



## 'E-Economics' Teaching / Learning in the Covid-19 Pandemic Process: A Short SOWT Review for Turkey

*Covid-19 Salgını Sürecinde 'E-İktisat' Öğretimi / Öğrenimi: Türkiye İçin Kısa Bir GFZT İncelemesi*

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### ABSTRACT

The e-education sector, which existed at a certain level before the Covid-19 epidemic, is given more importance with the epidemic that caused the closure of schools and made online education necessary. E-economics teaching / learning activities, which are a component of e-education, have become more popular in universities in Turkey within the scope of open education and distance education models. While the most positive side of the e-economics teaching model is that it is not subject to space and time limitations thanks to the internet, the most negative side is that it becomes prone to ordinaryization and poor quality. The subject and purpose of this study is to identify the strengths (S), the opportunities (O), the weaknesses (W) and the threats (T) of this model in the light of the general characteristics of e-economics teaching model, and to put forward some suggestions with the help of this SOWT analysis. The e-economics teaching model has also developed thanks to the constantly developing knowledge / information technology, This model opens the doors of lifelong learning to everyone for a classless society, unique to the age of internet economy.

**Keywords:** E-economics teaching / learning, SOWT analysis, Covid-19 pandemic

### ÖZET

Covid-19 salgınından önce belirli bir düzeyde var olan e-öğretim sektörü, okulların kapanmasına yol açan ve online eğitimi gerekli kılan salgınla birlikte daha fazla önemsenmektedir. E-öğretim bir bileşeni olan e-iktisat öğretim / öğrenim faaliyetleri açık öğretim ve uzaktan eğitim modelleri kapsamında Türkiye'deki üniversitelerde daha popüler olmaya başlamıştır. E-iktisat öğretim modelinin en olumlu tarafı internet sayesinde mekân ve zaman sınırlamasına tabi olmayışı iken, en olumsuz tarafı ise sıradanlaşmaya ve kalitesizliğe açık hale gelmesi olabilir. Bu çalışmanın konusu ve amacı, e-iktisat öğretiminin genel özellikleri ışığında sahip olduğu güçlü (G) yanlarını, yarattığı fırsatları (F), bünyesindeki zayıflıkları (Z) ve yol açabileceği tehditleri (T) teşhis etmek ve bu GFZTçözümlemesi yardımıyla bazı öneriler ortaya koymaktır. Sürekli gelişen bilişim teknolojisi sayesinde e-iktisat öğretim modeli de gelişmektedir. Bu model internet ekonomisi çağına özgü olarak yaşam boyu öğrenmenin kapılarını sınırsız bir toplum için herkese açmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** E-iktisat öğretimi, GFZT çözümlemesi, Covid-19 salgını

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### 1. Introduction

When the supply chain was interrupted due to the global Covid-19 epidemic, schools were closed or opened in a controlled manner until the new normalization, and online education was tried to be continued. With this surprise health crisis affecting the whole world and Turkey, attention was drawn to the intense relationship between education and the internet.

The latest point reached in information technology or in the knowledge economy shows that higher education related to social sciences in general and economics in particular can be done in the

form of "e-education"<sup>1</sup> and "distance education".<sup>2</sup> Here, economics covers all its derivative disciplines (business, finance, econometrics,

"E-education" (e-electronic learning), which is specific to the computer age, is an education model supported by electronic tools and equipment (computer, cd-rom, internet, etc.). This model has the following applications: i-Computer-based training (CBT): Using the computer as an assistant in education or as a direct teacher. Slides, which mean presenting a subject with visual methods such as sound, text, graphics, animation, film, etc., are the most well-known aspect of this application. ii-Web-based training (WBT): Making lessons and homework using interactive CDs at home, at work or in the open space, paid or free of charge. iii-Mixed learning.

international trade, labour economics and industrial relations). It is unthinkable that economics education, like its counterparts, will be left behind in our age, where information and communication technologies (ICT) are rapidly developing. Otherwise, an injustice would be done to the science of economics, which is known as the 'queen of social sciences'.

