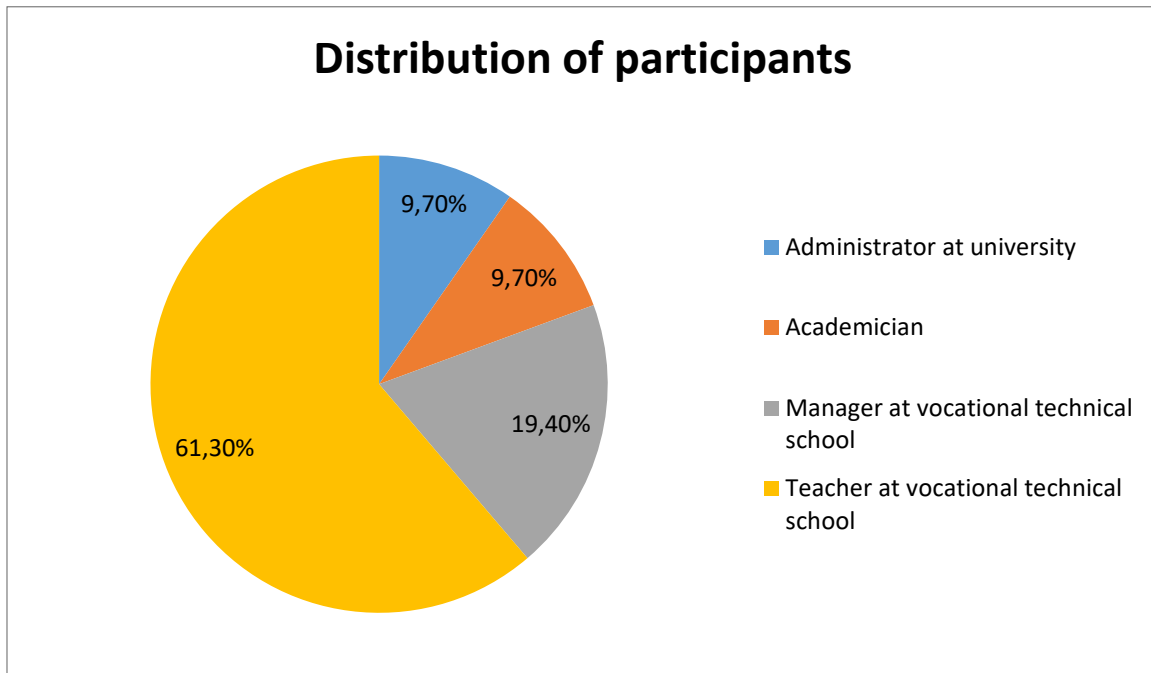
## METHODOLOGY

Vocational and technical secondary education institutions are educational institutions that are responsible for educating students as the workforce needed by their vocational fields and at the same time preparing them for higher education in accordance with the objectives of general secondary education. In the present study, results were produced through discussion on the evaluation of education policies of administrators, educators, teachers and students in vocational technical high schools in TRNC during the Covid-19 process. .

Figure 1. *Demographic characteristics of university, secondary / high school school administrators, teachers and students regarding the education policies in TRNC Vocational Technical Schools during Covid 19*



45.2% of the participants in the study on the determination of the education policies of the TRNC Vocational Technical Schools during Covid-19 are male and 54.8% are female.



Among the administrators, academicians, administrators in high schools and teachers participating in the research on the education policies of TRNC vocational technical schools during Covid-19, the highest participation was the teachers in vocational technical schools with 61.3%.

***The effects of education policy on changes in vocational technical high schools and online education during Covid-19***

According to the answers of the participants, a government directive is applied in the majority of the TRNC to prevent students and teachers from coming to school during Covid-19.

The mandate is renewable, extending from two weeks to one month. In a few cases, the lessons were indefinitely, first on WhatsApp, then on Zoom and in the Ministry of Education, with the supervisors and the basic classes of secondary schools, and sample slides were uploaded to the lectures and questions. Then, the lessons were periodically published in BRT. Pandemic guideline The guides were sent to the school administrations by the Ministry. In this process, working and training arrangements were transferred from department managers to school administrators.

