The Development, Importance and Evaluation of Distance Education in Turkey: The Case of Istanbul University

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Abstract
In today’s global and rapidly changing world, educational systems have become differentiated and in response to the changing needs of students, academic world works to meet their expectations. There have been substantial developments in the field of higher education over the years and recently, the rapid development of technology and the increasing use of internet, distance education started to gain popularity all over the world. In order to keep up with this rapidly changing world, Istanbul University started distance education in the period of 2009-2010. Purposes of this research are: to examine historical development, evaluation and transformation of distance education and its application in Turkey. Furthermore, to explain an innovative university’s adoption process of distance education is the other objective of this study. To this end, we addressed Istanbul University as an innovative university, in order to evaluate distance education in Istanbul University the authors have interviewed with the coordinators and administrators of distance education. SWOT analysis is one of the ways to evaluate the current situation. For that purpose, the authors have interviewed with those concerned, and revealed strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats then discussed possible tasks incumbent on faculty members and universities. This study tries to bring solutions on the issue.

Key words: Distance education, history of education types, innovative university.

Introduction
In recent years, the rapid development of technology and the increasing use of internet, web-based instructional programs have been diffusing intensely. As in all areas, also in higher education, innovativeness becomes a crucial factor. In order to meet students expectations, the universities which are adopting new technologies and offering different alternatives, can be seen as innovative. The Istanbul University, applying information technologies to instructional programs at different levels, might be the most beautiful examples of this issue. First of all we would like to give some information about historical development of distance education in the world and Turkey by the reviewing literature. Furthermore, in order to make SWOT analysis, we interviewed with the administrators and coordinators of distance education in Istanbul University. We are grateful to all coordinators and administrators for their contributions and interests to our study.

Definitions of Distance Education
“Distance education or distance learning is a field of education that focuses on teaching methods and technology with the aim of delivering teaching, often on an individual basis, to students who are not physically present in a
traditional educational setting such as a classroom” (Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distance_education). “Distance education is a method of education in which the learner is physically separate from the teacher. It may be used on its own, or in conjunction with other forms of education, including face-to-face. In distance education, learners are physically separated from the institution that sponsors the instruction” (Schlosser, L.A., Simonson M.R., p.3). “The basic idea of distance education is simple enough: students and teachers are in different places for all or most of the time that they learn and teach. Being in different places they depend on some kind of technology to deliver information and give them a way of interacting with each other.” (Moore, M., Kearsley G., p.1).

“The most evident setting of distance education occurs when both time and location are different. An example would be WBI with student and instructor residing in different parts of the country and interacting via e-mail at times convenient for each. Distance education also occurs when interaction happens at the same time (synchronous), but at different locations, such as a Web-based course using a chat room with an instructor at one site and learners at others. A third type of distance education occurs when instruction is offered at different times (asynchronous). In asynchronous instruction, learners and instructors are not online at the same time” (Davidson-Shivers, G.V., Rasmussen K.L., p.10) (Table 1).

Table 1: Distance education occurs when there is a difference in either time or location or both.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tim</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Not Distance Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different</td>
<td>Distance Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: From Davidson-Shivers, G.V., Rasmussen K.L., p.10

The terms e-learning (electronic learning) and online learning have been used synonymously with Web-based instruction (WBI). The term e-learning is typically found in business and industry training literature (mentioned by Schank, 2002, Stockley, 2003; Wagner, 2001) or in international education and training information (mentioned by Joint Information Systems Committee [JISC], 2003). Distance education and WBI are sometimes thought to be the same (mentioned by Center for Technology in Education at Johns Hopkins University [CTE], 2003; Stockley, 2003). Simonson, Smaldino, Albright and Zvacek (2000) define distance education as “institution-based, formal education where the learning group is separated geographically and where interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect learners, resources and instructors”. By contrast, CTE refers to distance education as “quite simply… any type of instruction wherein students are enrolled at a distance from faculty” (n.p.), and WBI is one type of distance education” (Davidson-Shivers, G.V.; Rasmussen K.L., p.10).

WBI → Only use web (internet, intranet)
E-learning → Web + CDs + other computer applications
E-learning = WBI + CBT (Computer based training) + other multimedia
(Davidson-Shivers, G.V., Rasmussen K.L.)

