Turkish Open Education Faculty Students' Perspectives About Distance Teaching of "The Principles of Ataturk and the History of Revolution" Course

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate and determine the perspectives of Open Education Faculty students about teaching and learning the "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" course at a distance. A survey was given to 124 voluntary students who were enrolled in various distance education programs. Results of this study indicated that taking the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolutions" at a distance made students develop their research skills and use information and communication tools faster. Another finding of the study is that open education faculty students mostly use printed materials rather than audio and video materials in the course. Without making interaction between student and instructor, learning levels of students are affected negatively. However, using the internet effectively may provide positive interaction between student and the instructor.

Keywords: distance education; the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution; open education faculty

Abstrak

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji perspektif pelajar Fakulti Pendidikan Terbuka tentang pengajaran dan pembelajaran kursus "Prinsip Ataturk dan Sejarah Revolusi" secara jarak jauh. Seramai 124 orang pelajar daripada pelbagai program pendidikan jarak jauh secara sukarela telah menjadi responden. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan kursus "Prinsip Ataturk dan Sejarah Revolusi" secara jarak jauh telah meningkatkan kemahiran penyelidikan dan penggunaan alat komunikasi maklumat dengan lebih cepat di kalangan pelajar. Dapatan kajian juga mendapati lebih ramai pelajar menggunakan bahan bercetak daripada bahan audio dan video. Tahap pembelajaran mempunyai kesan negatif apabila tidak wujud interaksi antara pelajar dan pengajar. Namun begitu, penggunaan internet yang lebih efektif dijangka dapat memberi interaksi yang lebih positif antara pelajar dan pengajar.

Kata kunci: pendidikan jarak jauh, prinsip Ataturk dan sejarah revolusi, fakulti pendidikan terbuka

Introduction

Distance Education (DE) is a kind education providing educational opportunities in some areas for people who are not able to attend in face-to-face education. The main characteristic of DE is that learners and given instruction are in different places. Because of this characteristic of DE, education can be provided at any place, time and date. Therefore, popularity of distance education programs has been increasing recently. Instructional activities can be held at predetermined times via technological tools and devices, even though instruction and the students are in separate places. Besides this main characteristic, some other important characteristics of DE have been mentioned by Verduin and Clark (1994) in Agaoglu et al., (2002) as follows:

1. Special media devices are used to connect learners and teachers and to communicate the course content.
2. Special data procession and communication devices are benefited to provide two-way communication between the learners and the teachers.
3. An effective educational management is established for student assessment.
4. Moreover, followings are main quality features of DE listed by UNESCO (1987).
5. DE is a product of work for providing alternative educational opportunities.
6. Various teaching environments are activated such as printed tools and mass communication devices create the most common teaching environment.
7. DE has a systematic structure that the most important feature of DE is that teaching procedures are ordered in a systematic way.
8. DE systems are expanding with the student support services, so students who are away from the instructor may need support from the instructor sometimes.

According to Kaye (1981) there are three main factors influencing the emergence of student communities attending DE activities. The first one is the demand for higher education that cannot be covered by traditional higher education institutions. In order to cover this demand Distance

Education approaches have been adopted in many countries. Second factor is the demand for educated human force in some important fields. This kind of demand can only be covered in an effective and cost effective ways by Distance Education. Third factor is the potential of Distance Education Institutions for providing education to the people who could not have educational opportunities in the past by some reasons.

According to Ruzgar (2004), some of the benefits of distance-learning systems used by institutions and corporations are:

1. Cost effectiveness of distance education; distance education enables companies and corporations to train more people, more often, and with reduced travel costs. In addition, when distance education systems are already in place, adding new students may not increase cost at all.
2. Effectiveness and productivity of distance education; through live and interactive programs/courses with multiple sites interconnected for group learning, learners can be given current knowledge and skills while they stay at their worksite.
3. Quality through distance education; by using distance education technologies, access to remote experts around the country and indeed around the world can be made possible, bringing information from the original resources into the classroom. Connecting many students from different sites with instructors/ experts allows the exchange of perspectives on the subjects so that new ways of looking at problems, productivity, motivation, etc. can be achieved (p. 22).

Technological infrastructure has been discussed by some researchers as the heart of the quality of Distance Education. For example Ozkul (2001) emphasised the importance of the infrastructure by stating that a high-quality infrastructure of telecommunication and information technology is needed for a powerfully built distance education system.

As Yazici, Altas and Demiray (2001) mentioned, different technologies for Distance Education have been expanding increasingly in order to make Distance Education a practical option for many higher education institutions. They also stated that via printed materials, televisions and

current interactive technologies Distance education provides a communication between student and instructor. According to Bates (1998), as an instructional tool, television has potential to give positive motivation by drawing the students' attention. It allows instructors to reach a large mass of students simultaneously. The most unique feature of television is its capability to deliver information to the students which is not quite possible with other devices.