In contemporary economies, where ICT-based "e-economy"<sup>3</sup> and "e-education" are intertwined as complementary sectors, "e-economics" teaching / learning, which is considered one of the distance education models, creates a richness in general (undergraduate and graduate) economics education, contributes to economics and makes teaching even more popular.

The slogan of "anytime, anywhere, unlimited, uninterrupted education" has an exciting and eye-opening feature for the economics education model to be realized via the internet. The model promises various employment opportunities and added values in itself.

In this short article, first the characteristics of e-economics teaching / learning, then a SOWT (i.e. strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and dangers) dimension of this teaching style were revealed, and finally a series of suggestions on the subject were tried to be developed.

## 2. Characteristics of "E-Economics" Teaching / Learning

The e-economics teaching model is carried out on the internet with the help of ICT as a more alternative education model. In this model, the teacher-student profile is different from formal education. There is flexibility and transitivity between the profiles of the two models. It represents an extension or enhanced example of TV, as it is a form of education connected to the internet.

The features of e-economics teaching can be listed as follows:

i- E-economics teaching does not have space and time limitations, as in other similar fields of education.

ii- While e-economics teaching creates diversity and richness in general social sciences, it turns into a complementary and/or alternative model for conventional economics teaching.

iii- E-economics provides positive externalities due to the internal structure of e-education. For example, from an individual point of view, in the context of human capital accumulation, a direct relationship is established between the increase in the education level of the individual and the increase in his productivity in the labor market. Thanks to the return of being highly educated, an increase in wages will accompany it (Merino and Sjöberg, 2008: 5-6).

iv- In terms of course tools: Economics books and other written documents can be downloaded and read from the internet as pdf files. This results in the replacement of official teachers by virtual guides.

v- Attendance and examination system: In this model, although a traditional and strict attendance and examination system is not valid for the student population, measurable and convertible exam

elements such as knowledge, attention and time are preserved here as well.

vi- E-education (e-economics) has the appearance of a system that brings together those who want to receive (economical) education but cannot, and those who want to give education but cannot. To put it in microeconomic terminology, this system envisages zeroing the excess demand for education and the surplus supply of education, thus ensuring the balance in (economical) education-market-industry.

vii- The European Union (EU) dimension of e-education should also be emphasized, including e-economics. In order to create the European knowledge economy (society), the EU focuses<sup>4</sup> on "e-education" for the education of the future and has been systematically presenting its regulations, incentives and suggestions since 2000.<sup>5</sup>

## 3. The SOWT (Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses, Threats) Dimension of "E-Economics" Teaching / Learning

The SOWT matrix gives the decision units the right choice and process in that issue (in solving the problem) by showing what the strengths (S) and opportunities (O), weaknesses (W) and threats (T) in a predetermined issue. It is an analysis tool that enables them to make a choice (and because of this feature, it is economical). "S" and "O" constitute 'superiority' (advantage) in terms of decision units, while "W" and "T" constitute 'weakness' or 'regression' (disadvantage).

The subject of this study is also the subject of a SOWT analysis. Because the following four questions about what kind of strategy the people and institutions in the general education sector and bureaucracy will follow are also valid for the "e-economics teaching" model:

i- Are there any strengths of e-economics teaching, if so, how can it be evaluated and used? (S)

ii- What opportunities does this teaching model create? (O)

iii- Are there any elements that seem weak here? How can these be strengthened / ineffective can it be done? (W)

iv- What are the possible threats posed by this model? How to defend against them? A good system can be created? (T)

There are also opinions<sup>6</sup> that the traditional education system likens students to "lemons"<sup>7</sup> and is based on an understanding that squeezes their heads like lemons. However, it also has reasons—

<sup>4</sup> E-education supply has become an important sector in EU countries. The leaders of the industry, in the words of Massey (2005), have fallen into the position of 'victims' in the storm of the last few years. Nevertheless, the supply side in different branches of this sector benefit from large-scale public sector reforms including e-education investments.

