

Chapter 16

A Study on the Role of Open Education Faculty, the Leader of Distance Learning in Turkey, in Higher Education and its Educational–Social Dynamics

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ABSTRACT

The distance learning method has changed the conception of classical education and training. In Turkey the distance learning mission has been undertaken by Anadolu University Open Education Faculty (OEF). Therefore, the presence of OEF in higher education has been considered as the need and demand for higher education through “distance learning system”. However, studying the state’s OEF move “a demand” is not sufficient for an integral analysis. The economic and political structure in the period when OEF was integrated into the education system was critical. In this context, there are significant social dynamics underlying the foundation of OEF as well. In this study, the differences between the distance learning experience in Turkey and other countries are analyzed. Besides the role and share of the OEF in higher education in Turkey is discussed and the socioeconomic reasons of the foundation of the OEF, as specified above, are studied within the framework of the background of the state’s educational move. Finally, the positive and negative views of the individuals on the OEF are presented in the study and suggestions are made in this framework.

INTRODUCTION

The basis of education and training can be considered as the transfer of knowledge. Knowledge is not consumed on the contrary, increases as you share it. As such, knowledge is public property. What distinguishes knowledge from other products is the fact that it is outdated very rapidly (Yazıcı, 2004). The fact that today technology changes on a continuous basis and it is integrated into our lives has removed the significance of time and location for access to knowledge. In this study, the classical classroom education where the students and the teacher are together will be discussed and the original aspects of the “Distance Learning” experience in Turkey that enables people to access knowledge anywhere and anytime will be analyzed. The significance of Open Education Faculty is revealed by 29,500 students (in 1981, while the number of student that can study at universities in Turkey was about 54.000, in one year’s time, the supply to universities increased by over 50% thanks to OEF is a very important development) who enrolled in the Department of Economics and Business Administration, which is a significant figure in that conjuncture in the first period (1982 – 1983). OEF, whose share and significance in higher education have always been high since it was founded, plays a key role in the distance learning experience in Turkey.

In this context, the main clues about distance learning in Turkey lie in the structuring of OEF. In order to spot such clues, in addition to discussing distance learning theoretically, studying the history and foundation dynamics of OEF, which is the leading institution of the Turkish experience in terms of educational and social aspects, is essential for understanding the role OEF plays in Turkish higher education system. In this respect, the study will concentrate on identifying the role of OEF in general education and distance learning in higher education, by also analyzing the views of their graduates.

Distance Learning

Distance learning is a type of education in which the student and the teacher are not face-to-face through various media of communication from a certain centre (Turkish Language Institution, TDK). Distance learning is a widely adapted concept for years among the education processes in which the students and teachers are not in the same physical environment such as distance training, e-learning, distance education, tele-learning, and flexible learning. Distance learning aims to provide educational activities in the time and location that are suitable for students, therefore, distance learning can be implemented synchronously for students and teachers or asynchronously (TBV, 2003).

Today information is employed in every field extensively, the flow of information in the society changes through communication and computer technologies. Thus the most important feature of the information society stage which Alvin Toffler calls “Third Wave” has been materialized (Yazıcı, 2004). In distance learning, in line with this transformation, Information Technology based concepts such as virtual classroom, e-Learning, m-Learning, web-based distance learning, online learning, blended learning have appeared.

Distance learning is used by the private sector, public and especially in higher education, and new structures have been produced to meet the needs of distance learning (network structure, server, content development, distance learning software, TV broadcasting etc.). There are organizations which only provide consultation services in this field. The students prefer distance learning sometimes together with formal education and sometimes instead of formal education.

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