Chapter 1
New Priorities and Needs in Distance Education:
Think Big!!!

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this chapter is to give information about the Distance Education System at Anadolu University (DESA), which has nearly two million students from diverse backgrounds. By the 1990s, the number of people of postgraduate age employed in Turkey had gradually increased to over 60 percent. The shortage of funds for educational services such as adequate classroom spaces and well-qualified instructors was already creating difficulties across the country. Higher educational institutions of all types had to decide on the principles, which were to guide them in dealing with this tremendous increase in the population. In this context, Anadolu University made provocative recommendations in 1982, defended the Distance Education system as the most appropriate milieu for the continuous education of the postgraduate students of Turkey, established the first College of Open Education in Turkey, and became one of the mega universities in the world. In short, the founding fathers of the Distance Education System of Anadolu University were able to critically analyze new priorities and needs in the area by just thinking big!

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the progress of wireless communication and sensor technologies have evolved elearning to mobile learning and now is evolving from mobile learning to ubiquitous learning. In this context, the Distance Education System at Anadolu University (DESA) provides a dynamic modeling system for postgraduate age employed, who is able to gather a variety of information about themselves as lifelong learners at any time and any place.

The purpose of this dynamic modeling system of the DESA is for the establishment of emerging

communication technologies based synchronous, asynchronous and hybrid modes. The DESA aims to propose the implementation of high-level communications among instructors, business, schools, even parents and their children of service provider in interactive milieus. The DESA also provides lifelong learners with adaptive and personalized materials, activities, and information about their professional areas. In this context, a dynamic modeling approach of the DESA is introduced to identify and update information about the leaners' professional progress, interests and knowledge level, critical thinking abilities, preferences for using the system, social connectivity, and current location. This information is gathered in an automatic way, using these learners' behaviors and actions in different communication situations provided by different components and services of the College of Open Education.

Furthermore, the DESA delivers necessary materials anytime and anywhere, allow postgraduate age employed to watch their learning progress on PDAs, tablet PCs and notebook computers via broadband and wireless Internet. The information in this dynamic model can help in giving these lifelong learners a better understanding about themselves regularly and gradually. Finally, the DESA is a dynamic system which spontaneously interoperates in changing environments and interacts with a set of communicating components that can change both identity and functionality over time as its circumstances change. The distance learners, therefore, thanks to the vision of Anadolu University, are able to obtain an education without losing their productivity.

BACKGROUND

As mentioned by Peters (2004) and Porter (2004), one of the main objectives of the interactive communication environments is to provide lifelong learners with a rich, dynamic and flexible support service. Therefore, the DESA model plays

a crucial role, storing and updating the relevant information about themselves by identifying their characteristics, needs and situations in an egalitarian way. All services contribute data in order to build and update information about these postgraduate age employed. Furthermore, all services have access to the information stored in the DESA model. Since the distance education milieu is developed by using the concept of agents, agents are responsible for gathering data from different services, calculating the respective information, storing information, updating the information if necessary, and providing services with access to this information.

The DESA includes the following categories of information about undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate learners, and also their school progress, interests and knowledge level, learning and communication styles, critical thinking abilities, intimacy (Physical, Mental, Emotional, Spiritual, Moral cognitive, etc) and social closeness. Each of these categories includes several kinds of information. In the subsections of chapters, this dynamic modeling process for each category is explained in more detail, giving a description of the relevant information of each category, showing which services require the respective information as well as deliver data to obtain the information, and introducing the tasks of the agents for gathering and providing the respective information. Shortly, the DESA allows lifelong learners to watch and truck their progress synchronously and asynchronously as well as hybrid on PDAs, tablet PCs and notebook computers via broadband and wireless Internet.

The DESA forms proper real-life experiences and ideas, fosters the several forms of economic skill and ability, and develops the traits and dispositions of character, intellectual and moral. The lifelong learners in this system are educated for intellectual participation in the social, societal and cultural growth of the country. The accomplishment of the final demands more than that the DESA trains learners from undergraduates to post-

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