General View on the Notion of Distant Education in Turkey

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Abstract— **Education is a long-term investment that is made for the future and planned in accordance with the needs of a country. The need in our country for qualified labor force that comes along the improvements in the world increases the desire for giving quality education to more and more students gradually. Especially, the innovations in information Technologies and rapid developments in communication make distant education applications increase and become widespread in harmony with the said developments. For education to lead to positive behavioral changes and meet its targets, the persons and educational institutes that perform education should have a certain experience and proper infrastructure. The increasing number of students demanding higher education in our country and the innovations in modern-day information technologies bring out some new pursuits in education. The attention and the need in distant education which is expanding and accepted worldwide are also increasing rapidly. The tools and technologies used in distant education and all other files about it ease the learning conditions occurring in normal education [4]. Computer-backed education is used in fields such as; visual notes, revisions, education and intensive testing. In time, computers have taken the place of lecturers eliminating boring tasks and giving students materials and assignments when they feel for it. In this article, besides giving general information about the universities conducting distant education in our country, the advantages and disadvantages of distant education and its progress in our country and in the world will be evaluated.**

Keywords— *distant education, open University, online learning.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Distant education is a planned education style in which students use their personal computers to learn from a lecturer giving online lectures within the framework of a given program, following a schedule without using any classrooms or such of an educational institution and benefiting from every opportunity offered by technology.

Several resembling definitions have been made for distant education. Whereas the one which was made in relation with higher education program conducted in Middle East Technical University states that it is *"the education style in which the locations of the students and the lecturers are different and the transfer and the interaction of the lecture materials is performed via technology"* [14]*,* another point of view has defined it as *"a model which brings teachers and learners in different locations together and enables education by using different means of communication* [5]*.* Eventually, despite the fact that distant education has been defined diversely, all definitions have a common conclusion.

The notions "distant learning" and "distant education" are frequently substituted for each other. While lecturers or those who are, in general sense, in the position of teachers maintain provide the teaching process, it is the learners' task to learn. In other words, distant learning results from distant education. Urdan and Weggen define this in their book which was published in 2000 as follow [12].
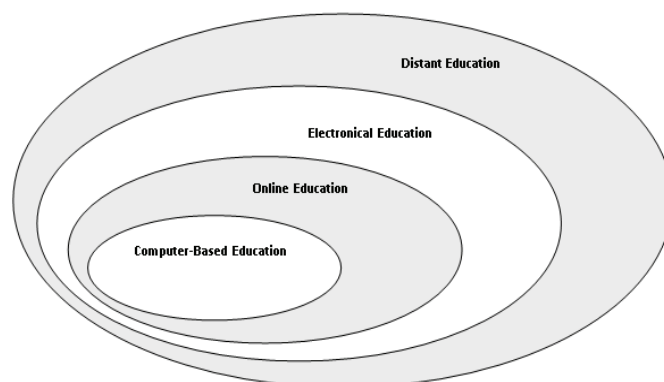

Figure 1. Distant Education Notions

Success in online learning, depend on the suitability of the needs required by the student and by the education unit. Here, as explained in Judith V. Boettcher's article on Envisagement Levels of Distant and Online Learning[3, pg-21], in a representation based upon Vygotskian theory, it is stated that the query of user and presenter needs in advance will procreate successful results in the to be implemented program.

Correspondingly, in the envisagement of an implemented education, the **consulting unit** providing the communication between the student and the education unit, the **content of the program** to be implemented, the content of **teaching and learning experience,** along with the process pursued through the **development of the education concept** constitute the basis of Vygotskian theory.

The units starting distant education generally tend to accept the method as transferring the reading, practice and homework materials on the web database. This approach may be reasonable in cost, yet it is insufficient in terms of education [2].

Whether it is called distant education, online learning or e-learning, today internet based education has reached to an important position among professional education. In education going on for years, teachers have been doing their lessons face to face with the students in the same classroom. Now distant education is changing this fundamental base as well.

Let us take a brief look at the studies on distant education done over the world and in our country.

II. DISTANT EDUCATION IMPLEMENTATIONS IN THE WORLD

England is one of the first countries to establish 'Open University' in higher education. In 1948, in Japan soldiers and people who were away from schools or failed to attend half-time schools were included into a distant educational system covering secondary, high school and higher education [11].

In the same years, universities with open education were established in The United States of America. Universities in Pennsylvania and South Carolina are accepted as the pioneers. These universities, reaching to the students at their homes via television and computers, were able to offer consulting service between lecturers and the students.

