FAMILIES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN IN TURKEY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

 (*Research article*)

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Abstract

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic period, distance education is attempted at all levels of education in Turkey and the world. The present study examines how the education process is shaped during the Covid-19 period for children with special needs and their families. The case study design was implemented as a qualitative research method. The study group sample was composed of 11 parents who reside in various districts of the city of İstanbul and who have children with special needs attending special education rehabilitation centers. The interviews conducted in the scope of the study showed that the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic process on children with special needs had behavioral and social-emotional reflections. Behavioral problems and reflections in behavioral difficulties in children with special needs were observed as a disability in comprehension due to developmental issues, hypermobility, and pandemic period's positive influence. In terms of reflections of social-emotional problems, children with special needs experience shyness due to being ridiculed. The study concluded that children feel the need to go out of their home and feel fear/anxiety and longing for the family to move to another city. The research results showed that children could not perform activities due to boredom, screen addiction, and missing friends. Interviews suggested that the Covid-19 process created specific needs and problems for parents and social-emotional reflections. Problems experienced by the families were determined as health problems, inability to spare time for other siblings, conflict between spouses, distress due to not being able to go out, mother being the only parent responsible for child- care, financial difficulties and educational guidance. Overall results of the study suggest that necessary measures need to be taken to ensure that children with special needs receive one-to-one education.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, special education, family participation

1. Introduction

Coronavirus disease has first emerged in China's Hubei province Wuhan. Common symptoms of the disease transmitted from person to person are coughing and respiratory tract complaints. Since the disease can be easily transmitted through droplets, the people most affected are those with chronic respiratory diseases, people over the age of 60, and people with conditions such as having heart problem (Ministry of Health, 2020). The disease was named Covid-19 due to its occurrence in 2019. It has started to be seen all over the world after emerging in other provinces in China. The disease, which affected the whole world, spread rapidly. After this process, cases have begun to be seen in Turkey as well.

The first Coronavirus case in Turkey was announced on March 11, 2020 (Ozer, 2020). The Ministry of Health and the Scientific Committee in Turkey have taken preventive measures about spreading the pandemic. Paying attention to hand hygiene, maintaining social distance with people and using a medical mask are some of these measures. More severe measures have also been taken, such as the isolation of a person who is in close contact with a person infected with coronavirus disease and the sick person's quarantine (Ministry of Health, 2020).

Measures implemented to prevent the spread of the disease, such as isolation, social distance and curfews, have affected many sectors, including supply chains, tourism and entertainment. Covid-19 has profoundly affected social life and economy, had a traumatic effect on society, and deeply affected many students' education life. This influence affected the routines of students and has led to a significant paradigm shift in education, thus affecting the lives of the personnel working at all levels of education and parents. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has prepared a report to provide an appropriate framework for creating and implementing effective education programs in the Covid-19 pandemic. The report predicts that social isolation measures will prevent losses in the learning process in the Covid-19 period by implementing effective strategies to protect learning opportunities. The report predicts that implementing effective strategies to protect learning opportunities will prevent losses in the learning process despite the social isolation measures taken in the Covid-19 period. During the pandemic period, it is a top priority to create prosperous and inclusive education programs to ensure the continuity and sustainability of education within social isolation measures. Reimers and Schleicher (2020) stated that providing academic learning and supporting students who cannot work independently are critical basic needs for learning in the pandemic. Also, the study claimed that ensuring students and teachers' well-being, providing professional support to teachers, providing medical care to teachers, and ensuring the integrity of the assessment and evaluation processes are other critical needs in the covid-19 period (Reimers and Schleicher, 2020).

In Turkey, the Ministry of National Education has suspended education in schools until the end of April 2020 by the Ministry of Health and the Scientific Board's decision. Therefore, the face-to-face education process was interrupted by the pandemic and continued in distance education. Later, the education process was continued via the Educational Information Network (EIN), an online education platform created by the cooperation of the Ministry of National Education (MNE) and Turkey Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) (Ozer, 2020). This shift of physical learning environment from school to home has led to some changes in children, families and teachers. For instance, the collaboration between parents and teachers has gained critical importance in the distance learning process. Parents are primarily responsible for creating a safe and stable home environment. During the distance education process in the pandemic, parents and teachers started to become jointly accountable for children's education at home and school. Academic success is related to learning in the classroom and the extent to which the family supports the child's school life.

In this period which is difficult for everyone, family of children with special needs participating in the education process and cooperating with the educators is essential in supporting the child's development as ensuring that the child learns independent life skills. "Children with special needs" is an umbrella term which is used to describe a variety of symptoms which require appropriate accommodations for the child to function normally, including developmental delays, medical conditions, psychiatric conditions, and congenital conditions (Mauro, 2020). The primary purpose of special education services is to fulfil the educational needs of individuals with special needs and provide a learning environment in line with their interests and abilities. In this direction, preparing individuals for social life and professional life is another education goal (MNE, 2018). Special education is the continuation of the education of individuals who differ significantly from their peers in terms of development and educational components by supporting competent personnel in the field, an appropriate program and a learning environment to meet their academic and social needs. Individuals being educated in the same learning environment with their peers by interacting with their peers and other people and receiving individual support services for educational purposes is defined as education through integration and inclusion (MNE, 2018; Oğuz, 2020).