As a result e-learning includes Web based instruction (WBI). Distance Education includes; Correspondence education (by letters), radio, TV, The Open University (by sending books and writable materials), e-learning, WBI. (Table 2) In recent years, technological advancements also affect education. When computer and naturally internet using become more common all over the world, e-learning has arisen a kind of distance education.

Table 2: Distance education types and means.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance Education Types</th>
<th>Distance Education Means</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence Education</td>
<td>By letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Open University</td>
<td>Radio, TV, books and writable materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-learning</td>
<td>Computer applications, Web</td>
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History and Development of Distance Education

Distance education has developed through various historical generations although some people believe this began with the invention of the internet. The first generation was text and instruction was by postal correspondence as the medium of communication. The second was teaching by means of broadcast radio and television. The third was open universities, the forth was teleconferencing and finally the most recent generation of distance education based on internet technologies (Moore, M., Kearsley G., p.24.).

Distance education seems a new idea for today’s most educators. Although, distance education dates as early as 1728, when an advertisement in the Boston Gazette... [named] ‘Caleb Phillips, Teacher of the new method of Short Hand was seeking students for lessons to be sent weekly. Modern distance education first relied on the development of postal services in the 19th century and has been applied at least since Isaac Pitman taught shorthand in Great Britain via correspondence in the 1840s. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distance_education). “Distance education in the form of correspondence study was established by Charles Toussaint and Gustav Langenscheidt to teach language in 1856, Berlin, Germany. Later on this correspondence studies are verified for many fields. Correspondence study crossed the Atlantic in 1873, with founding by Anna Tickner to encourage study at home. Between 1883 and 1891, academic degrees were authorized by the State of New York, through the Chautauqua School of Liberal Arts to students who completed the curriculum of the required summer school and correspondence courses”(Demiray U., İşman A., p.25. http://www.tojet.net).

“The contemporary period is often characterized as one of unpredictable change. Globalization, brought on by supersonic air travel, satellite television, computer communications, and societal changes, has inspired new ways of looking at distance education. Edwards (1995) uses the term open learning to describe a new way of looking at education in a quickly changing and diverse world. He indicates that distance education and open learning are two distinct approaches to education. Edwards states that this can occur outside of the traditional organization of education. This is a major difference between his description of open learning and the previous definitions of distance education. More recently, the idea of the “virtual school” has become popular and often used when referring to distance education in schools. Virtual is defined as something quasi, or pseudo. Virtual is often a potential state that at some time might become “actual.” And, just to add to the confusion, actual is generally considered the opposite of virtual. So, it must be that a virtual school would be a potential school as compared to an actual school” (Schlosser, L.A., Simonson M.R., p.5-6).

History and Development of Distance Education in Turkey

The first application of distance education system of Turkey has been started in the years of 1950. Distance education practices accelerated and application preparation on this subject started after the year of 1950 (Uşun, S. 2006, p. 219). Initially, correspondence teaching practice started and The Board of Correspondence Teaching Center was founded. After that, Trial Higher School for Teachers, Widespread Higher Education Institute, Open Primary Education School, Open Education High School, Open Education Faculty, Vocational and Technical Open Education School were founded (Uşun, S. 2006, p.218).

“In 1970s, the methods and components of the distance education were given by a television system established at the Eskişehir Economical and Commercial Sciences Academy (ECESA). By 1982 a new constitution and new Higher Education Acts were accepted. As a result a Council for Higher Education (HEC), referred to as YÖK, was created and given the authority by the Constitution of the Republic to regulate all higher education. Within the same year, the distance education application, very closer to its meaning of today, was started with a governmental decision executed by HEC under a law and so, the opportunity and right was presented to the Turkish universities to make distance education.” (Rüzgar, N.S., 2004, http://tojde.anadolu.edu.tr/).

“In 1981 November, with the governmental decision under 41 no code as included in the 2547 no Higher Education Law, the universities were given right to make distance education and Anadolu University that had a sufficient infrastructure with this regard was assigned to make distance education starting from that date. Today, Open Education Faculty (OEF) is almost to finalize its trial studies on videoconference to be integrated with the system. In 1992, considering the secondary school level and content with the management of Ministry of National Education started The Open High School (OHS) application under the structure and operation model of OEF.