Author also stated that this is a significant opportunity for students who were not able to receive higher education at an institution. According to Liu (2002) recent innovations in hardware and software technology all around the world has positive effects on the development of distance education technology. Instructional television (ITV), web-based instruction (WBI), a hybrid of ITV and WBI Currently, and web-enhanced instruction are some examples of up-to-date technologies used in distance education and some of them provide face-to-face communications between instructor and the students. Sherry (1996) also gave examples of popular distance education media as e-mail, bulletin board, web pages, tele-conferencing, and video-conferencing.

About "The Principles of Ataturk and the History of Revolution" Course

Subjects in "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" course exist in social science, Turkish and life science courses under the units about Kemalism in 1−7 grades during elementary education. These subjects are included in the course named "History of Republic of Turkey and Kemalism" in grade 8 in elementary school and grade 3 in high school. The course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" are given 2 semesters in the first grade of all the programs in Universities. There exist interaction and communication between students and the instructor in the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" taking place in face-to-face classrooms. This is very important point since students may have opportunities to ask questions to the instructor immediately. In addition these students have chances to see, read, and evaluate various course materials. Therefore it can be said that these students are luckier comparing to students in Open Education Faculty.

Aims of the history of revolution should be taught to students both in distance education and in face-to-face education. According to Safran (2006) these aims are:

1. Introducing the principles of Ataturk to new generations,
2. Making new generations to adopt the principles of Ataturk,
3. Adapting the principles of Ataturk according to new conditions,
4. Comparing the revolutions of Ataturk with modern revolutions,
5. Providing power to fight against all harmful ideologies,
6. Growing new generations who will form social justice,
7. Providing national consciousness and conceit,
8. Informing youngster about national history.

> While Emiroglu (2006) stated "*it can be seen that the course of History of Republic of Turkey and Kemalism and other history courses are formed around two central purposes no matter the grades in which these courses are given. These purposes are historical consciousness and citizenship consciousness*", Safran (200) said "*with the course of the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution, it is aimed to make youngster develop positive attitudes towards the fundamental philosophy of Turkish revolution, republic regime and the principles and revolutions of Ataturk*".

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate and determine the perspectives of Open Education Faculty students' about teaching and learning the "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" course at distance. Specifically present study was conducted to identify types of materials students used while following the distance education course and to identify strategies and skills students developed during distance education.

Method

Population (universal set) of the study was all Open Education Faculty students residing in Adiyaman. Sample of this study was consisted of 124

voluntary students who were enrolled in various distance education programs offered by Open Education Faculty.

A survey was given to the participants in order to identify the students' perspectives. Survey was consisted of 22 likert type items, 2 items for obtaining demographic data such as age and gender, 5 open ended items. Likert type items have 3 categories (Agree, Partly Agree, and Disagree). Items in the survey were prepared after reviewing existing literature and distance education documents. Items were reviewed by experts. SPSS 11.0 package program was used for organising the data which were presented in frequencies. In addition percentages were also provided by using descriptive statistics.

Findings

Table 1 Gender

	Frequency	Percentage
Male	76	61.3
Female	48	38.7
Total	124	100.0

Of all the participated students 61.3% were male and 38.7% were female.

Table 2 Age

	Frequency	Percentage
20–25	24	19.4
26–30	56	45.2
31–35	8	6.5
36–40	20	16.1
41 and over	16	12.9
Total	124	100.0

As seen in Table 2, 45.2% of the participants were between the ages of 26–30. When considering that 19.4% of the participants were between ages of 20–25, it can be obviously said that 64.6% of all the participants

were at the age of 30 or below. Most of the students (71%) said that they were interested in history course (Table 3).

Table 3   Interested in history course

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	88	71.0
No	36	29.0
Total	124	100.0

Table 4   Reason attend in open education faculty

	Frequency	Percentage
To make a career	56	45.2
To obtain a promotion	48	38.7
Due to the family pressure	12	9.7
To postpone military service	8	6.5
Total	124	100.0

As seen in Table 4, 45.2% of the participants stated that they attended in open education faculty for making a career and 38.7% of participants attended for obtaining promotion in their professional career.

1. During the preparation for final examinations at what rank do you put the preparation to final exam of the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" in terms of importance.
   Rank (8) 6.4%, rank (11) 8.9%, rank (48) 38.8%, rank (36) 29%, rank (13) 10.5% and rank (4) 3.2%. 38.8% of the participants stated that they put the preparation to final exam of this course in the third rank and 29% of the students put it in the fourth rank.
2. What are the materials do you use for following the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" (you can mark more than one option) A. printed text (104), B. Audio (37), C. video (26), D. other materials (75).