Eight areas of inclusion/ integration applications are mental disability, hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical impairment, language and speech impairment, learning disability, autistic spectrum, and multiple disabilities (MNE, 2008; Oğuz, 2020). Last published by the Ministry of National Education in 2006, the Special Education Services Regulation was updated in 2018 in light of current needs and developments. The revised regulation is considered a guide for diagnosis, evaluation and inclusion practices for the educational needs of individuals with special needs (MNE, 2018). Students who continue their day education in official private education institutions receive lunch free of charge in our country. Also, transportation of students in special education classes, of individuals with special needs who benefit from non-formal education services, and students in formal special education schools to institutions is provided free of charge (MNE, 2018). Disadvantaged children are most affected by the interruption of face-to-face education during the Covid-19 period. Policies implemented to prevent transmission of the virus, such as distance education, involve children in vulnerable groups. 1.6 billion students around the world have not been able to attend school. Even though children with opportunities gain access to resources in one way or another, it is of great importance that children without access to resources such as internet connection and technological devices cannot continue their education. OECD's "Taking Education One Step Beyond the Coronavirus" report states that post-pandemic countries should act complying with the principle of equality in education via strengthened public budgets. Countries should double the efforts to increase education quality before the Covid-19 period and seek solutions to the inequalities resulting from the pandemic. The interruption of face-to-face education due to social isolation implemented during the Covid-19 period predicts that countries will suffer social and economic damage in future projections. (Schleicher, 2020).

The experienced crisis has created the need to develop a new perspective for children's educational life, learning and upbringing. First of all, it is a need that problems should be identified to enrich this perspective and provide effective solutions for requirements. A high-quality assessment of the issues created by the process is needed for accurate identification. This study examines families' feelings and thoughts with children with special needs about the pandemic process, the education provided to the children, and families and children's problems and needs.

With this aim, the following questions were investigated in the study:

1) How are children with special needs affected during the pandemic process?

2) How are the parents of children with special needs affected during the pandemic process?

3) What has been experienced during the education of children during the pandemic process?

2. Method

2.1. Research Model

The present study is a case study. Case studies collect in-depth detailed information about a current situation or situations in real life, describe a situation or reveal the themes of the situation (Creswell, 2016). In other words, case studies examine a limited system with an in-depth description (Merriam, 2013). Case studies have some distinctive features such as particularistic, descriptive and heuristic. Particularistic feature refers to the focus of the work on any event or phenomenon. The descriptive feature is a rich and dense description of the data obtained in the case study. The heuristic feature of a case study is that it allows the reader to better understand the phenomenon in the study, infer new meanings, gain experience, confirm what they know, or reveal previously unknown relationships and variables (Merriam, 2013). Case study design, which is a highly preferred pattern in applied fields such as education, was

used in the study. Case study designs facilitate understanding of a current phenomenon within its framework (Yin, 2004). Stake (2005) states that three types of case study can be done, namely, internal, instrumental and integrated, depending on the subject's content to be investigated. An instrumental case study's focus is the process experienced about the process's structure and the activities applied rather than the situation itself. Within the scope of this research, an instrumental case study design was used to investigate the distance education processes of parents and teachers during the pandemic process and their experiences and circumstances during the implementation.

2.2. Participants

The present study sample was determined according to the appropriate sampling with a criterion-based approach (Johnson & Cristensen, 2012). Accordingly, the criteria were set as parents who have children with special needs attending a special education rehabilitation center in different districts of İstanbul. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the parents in the study group.

Table 1. *Demographic information of parents participating in the study*

Participants	Occupation of Mother	Number of Siblings	Internet at home	PC at home	Disability Group	Age	Grade
A1	Housewife	5	YES	NO	Hearing impairment	8	1.Grade
A2	Housewife	1	YES	YES	Atypical Autism	3	Play group
A3	Housewife	1	YES	NO	Learning disability	10	4. grade
A4	Housewife	2	NO	YES	Atypical Autism	9	2. grade
A5	Housewife	2	YES	YES	Language and speech impairment	6	Kindergarten
A6	Housewife	3	YES	YES	Hearing impairment	6	1.grade
A7	Housewife	1	YES	YES	Mild Mental Disability	8	1.grade
A8	Housewife	3	YES	YES	Language and speech impairment	6	Kindergarten
A9	Housewife	3	YES	NO	Learning disability	8	1.grade
A10	Retired	2	YES	YES	ADHD-Learning disability-Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)	11	5. grade
A11	Housewife	3	YES	YES	Language and speech impairment	5	Kindergarten

The ages of the children range between 3 and 11 years old. In terms of the children's grade levels, there is one child in the playgroup, whereas other children range between kindergarten and fifth grade in primary school. In Table 1, it is seen that the majority of mothers are housewives, and only one mother is retired. The number of siblings ranges from one to five. All houses have an internet connection except for one person. Everyone has a computer in their home, except for three people. In terms of the disability group of the children, it is seen that two children have atypical autism, three children have language and speech impairment, two children have a hearing impairment, and three children have a learning disability. It is seen that one of the children has ADHD and OCD in addition to a learning disability, and one child has a mild mental disability.