Canada, as in the USA, in its early years practiced widely upon television in the field of distant education. India, uses television education with satellite in a expansive manner. Israel, has enhanced television books called 'Every Man's University'. Italy has made its position among countries starting distant education via television broadcasting by successfully implementing the 'tele Scoula' project of the Italian Radio and Television institution [11].

Indira Gandhi National Open University in India – to be the first in Africa and Asia and the second in the world – started education in 1985 and is now seen as a mega university with a population of 3.500,00 students. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/mega_university)

After the 1980s, with the production of stronger and more developed soft ware and hard ware, traditional education has given its place to a branched computer based education [3, p-190].

III. DISTANT EDUCATION IMPLEMENTATIONS IN TURKEY

In the Republic Period, one of the biggest needs was to extend education to every level of society as quickly as possible. The need of qualified labor force promoted the search of alternative solutions on this topic. This search made 'distant education' option the top priority in education agenda.

In 1960, to be the first in our country, the Ministry of Education made an attempt to teach some technical subjects and established 'Center of Mail Education' in the Department of Statistic-Publication. Despite its one dimensional and limited purpose this attempt is the first serious implementation of 'Distant Education' in Turkey. Another implementation is

YAYKUR known as widespread education. The aim is to educate high school students with a two-year associate degree in order to raise the needed labor force.

By the year 1981, whereas the number of students applying to have a higher education at a university was around 420,000 the real number of students obtaining this education was around 54,000. This shows that in those days the universities were only able to cover a 13% of the students wanting to get a higher education. Today ,in 2011, the number of students applying at a university has become 1.800,000 whereas the student quota has reached 597,000 (in our country regarding the 2011/2012 school year the number of students to obtain a bachelor's degree is 345,041 and for those to obtain an associate degree is 252,467). Despite the time passes in between the rate has only reached a percentage of 33%. (*http://www.egitimsistem.com/2011*)

By years, the rapid growth in student number, the improvements in education technologies and the idea of transferring education out of its boundaries have made a new distant education model obligatory. The first implementation was started in the school year 1982-1983 as Anatolian University Open Education Department started to render service. The application of 29,500 students in the first year clearly showed the amount of demand and need of higher education.

In the last years, opened under Eskişehir Anatolian University, Open University has backed the lessons with radio and television broadcasts. Another implementation is the Open Education High School founded in October 1992.

Starting at METU in 1998, IDEA has been maintaining the online and asynchronous e-education studies. Today e-MBA program, numerous in campus lessons and foreign language certificate program are being held [1]. (e-MBA is an online post graduate degree whose education is completely internet based.

Sakarya University started distance education program in 2000, and continued this program by opening distance education program for bachelor's degree in 2002, and stated providing distance education in Adapazarı Vocational School.

Throughout the years, numbers of universities started distance education program in different branches. In 2010/2011 Ege University started "business administration e-post graduate program", and completed studies on two more post graduate program for "logistics" and "economics". Thus, there became three different online post graduate programs in Ege University.

By 2011/2012 school year, there are 105 state, 61 foundation, 6 foundation vocational schools, totally 172 universities provide education in our country. Among these 52 universities which provide distance education and which are listed above, Eskişehir Anatolian University is the one with the highest number of students(884,000) [4].

IV. THE NEED FOR DISTANT EDUCATION

Due to the increasing number of students waiting to get a higher education along with the inadequacy of student quota in the schools there has always been a search for new solutions. Besides, the lack of lecturers in different branches who are be able to teach students in every field, the far presence of educational institutions and the lack of lecturers and materials have increased the search for new solutions.

Despite the differences in solving educational problems the target of all countries are the same. The main objective is to terminate the problems in education. The lack of schools and classrooms, insufficient materials and tools, lack of qualified lecturers and teachers, overpopulated classrooms, problems faced in attendance, rapid increase in population, the absence of education regarding student's needs and skills and some other reasons can be named as some of the top educational problems of our country [4].

The answer to the reasons named above and the requirements needed in this field can be found in distant education. Among the methods used in distant education the most important fact is to establish a solid connection in the education between the student and the lecturer in every environment. Many different approaches can be benefited to perform the education with the online system that lifts of the limiting boundaries of time and space.

Besides, as most of the students over 26 are working their school and work schedules overlaps each other. That is why adult students think of a more flexible education program, in other words they wait to be offered an education suiting world of modern-day.

There are many reasons why adult students want to get education. Some of them want to change their occupation, some to increase their culture and knowledge level for personal or occupational reasons, learn a new language or some want to improve their careers due to familiar or occupational reasons.

Learning, is one of the most important qualification of the humankind which separates human beings from the other living things. Learning is the constant changes in a human's knowledge and in his behaviors [6].