Examples of the Universities Which are Applying the Model of Distance Education in the World

“The University of London claims to be the first university to offer distance learning degrees, establishing its External Programme in 1858. In the United States William Rainey Harper, first president of the University of Chicago developed the concept of extended education, whereby the research university had satellite colleges of education in the wider community, and in 1892 he also encouraged the concept of correspondence school courses to further promote education, an idea that was put into practice by Columbia University. In Australia, the University of Queensland established its Department of Correspondence Studies in 1911. More recently, Charles Wedemeyer of the University of Wisconsin–Madison is considered significant in promoting methods other than the postal service to deliver distance education in America. From 1964 to 1968, the Carnegie Foundation funded Wedemeyer’s Articulated Instructional Media Project (AIM) which brought in a variety of communications technologies aimed at providing learning to an off-campus population. According to Moore’s recounting, AIM impressed the UK which imported these ideas when establishing in 1969 The Open University, which initially relied on radio and television broadcasts for much of its delivery. Germany’s Fern Universität in Hagen followed in 1974 and there are now many similar institutions around the world, often with the name Open University (in English or in the local language). All “open universities” use distance education technologies as delivery methodologies and some have grown to become ‘mega-universities’, a term coined to denote institutions with more than 100,000 students” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distance_education).

“Technology is having a dramatic effect on colleges and universities, producing what may be the most challenging period in the history of higher education. One manifestation of the convergence of technology and education is distributed learning. The World Wide Web provides alternative means for the delivery of courses and services, providing learners with an extraordinary range of options”(Oblinger et al., p.1. http://www.acenet.edu/bookstore).

In U.S., Berkeley College recognizes the importance of distance learning in the higher education community and brings the classroom to the students anywhere in the world with the same high level of support as on campus classes through internet. The instructors, classmates are also available by phone or e-mail and the students get the same proven curriculum and faculty support that is provided on-campus classes (http://berkeleycollege.edu/-Online/index.htm).

At Harvard University, several distance education programs are available under the name “Harvard University Extension School”. Online lectures use streaming video technology, along with standard internet browser software and are available to meet a wide range of needs. Also “Live Web Conferences” are held at specified class times without video (http://www.extension.harvard.edu/DistanceEd/). Another U.S. University; University of California offers online courses under the name “UC Berkeley Extension Online courses” with experienced and talented instructors and with expertise in the latest online learning techniques (http://learn.berkeley.edu/html/distance.html).

The Universities Which Apply Web-based Distance Education Model in Turkey

Information technologies have been developing day by day. All of the institutions have to adapt these innovations unless they could not survive. It might be therefore, Information Management and Computer Programming associate degree programs were opened by Vocational School of Sakarya and they started the education with 817 students in 2001-2002 period. Associate degree programs, given via Distance Education by Vocational School of Sakarya, were incorporated into Vocational School of Adapazarı which was newly established (http://www.uzem.sakarya.edu.tr.). In Mersin University-Vocational School of Mersin, Distance Education Unit was established in the year of 2002 and e-enabled instruction working has first begun in 2002-2003 period with Industrial Electronics program. In the year of 2003 Computer Programming, Electronic Technology, Electronic
Communication Technology, Control and Automation Technology also in the period of 2009-2010, Business Management and Pharmacy Services associate degree programs were added to Distance Education Unit, therefore number of programs has reached to six (http://www.mersin.edu.tr).

The Public Universities in Turkey that apply distance education programs are: Afyon Kocatepe, Anadolu, Ankara, Atatürk, Çukurova, Fırat, Gazi, Istanbul, Karabük, Karadeniz Technical, Kırıkkale, Koceli, Mehmet Akif, Mersin, Sakarya, Süleyman Demirel, Trakya, Uşak University and the Foundation Universities in Turkey that apply distance education programs are: Atılım, Bahçeşehir, Beykent, Istanbul Aydın, Maltepe, Turkey Logistics Researches and Education Foundation (http://www.osym.gov.tr). In Turkey, some vocational schools have started to web-based distance education programs before 4-year faculties. 5 universities have started the first 4-year faculty web-based distance education programs in the year of 2009. It is possible to see ÖSYM- Guides of Student Preference.

The Case of Istanbul University
The distance education activities started in Istanbul University when ISUZEM was founded in 2009 and the Distance and Open Education Faculty was founded in 2010. The distance education programs that targeted to various student groups have been offering Istanbul University quality education without the limitations of time and space and with the missions of “Converting World into a school” and “Long-established tradition, high technology” (Istanbul University Press Meeting held on 05.04.2011).