2.3. Data Collection Tools and Process

Interviews were used as a data collection tool within the scope of the study. In total, eleven participants were interviewed for one session each. The data were collected through one-on-one interviews with the participants. Expert opinion was received after the interview questions were prepared. After the preparation of the interview questions was completed, the approval of the ethics committee was obtained. Interview questions were created in the form of eight questions under three main headings: the current situation, problems, and distance education needs. Some of the interview questions are as follows: Has your child's education continued during the pandemic process? What were your needs during the pandemic? What problems did you encounter during the pandemic?

The interviews were held face-to-face in September 2020, and voice recordings were taken with the participants' approval. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes and 45 minutes. The participants were asked questions in the same order. First, demographic questions were asked about the total number of children, age of children, internet and computer ownership. Then the interview questions were asked.

The interviews were held in an empty and quiet room in the rehabilitation center, with masks and social distancing within the framework of covid-19 measures. The data were collected through one-on-one interviews with the participants. While the children were in the rehabilitation center, the families were interviewed. The meetings took place in the morning and at noon.

2.3.1. Contribution of Researchers to the Study

Two researchers carried out the present research. The first researcher has worked as a teacher and an administrator in preschool education institutions for six years and has undertaken quantitative-qualitative research on different preschool education subjects in the academic community for nine years. He contributed to the study's content analysis, the formation of the methodological structure, and the discussion and reporting of the obtained data. The second researcher graduated from the preschool education department at Boğaziçi University and works as a research assistant while currently doing a master's degree in preschool education. She took part in collecting the data of the study. She took part in the reporting process of the study, like a literature review, by transcribing the records. Researchers aimed to spotlight to the social reality experienced during the pandemic processes and made suggestions to facilitate this complicated pandemic process. The study was conducted to be more beneficial to society within the framework of a pragmatic paradigm.

2.4. Data Analysis

In this study, NVIVO 11 Software was used in qualitative data analysis and content analysis steps performed. In the first step, obtained data were transcribed into a written document. Important and relevant data were combined under the same code. After a theme was created

from the codes associated with each other, designed themes were combined under categories. The computer software enabled that the creation of codes and themes has been performed systematically and practically. It is ensured that the codes under the themes are shown with integrity to reveal the relationships between them. Association established between the created categories and themes was presented in the findings section under the research questions.

2.4.1. Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity and reliability in a qualitative study, the analysis must be carried out ethically, first and foremost (Merriam, 2009). In this context, firstly, an application was submitted to the Publication Ethics Committee of Istanbul 29 Mayıs University, the institution where the second researcher works. The Publication Ethics Committee approved that there is no ethical harm by the decision dated 02.09.2020 and 2020/2.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that four strategies could ensure the validity and reliability of a qualitative study. Participant confirmation has been obtained to ensure internal validity. Internal validity was ensured by providing detailed information regarding the researchers' stance and the roles of the researchers in the study as another internal validity strategy. Within the scope of external validity, a transferability strategy was ensured. In this context, the findings were described in detail, and direct quotations were included. For internal consistency, the stages of determining the research method, preparation and implementation processes of the data collection tool, data collection process, and analysis steps were explained in detail under the consistency strategy. The raw data and coding of the interviews performed within the research scope are stored, and the interview records by researchers for the confirmation of the concerned parties, by the verifiability strategy and within the degree of external reliability. In addition to these, the verification of the steps related to content analysis was facilitated by utilizing the NVIVO 11 Software. All ethical criteria were fulfilled by ensuring that participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were informed about the research. Consent forms were obtained from the participants regarding the collected data. Moreover, the participants' identities were kept confidential during the research process by giving code names to the participants.

3. Findings

The findings of interviews conducted with families were grouped under three headings within the scope of the research questions: how children with special needs are affected, how parents of children with special needs are affected, and what happened in the education process of children.

