Distance Education: An Overview of Distance Education in Turkey
Sule Yilmaz
18 January 2008

Abstract

Distance education is a major instruction system that provides broad education. This paper introduces the distance education, overviews its history and examines distance education; especially the Open Education Faculty which is the most important institution in Turkey. In addition, statistics about usage of Internet and computer, last improvements about distance education, and attempts in online education in Turkey are also analyzed.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. What is Distance Education?
3. History of Distance Education
4. Distance Education in Turkey
   a. Open Education Faculty
   b. Evaluations on Open Education Faculty
   c. Usage of the Internet in Educational Purposes in Turkey
   d. Online Education Initiatives in Turkey
   e. Last Improvements in Turkey about the Distance Education
5. Conclusion
6. References

Introduction

Education has been an important issue for every society for being civilized because education provides people to improve them and thus the nation becomes developed. Especially, in today’s knowledge society, education is the one way to develop for a country. The purpose of education is to supply people to gain essential skills which access information, interpret it, utilize it, and make creations by using it. One who received education which reached these purposes become a potential procreative resource for promote his own nation and all humankind. In time, education and educational tools have changed with technologic developments, and it continues to change.

At the present time, education has become a delivery server which can be received from anywhere and anytime by means of distance education. This service executes more extensive education.

Applications of the distance education have been continued from 1840 (Matthews, 1999), and it is modified in many processes till now. It started from correspondence and developed into online education with assistance of technology. In Turkey, the implementations of distance education
have started much lately compared with the more developed countries. Although Turkey has realized enormous improvements in distance education applications as especially founding the Open Education Faculty and lastly attempting online undergraduate programs, it has stayed behind the improvements in the developed countries.

Turkey should seriously concern about education, because it has a huge young population, and the population continues to grow rapidly. Over half of the Turkey population is below the median age. However, according to Human Development Reports which published by UNDP in 2008, in Turkey, the illiteracy rate of the age of 15 and the higher ages is % 11.9. These people could not receive education because of many obstacles. Distance education might be a great opportunity for these people.

One another educational issue for Turkey is that many people have not opportunity to attend a university because the population of people who desire to attend a university is much more than the student capacity of universities. Students have to take a test that happening once a year in order to enter a university. According to the statistics made by Turkish Statistical Institute (2007), nearly 1.8 million students take the test but dramatically only 400 thousands of them have a chance to attend a regular university, and approximately 200 thousands of them attend the Open Education Faculty. It is obviously seen that using distance education systems would be easy and affordable than founding universities to provide more students to attend a university.

Content

What is Distance Education?

Distance education is a bridge in order to assemble instructions and students at asynchronous times from any location and reduce education divide. This bridge is constructed by many forms of technological tools which have been developing in time as technology advance. Matthews (1999) stated that these forms have been started by “mail, facsimile, radio, television, satellite broadcasts, videotapes, teleconferencing and, most recently, the Internet” (p. 54). Distance education creates a chance for people who could not register or complete a school because of many reasons including financial, location and health problems. According to another source, the definition of open and distance learning is “A way of providing learning opportunities that is characterized by the separation of teacher and learner in time or place, or both time and place; learning that is certified in some way by an institution or agency; the use of a variety of media, including print and electronic; two way communications that allow learners and tutors to interact; the possibility of occasional face-to-face meetings; and a specialized division of labor in the production and delivery of courses” (Inoue, 2007, p. 26). Namely, purpose of distance education is increase the quality of education, facilitate it, and expand it as possible. Shih and Hung (2007) described distance education as “an integration of information technologies, computer hardware systems, and communication tools to support educational professionals in remote teaching” (p. 1). The USDLA definition is "The acquisition of knowledge and skills through mediated information and instruction, encompassing all technologies and other forms of learning at a distance" (Rockwell, Schauer, Fritz & Marx, 1999, para. 2). The definition of the distance education will change in time because form and content of its application has been changing with technological developments.
In the distance education, students play a dynamic role in communication, teachers guide students, designer groups facilitate technology, directors plan and implement process of education (Isman, Dabaj, Z. Altinay, F. Altinay, 2004). Also the distance education provides flexible education environment which facilitate receiving education; however, lack of in-person education creates some obstacles. Furthermore, “cost, motivators, feedback and teacher contact, student support and services, alienation, lack of experience and training” are the other obstacles which can be faced (Isman et al., 2003).