Distance Education Programs in Istanbul University
Istanbul University offers 3 associate degree programs (International Trade, Banking and insurance at Vocational School of Social Sciences and School of Jurisprudence), 10 undergraduate degree programs (Turkish Language and Literature, Economics, Business Administration, Econometrics, Public Finance, Labor Economics and International Relations, Teacher Training in Computer and Education Technologies, Journalism, Public Relations and Advertisement, Radio-TV and Cinema), 3 graduate degree programs (Informatics, Capital Markets and Financial Econometrics), 1 undergraduate completion (Divinity) and 1 certificate program (Molecular Mechanisms of Patients); a total of 18 programs within the scope of distance education (ISUZEM, http://uzaktanegitim.istanbul.edu.tr).

Methodology of Research
SWOT analysis that includes strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats is reported to be a useful planning tool for situational analysis, for program evaluation and for quality improvement. SWOT analysis allows one to collect and analyse a great quantity of information about the SWOT of a programme. It was originally developed for change management in business planning and can be adapted easily for use in many different situations (Camden et al., p.1374).

SWOT analysis is one of the ways to evaluate current situation, therefore we decided to analyze distance education process in Istanbul University with SWOT. In order to make SWOT analysis, we interviewed with the 4 administrators and 10 coordinators of distance education in Istanbul University. A questionnaire with four open-ended questions was developed typically in a SWOT analysis. These are:

A. Strengths: What are the current strengths of the distance education?
B. Weaknesses: What are the current weaknesses of the distance education?
C. Opportunities: What are the current opportunities for the model of distance education?
D. Threats: What are the possible threat items about this education type?

We collected all the opinions of the interviewers and listed under the 4 categories.

Strengths
- It provides time and place flexibility.
- It is possible to access the education wherever there is an internet connection.
- Both the faculty members and the students can be online synchronously (Synchronous education).
- It is an interactive education type; students can ask questions while having the lectures.
• It provides one to one education.
• If students miss a class, they can watch it by the system that records them. (Asynchronous Education)
• Thanks to this system, faculty members can also watch these classes and rate their performances by critici-
  zing them, thus the quality of these classes evolves.
• By test questioning, an objective evaluation is done.
• Time is saved.
  a) No time is wasted on traffic.
  b) Faculty members can spare their times for academic researches.
  c) Students can work in the mornings and continue their educations in the evenings.
• This system also saves place. Instead of training a limited numbers of students in structures, hundreds of
  students can be reached by net.
• This system causes education costs to decrease as mentioned below:
  a) Students’ travel and transportation expenses, sheltering, etc. costs decrease.
  b) Except for system installation costs and fixed costs, thanks to increasing numbers of students the pro-
     ductivity improves, with less costing more students can be trained. Due to scale causing yields, costs can
     be minimized.
• It is a system that yields fair profits for university.
• System offers lots of class materials. Especially it helps students to learn easier by using visual effects and
  sound effects. Refined lecture notes are enriched by content design team.
• At the beginning of the 14 weeks scheduled class program, faculty members prepare comprehensive lecture
  notes. So students can be prepared before the course begins. This would help them become more motivat-
  ed and disciplined.
• 130 live lectures are done in a week.
• It helps faculty members and students to adapt technology easier.
• To solve every technical problems and to use visual technology in better ways; system administrators, tech-
  nical team, call-center operate R&D continuously.
• It helps to reach a wide audience of education, speeds up development process of information society.
• It increases competition between universities. Therefore it encourages the quality growth in education.
• One of the strongest aspect of this program is, high brand value of Istanbul University faculty members
  causes distance education programs being preferred.