The two categories regarding how children with special needs are affected are behavioral reflections and social-emotional reflections. Behavioral reflections consist of 4 themes: Behavioral problems, inadequacy in comprehension due to developmental problems, hypermobility, and positive influence of the pandemic period. On the other hand, social-emotional reflections consist of six themes: Shyness due to being ridiculed, a need to go out of the house, fear and anxiety, a longing for the family due to moving to a different city, an inability in performing activities due to boredom, screen addiction, longing for friends. Created categories and themes are presented in Figure 1.
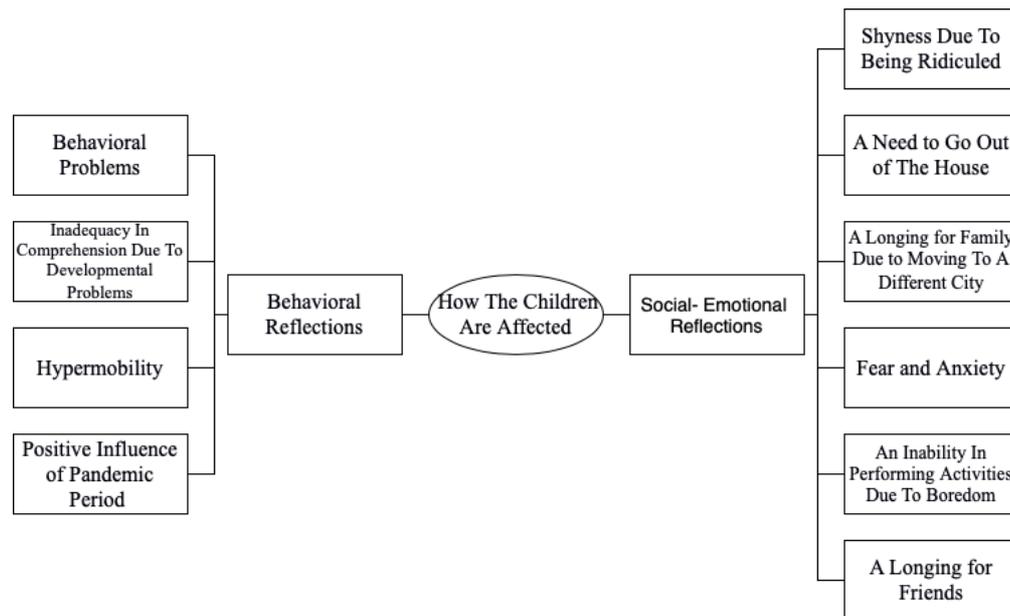
Figure 1. Findings regarding how special needs children are affected by covid-19 process

As a result of interviews with families, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic process on children with special needs consisted of two categories as behavioral and social-emotional reflections. The behavioral reflections category consisted of four themes: behavioral problems, inadequacy in comprehension due to developmental issues, hypermobility and positive influence of the pandemic period. Regarding the first theme, behavioral problems, the A10 expressed their experience as follows:

"You know, s/he has a bad temper or something, s/he calls out or screams, but not much."

Regarding the second theme, inadequacy in comprehension due to developmental problems, A9 expressed their experience as:

"I wanted him/her to read for 1 hour, but of course I could not have him/her read for 1 hour. Half an hour is hard; after reading for half an hour, s/he inevitably does something, whatever s/he fancies. S/he shuts herself/himself down. S/he's starting to stutter. Begins not to comprehend. S/he says incorrect or incomplete words. Or s/he adds something to word's side. When I saw s/he is doing... you know... then I did not force it anymore, I quit."

Regarding the third theme, hypermobility, A2 expressed their experience as:

"I can say s/he became more active in the house may be because s/he couldn't get his/her energy out of the system. S/he became a child more like jumping on the spot, walking on top of the chairs. S/he used to be calmer."

Regarding the fourth and final theme, positive influence, A2 expressed their experience: *"I am slowly starting toilet training. We used the time in this way. Our communication is better than before. At least when I smile, s/he smiles back and makes eye contact. Even this is a perfect thing for me. This process had its drawbacks. But it has been an advantage for us."*

The second category, social-emotional reflections, consisted of seven themes: shyness due to being ridiculed, a need to go out of the house, a longing for the family due to moving to a different city, fear and anxiety, an inability in performing activities due to boredom, screen addiction and longing for friends. Regarding the first theme, shyness due to being ridiculed, A5 expressed their experience as follows:

"In this process, C5 was longing for school. Because his/her friends started to make fun of his/her speech much more, it happens very often these days. You know, my nephew makes fun of C5 about his/her speech. My sister in law's children is making fun and everything. S/he was also very affected."

Regarding the second theme, a need to go out of the house, A6 expressed their experience as follows:

"So it was really troublesome. The children wanted to go out. You cannot explain (why they cannot). Don't go to this place, don't go to that place. Mom, let's go to the market; mom, let's go over there. Let's go to the grandparents. We have always had these troubles."

Regarding the third theme, a longing for the family due to moving to a different city, A3 expressed their experience as follows:

"C3 missed his/her father very much. I freaked out like, if something happens to my husband, I cannot reach him. If something happens to us there, he will not be able to reach us. It was very terrible. I would not wish it upon my worst enemy. On top of it, you have a child; then it is even worse."

Regarding the fourth theme, fear and anxiety, A1 expressed their experience as follows:

"I took him/her out, just like that, in the hall. S/he gets scared like, is anyone there, where is the police? So, s/he knew at that time... that we couldn't get out. I used to go out to buy bread. Whenever we needed anything (I used to go out), it passed like this."