**Content**

**History of Distance Education**

The background of distance education endures more than 1.5 century. Researchers have endeavored on distance education in order to expand education to increase literacy rate, forward instruction to people who has no opportunity to receive education, enhance the quality of education, and spread out the higher education for years. In the length of time, technology has assisted distance education to design more advanced and qualified distance programs. Last decades researches show that online education is the foremost method in distance education with advanced technological tools. Recently, online education applications have intensified and accelerated.

The first distance education launched with exchange of letters by mail in 1840. Sir Isaac Pitman set forth this opinion to convey large-scale of addressees. The Unites States, United Kingdom, Germany, and Japan had comprehensive programs in a time period of ten years. The first department of teaching by mail was found at the University of Chicago around 1900s. In 1911, the University of Queensland, in Australia, set up a Department of External Studies. In 1969, founding of British Open University in United Kingdom was the second turning point for distance education (Matthews, 1999). The Open University created new concept for distance education. The Open University has increased the prestige of distance education and it affected other countries, especially the USA and Japan. They started to design more developed distance programs (Nasseh, n.d.). The British Open University was sending materials which include composed texts, audio, and video resources with formal (conventional) radio and television (Matthews, 1999). Courses were observed nearby and conveyed to more than 100,000 students effectively (History, n.d.). After opening the British Open University in 1969, within twenty years, four open universities in Europe, and over twenty universities in other countries were found. The expansion of distance education by correspondence has continued following decades. The Open University and other open universities ensured that implementation of distance education had been expanded (Matthews, 1999).

The number of students who enrolled a distance program and university that provide distance program has enlarged in the following years. For instance, in the mid-1980s, over 300,000 students registered for university distance education courses in the United States. The Open University in 1994 had over 200,000 students was from Russia, Slovak republics, the Czech, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary. Since 1997, in many countries the amount of undergraduate students who have registered for a distance program increased to 10-14 % of the all undergraduate students. Moreover, in some cases the ratio has been 39-40 % (Matthews, 1999).
Online learning is a newly invented distance education. More than past decade online education has developed vastly. In the twentieth century, advanced technology enables untraditional educational systems. World Wide Web and increased internet access and its quality facilitate to reach these education systems in higher education for people all over the world. According to a survey made by the United States Education Department, number of registration for distance education courses increased “from 750,000 in 1994-1995 to 2.9 million in 2000-2001. Forecasted income is scale “from $550 million in 1998 to $11.4 billion in 2003” (as cited in Li & Irby, 2008). As it is seen; the statistics show that distance education becomes more important day by day.

Content

Distance Education in Turkey

As a developing country and having a great deal of young population, universities have not enough places for all students in Turkey and founding new universities would cost much for Turkey. In addition it is hard to find a university gives education in Turkish in the foreign countries. Because of these reasons a distance education system was set up by the Turkish government (Isman, 1997). Besides these, distance education provides a chance to obtain education for people who is not enabling to go to school because of several reasons. Some of these people are workers, disabled people, people who live far from a university, and low-income people. The distance education might be a vital solution for increasing the level of educated people in Turkey.

First attempting for distance education started in 1927 in Turkey, however it did not go beyond discussions. Until 1956 (1927-1956), this period called “period when the distance education merely remained an idea” (Demiray, 2007, p. 279). The first implementations of distance education started at Ankara University in the Faculty of Law (Research Institute of Bank and Trade Law) by teaching staffs in the banks via correspondence in 1956. The Center for Education through Letters was found by depending on National Ministry of Education in 1961 with the aim of fulfilling secondary education without joining class for people who would like to complete their secondary education. These initiatives proceed until 1966 (Demiray, 2007). In 1974-1975 academic years a correspondence program was launched by Ministry of National Education; however the program failed because universities in Turkey did not support enough the program and politics of the government on education was poor (Isman, 1997). In 1981, Turkish government launched a campaign to expand literacy rate through nationwide. Television was used as an educational tool in this attempt. The campaign accomplished the purpose by providing significant rise in the literacy rate (Usun, 2003). At that time, Turkish Higher Education Council ensured a facility to instigate distance education at universities in Turkey (Usun, 2004a). After these years, approaches for distance education have started to be more scientific, efficient, and professional than before (Usun, 2004a).