<sup>5</sup> For example, a report prepared for the Commission of the European Communities in 2002, like its counterparts, was based on the four action plans of the "E-Education Initiative". In this plan, infrastructure and equipment, learning at all levels, quality content and services, cooperation and networking within Europe are described in detail.

<sup>6</sup> MacLeod and Urquiola (2009) talk about how schools create an "anti-lemon" effect when they can select students according to their natural talents, and that such an effect can be achieved by relatively small-scale schools serving by special talent rankings: It points to a socio-economic stratification/classification that would occur if the least talented students were placed in the worst schools versus students who were prepared and then (graduating from there) with high incomes. Such a structure would generally not be an effective solution for two reasons: First, all students face weaker incentives for academic success than the established order. Second, fame can act as a stimulus on sluggish schools to increase productivity, since a low value-added school can always spread its reputation by being more selective.

<sup>7</sup> It should also be remembered that the word "lemon" mentioned here means "worthless thing / naughty person" in English.

<sup>2</sup>"Distance education", which stands out with its open education high school and university (a-education) applications, including e-learning tools; It is an education model that is used in situations where the student and the teacher are far from each other, but require them to be together in a certain lesson / seminar. Thanks to this model, the parties can carry out their educational activities by using the most appropriate and possible methods of asynchronous distance education (the exchange of printed / electronic media at times determined by the teacher and the student together) or synchronous distance education (interaction with technologies that provide simultaneous communication).

<sup>3</sup>Here, "e-economy" is used to mean that economic activities are carried out electronically. In a narrow sense, this has nothing to do with teaching of "e-economics" directly.

beyond the limits of this article—to hope that new-contemporary education models take an “anti-lemon” line, and within this framework, it can be turned e-learning into an ideal tool.

### 3.1. Strengths of e-Economics Teaching

The "e-economics" teaching model has many strengths in the theoretical context. The following examples can be given to these strong parties in Turkey, which has started to benefit from the internet economy, which gained momentum with the Covid-19 epidemic, simultaneously with the modern world:

i- The strongest aspect of the model is that it relies on its microeconomic consequences, for example, that it creates positive externalities. In other words, since the model transforms some of the costs caused by the face-to-face education system into savings; “e-economics” has created a real “e-economy” (that is, it provides savings in cost, time and space).

ii- E-economics teaching can bring together students and teachers,<sup>8</sup> who normally cannot come together in the same classroom at the same time for a lecture/seminar, in different time zones and in different places such as home and office, thanks to the internet.<sup>9</sup>

iii- It is a remarkable advantage of the model that it also gives people with physical disabilities or those who have to work in a job the chance to benefit from economics education through computer + internet ownership.

iv- The level of economic literacy will increase in our country thanks to the "E-economics" teaching, thus, it can be easily expected that the sensitivity of “e-economics” students and/or general audience to economic crises will be strengthened.

v- Conducting education and economics education online reduces the rate of transmission of the new type of corona virus and is suitable for the correct management of the epidemic process.

vi- Generally, e-education is a model that is highly valued and recommended by the EU. Therefore, the teaching of "e-economics", which is our subject, can also play an important role in the construction of educational integration between Turkey and the EU, of which it is a candidate member.

### 3.2. Opportunities of E-Economics Teaching

It is a fact that the Covid-19 pandemic offers various opportunities for the further development of internet infrastructure and equipment. Like any innovation, e-economics teaching innovation seems to create opportunities such as:

i- In "e-economics" teaching, direct effects of the university examination system and examination process (for example, coefficient application, vacant quota problem, etc.) are not encountered and economics teaching becomes more widespread.

ii- Due to the structure of university-formal education, the obligation to go out of the city of residence, payment of fees, accommodation in the dormitory, etc. As a result of the elimination of

<sup>8</sup>For example applications in the context of British and American universities, see Information Society Forum. (The main theme here is that, thanks to the internet, the era of "virtual universities" has begun in many parts of the world.)