Regarding the fifth theme, an inability in performing activities due to boredom, A1 stated their experience as follows:

"He does not do it; these days Hasan is completely bored anyways. He says that he does not want to do it. He says, 'I will not do it home, and I will not do it here."

Regarding the sixth theme, screen addiction, A10 stated their experience as follows:

"They mostly watch different, strange things in games on tablets. Here, for example, bedtime hours have changed at night. They sleep at five, at four at night, at six at seven in the morning. For this reason, we have removed all of the modem and internet for two days."

Regarding the seventh theme, longing for friends, A3 stated their experience as follows:

"He also missed his friends, my son. He has a few friends and says he missed them all the time."

3.1. Findings Regarding How Parents with Special Needs Are Affected By the pandemic

Three categories of how parents with special needs are affected are needs, problems, and social-emotional reflections. Parents' needs consist of five themes as one-to-one education, educational content, educational material, psychological support and guidance. The second category of problems consists of five different themes comprised of health problems in the family, inability to spare time for other siblings, the conflict between spouses, distress due to not being able to go out, and financial difficulties. The third category, social-emotional reflection, consists of three themes: fear and anxiety, positive influence, insensitivity of people. The graphic created through the NVIVO 11 program regarding the categories and themes are presented in Figure 2.
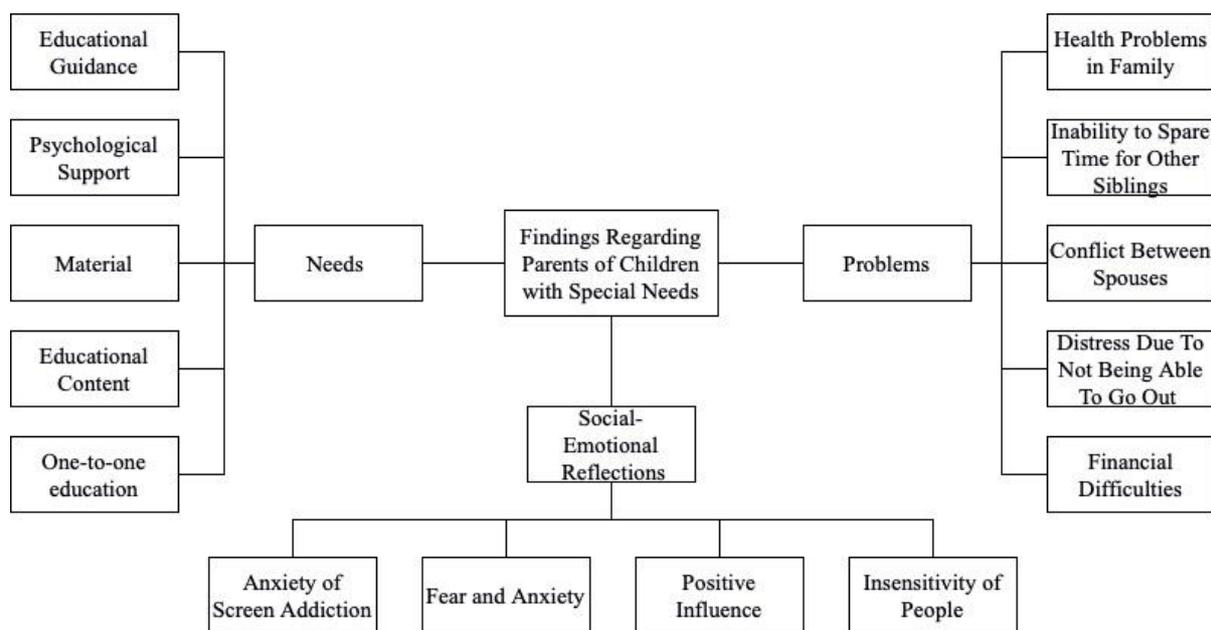
Figure 2. Findings regarding how parents with special needs are affected by the pandemic

As a result of the families' interviews, the findings consisted of three categories: parental needs, problems, and social-emotional reflections. The first category, needs, consists of five main themes, including one-to-one education, educational content, educational material, psychological support and educational guidance. A9 expressed their experience regarding the first theme, one-to-one education, as:

"Yes, our government is making an effort for us and providing distance education, doing things, but for such children, distance education does not help. S/he must take one-to-one lessons. The teacher also needs to observe. In this process, one-to-one training is a must; I learned that in this process. This type of education is a must for all children."

Regarding educational content, which is the second theme, A11 expressed their experience as:

"You know, sometimes I go on the internet… The internet world is a profound realm, but I fear that I will teach the child in an incorrect way. If I was able to teach one thing, I could not teach the other thing. I could do as much as I could."

A4 stated their educational material experience, which is the third theme, as:

"We buy the materials ourselves. We are not supported by that. Whatever the family buys... We print out materials ourselves."