Two distance education constitution were formed by the agency of the Ministry of National Education: Open High School and Open Education Faculty.
Open High School (OHS) is a broad secondary education program and has been administrating since 1992. The aim of this form is to provide an opportunity to complete secondary school for people who could not. This program supplies a high school diploma. The curriculum of OHS is the same as the curriculum of ordinary high school. The materials for OHS are “textbooks, newsletters, bulletins, television and radio broadcasts” (Usun, 2003). According to the 2008 statistics which produced by Turkish Statistical Institute, approximately 6% of the primary and secondary school students obtain their education with OHS.

Content

Open Education Faculty

Insufficient capacity of universities has been an important problem of Turkey for years because excessive amounts of applicant for a college could not go to a college. In the developing process Turkey has needed to expand the education, especially higher education, throughout the country. To meet this need, a great deal of initiatives has been started. The Open Education Faculty (OEF) is one of them. The OEF is the most significant milestone in terms of the distance education in Turkey. It has provided increasing the rate of educated people. It has became popular in Turkey because inadequate number of university, financial problems of many students, and the numerous of workers who demand education. The OEF is also the main institution where many researches are done on the distance education system of Turkey.

In 1982, Open Education Faculty (OEF), the first university faculty of distance education in Turkey, was founded at the Anadolu University. The OEF consisted of two undergraduate programs called business administration and economics and 29,445 students were first registered to these programs (Usun, 2004a). These programs were expanded to foreign language, nursing, science, math, tourism, teacher training and training for private sector in the following years. OEF has three colleges which are Business School, School of Economics, and College of Open Education. They offer 28 two and four year programs. The first degree students of the OEF started to courses on December, 1982 and they graduated on November, 1986 (Usun, 2003). Until today 850,000 students register the OEF. It has 35% of the higher education students in Turkey (Open Education, 2004). At first, education in the OEF was sustained with printed materials, television programs, face-to-face lectures in some universities and cities. Afterwards, “radio programs, video education centers, newspaper, computer centers, CD-ROMs, and various “e” applications such as e-books, e- exams, e- essays, e- TV, e-academic counseling, etc” have been used for instructional purposes at OEF (Demiray, 2007, p. 280). These materials are prepared by the faculty of Anadolu University Open Education Faculty (Isman, 1997).

Today, the OEF continues to provide educational facilities in order to expand the level of education for people who could not have a chance or cannot register a university for different reasons (Anadolu, n.d.). It has been proceeded to give distance education to students by means of radio, television, correspondence, computer, and internet and it has spread out among Turks in Turkey, Europe, and Northern Cyprus (Isman, 1997). Materials contain a diversity of media tools. Textbooks are sent to the students, television programs are made, and academic support via internet and teleconference were realized (Anadolu, n.d.). The Open Education System of Anadolu University forms e-learning applications: “internet based tutorials, self-tests, drills and practical assignments” (Open Education, 2004).
Although the Open Education Faculty was founded as a faculty of Anadolu University, now it is the largest faculty of Turkey. On the word of the World Bank, Anadolu University is the largest university on earth. It has regional offices that provide academic services all over Turkey (Usun, 2003, p. 8). In addition, Usun (2004a), in his article, stated that Turkey has observable and distinctive status among the other countries as basing John Daniels’s book *The Mega-Universities and the Knowledge Media*. In this book, Turkey was described “as having one of the 10 largest distance education institutions in the World” (Usun, 2004a, p. 262).

