Open and Distance Learning Opportunities and e-Learning Services in Turkey

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Abstract

This study analyzes the open and distance learning opportunities at various levels starting from primary education to bachelor’s education offered to individuals having needs for education and tries to determine the potential for using e-Learning in the Turkish open education system as a whole evaluating the e-learning experiences at Anadolu University Open Education System between 1999-2007.

Key Words: open and distance education, e-learning

Introduction

Open education is one of the ways of offering equal opportunity in education to people who cannot find the opportunity to get face-to-face education for different reasons. People may prefer open education because they are working, they have physical disabilities, they are imprisoned, they cannot leave their home because there maybe people they are responsible for caring, they do not meet the age criteria put by traditional universities, they are doing their military service, or because of low income. In addition, housewives, the ones who would like to get a second degree, and the ones who live abroad prefer open education.

Since students at open education system may not participate in traditional face-to-face education, the most frequently used teaching method that is used in the open education is ‘distance education’. The distance education was based on teaching via letter and newspaper many centuries ago, and technologies such as telephone, radio, and cinema were also used in this century. Education via television made Open Education famous today, and new distance education establishments were created in 1980’s in many countries using the experiences of the Open Education of England, which was opened in 1960’s.

Turkish National Education System

The Turkish National Education System is composed of four steps as the pre-school teaching for 0-6 age group, primary education for 6-14 age level, high school for 14-18 age group and higher education for the age of 18 and above. The primary education, which lasts five years, was obligatory to 1997, and since 1997 the length of the obligatory education has become eight years for 6-14 age level. The length of high school was increased three years to four years in 2006 (OSYM, 2007) (Fig. 1).

Institutions Offering Open and Distance Education in Turkey

The open education system in Turkey has been started by the Anadolu University as a central application in Higher Education in 1982. In the first year, 29,000 students were enrolled in two programs, and today, students are accepted to 15 associate degree and 7 graduate level programs on the basis of students’ grades in the open education system. 1,100,000 students are enrolled in the Anadolu University Open Education system, and more than 900,000 of those students are active. More than 45% of those students study in the Anadolu University.

The right to offer open education in Turkey at associate and bachelor’s level in from a specific center has been given to Anadolu University. Anadolu University offers this service via three faculties and a center (AU, 2007).

- Open Education Faculty (Open Associate and Open Bachelor’s Degree)
- Faculty of Business Administration (Open bachelor’s education)
- Faculty of Economics (Open Bachelor’s Education)
- Applied Research Center for Continuous Education (Open e-Certificate Education)

The Open Education High School system was started in 1992 by the Ministry of National Education (MNE) for students who are above the secondary education age. Today, the open high school has more than 300,000 students and more than 275,000 of them are active. The Open Primary School system was started by the Ministry
of National Education in 1997 for the ones who could not complete their primary education and adults who are above the compulsory primary education age level so that they can receive education everywhere and in all circumstances through distance education principles and techniques. The Open Primary School has more than 250,000 students, of which more than 100,000 are active. The basic instructional materials in the Open Primary School and Open High School that depend on the Ministry of National Education are the course books and television/radio programs. The Vocational Open Education High School that use distance education and face-to-face education methods has been started by the MNE in 2006 and today more than 78,000 students are enrolled in Industrial Vocational High Schools, Imam and Preachers’ High School, Vocational Girl’s High School and Trade Vocational High School. The MNE Vocational and Technical Open Education School was established in 1974 and offers distance education for certificate. Nearly 70,000 individuals graduated from the Vocational and Technical Open School have been given a document stating that they are authorized to work as electricians (MNE, 2005, 2007).

Figure 1. Turkish National Education System

The open education institutions within the MNE are conducted by the General Directorate of Educational Technologies (EGITEK, 2007) (Fig. 2).

The aim of the Turkish National Open Education System is to offer education from primary education to bachelor’s education mostly to individuals who could not be involved in the on-campus education system or who were excluded from the system.
Other than the Open Education System, 8 universities in Turkey have Internet-based associate degree, bachelor’s degree, and master’s degree programs. Those schools are inspected by the Distance Education Commission within the Higher Education Council. Since the acceptance terms for those programs are the same as the acceptance terms for face-to-face programs and the education is offered according to the laws for face-to-face education, they cannot offer a real open education. Therefore, they are not included in the scope of this study.

