Chapter 18
Blended Assessment Methods in Online Educational Programs in Turkey:
Issues and Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed eleven online educational programs of different universities in Turkey regarding their assessment methods with several aspects. The results showed that online quizzes and tests, assignments, individual and group projects, participation to the discussions, proctored face-to-face midterm and final exams are major blended assessment methods used in the online programs. All methods have benefits and challenges while preparing and administering in the courses. Therefore, online and traditional assessments methods are used complementarily to overcome their respective disadvantages. The main parts of student success scores are assessed based on human proctored face-to-face final exams at the end of the courses to get accreditation in the programs.

BACKGROUND

Turkey is a country with physical and cultural bridge between Europe and Asia. It has a total area of about 780 sq.km. with a population of 72 million. Children between 0 and 14 age group constituted 29.8% of this estimated population. Population between 6 and 21 age group constituted 29.1%. The primary education was compulsory education which was extended to 8 years in 1997 for children aged between 6 and 14 age groups. Secondary education was also extended to 4 years in 2005 (MoNE, 2007). After the students have graduated from high schools, they have to enter the university entrance examination to be students in the university. There is a great competition for entry into the 68 public and 25 private universities. In the last years over 1.5 million high school graduates took this examination and less than a quarter of these students admitted to conventional higher education institutions. Due to

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the characteristics of educational system, distance education is a rational alternative to increase an overall education level in Turkey.

Distance education has been applied in Turkey since 1980. Although some distance education models were discussed and seen before 1980, as an implementation, Anadolu University began distance higher education in the preserve of its Open Educational Faculty (OEF), OEF started programs in Business Administration and Economics with a student enrollment of 29,479 for the 1982-1983 academic year in 1982 (Ozkul, 2001). Today, Anadolu University comprises 12 faculties, three of which- Open Education, Business Administration and Economics- constitute the Open Education System, 10 vocational schools, 6 graduate schools, and 26 research centres. There are more than 1.000.000 pre-bachelor and bachelor degree students graduated through the Open Education System and it is one of the mega universities of the world.

In addition to Anadolu University, with help of Internet technology, numbers of courses and programs were started to deliver at various universities such as METU, ITU, Sakarya, Fırat, İstanbul Bilgi and Ahmet Yesevi at the end of 1990s. METU has started an experimental distance education course via the Internet in 1997. In the following years, METU developed online certificate and graduate programs. Sakarya University has started an online two years pre-BA program related to computer programming, information management. Also, several courses have been offered both online and on-campus in the following years. ITU established remote classrooms via a microwave link connecting two campuses that were in different locations of Istanbul. Furthermore, Istanbul Bilgi University offered e-MBA program in 2000. Fırat University has broadcasted some educational programs on Fırat RTV. Ahmet Yesevi University has offered some distance learning programs via the Internet (Askar, 2005). Nowadays, several courses and programs (especially graduate courses and programs) have been given over the Internet in many universities in Turkey.

SETTING THE STAGE

With the information era, online education has become more important for lifelong learning. Developments in telecommunication and computer technologies made easily design online courses with establishing networked cultures. Today, there are numbers of courses given online for any subject in higher education institutions. With time, most of the problems with online education have been solved and new ways have been developed for better online learning environment. One of the main problems of the online education is assessment part of the education that is still tough problem in front of the online education. Although there are lots of comments and studies related to advantages of online learning, there have been few evaluations and it is an ongoing challenge for educators since with little known on how assessment is implemented in online courses and how to use computer-mediated tools to monitor and inform performance and progress (Bartley, 2006; Benson, 2003; Liang, & Kim, 2004; Shephard, 2009).

Assessment is a key component of any education systems. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA, 2006) describes assessment as "any processes that appraise an individual's knowledge, understanding, abilities or skills" (p.4). Also, Suskie summarized assessment as:

the ongoing process of (1) establishing clear, measurable expected outcomes of student learning, (2) ensuring that students have sufficient opportunities to achieve those outcomes, (3) systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well student learning matches our expectations, and (4) using the resulting information to understand and improve student learning. (Suskie, 2004, p.3)