Some answers stated that the guidelines from the ministry did not match the reality of the schools. Some of the respondents spoke of clear plans for an implementation strategy that could support schools in maintaining teaching throughout the crisis. Some schools use online platforms to maintain teaching, while in some countries governments use educational television to broadcast content.

When asked what the government or school networks have done to support students' academic education to date, a large majority of respondents answered “nothing,” followed by encouraging schools to use online resources.

***Which needs of education policy do participants (students, teachers, administrators and academics) consider most critical in this process?***

The areas considered to be of highest importance are: ensuring academic learning for students, supporting students who are deficient in self-study abilities, ensuring students' well-being, providing professional support to teachers. However, many of the participants evaluated the revision of the graduation directive, ensuring the reliability of the assessment process, and determining new priorities for the curriculum.

Respondents were also asked which of these issues would be the most difficult to address. Topics identified as very challenging by most participants are to ensure the continuity of academic learning (lack of internet infrastructure) for students, to support students who have deficiencies in terms of self-study skills, to ensure continuity and reliability in measuring student learning, to support families to support student learning, and to ensure that students and teachers are healthy. ensuring that they are. However, a significant portion of the participants also rated the remaining topics as very challenging.

### ***The Educator, Administrator, and Teacher's Responses to the COVID-19 Crisis***

The areas that are considered the most challenging in terms of education by most people are the accessibility of technological infrastructure, addressing the mental health of students, balancing digital and non-digital activities correctly, planning the recruitment of interns to institutions and organizations, and managing the technological infrastructure.

Similar to this study on the education policy in vocational technical high schools in the TRNC during the Covid-19 process, it is in line with the results of the PISA 2018 survey. According to PISA, even in member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, an average of nine percent of 15-year-old students do not have a quiet space to study at home, and in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand these figures exceed thirty percent. Even in Korea, which scores the highest in PISA, one in five students in the most socioeconomically disadvantaged schools have no space to study at home. In Denmark, Slovenia, Norway, Poland, Lithuania, Iceland, Austria, Switzerland and the Netherlands, more than 95 percent of students said they have a computer for work at home, but in Indonesia only 34 percent of students. For example, nearly all 15-year-old students in socioeconomically advantaged schools in the United States have a computer at home to work on.

In this process, in line with the above analysis, there was not enough demand from the institutions for the interns. During Covid-19, the students were evaluated due to insufficient facilities at home, insufficient internet, insufficient computer and telephone barriers, students' adaptation to online education and the lack of internship opportunities.

### **Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations**

TRNC Ministry of National Education (TRNC) directed the closure of schools due to the pandemic to EBA, as the syllabuses and books for high schools in the MoNE moodle came from the TR, and after a short time, the state television Bayrak Radio Television (BRT) managed the process and transmitted the learning contents through television and media. tried to present it to his students. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is observed that the courses conducted for secondary school over the BRT channel within the scope of distance education applications are generally composed of basic courses and branch courses such as Painting, Music, Physical Education are not included in practice, and there is no significant study for the education of individuals with special needs. If we look at the educational practices carried out over BRT for students studying at secondary and high school level, it is known that the educational activity carried out aims at a television-centered, one-way and mass education, and not all teachers working at education levels are included in the process.

State authorities should take measures by taking into account the psychological, social and economic transformations, both at the beginning of the pandemic process and in the following process. It is important to plan activities and practices that can facilitate the adaptation of students to the school environment in the post-pandemic period, especially taking into account the bio-psycho-social developments of the students in the education system (Kara, 2020). In this respect, while providing academic support to students with distance education, on the other hand, the fact that the psychosocial aid process has been activated through psychological support and guidance in order to minimize the anxiety and traumatic effect of being at home for a long time and being deprived of social activities on students and their families, open and distance education Although the integration of psycho-social support practices into their practices is very valuable in this traumatic process, it seems important to plan activities and practices for returning to school after the pandemic.

Even temporary closure of schools brings high social and economic burdens. However, the anxiety that comes with school closures also affects people, especially for disadvantaged children and their families, it can be more serious such as irregular and interrupted learning, child care problems, parent and child relationships and economic costs for families who cannot work (Daniel, 2020).