- Anadolu University (1 Associate, 3 Master’s programs)
- Middle East Technical University (1 Master’s programs)
- Sakarya University (5 Associate, 1 Master’s programs)
- Mersin University (4 Associate programs)
- Çukurova University (1 Associate program)
- Gazi University (2 Associate programs)
- Maltepe University (3 Associate, 1 Master’s programs)
- Bilgi University (1 Master’s program)

Options for Entering to the Open and Distance Education

In Turkey, individuals are offered open education at primary, secondary and higher education levels. Acceptance to the Open Primary and Secondary Education are supervised by the MNE and acceptance to the Open Higher Education is conducted by the Student Selection and Placement System (SSPS) organized by the Student Selection and Placement Center (OSYM, 2007). Two types of placements are available for the SSPS open education programs: a) Graduates of the vocational and technical high schools can be placed to the open associate degree programs related to their field without taking any exams. b) Individuals receiving 160 score and more in the Student Selection Exam can be placed into any open associate and bachelor’s program without any quota. The ones who cannot be placed into any program by the Student Selection and Placement System can be enrolled in Open Education e-Certificate programs and receive education to get a certificate.
There are five ways of being accepted to the open education in Turkish education system.

1. Individuals who could not complete their face-to-face primary education can go to the open primary school.
2. Individuals who completed their primary education can go to the open education high school or vocational high school.
3. High school graduates and individuals who could not be placed into a higher education program by the Student Selection and Placement System can be enrolled in open e-certificate programs.
4. High school graduates and the ones who obtain 160 or higher score in the Student Selection Exam can be placed to an open associate degree or bachelor’s degree program. The ones placed to the on-campus associate degree or bachelor’s program can transfer to the open education system through “vertical transfer”, “bachelor’s degree completion”, or “second university” opportunities.
5. Graduates of vocational and technical high schools can be placed to the open associate degree programs by the SSPS. The ones placed to the on-campus associate degree programs without taking an exam and having sufficient requirements can transfer to the open education system through “vertical transfer”, “bachelor’s degree completion” and “second university” opportunities.

The road maps offered to individuals to enter to the open education system are explained in the following sections.

Open and Distance Education Opportunities for Individuals Over 15 Year of Age

Individuals who could not continue their education after the first five years or who could not complete their face-to-face education can register in the 6th, 7th or 8th classes of the Open Primary School. The ones who complete the Open Primary School receive a primary school diploma. They obtain the right to go to the Open Education High School and Vocational Open Education High School (Fig. 3).

Figure 3. The open and distance learning opportunities for individuals over 15 year of age.

Individuals having the qualifications below can apply for the Open Primary School (OPS, 2007).
- Individuals who started the age of 15;
- 5-Year programmed primary school graduates;
- Individuals who finished the 5th class of the primary schools and who left from the 6th, 7th or 8th class;
- Adults who completed reading-writing courses of the public education centers;
- The ones studied abroad and having equivalence for the 6th, 7th or 8th grade.
- If they meet one of the conditions mentioned above, the ones who prove that they are imprisoned or physically handicapped and the ones who prove that they need special education through a document that can be received from the Special Education Services Committee can apply.

Open and Distance Learning Opportunities for Individuals Who Completed Their Primary Education

Individuals who cannot receive face-to-face education in secondary education institutions can register in the Open Education High School, Vocational Open Education High School or Vocational and Technical Open Education School. The ones graduated from the Open Education High School are considered as the graduates of a general high school, and graduates of the Vocational Open High School are considered as if they graduated from a vocational high school (Fig. 4).
Individuals having the following qualifications may apply for the Open Education High School (Grades 9, 10, 11, 12) (OEHS, 2007):

- Graduates of primary school/secondary school,
- The ones who left from the general high school programs within MNE or other ministries,
- Individuals who left from Anatolian Fine Arts High School, Sports High School, and Social Sciences High School,
- Individuals studied abroad and having the requirements mentioned above.

Individuals having the following qualifications can apply for a Vocational Open Education High School (grades 9, 10, 11, 12.) (VOEHS, 2007):

- Primary/Secondary school graduates,
- Individuals who left from secondary schools within MNE or other ministries or graduates of those schools.
- Individuals who studied abroad if their education level stated on the equivalence document meets one of the conditions mentioned above.

Vocational and Technical Open Education School (VTOES, 2007)

- It is an institution that teaches professions to individuals graduated from a primary school or higher level schools and that uses distance education or face-to-face education when necessary.