**Content**

**Evaluations on Open Education Faculty**

Many researches and evaluations about Open Education Faculty and its system published both in Turkish and English in its 15 years history. Several of them were master or doctorate thesis written by Turkish researchers, and some of them were written by foreign observers and researchers who had visited Turkey (Usun, 2003, p. 8). Some of them are following below.

Usun, in his article, analyze distance education system in Turkey, especially Open Education Faculty (OEF) in terms of four forms of interactions: “(a) learner-content interaction, (b) learner-instructor interaction, (c) learner-learner interaction, (d) learner-technology interaction” (Usun, 2004a, p. 127).

Learner-content interaction depends on independent learning of students with printed materials, radio and television broadcasts, and academic counseling in OEF (Usun, 2004a, p. 127). The OEF offers text materials which integrate with media broadcasting (Usun, 2003, p. 6). These materials are created by academic members of Anadolu University regarding distance learning techniques and principles. In OEF, 85% of the learning consists of studying from the textbooks (Usun, 2004a, p. 127). Textbooks have founded the most informative tools by the several of the first year students in OEF. The reason why they think textbooks are the most useful tool is that education system in Turkey mostly traditional and they are the most common material in educational process. However, some of them think that purely studying textbooks is not providing complete interaction with the content (Usun, 2004a, p. 127). Media broadcasting, especially TV and radio are also used in the distance education. As said by a study, although students are generally watching OEF’s TV course programs, broadcast hours of the programs are not enough for students to improve their learning.

Radio that started to be used in distance education programs in 1973 is another useful tool in the OEF. A researcher suggested a model about using educational radio programs with other instructional tools in teaching for Anadolu University Open Education Faculty. The model emphasizes that the content of radio programs and other materials should be consistent and broadcast hours of radio programs should be convenient for students.

Video has started to be used in instructional process around 1980s in spite of contrasting thinking. In a study, the role of video in the distance education process in OEF was experienced. According to the findings, using video had increased the success of students in the learning process 45-60 points more than before. The Video Education Centers were constituted in many
cities in Turkey in order to facilitate accessing the video programs for students of the OEF (Usun, 2004a).

Some Math and History lessons offered with CD-ROM software which includes television programs, and electronic books designed by Department of Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) of Anadolu University Open Education Faculty. These lessons are improved asynchronously by diverse teams. According to a study, OEF students consider that CD-ROM software is more effective and functional than other materials like academic counseling, television, and textbooks (Usun, 2003).

According to Usun (2004a), problems on learner-content interaction can be summarized like; forceful individual learning, association between text materials and TV broadcasting, ease of access and appropriate broadcast of radio and TV, support of Video Education Service in OEF.

Learner-instructor interaction means that the instructor uses some techniques and ways to motivate and inspire students. Learner-instructor interaction in the Open Education Center consists of lectures weekly in Lecture Theater in university and halls in cities and towns on weekends and in the evenings. According to a study in 1987, small amount of the OEF students had attended these lectures. However, today, this kind of lectures is seen as an important chance in terms of providing interacting between student and instructor and attendance of these classes has increased. Also, 55 cities have Academic Counseling Centers in order to provide instructors and academic advisors from local university faculty for assisting the students for once a week. Nearly four-fifth of the OEF students can benefit from these centers. These centers also have other services such as videos, newspapers, and extra official services for students. The duty of professors is clarifying difficulties for students (Usun, 2004a, p. 127). OEF students can contact with officers via visiting, calling, and exchange letters. The problem areas of learner–instructor interaction in distance education system are; using technological tools like TV, video, radio, and internet for interaction of learner-instructor, arranging appropriate time for lectures and scarcity of participation to lectures (Usun, 2004a).