Weaknesses
• It is a new system in Turkey.
• Some of the faculty members are against this education system.
• Because of the use of multiple-choice exams, comment questions can not be asked like in classical exams.
• Faculty members can not use any conviction notes about the performance of the students in class. (passing
  grade initiative can not be used)
• Problems caused by sufficient knowledge of system and problem solutions.
• Faculty members and students who do not know enough to use the technology.
• Some students might have a lack of adequate technical opportunities (Microphone, camera, etc.).
• Deficiency of internet, possible power failure and the lack of technological infrastructure that may occur.
• Faculty member can not have eye contact on students. Also communication can not be done by body lan-
  guage.
• Students can not be checked whether they listen or not.
• It causes faculty member to feel like he/she has been talking to him/herself.
• Students’ lack of intrinsic motivation about following the lectures can cause planning problems for the stu-
  dents who do not have study habits.
• Students can not have a constant contact with faculty members. Also they can not live in a classroom atmo-
  sphere, and being unable to live in a campus.
• System can cause passive watching like happens in TV.
• Lots of number of students can cause communication problems.
• Faculty members try to teach 3-4 hours needed lectures in 50 minutes.
• Some lectures –economics, econometrics, statistics- that needs problem solving and computer laboratory applications; applications cannot be done and time is limited.
• System doesn’t fit to all programs that especially need intensive application and laboratory study.
• Notes may not be collected from some of the faculty members on time.
• Possible quality decreases might outcome because of lecture notes that has been wanted from faculty members in a short period of time. It can be counted as one of the defects of this program.
• System expands the responsibility and course loads of faculty members, increases the administrative burden.
• There is a chance to pass the lecture documentaries and exam questions into the hands of unauthorized and malicious people.

Opportunities

• Provides equality of opportunity in education.
• Provides education of Istanbul University quality to the employees, students with limited economic opportunities, housewives, disabled people, prisoners, people who want to continue their academic career, students who don’t prefer to stay away from their families, teens inhabited in non-university cities, expatriates, middle age and upper middle age people, school-girls not allowed to be educated in metropolitan universities in their locations.
• Provides the opportunity of both working and studying.
• Formal education doesn’t allow students to have the opportunity of working as well as the distance education students could have the work experience and could continue education at the same time.
• Students may be helped to reduce the material and spiritual problems.
• Associate degree, undergratuate and master of education programs are available under distance education at Istanbul University.
• Students, who have a certain GPA, may make the transition from distance education to formal education in accordance with legislations.
• Provides the same opportunities of having a diploma received from formal education. (Without specifying the type of the education, graduates are given the Istanbul University program diploma).
• Distance education students graduate as more well equipped in terms of technological know-how than the formal education students.
• Provides a significant increase in revenues of education which is the most important item of income in universities.
• Increased university income is reflected by the faculty members teaching in distance education as economic opportunities.
• Students can follow the courses with his/her family and friends. Thus, the society as a wide audience is reached and their level of knowledge is increased. This is the most effective way for the formation of information society.
• Increases the professional satisfaction of faculty members, creates opportunity to meet with the new student profiles.

Threats

• Common internet threats can be a problem in this area as publication of each transaction is provided through the general computer networks. For example, course notes may be changed, course materials and passwords can be stolen, exam questions can be changed, the viruses can be sent or entrance to the system may be blocked.
• Applying the mid-term exams on the internet may pose a risk.
• System is quite open to be abused if it is not well planned. Someone instead of the real student may disrupt the flow of the lecture by entering the system and by asking questions out of the curricular, and may also take the exam instead of the student.
• Students may lack in terms of cultural interaction and friendship relations.
• May cause students to have socialization problems.
• Students may not have opportunities for psychological and sociological development.
• Health problems may occure due to long-term use of computers.
• Employment problems can lead to an increase due to the increase in the number of graduation.
• It may be a threat to formal education if this model of education is well-settled. Traditional education may be kept in the background. In the presence of distance education with formal education together, formal education graduates may have inequality of competition in terms of job opportunities.
• It may be a threat for Istanbul University if the quotas do not increase.

Conclusion and Proposals

As a result, distance education is providing traditional formal education to masses interactively, for the purpose of creating a knowledge society and lifelong education through internet, independent from time and space. It is a new and open horizon education and teaching system and concerned as web-based in the era of information technology.

After analyzing SWOT we notice that from our point of view strengths are more than weaknesses, opportunities are more than threats. Although the system is very new in Istanbul University its application is successful. However since this is a new program we will be able to see its advantages only after graduation. Distance education is a section between traditional education and open education. Distance education serves the philosophy of life-long learning and the detection of problems and constructing the infrastructure needed will take time.

Our proposals are mentioned below:
• The system should be designed for each department’s specific features. The technical staff should work in coordination with the scholars.
• More staff and a more professional structuring are needed.
• The activities should comply with the Bologna Process.
• The staff and scholars should be trained consistently.
• The success of this type of education should be measured after the graduation of the first students.
• All examinations might be conducted online however the security measures should be tightened.

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