**Open and Distance Education Opportunities Offered to High School Graduates and Who could not be placed to Higher Education by SSPS**

Graduates of general high schools or vocational and technical high schools can be accepted to open e-Certificate programs organized three times a year and taught using distance education methods if they cannot be placed to university as a result of the centrally conducted student selection and placement exam (ECP, 2007) (Fig. 5).
Anybody possessing a secondary school or higher level diploma can apply for the open education e-certificate programs. Twenty-two certificate programs are available for the time being.

**Open and Distance Learning Opportunities for High School Graduates and Individuals Placed to a Higher Education Program by SSPS**

Graduates of open general or vocational and technical secondary school and who receive at least 160 score and higher in the SSE (student selection examination) conducted by the SSPS can be placed to open associate and bachelor’s degree programs. The ones who have been placed to face-to-face associate degree or bachelor’s degree programs can transfer to open education thanks to ‘vertical transfer in open education’, ‘bachelor’s degree completion in open education’ and ‘second university in open education’ opportunities.

Those individuals are offered different opportunities depending on whether they are placed to open or face-to-face programs or open vocational or bachelor’s degree programs by the SSPS. Those opportunities are examined in the following sections (Fig. 6).
a) **Placement to the Open Associate Programs by the SSPS**

In the 2007-2008 academic year, students are accepted to 15 open associate degree programs via the SSPS.

Individuals placed to those programs receive an associate degree diploma when they complete those programs. Those graduates can register in an open bachelor’s degree program suitable to them through vertical transfer opportunity and either directly continue the program or after studying one year in the preparatory class.

Vertical transfer to the Open Education System is realized without taking an exam. Open education students can continue to the on-campus bachelor’s degree programs if they obtain a required score in the vertical transfer exam. In this study, the priority is given to the open education opportunities offered to individuals and hence not all the on-campus education opportunities are examined.

b) **Placement to the Open Bachelor’s Degree Programs by the SSPS**

In the 2007-2008 academic year, students will be accepted to 7 open bachelor’s program.

Individuals who completed the first two years of the open education bachelor’s degree programs and left the program can find the ‘bachelor’s degree completion’ opportunity. This bachelor’s degree completion is available for many associate degree programs. Individuals completing the first two years of the universities offering face-to-face education and leaving the program after receiving an associate degree diploma can complete their ‘bachelor’s degree’ in the open education system.

Individuals can obtain a bachelor’s degree via either vertical transfer or bachelor’s degree completion.
c) Placement to the On-Campus Associate Degree Programs by the SSPS

Individuals placed to an on-campus associate degree program can register in the open bachelor’s degree programs thanks to the ‘vertical transfer’ opportunity after completing the program and receive an associate degree diploma. While studying in an associate degree program or after their graduation from such a program, individuals can enroll in open associate degree programs and can enroll in an open bachelor’s degree program via vertical transfer after completing the program.

d) Placement to the On-Campus Bachelor’s Degree Programs by the SSPS

Individuals who are placed to an on-campus bachelor’s degree program can register in open bachelor’s degree programs after receiving their associate degree diploma after completing the first two years thanks to “bachelor’s degree completion in open education” opportunity. While they are studying in a face-to-face bachelor’s degree program or after graduation, individuals can register in open associate or bachelor’s degree programs thanks to “vertical transfer in open education” or “bachelor’s degree completion in open education” opportunities.

e) Case Of Not Being Placed To On-Campus Education Institutions By The SSPS

Candidates who could not be placed to face-to-face programs by the SSPS can be accepted to a program they like if there is free place offered by SSPS. Additional placement can be done to the open education programs without quota restriction. People can register in an open associate degree or bachelor's degree program using this opportunity.

Open and Distance Learning Opportunities Offered To Vocational and Technical School Graduates

Graduates of vocational and technical schools are placed to an associate degree program in their field in the Anadolu University Open Education System without taking an examination, which is an application organized by the SSPS (Fig. 7).

![Figure 7. Open and Distance Learning Opportunities Offered To Vocational and Technical School Graduates](image)

Individuals who completed the open vocational school can transfer to an open bachelor’s degree program using the ‘vertical transfer in open education’ opportunity.