Learner-learner interaction means that “interaction between one learner and other learners, alone or in group settings, with or without the real time presence of an instructor” (Usun, 2003, p.5). Students are required to memorize and recite from texts in Turkish education system. Therefore, learner-learner interaction is not typically comprised by Turkish distance education system. Conversely, OEF students interact with each other on their work sites, at lectures, and exterior courses (Usun, 2004a, p. 131). It is likely that collaborative learning can be promoted with new technological tools while teacher oriented education decline. Also, interaction between students advances with computer-mediated communication that contain “e-mail, computer conferencing, electronic bulletin boards, and the Internet as discuss and share resources” in Turkey (Usun, 2004a, p. 131). The main problem on the learner-learner interaction in Turkey is that remaining behind following current technological improvements, software for advancing collaboration and interaction between students. (Usun, 2004a).

Learner-technology interaction means that “interaction between the learner and the technology or technologies used in distance education courses” (Usun, 2004a, p. 133). Researchers discussed that technological tools have to be used in learning process to enforce communication with the content. Of course, it could not be expected that students will be familiar with a technological tool when they take a class in which used technology. They need time to feel comfortable with
them. In this process, they are more likely to display indecisive and diffident behaviors. After obtaining enough skills to use these tools, they start to concentrate the content and partake in activities and interact with other students and the teacher. While distance education attends to integrate with more advanced technology, students become more interact with the technological tools. In Turkey, learner-technology interaction is not generally included in distance education (Usun, 2004a). The most important problem on the learner-technology interaction in the OEF is that the distance education system in Turkey needs an advanced information technology and telecommunication substructures. (Usun, 2004a, p. 136).

Usun (2004a), in his article, put forward some models to improve these four types of interactions in Turkish distance education. While the instructional creator asks a different kind of questions to learn what they need in the designing process, founded on the answers, the designer makes decision about strategies of teaching. Figure 1 illustrates this process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Context</th>
<th>Influences responses to</th>
<th>What is the need?</th>
<th>To decide</th>
<th>Design</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Who are the learners?</td>
<td>-objectives</td>
<td>-objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What is the task?</td>
<td>-Sequence</td>
<td>-Sequence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What are the resources</td>
<td>-strategies</td>
<td>-strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-evaluation</td>
<td>-evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-technologies</td>
<td>-technologies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.** Model of cultural influences on interaction in distance education (Source: Usun, 2004a, p. 134)

Murphy claims that when this model is followed, quality of distance education in Turkey will improve. In addition, implementing interactive technologies and instructional strategies, like telecommunications, assist to enhance learner-instructor and learner-learner interaction in distance education (as cited in Usun, 2004a, p.134).

Furthermore, Usun (2004a) offered some strategies for improving the distance education system in OEF; culture, economy, politics, context, and social factors must be considered when distance education programs design; expense, usefulness, accessibility, cooperation, flexibility, inspiration should also be considered in designing process; Video Education Centers should be improved for learner-instructor and learner-learner interactions; OEF should use current technologies as enhance cooperative learning and text materials should be prepared more convenient for students and sent by more common ways and been more appropriate with radio and TV broadcasts (Usun, 2004a). In Open Education Faculty cultural and sociocultural context of students has influenced four types of interactions (Usun, 2003).

Dillon and Blanchard notice that motivation or confidence of the learner is one of the significant factors to increase success of the learner (Usun, 2003). In lack of students’ motivation, interaction with the instructor or a tutor could be beneficial. Group supports might be helpful for less confident learners. Learners in distance education system can take advantage from group
works because Turkish sociocultural context based on group ethos. In addition, males and females status and roles in society are different and it should be taken care of in terms of accomplishment in the Open Education Faculty (OEF). “The males generally expected high marks, while the females either expected low marks or did not speculate” (Usun, 2003). Appropriating the sociocultural context is important to provide more suitable support systems for students in the distance education system (Usun, 2003). For this reason, it is more appropriate that researchers who are in the designing process of distance programs should know cultural context and students who live in this culture.

Learner-content, learner-instructor, and learner-learner interactions depend on progress of learner-technology interaction because currently the distance education systems actualize with technological tools. When students’ competency of using technological tools improves, they will be more effective in the other interactions. Students generally contact with each other and instructors with internet, also students interact with content by using technological tools besides reading textbooks. Pre-training programs about using technological tools would be helpful for students to understand the content. Also these programs might promote students’ motivation.