Regarding the fourth theme, psychological support, A5 told their experience as:

"I really needed a psychological counsellor. Because we had to stay in the house."

Regarding the fifth and final theme, educational guidance, A11 stated their experience as:

"I tell the child, but s/he cannot do it. There is a technique for this, which I do not know, so I cannot make him/her do it. For example, the child cannot get the letter B, or the letter P or the letter M. For example, the child could not say father (baba in Turkish) so far. S/he always said 'mama' or 'dada'."

Problems, which constitute the second category, are composed of six codes: Health problems in the family, inability to spare time for other siblings, the conflict between spouses,

distress due to not being able to go out, the mother being the only parent responsible for child-care and experiencing financial difficulties.

A3 stated their experience regarding the first theme, health problems, as:

"I suppose we had corona at that time, and it was such a terrible disease... We got the disease from my aunt then. She was coughing, and we all got infected. We were all sick in bed."

About the second theme, inability to spare time for other siblings, A5 told:

"Regressed, I always put my little child aside. I show more interest in C5 about education. I pay the most attention to him/her." Regarding the third theme, the conflict between spouses, A7 said:

"My spouse... I always tell him not to do these stuffs while the child is around. He (the child) was already asleep; he was sleeping; we did not make up huge fights. Still, I thank God that my son has a 50% report. We have been through a lot. I hope that God takes his father; we would only have peace then. Because, as long as his father is around him, we always will get that report. You know what I mean?"

A5 told their experience about the fourth theme, distress due to not being able to go, as:

"We went out of town, could not come back. We had real trouble there. Also, there was a lot of police traffic stops on the road. We had two kids in the car. They started crying non-stop when they saw the police. Non-stop."

Regarding the fifth theme, the mother being the only parent responsible for child-care, A7 shared their experience as:

"I deal with both my husband and C7. Actually, I am the one who needs to be hospitalized. But I really have to stay strong for my son. There is a father, but actually, there isn't."

Regarding the sixth theme, experiencing financial difficulties, A8 said:

"Yes, there is support, but my husband works without insurance. He is a hauler. I mean, we had serious problems about money for three months during this pandemic period. We could not pay our rent or water bills. Inevitably, the children were also affected by this."

The third and final category, social-emotional response, consists of three themes: fear and anxiety, positive influence, and people's insensitivity.

Regarding the first theme, fear and anxiety, A9 shared their experience as:

"No, I did nothing, I was scared, frankly. As I said because I'm so afraid myself. I have never left the house because I have chronic illnesses. We were in the house twenty-four-seven for three months."

Regarding the second theme, positive influence, A2 said:

"We are separated parents who are very busy with work. He could not see me much. Actually, this pandemic period was sort of a blessing; I quitted my job, took care of him. In fact, I can say it was efficient for us. I got to know Berat better, and he got to know me better. I was good for us in that way."

About the third and final theme, people's insensitivity, A3 stated:

"In general, we need to do whatever the government says, and Fahrettin Koca (Minister of Health) says. Last night I watched (on TV) a guy took his mask off and threw it into the sea; it wrapped around a seagull's throat, how sinful of an act. Pal, this is a mask; why do we wear masks? So that the disease is not transmitted. So that you do not get infected if I am sick. One

person gets 30 people infected. This is not that unimportant. If I am sick, I need to think not only of myself but also people around me."