<sup>9</sup>The advantages of the internet are many. As Merino and Sjöberg (2008: 36) stated, online courses / seminars / conferences, for example, give a student the chance to complete his university education without being away from his family for various reasons. It also offers a lot of flexible working hours options for the student who is away from the university campus. All these contribute positively to human capital accumulation. It should be added that online education also provides various savings in terms of campus and other institutional costs of the university.

these problems, the number of those who want to receive economics education can be increased thanks to the e-economics application.

iii- “E-economics” offers an open-ended opportunity to young people who cannot receive economics education due to financial difficulties and other reasons in the current system, and to citizens who want to study a second major. Thus, a traceable increase in the number of "professional economists of the future" or "voluntary economist candidates" will be seen.

iv- For those who have interrupted their formal education, there will be an opportunity to complete their education through e-economics.

v- E-economics means internet teaching and this can turn into a new or additional source of income for faculty members. Because the internet will provide them with more free time to develop their current profession and/or even create a chance to pursue a second profession (consulting, writing, etc.).

vi- As a result, a post-modern trend in the form of "internet teaching" may emerge, and therefore, universities may start to place advertisements for "online faculty members" in the near future. Because the internet, even as it is, has become a key ICT platform increasing<sup>10</sup> the demand and supply of education.

vii- E-economics teaching is a form of teaching that is relatively easy to implement; if it gives successful results, it can create an opportunity to be a model for other fields.

viii- It can also accelerate the integration with the EU in the field of higher education. There are also criticisms and expectations<sup>11</sup> regarding higher education in the EU's manifesto for 2010.

### 3.3. Weaknesses of E-Economics Teaching

On the other hand, depending on the natural structure of e-economics teaching and whether it is well and correctly implemented, there is a possibility that it can be added to the general economics teaching chain as a weak link, especially in the context of Turkey. The ‘weak grades’ —of a more objective nature—that might be included in this model's report card might be:

i- E-education, and therefore the e-economics teaching model, eliminates or reduces the knowledge, manners and various life experiences that can be obtained from joint activities carried out in classrooms, schools, campuses, libraries, socio-cultural-sports buildings which are the natural places of face-to-face teaching.

ii- E-education and e-economics teaching have an autonomous, that is, decentralized structure.

iii- Unless this organization proves the contrary, it can turn the education and economic education system into a patch, or it can bring the dichotomous-tripartite feature to the fore as a hidden weakness of the established system.

iv- To the extent that the Covid-19 epidemic has made education partly contactless, distant and largely masked, the quality expected from economics teaching has been condemned to the unequal opportunities of internet access.

### 3.4. Threats of e-Economics Teaching

<sup>10</sup> Already, online courses with millions of students in the developed world and partially in Turkey are increasing and university lecturers can also give lectures over the internet.

<sup>11</sup> Education is the key to the knowledge economy that will make the EU a global competitor. However, higher education performance in the EU remains at a 'low' level. Because Europe has very few research universities in the world. This is why European universities feel the need to modernize their archaic governance structures. Education programs supported by solid financial funds such as Erasmus are implemented to meet this need (Barysch et al. 2006: 4).

With the weak features listed above, e-economics teaching also feeds some threats. Namely:

i- E-economics may lead to widespread adoption of the humanless education model. Positive externalities (benefits) provided by face-to-face education can turn into negative externalities (damages) with e-economics teaching, which can pose a serious threat to the local economy and increasingly to the macroeconomy. For example, a student who does not take mass transportation vehicles, rent a house or stay in a dormitory because s/he does not have to come to school directly reduces the expected added value to the economy of that city as much as any economic activity he does not perform.

ii-E-economics teaching, due to some of its attractive features, can shift universities to commercial purposes and in this sense, it can drag universities to commercial competition rather than quality.

iii- When e-learning and its component, e-economics, encourage and spread education due to the full or partial closure of the Covid-19 epidemic, this model may not make it cheap for those who demand it, even if it reduces the costs of the suppliers.