**Content**

**Usage of the Computer and Internet for Educational Purposes in Turkey**

Turkey has met computer and internet technologies lately and mostly imports the technology. Turkey has still problems on inadequate usage of computer and internet, especially in rural areas. It is the core trouble because it does not seem likely to expand distance education sufficiently without technology. The Ministry of National Education attempts several projects but the problems need to be handled totally.

The first network connection was founded in 1990 in Turkey. Many universities were major user of through the first six years. The internet was started to be used by nearly all branches of business, education, and health since 1996. Even though several initiatives for integrating the Internet into the curriculum of prime and secondary school from the half of the 1990, nearly none of them was achieved because of “slow working, highly bureaucratic, and centralized organization of the Ministry of National Education” (Usun, 2004b, p.265). Nevertheless, students use the Internet in order to communicate with their foreign peers and manage data searches for their homework in some private schools.

In 1984, the Ministry of National Education initiated a project called Computer Assisted Education (CAE). The major elements of this project are designing and incorporating curriculum, creating and improving software, training teacher, obtaining hardware. In the 1985-1986 academic years, for this project, 1,111 computers were ensured for 101 high schools, and two teachers of each school were instructed for five years. In 1989, the Ministry of National Education asked some companies and universities to participate the project. 28 companies including 17 local and 11 foreign participated. Although the CAE project started from 1984 to 2002, it could not make sufficient improvements and reach its purpose exactly. In 1993, The Ministry of National Education launched a project called Computer Experimental Schools with economic support of the World Bank. 53 specially prepared schools for facilitating education
placed in diverse location of Turkey. Another project was “Project for Globalization in Education 2000” supported by the World Bank in order to monitor new improvements of the information age and utilize educational technologies in all grades of the education system and finally obtain a culture which adjusts standards of the information and technology. Computer labs were set up in 2,451 schools in 80 cities and 921 towns by the agency of this project. In the classrooms a variety of technological tools used like scanners, office programs, courseware, video, projector. In addition, the computer companies offer free one year access of internet within the project. The second part of this project continues with 3000 schools. Turkey has agreed to apply some principles in order to keep up with the century of 21. Supporting official education by means of distance education was one of the principles (Usun, 2004b).

In 1992, there were an application that a computer-mediated distance education between the Turkish Open University and American universities (University of Mexico, the University of Oklahoma, Florida State University, Arizona State University, and the University of Wyoming); Turkish and American students took some courses by means of this implementation in Turkey (Usun, 2004a). In some educational institutions and mostly open universities tend to moderate web-based educational programs. Yet, some of them offer on-line certificate programs. For instance, Anadolu University has attempted to offer alternative online courses for students who are on-campus student of the university to experiment that it is effectual and achievable (Usun, 2004a).

One of the most important educational problems of Turkey is digital divide and it plays a negative role in the development of distance education. If this divide is bridged to provide expanding the usage of computer and the access of internet, the distance educational applications will grow instantly. To close the divide, financial supports and invests should be made by the government and also private sectors. The government should also provide budget as much as developed countries to reach their technology and educational level. Besides these, to provide doing more research studies in universities accelerate developments in education. For the best way of making progress in distance education is that ensuring technological tools which integrate with culture and education system.

Usun (2004b), asserted main problems about the Turkish distance education system; extreme number of students, inadequate number of classes, utilize computer technology in an effective way, using communication tools in a proper way, nonexistence of projects to improve distance education technologies, shortage of in-service training for updating information about present technologies, financial limitations, incompetence of resources, efficient support system for students, use one-way technology, appropriate and accessible television and radio broadcasting, insufficient joining of lectures (Usun, 2004b).

Content

Online Education Initiatives in Turkey

Most of open universities and educational institutes tend to design web-based educational programs in Turkey. Some of them provide degree or certificate programs. Anadolu University has offered online self-test programs to its distance students from 1998 (Usun, 2004b). In
addition, Anadolu University provided two-year online certificate program in 2000-2001 academic years. Materials relevant the lesson, software, digital video, books, academic counseling service, virtual class break, support, exams have been offered (Usun, 2003).