Thanks to all these opportunities, people who could not start or complete their face-to-face education can get the opportunity to complete their education. Individuals who complete their education thanks to open education can continue their face-to-face education at a higher level if their success level is enough. The ones who cannot manage to pass to face-to-face education can continue to study through open education until they receive a bachelor’s diploma. Individuals receiving a diploma from an open bachelor’s program have the right to enter a face-to-face master’s or doctoral program if their success level is sufficient. Opportunities such as “additional placement to open education programs by SSPS”, “transfer to open education programs without examination by SSPS”, “vertical transfer in open education”, “bachelor’s degree completion in open education” and “bachelor’s degree completion in open education” and “second university in open education” adds flexibility to Turkish Open Education System and enhances the transfer opportunities between face-to-face education and open education.
e-Learning in Open Higher Education

The initial design of the open higher education system of the Anadolu University includes five components i.e., course books designed according to distance education techniques, instructional programs broadcasted in the national television channel, face-to-face academic facilitation courses given at evenings and week-ends, central examinations organized simultaneously in all cities, and bureau services offered to students. Since 1999 a series of e-learning services has been designed and offered to students in the Internet environment. The first service in the Internet environment was the trial exams composed of randomly chosen questions. This service later was entitled as e-Exam. Then e-Practice materials, interactive multimedia software, including text, picture, animation, and voice, have begun to be offered. The following service was e-Book that was actually electronic copies of the course books published on the Internet. The e-Television service, i.e., publishing the digital video files of the instructional programs that are published on the Internet, has begun as a result of the developments in the Internet infrastructure in the country and increase in the number of students having broadband Internet access. In the following period, e-Consulting service that allowed students ask questions to the subject area specialists and receive reply asynchronously was offered. In the same period, the e-Audio Book service, which means publishing radio-phonically vocalized digital audio files of the course books on the Internet, has begun. For all those services, the e-Support application that allows students to get help from experts about technical problems via the Internet has been put into practice. Those services that were developed by different teams at different times were combined under the name of Open Education e-Learning Portal in 2005. This allowed students to access all services once they log in. In 2006, a multimedia e-Course design that included text, picture, animation, voice, and video has developed and courses have begun to be developed according to this design for large number of students. Video presentations based on the Flash Video technology are used in this design that requires a larger Internet band width than other services (Mutlu and Ozkul, 2006).

Various e-learning environments have been designed for each course in the Anadolu University, Open Education e-learning system and hence students having different learning styles are offered different options so that they can use the most suitable learning environments for their needs. Such an approach allows creating teams having different types of production processes and allows those teams to design and develop various learning environments that are parallel to each other.

Although it was not compulsory students use the Anadolu University e-Learning Portal frequently. In the e-learning portal where more than 2 million students including graduates have the right to log in using their TR identity numbers, more than 635,000 different students logged in more than 19, 5 million times between May 2005-September 2007. During this time period, 1.146 million hits and 163 TB data transfer occurred. The average visit time was observed as 26 minutes. Research shows that students using e-learning services are more successful than the ones who do not use it.

Anadolu University e-Learning Portal is the largest portal of Turkey in terms published content and the copy right of the content belongs to the university, in terms of the number of users accessing this content and in terms of the number of access. Anadolu University owns the server and band width infrastructure that is able to offer those services to 50,000 students at any time and 500,000 different students in a day. This capacity is expected to double in one year.

e-Learning in Open Primary School and Open High School

e-Learning services belonging to Open Primary School, Open High School, Vocational Open High School and Vocational Technical Open School is offered by EGITEK unit which has been found for this purpose by the ministry. EGITEK prepares the following e-learning materials for students enrolled in Open education institutions within the ministry (EGITEK, 2007).

- PDF files of the courses are accessible on the Internet.
- Television-radio programs are sold in cassette and CD format.
- Television programs are published on the Internet via the Internet-TV service.
- Radio programs are broadcast on the Internet via the Internet-Radio service.

Anadolu University and Ministry of National Education should coordinate so that e-Learning experiences of Anadolu University are evaluated by the MNE and for the production of e-Courses for MNE open education institutions and for the design of projects to deliver those courses via a learning management system.
Conclusion

In the open education system of Anadolu University 1,100,000 students are offered e-Exam, e-Book, e-Television, e-Practice, e-Facilitation, e-Support, and e-Voiced Book services while 628,000 students in the MNE open education schools are offered only e-Book and e-Television services. EGITEK should take the initiative to diversify and increase the e-learning services offered in MNE open education institutions. This will help offer an effective continuous open education to individuals from primary school to university. Investigating the national open education systems of other countries will allow to prepare the inventory of open education opportunities offered to individuals.

References

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