iv- While trying to reduce the relatively high costs arising from the internal structure of formal education with e-economics teaching, the demand for computers and internet may explode. As seen during the epidemic process, if there is not enough supply to meet this demand and the effect of high exchange rates is not compensated, then products and services of computer + internet sector can be consumed expensively, which may catch up with the level of formal education costs.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

With the Covid-19 epidemic process, several distinctive aspects of "e-economics" teaching have emerged in the context of Turkey. For example, in the current economy and internet age, an artificial and unnecessary demand has been pumped against "e-economics" teaching. If it goes on like this, all kinds of barrage exams, including university entrance exams for economic sciences, will be abolished in the near future. Both entrance scores and student quota-occupancy rates for economics departments at universities have been de facto declining over the past few years.

On the other hand, it is possible that all university graduates from different branches, especially high school graduates, can apply to e-economics departments. Open teaching faculties (AÖF in Turkish) are already specialized in providing this service. The aim here is not to employ more than enough graduate economists,<sup>12</sup> but to spread the scientific learning of economics. No country needs so many permanent economists anyway.

E-economics teaching, like its counterparts, prepares the ground for the "classless-unlimited education" model in every sense by removing the teaching from the monotonous classroom environment and moving it to the place and time determined by the individual himself. According to formal economics education, e-economics coincides with the demands of the people of our country to obtain a diploma in a short, cheap, fast and with little effort. This is an argument that can be made both for and against the model, depending on where one looks at it.

In summary, the following points should not be forgotten about e-economics teaching, generally valid for our country:

i-The strongest (S) aspect of this model is that it completes the possible deficiencies of formal education or offers a second education

option to prospective economist students at the same time and acts as an umbrella against epidemics such as Covid-19.

ii-This model creates opportunities (O) independent from the epidemic process, such as increasing the level of economic literacy, sensitivity to financial crises, and educational integration efforts with the EU.

iii- The weakest (W) part of this model is that it resets the physical contact with people and carries the pedagogical relations between the teacher and the student, which are the main components of education, to the virtual-digital realm.

iv-This model can have threats (T) results if it puts universities in a market race with the motive of increasing students instead of quality of education in the e-learning sector.

In this context, the following recommendations can be developed:

i-First of all, when applying virtual teaching models, as in the case of "e-economics", the fact that these models are public-service-oriented rather than private-profit-oriented and should be designed in accordance with the expectations of the relatively poor should be taken into consideration.

ii- An e-learning coordination desk should be established within the Council of Higher Education (YÖK in Turkish). Whichever university will switch to this system should be subject to good regulation and strict control. The "e-economics" program – internet, academic and administrative staff – can be put into practice after establishing its infrastructure and posting it on the website.

iii- If the primary purpose of e-economics teaching is to remove all obstacles to economics teaching; its secondary aim is to contribute to the delivery of education at the lowest cost, even if it is not to pave the way for completely free education. So, first of all, the supply side (policy-makers) should make the necessary contributions so that e-economics students can obtain basic and peripheral computer materials cheaply. For example, while computer manufacturers and marketing companies follow a low-profit sales strategy, universities running the e-education program should not charge fees, and social state should first equip all parts of the country with internet access networks and reduce or even zero the indirect taxes reflected on ICT products.

iv- By following the examples in the world and in the EU and other contemporary developments, an agenda should be established on the future shape of e-economics teaching. This model, at the end of the education period, especially for students, benefit-satisfaction, employment, etc. parameters should be obtained and shared with the public.

As a result, as observed during the Covid-19 epidemic process, e-learning as a variation of distance education is actually a model that brings education closer. "E-economics" is no exception in this sense. This model, going beyond the traditional university education patterns, paves the way for "life-long economic literacy" with the aspiration for a classless society. Thus, it facilitates the transition from the "science for science" approach to the truly "science for society" approach.

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<sup>12</sup>Current civil servants who have received associate and undergraduate degrees from universities that offer open education or e-learning in economic sciences in Turkey are not professional economists, but they earn a symbolic level of salary and advancement.

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