3.2. Findings Regarding the Education Process of Children

Two categories are identified concerning the education process of children with special needs: Problems and implementation process. The problems consist of two codes as EIN contents not being suitable for children with special needs and education being interrupted. The implementation process consists of five codes: online lessons, offline lessons, parents' effort, support from the rehabilitation center, and natural based education. Findings regarding the education process of children are shown in Figure 3.
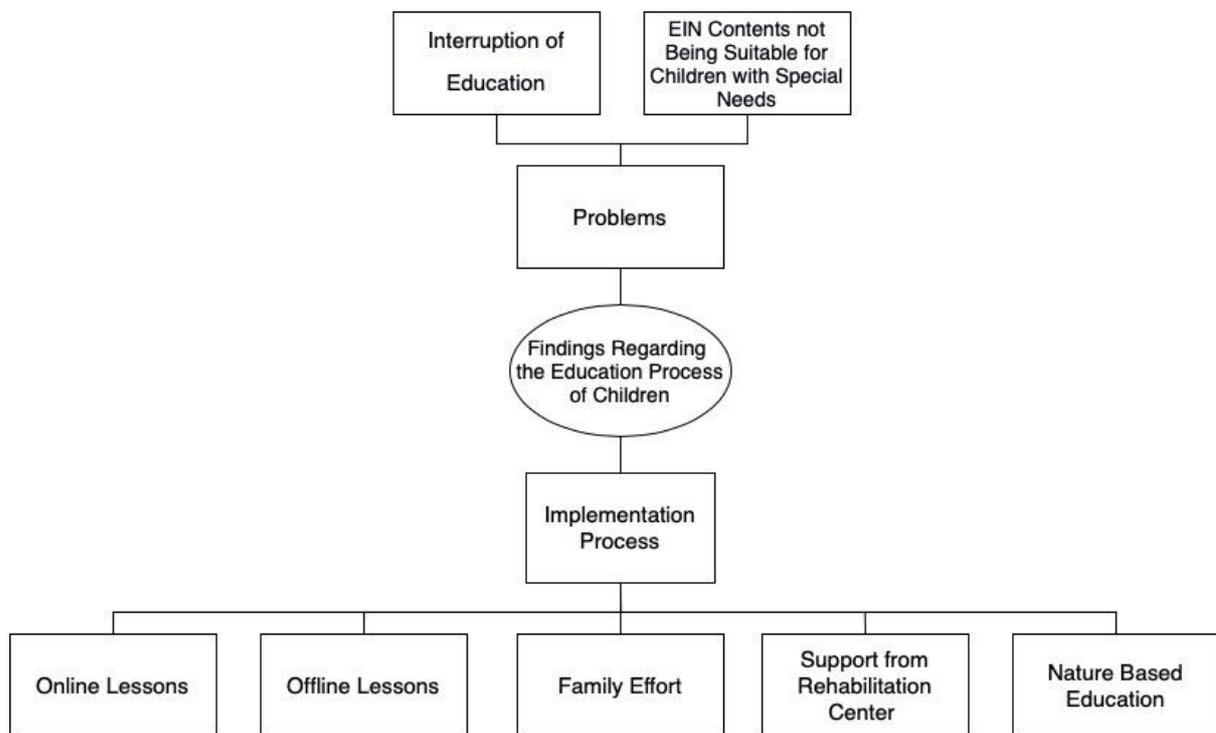

Figure 3. Findings regarding the education process of children

As a result of the interviews with families, the findings regarding children's education process with special needs during the Covid-19 pandemic process consisted of two categories: problems and implementation process. Firstly, the issues' category consisted of two codes of EIN contents not being suitable for children with special needs and education being interrupted.

Regarding the first theme, EIN contents not being suitable for children with special needs, A10 told their experience as:

"We could never open EIN. They did not open it, they got angry, they always scream and ask if they are going to sit in front of the TV like that all the time. This is what I cannot understand; I cannot ask. What kind of teacher s/he is it? They always react like that. They cannot teach as the way my teacher does."

Regarding the second and last theme, the interruption of education, A4 said:

"No, it is completely over now that the schools are closed. It was not (continued) online either."

The second category, the implementation process, consisted of five codes: Online lessons, offline lessons, family effort, receiving support from the rehabilitation center, and natural based education. A9 told their experience regarding the first theme, online classes, as:

"May God be pleased with him/her; our primary school teacher always took care of us. We had online sessions with him/her for 45 minutes every day at 6:00."

About the second theme, offline lessons, A1 said:

"No, via the internet. S/he created a group with parents. S/he sent us. We did it."

A11 stated their experience regarding the third theme, family effort, as:

"I just looked it up on the internet as much as I could, by using cards and stuff. You know, to figure out what can be done. I continued like this."

Regarding the fourth theme, receiving support from the rehabilitation centre, A8 said:

"They called and checked every single day. What did the child do? What is the child doing? How is s/he? They never left us alone, I appreciate that."

A5 stated their experience regarding the fifth and final theme, natural based education, as:

"You know, when we saw animals in the village, I made him/her say their names. We reviewed colors. I taught the numbers from 1 to 10. Like that."

4. Conclusion and Discussion

The interviews with families revealed that the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic process on children with special needs have behavioral and social-emotional reflections. Previous research suggested that the stress on the families is created by the school system which lacks the appropriate support for children with disabilities, rather than the specific disability of children (Ott., 2015). It is also known that unexpected change processes such as Covid-19 alter the daily routines of children and adults. These sudden changes cause some problems in the lives of individuals. The fact that parents and children experience social-emotional development problems is among the negative consequences of the shift (Uzun et. al., 2021).

It has been observed that the behavioral reflections category includes behavioral problems, inadequacy in comprehension due to developmental problems, hypermobility and positive influence of the pandemic period.

In terms of social-emotional category for children, it has been observed that they experience shyness due to being ridiculed, a need to go out of the house, a longing for the family due to moving to a different city, fear and anxiety, an inability in performing activities due to boredom, screen addiction and longing for friends. The amount of time children spends inside and with screens has increased due to Covid-19. This increase affected the level of physical activity, and it also encompasses health risks such as obesity (Ten Velde et. al., 2021). Changes in routines of individuals with special needs, especially autistic children, affect their lives profoundly. It is stated that the risk factors regarding the routines and habits, which have been changed, especially in the pandemic period, are increased for autistic individuals who do not have friend or family support (den Hounting, 2020). It is said that pandemic affects the mental health of autistic individuals. Inability to go out, which occurs more frequently due to restrictive precautions of the pandemic process, causes psychological problems such as anxiety and depression in individuals with special needs (Pellicano & Stears, 2020). Sudden changes on a macro scale, such as the Covid-19 outbreak, are known to result in behavioral and autonomy problems in children and teens. Anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder are

among these problems (Benner & Mistry, 2020). As a result of interviews conducted with families, it was determined that the parents' needs and difficulties have social-emotional reflections. It was concluded that the needs of families are one-to-one education, educational content, educational material, psychological support and educational guidance.