Scheduling the lessons according to distant education is very complicated when compared to classical method. The programmers of the lessons have to organize the time of the lessons, the students who will attend the lessons and the tools which will be used in those lessons in a very detailed way[4]. Here, the aim of distant education can be defined as:

1. Educating more students.
2. Suppressing the idea of distant between the learner and the teacher in education process.
3. Decreasing the cost of education and accessing the students more quickly.
4. Accelerating the education process.
5. Suppressing the possible classroom anxieties.
6. Making the students more active in the education process.

7. Increasing the education opportunities and alternatives.

Here, the essential thing for an education unit is planning its aims and applying distant education according to these aims. During the envisioning of a distant education program, as it is explained in the two steps starting with "strategic plan" and finishing with the "guarantee of quality"[3, pg-278], the strategic plan containing the aim of the program is very important.

A. The Advanteges of Distant Education

There have always been some obstacles in the application of face to face education[4]. Some of these obstacles are transportation, cost, working life, the geographical differences between the students and the teacher etc. For this reason, distant education has started. Below there are some brief points about the advantages of distant education.

1. Having the opportunity to educate more and more student in different geographies.
2. Having the opportunity to give education on time.
3. The need for an access between the students and the experts of the same topic.
4. The need for providing education methods and environments with flexibility.
5. Increasing the sharing of the lecturers and resources, the productivity which rises with educating the students in their own environment.
6. Decreasing the transportation costs' of the students.
7. Decreasing the difference between the education environment and the real working field.
8. Decreasing the education expenses.
9. Quickening the access for information.
10. Distributing the education materials more quickly.
11. Distant education's maintainability with the social life.

B. The Disadvanteges of Distant Education

Although distant education has lots of advantages when its compared to normal education, there are still some disadvantages [9].

1. The idea that the student cannot have a lesson in the classroom environment leads to the lack of motivation in the student.

2. Although the student is registered to the university, the students of distant education can not feel themselves like real students. In some schools this problem is tried to be overcome with the help of virtual classroom. Unfortunately, for distant education centers having students at a number described with 1000s this is not possible. Due to the lack of classroom environment the students don't have any classmates so the sharing of notes and ideas cannot be realized.

3. Another important problem is that the student is not able to ask questions as wished. In standard education there is the opportunity to ask the teacher in the same classroom environment, this cannot be realized in distant education, though. In some centers this situation is being overcome via methods such as mail

or question forms. In those cases the teacher is not able to answer the question immediately and the heat of the moment is lost which affects the level of learning.

4. In distant education, as in standard education, the expenses taken from the students are determined according to each education institute separately. However, in distant education method, a different kind of cost is required for both the needed soft and the hard ware [3, pg-278]. As a result, the expense for the distant education is slightly higher than the one for standard education. As the price is determined by the education unit according to the education that will be given some differences are seen.

5. Especially for working women who also have a mother role studying at home can be impossible from time to time. The presence of a young child could turn the situation into a torture. For this reason the fact of studying at home could easily be seen as an advantage as well as a disadvantage.

6. In our country according to the Department of Higher Education regulations, the final tests have to be taken face to face. This constitutes another problem for the travel restricted students and also for the working students as they have to travel to another city.

7. In standard education, the teacher who asks questions from the given lessons is able to make the students responsible for the pre handed subjects even though they have not been fully covered. While in standard education the lecturers are off during the public holidays, in distant education this is not the case and the lessons may continue during the holiday period.

8. In distant education, the midterms are taken online and for any failure happening at that moment such as connection time out, power cut, crush of the computer the students are made responsible. Their exams are accepted as not finished. In these kind of situations the students are suffering.

V. CONCLUSION

Learning and teaching embodies an important aspect of human life. Education is one of the most important factors influencing the development of societies. Today in our country, an increasing number of students are graduating from high schools and demanding a university education. However, there is the problem of limited capacities of the universities. It is now possible to overcome this problem by distant education which could be planned in advance. During this planning process the amount of students namely a 15% who either do not or could not answer the questions must be taken into consideration as well.

For the institutions giving distant education it is necessary to determine the possible technical problems encountered during the process and their solutions in advance. It is an important indicator to be able to give online support in any kind of difficulty. In modern-day this sort of service is no longer seen as a necessity but as a must have.

As it is stated in the article *'A Research on Computer Networks Used as an Education Tool in Turkish Universities'* [7], in order to conduct distant education as an education tool in Turkey, the education is required to be online, and multimedia devices and systems connecting educators to students (e-mail, video conferences, social communication devices etc.) reinforced with face to face education must be used.

In addition, to be successful in distant education, the system should be supported with a well developed hardware and software to ensure the solid connection by which the education will be delivered.

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