As seen in the above results, during the distance education process, open education faculty students stated that they mostly use printed materials and

other materials rather than using audio and video materials in the course of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution".

Table 5   Web sites used

Mark the web sites that you used to receive distance education "You can mark more than one web sites"	Frequency
Middle East Technical University Institute of Informatics: http://www.ii.metu.edu.tr/emkodtu/ and http://ion.ii.metu.edu.tr/	1
Beykent University "Distance Teaching Technologies Research and Application Centre": http://www.beykent.edu.tr/	1
Sakarya University -Internet Supported Teaching: http://www.ido.sakarya.edu.tr/	13
Selcuk University Distance Education Program: http://www.selcuk.edu.tr/suzep/	8
Istanbul Technical University -UZEM: http://sariyer.cc.itu.edu.tr/~uzem/	1
Anadolu University Open Education Faculty: http://aof.anadolu.edu.tr/	108
Ministry of National Education World Links Project (World Links for Development Program): http://www.meb.gov.tr/PROJELER/worldlinks/worldlinks.htm	2

It was seen in Table 5 that students participated in this study mostly used the web site of Anadolu University Open Education Faculty to get help in the web followed by web sites of Sakarya University and Selcuk University. Twelfth students did not mark any of the given websites.

Table 6   Students' perspectives

	Agree		Partly Agree		Disagree	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
During distance education I learned the subjects in the course of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" easier.	48	38.7	24	19.4	52	41.9
During distance education I learned the subjects in the course of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" by following television programs.	28	22.6	24	19.4	72	58.1
During distance education I learned the subjects in the course of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" from web sites related to distance education.	28	22.6	24	19.4	72	58.1
During distance education I learned the subjects in the course of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" at private tutoring centre easier.	20	16.1	28	22.6	76	61.3
During distance education I learned the subjects in the course of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" by following text books.	101	81.4	15	12.1	8	6.5
I had difficulties in learning the subjects in the course of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" no matter what materials I used since lack of motivation.	20	16.1	28	22.6	76	61.3
Questions in the exam of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" are based on memorisation.	72	58.1	20	16.1	32	25.8
During distance education I learned the subjects in the course of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" by memorising.	40	32.3	40	32.3	44	35.5
In the text books prepared for distance education, questions related to "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" are very similar to each other.	36	29.0	48	38.7	40	32.3
I would like publishers to prepare CDs including subjects and questions related to "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" for exam preparation.	80	64.5	36	29.0	8	6.5
During distance education I would like the course of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" included more current subjects.	104	83.9	12	9.7	8	6.5
I believe that exams of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" course do not measure student knowledge properly.	52	41.9	44	35.5	28	22.6
During distance education I would like to ask questions about the course of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" to instructors.	84	67.7	12	9.7	28	22.6
I would be more successful if I have taken the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" in face-to-face education.	80	64.5	20	16.1	24	19.4

Continued on next page

Table 5 (*continued*)

	Agree		Partly Agree		Disagree	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
I have put more effort on "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" course comparing to other courses.	56	45.2	16	12.9	52	41.9
I reached the materials about "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" course easily.	48	38.7	40	32.3	36	29.0
I saw that the content of the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" was not different from the subjects that I learned in secondary and high schools.	32	25.8	60	48.4	32	25.8
I cannot follow the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" since I have difficulties in using Internet.	36	29.0	20	16.1	68	54.8
I developed self study skills since I have taken the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" as distance education.	48	38.7	40	32.3	36	29.0
Taking the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" at distance made me use information and communication tools faster.	56	45.2	44	35.5	24	19.4
Taking the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" at distance made me develop my research skills.	36	29.0	44	35.5	44	35.5
The course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revaluations" increased my general knowledge.	68	54.8	44	35.5	12	9.7

According to Table 6, the number of students who agree with the statement "During distance education I learned the subjects in the course of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" easier" are more than the others. The rate of the students who disagree with this statement is 41.9%. 58.1% of the students agree with the statement "During distance education I learned the subjects in the course of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" by following television programs". In addition, 58.1% of the participants disagree with the statement "During distance education I learned the subjects in the course of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" from web sites related to distance education". Of all the students, 61.3% disagree with the statement "During distance education I learned the subjects in the course of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" at private tutoring centre easier". 81.4% of the participants stated that they learned the subjects in the course of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of

revolution" by following text books during distance education. It is obviously seen that students learned the subjects in this course mostly from text books. 61.3% of the students stated that since they have well motivated in the course, they had no problems in learning the subjects in this course no matter what materials they used. 58% of the students stated that questions in the exam of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" are based on memorisation. In response to the statement "During distance education I learned the subjects in the course of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" by memorising" most of the students stated that they did not learn the subject in the course by memorising.