The fact that educational institutions were caught unprepared for the coronavirus made it necessary to suspend the assessment and evaluation processes based on passing/fail in many countries (Bozkurt et al., 2020) or to hold online exams instead of traditional exams and tests without adequate validity and reliability studies (d'Orville,

2020). As a matter of fact, the situation in universities on the island has been close to this. In this case, there is more information on how the learning needs of the students who study at universities that do not have UZEM (Distance Education Application and Research Center) or which have UZEM but are not sufficient in terms of infrastructure, content, and personnel are met, and how their course success, measurement and evaluation processes are carried out. highlights the need for detailed studies. Considering the online exam applications, which were carried out on such a large scale for the first time due to the pandemic and which could not be audited, as a pilot application, according to the data to be obtained at the end of the process, the deficiencies of the online exam applications should be eliminated and the system should be strengthened.

It is seen that the distance education applications in the higher education system in the TRNC are mostly carried out asynchronously. It has been observed that there is a need for preparation in terms of infrastructure and content for graduate programs. There are uncertainties regarding the measurement and evaluation of student success in distance education practices carried out in other education levels and higher education. As Can (2012) stated, the ability to measure and evaluate student achievement in the open and distance education process in a healthy way depends on the creation of a measurement and evaluation unit. In this process, infrastructure should be established and security measures should be provided at the point of access of students to exam applications. In addition, the analysis of the question items to be used in online and offline central exam applications should be performed by measurement and evaluation experts.

The fact that the Education Informatics Network (EBA) belonging to the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Turkey is also available to TRNC high school students who apply to take the YKS exam as of 30 March 2020 can be considered as a positive step in targeting equality of opportunity in education. It can also be said that making it available to TRNC high school students makes a significant contribution to students studying with Turkish books in high schools. A union is a union ('TDK', ty) established by workers or employers to protect and further develop their interests in business, earnings, social and cultural matters, or a legal entity formed to protect and develop the common economic, social and professional rights and interests of public officials. The union is the structure that expresses the organizations with personality. Conducting productivity researches, preparing reports on the results, making suggestions and working together with employers on these issues are among the powers and activities of the unions ('TES', n.d.). As an education stakeholder, we can say that KTÖS and KTOEÖS are actively involved in the process as a union with the studies they have done and the suggestions they have made, and make valuable contributions to the sustainability of education.

Coping with negative life experiences in challenging processes such as the epidemic is not a situation that the Ministry of National Education can overcome alone, but is a social process that requires every segment, especially education stakeholders, to do their part seriously. At this point, we can say that KTÖS and KTOEÖS are in conflict as an education union.

There is no doubt that the value of the teacher in education is much more valuable and important than the physical or technological infrastructure of educational institutions. Distance education or continuing education with methods other than traditional approaches do not reduce the role of the teacher in the system. It is important to facilitate the access of teachers and students to learning materials during periods when education needs to be carried out remotely, as in the current pandemic process. In pandemic processes such as Covid-19, despite the possibility of schools being closed, it is important to ensure the continuity of the communication network of the Ministry of National Education with teachers, and that teachers create structures that will enable them to communicate among themselves and with their parents. When educational institutions open their doors to their students, education should be started by taking into account the mental health of students, as well as measures such as social distance, masks and cleaning. As the right sources of information, teachers should answer children's questions about the process without giving more than the information they need, without causing confusion, without triggering their fears and anxieties. Due to this negative experience of teachers and students during the pandemic process, it is important to create and implement support action plans for parents and students during the period when educational institutions are closed and preparations are made for opening afterwards.

In this process, the necessity of taking into account the fact that learning deficits may increase due to the fact that independent working and learning abilities are not fully developed, children with special needs, attention deficit and hyperactivity, and learning difficulties are better understood in this process. It has been seen that this support should be provided by governments and education stakeholders to students who cannot reach the structure. In the TRNC, it will be beneficial to provide education opportunities to large masses by creating sufficient infrastructure to provide access to the internet network throughout the country. In this process, it has been revealed that the scientific committee formed only in the field of health is not sufficient, and that there is a need

for an 'Educational Board'. The existence of the Education Science Board, which will be composed of academicians from their disciplines and experts from the MEB, will contribute to the process.

The importance of conceptual discussions has emerged in order to prevent the negative perception that may arise towards distance education and the negativities that may be experienced by students and teachers who experience distance education for the first time. The effectiveness of distance education activities given to students and the factors affecting their participation in materials, activities, online education and live lesson applications should be determined.

