

Chapter 16

Framework for the Structuring of Distance Education in Higher Education Institutions in the COVID-19 Pandemic Process

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the structure, tasks, and resources of distance education centers of Turkey universities to determine the changes occurring in the centers during the pandemic process by interviews with center employees and to create the framework for the tasks and responsibilities of centers. For this purpose, the organizational structure, tasks, and resources of distance education centers were examined by websites and a variety of documents by content analysis. Then, new tasks, problems, and solutions in the COVID-19 pandemic process were examined with semi-structured interviews with center employees, and changes in the structuring of center were determined. According to results, it is seen that there are more support requests coming to the assessment and evaluation unit than the normal process, communication problems with instructors, slowing and delayed question checks, and technical problems.

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 appeared in Wuhan, China in December 2019 has turned into a pandemic that affects the whole world in a short period of four months as of March 2020 (Huang et al., 2020; WHO, 2020). With the pandemic, radical changes have occurred all over the World (Yavuz, Kayalı ve Tural, 2021; Zhao, 2020). The sectors most affected by this virus in the world were the health and education sectors, respectively. According to the UNESCO (2020) report, between April 2020 and September 2020, face-to-face educa-

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tion activities were suspended in 191 countries (approximately 98% of the countries worldwide), and the educational activities of approximately 1.6 billion students around the world were affected (Bozkurt and Sharma, 2020; OECD, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). As a result, distance education activities have become necessary for all learners and many countries have decided to continue education with the distance education method for different education levels (Bozkurt and Sharma, 2020; Gewin, 2020; OECD, 2020; Önal ve Özdemir, 2021; Yamamoto and Altun, 2020).

Covid-19 was first seen on March 10, 2020 in Turkey (BBC, 2020). The Council of Higher Education (YÖK) has suspended formal education at universities since this date. As of March 23, it has been announced that distance education will continue in all universities (YÖK, 2020).

Distance education is education that is carried out synchronously or asynchronously, in which the student and teacher are in different environments (Frank, Reich, & Humpreys, 2003). This education is carried out with the help of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) without any physical interaction (Clark, 2020). Teaching environments in distance education are designed in two ways, synchronous and asynchronous (Traxler, 2018). During the pandemic process, there are studies that have positive results from distance education activities in higher education. Studies in which students show a positive attitude towards distance education (Lall and Singh, 2020), students are more successful by studying independently (Xie and Yang, 2020) and teachers have a better quality process (Arora and Srinivasan, 2020), are some of them. In addition to these, there are also some studies with various problems in the distance education process. In a study examining distance education in the USA during the pandemic process, it was stated that the technology infrastructure was insufficient and some instructors shared course documents incompletely (Hammond et al., 2020). Arora and Srinivasan (2020) stated that internet problems were experienced during this process, sufficient awareness was not created regarding distance education, and student participation was low. Lall and Singh (2020) said that students had a lack of communication during this process. In one study, Erarslan (2021) examined 69 studies on distance English teaching in Turkey. The results show that the most important problems in online English education are teachers' lack of digital literacy and internet connectivity. In addition, in the distance education process in the pre-pandemic period, certain problems were experienced such as decreased interaction between students and teachers, insufficient feedback, improper use of technology, not designing material for student needs, not having enough student support and not meeting the need for teaching staff (Falowo, 2007). UNESCO National Commission of Turkey, has some recommendations to deal with these potential problems. These include examining the readiness for the lesson and choosing the most appropriate educational tool, protecting the security of data, planning the time of educational programs, providing support to teachers and families regarding the use of digital tools, monitoring the learning process, determining the time according to student self-regulation (UNESCO, 2020). The staffing requirement for the implementation of these recommendations is also increasing.

There are various studies about problems experienced in distance education centers in Turkey. The main problems in these studies are the personnel need of the centers, lack of infrastructure and resources (Bilgiç and Tüzün, 2015; Bilgiç, Doğan & Seferoğlu, 2011; Yaman, 2015) and the need for support staff and experts (Durak, 2017; Tuncer and Bahadır, 2017). During the pandemic, these problems have deepened. Distance education centers should be planned more effectively in order to solve these problems.

The aim of this study is to examine the structure, tasks and resources of Distance Education Centers of universities in Turkey, to determine the changes occurring in the centers during the pandemic process by interviewing center employees and to create the framework for the tasks and responsibilities of centers. The research questions of the study are as follows:

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