Similarly, most of the students agree with the statement "In the text books prepared for distance education, questions related to "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" are very similar to each other". 64.5% of the students stated that they would like publishers to prepare CDs including subjects and questions related to "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" for exam preparation. 83.9% of the students would like the course of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" included more current subjects during distance education. 41.9% of the students believe that exams of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" course do not measure student knowledge properly. 35.5% of the students also partly agree with this statement. 67.7% of the students would like to ask questions about the course of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" to instructors who created the questions. 64.5% of the students believed that they would be more successful if they have taken the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" in face-to-face education. While 45.2% of the students stated that they have put more effort on "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" course comparing to other courses, 41.9% stated that they did not put more effort on "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" course comparing to other courses.

It is seen that while 38.7% of the students reached the materials about "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" course easily, 29% had difficulties reaching the materials. While 48.4% of the participants stated that they partly agree with the statement "I saw that the content of the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" was not

different from the subjects that I learned in secondary and high schools", 25.8% of the students said that they agree with the statement and 25.8% of the students said that they disagree with the same statement.

Considering this result it can be said that the notion "history subjects are over repeated" is still usual. 54.8% of the students stated that they disagree with the statement "I cannot follow the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" since I have difficulties in using internet".

However, 29% of the students stated that they cannot follow the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" since they have difficulties in using Internet. 38.7% of the students stated that they developed self study skills since they have taken the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" as distance education. 32.3% of the students stated that they partly developed the self study skills. While 45.2% of the students stated that they agree with the statement "Taking the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" at distance made me use information and communication tools faster", 35.5% partly agree with this statement. While 35.5% of the students stated that taking the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" at distance did no make them develop their research skills, 35.5% of the students stated that they partly develop their research skills and 29% stated that taking the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" at distance make them develop their research skills. While 54.8% of the students stated that the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" increased their general knowledge, 35.5% of the students stated that the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" partly increased their general knowledge.

This result indicated that the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" is playing important role on development of students' general knowledge.

Discussion and Conclusion

Although, as can be seen in the Kaye's (1981) study, in early 1980s most of the students attended in the distance education were between ages of 20 and 40, in this study, it was found that the 64.6% of the participants were

between ages of 20 and 30. This indicated that the age attendance got lower over the past two decades.

Study indicated that most of the participants (83.9%) attended in distance education programs have career proposes. Thus it can be said that these students were well-motivated as they continue in their programs of study by using the opportunity to take education.

In this study, it was found that most of the students used text books as the only material. Although distance education, as mentioned by United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA: 2009), is delivered by means of various tools such as internet, television broadcast, audio and video materials, most of the participants in this study did not use these resources. Saglam (1999) in his study indicated that using audio and video materials provide students effective studying strategies.

Students participated in this study stated that they would like to ask questions to the instructors about the subjects and they also stated that they would be more successful if they have taken this course face-to-face education. As it can be seen here, in distance education, since there is no interaction between students and the instructors all the time, immediate feedbacks cannot be received As Ispir (2003) stated, there is no opportunity for students to facilitate the lesson in distance education.

For this reason, if the technologies used in distance education have well quality to help forming an interaction, students would receive feedbacks much quicker.

According to the results of this study, students stated that they generally;

1. Could not learn "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" during distance education easily,
2. Put more effort on "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" comparing to other courses,
3. Did not have difficulties to learn the subjects in "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" no matter what resources they used.

4. Thought that questions in the exam of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" needed memorisation,
5. Would like to see CDs including subjects and questions related to "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" for exam preparation,
6. Would like the course of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" included more current subjects during distance education,
7. Would like to ask questions about the course of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" to instructors, who created the questions,
8. Believed that taking the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" at distance made them use information and communication tools faster.

In addition, students participated in this study believed that they developed self study skills since they have taken the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" as distance education.

Students stated that taking the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" at a distance make them develop their research skills.

Students believed that exams of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" course did not measure their knowledge properly. One of the interesting findings in this study is that a relatively important portion of the participants stated that they followed the web sites related to distance learning. According to student responses the course "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" was seen as one of the first studied course during the exam period compared to other courses.

Implications

1. The curriculum of "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" prepared for students in Open Education Faculty should be expanded by including more current subjects.

2. Web based instructions should be more widespread and students should be informed about these technology.
3. CDs including subjects and questions related to "the principles of Ataturk and the history of revolution" and other courses for exam preparation should be created and distributed with text books if possible.
4. Questions should be prepared as not requiring memorisation of concepts and forcing students to make comments and use reasoning skills.
5. Instead of a kind of history course in which students can pass the exams by memorising, the history course that takes an effective role on growing individuals who adapt national and universal consciousness and values can produce democratic and peaceful solutions can be more effective and permanent.
6. Without making interaction between student and instructor learning levels of students are affected negatively. However, using the internet effectively may provide positive interaction between student and the instructor.

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