The pandemic process is not a process that the Ministry of National Education can overcome on its own regarding the disruptions to be experienced at the point of education, but is a social process that requires everyone to do their part seriously. The primary goal of all countries where the epidemic has been seen has been to ensure the uninterrupted continuation of education. In the pandemic process, in the period when schools were closed, despite the disruptions and deficiencies in distance education applications, the Ministry of National Education and YODAK in the TRNC quickly implemented the existing open and distance education opportunities in order not to interrupt education at all education levels, At this point, it would not be wrong to say that it is trying to get through the process with the least damage by taking action and acting together with its stakeholders.

On the basis of economic development, it is important to train a sufficient number of qualified personnel required by the labor market. But more importantly, it is the training of personnel with the qualifications that the market needs. One of the factors affecting the quality of vocational and technical education is the need for continuous updating of curricula. Considering that vocational and technical education is basically a learning and teaching issue, it is important to organize and update the curriculum (curriculum) in line with the needs of the labor market.

As a result, a country's own sociological and economic realities and future visions are the main factors that shape the character of vocational education. At this point, the current situation of the vocational and technical education system in our country has important and deep-rooted structural problems, and all these problems, the lack of communication with the sectors, are a reflection of the sociological and economic structure of the country in a historical process.

According to the opinions of teachers working in TRNC schools;

The 1st Pandemic had a very high negative impact on TRNC education.

2. This effect will cause serious learning losses in at least two academic years.

3. The main reason for the resulting negative impact is that the Ministry of National Education and Culture does not have a planned process or procedure for crisis management, and therefore its performance in managing the crisis over time is low.

4. The educational levels most negatively affected are respectively higher education, vocational technical education, primary education and general secondary education.

5. The dimensions that are most negatively affected are;

- Opening the gap between the knowledge and skill levels between students who have and do not have the opportunity to access distance education applications.
- Opening the difference between the knowledge and skill levels of students attending private schools and public schools
- There were deficiencies of the students in the field of vocational technical education.
- Negative effects of private sectors and insufficient internship of students due to the pandemic,

6. The factors that need to be changed immediately in order to eliminate the negativities that have arisen and to be prepared for a new crisis are listed as follows (circular issued by KTOEÖS):

- Technological infrastructure of schools and the central organization of the Ministry,
- Guidance and guidance services
- Learning – teaching methods,
- Qualifications of the Ministry's human resources,
- Educational supervision
- Measurement and evaluation methods
- Teaching programs
- Competencies of education administrators
- Teachers' competencies
- Transition between levels and central exams
- Class passing, graduation conditions.

Depending on the outcome of the study, recommendations to policy makers and education administrators at all levels were also included in the report.

Recommendations;

- Taking necessary measures in the Ministry of National Education and Culture for serious educational losses that may arise due to the fact that the effects of the education will continue for 1-2 more years,
- Providing distance teachers training during the pandemic process,
- Depending on the conclusion that the area most affected by the pandemic process is higher education, YODAK, the Ministry of National Education and Culture and University administrations should come together and take measures to minimize the negative impact in the field of higher education.
- Implementation of online council decisions during the pandemic process,
- The finding that vocational technical education will be negatively affected in the second place should also be taken seriously. Because vocational technical education has undertaken the task of training technical personnel in the development move of a society. In this context, measures to be taken through scientific studies should be determined by organizing workshops and/or search conferences to eliminate the negative effects of the pandemic in cooperation with the MEKB Vocational and Technical Education Department and all relevant sector organizations.
- Rational planning should be made in order to make projects to strengthen the technological infrastructure of all schools, especially the central organization of the Ministry of National Education and Culture, including distance education opportunities, and to evaluate the scarce resources of the country more accurately.
- Enriching and recording the MoNE moodle system with its own teachers and administrators,
- Based on the finding that the gap between the knowledge and skill levels of students who have the opportunity to access distance education applications and those who do not, holistic plans should be made to support the children of families who do not have these technologies economically,
- Focusing on a strategic educational transformation plan that includes change in education with an innovative perspective that will provide students with 21st century skills,
- It is recommended that the decisions taken in the council decisions be implemented in a collaborative manner within the Vocational Technical Department of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

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