A report by Asbury et. al. (2020) emphasizes that support needs to be provided to families with special needs children in terms of psychological support and methods to facilitate going back to school. Every family is affected by the social and economic consequences of the pandemic differently. The severity of this effect is determined by many factors, including the family's experiences and their socio-economic level. It is stated that receiving psychological support from professionals is critical for families affected by the pandemic period, especially families in a vulnerable group, to prevent the negative consequences of the pandemic (Prime et. al., 2020). Parents who work remotely supported the education activities of children at home. It is observed that the parents' workload has increased, resulting in less time for leisure-time activities and therefore, they were affected negatively by the process (Prime et. al., 2020; Uzun et. al., 2021). Families' problems are determined as health problems, inability to spare time for other siblings, the conflict between spouses, distress due to curfew, only the mother being the responsible parent and financial difficulties. Stress on parents and disagreements among partners has increased due to financial problems and stress. This increase is also related to children's problematic behaviour (Neppl et. al., 2016). Problems that pre-exist in the marriage increase due to macro-scale sudden changes and new issues occur and the existing ones. Considering stress factors associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, which involve economic pressure and include job loss and being forced to take unpaid leave at the workplace, it is seen that the conflicts among partners have enhanced (Prime et. al., 2020). The increased workload of parents due to pandemic deepens parental stress. It is described that adults working from home who also have the burden of care experience difficulties during this process.

The relationship between parents and their children is damaged as a result and the relationship between siblings (Benner & Mistry, 2020). A study by Prime et. al. (2020) examining the pandemic's negative consequences on individuals' states that the Covid-19 pandemic damages the relationship quality between siblings. It is found that families have fear and anxiety with regards to the Covid-19 process. The family's attitudes and behaviours towards children with special needs affect children fundamentally. In parallel with this finding, a study conducted by Asbury et. al. (2020) with 241 parents in the United Kingdom determined that changes occur in both parents and children's mood and anxiety levels.

It was found that although both parents and children were disturbed by the insensitivity of people, they were affected positively by the pandemic process due to spending more time together. A large-scale study was conducted to assess China's psychological problems (Qiu et.al., 2020). According to this study, it was seen that pandemic caused various psychological issues such as anxiety and depression in individuals. A study conducted in New Zealand (Every-Palmer et. al., 2020) reported that pandemic had positive effects on individuals and negative psychological stress such as anxiety and stress. In the study, %62 of the participants stated that they work from home due to pandemic, and they enjoy working from home, and they considered the increase of time they can spend with family as a positive thing. Individuals with autism need access to specific supports to apply public health protection measures such as social distancing and accessing food (den Hounting, 2020). It has been determined that children with special needs experience problems due to EIN contents' inappropriateness and the interruption of their education during the education process. Education disruption due to the pandemic has affected more than 1 billion students around the world.

School is closed to control the epidemic have academically damaged vulnerable groups such as socio-economically disadvantaged or individuals with special needs. (Benner and Mistry, 2020). It has been determined that the education process is continued by various methods such as online lessons, offline lessons, family effort, support from the rehabilitation center and natural based education. A portion of children in vulnerable groups in developing countries does not have any formal education, and this ratio increases even more for individuals with special needs (Pellicano & Stears, 2020). The pandemic requires schools to re-evaluate manners that they use spaces, people, time and technology. Due to schools being closed, digital resources have had a crucial importance in education. The pandemic has forced teachers and students to adapt to teach and learn online quickly. In a study, individuals' readiness to implement online education is the essential element of distance education. In other words, the applicability of distance education depends on the readiness of teachers and parents to use online learning technologies. Some of the problems presented for distance education are equipment, technical support and attendees, the necessity of training teachers for the distance learning process. Some of the recommended distance education tools are online resources such as Skype, YouTube, e-mail, e-books or electronic versions of educational materials (Fedina et. al., 2017).

4.1. Suggestions and Future Directions

Teachers working in rehabilitation and children with special needs and their parents should have priority in vaccination. When face-to-face education is interrupted, the education of children with special needs should be taken into the priority area and one-to-one education should be continued, albeit limited, by taking health measures. Under curfews, families with special needs should be given privileges to take children outdoors. Families with children with special needs stated that they were psychologically worn out during the covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, first of all, providing free psychological support to families is an essential point for the well-being of parents and children. However, in environments such as a pandemic, where face-to-face education cannot be attended, it is important to ensure that families with special needs have access to experts they can consult about the educational needs of children. Having a hotline, such as a free call centre, will be a protective factor for parents.

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