A governmental foundation called the Higher Education Council (YOK) founded a committee named the National Informatics Committee (EMK) in order to assist universities to share instructional reserves; to enhance quality of education with regard to using technological tools designed by information technologies; rise performance and accessibility of higher education; and finally create a virtual university in Turkey (Usun, 2004b).

As compared with developed countries, Turkey is in the primary stage of utilizing Internet for educational purposes (Usun, 2004b). Research by Aydin and McIsaac (2004) supports Turks are not utilizing the current technological improvements in communication. For instance, usage of Internet in Turkey is not as effectively and efficiently as other developed countries. Aktan claims that Turkey is not sufficient regarding to access computer and Internet, export technology, and contribute to the scientific developments throughout the world in comparison with the five most developed countries (Aydin & McIsaac, 2004). As indicated by World Bank (2002), in developed countries, the rate of computers for each of 1000 people is 500, however, in Turkey it is just 38. In the United States, around 100 million people have Internet access; meanwhile in Japan around 50 million people have Internet access. When it comes to Turkey, according to recent informs, the rate of household computer in Turkey is yet 25 %, and most of these computers do not have Internet access. There is around 3% of the population enrolled for Internet, and just 7% of the population has Internet access in their home. The rest of enrolled is in work, or internet cafes. The ratio of having computer in primary and secondary schools in Turkey is just 17%. “The ratio of computers to pupils is 1 to 81 among primary and secondary students- quite a bit lower than the world average of 1 to 45 students” (Aydin & McIsaac, 2004). In addition, according to a study (2002), the majority of these schools have no or restricted Internet connection. In spite of in higher education the number of computer is more than in primary and secondary education, it is insufficient. The main reasons which cause these consequences are ineffective and insufficient infrastructure, deficient legislation, and financial troubles (Aydin & McIsaac, 2004).

According to the 2008 statistics which produced by Turkish Statistical Institute, a government agency, 24.47 % of household have Internet access, and the ratio of usage computer among the age group 16 to 74 is 38.1 % while the usage of internet among the age group 16 to 74 is 35.8 %. The highest ratio of computer and internet usage is among people who have higher level of education with respectively 87.9 % and 87.2%. The purpose of the usage internet is mostly reading newspaper and magazine. 76 % of the people use internet for reading newspaper and magazine, 74 % is using to send and receive e-mail, 69.7 % is using for instant messages, 65.2 % is for downloading or listening to music. In addition; there is a big gap between the ratio of usage computer and internet by urban people and rural people. Figure 2 illustrates the rate of usage computer and internet as comparative rural and urban regions.
Figure 2. The Ratio of Computer and Internet Usage.

Content

Last Improvements in Turkey about the Distance Education

Besides Anadolu University Open Education Faculty, there are other universities which are offering online degree and certificate programs for over ten years. Some of them; for example, Middle East Technical University (METU) and Bilgi University have offered numerous of online certificate programs about computer competency and English language education (Usun, 2004b). Also they have provided a two-year online e MBA degree program (Demiray, 2007). The videoconferencing system was created by Bilkent University in 1996 and Istanbul University in 2000 (Usun, 2004b). In addition, Firat University offers distance training programs through Firat TV which is a local television. Sakarya University began to work on distance education applications (Demiray, 2007). It is the first time in Turkey that online undergraduate programs, computer engineering, industry engineering and the administration of human resources, started at Sakarya University in the 2008-2009 academic years. 70% of the courses are online, remained courses are made in class. These initiatives are a huge progress for Turkey.

Nevertheless, many of these attemptings are at the early phase of improvement on distance education and they are mostly restricted certificate programs and online courses except the last improvements in a few university. Although nearly all Turkish universities have web pages, and they use it commonly, there are not sufficient studies on using internet for instructional purposes (Demiray, 2007). As the literature of the distance education in Turkey is overviewed, there are not enough study on distance education in terms of theoretic and ethic, and according to Demiray (2007), many researches and studies should be done.
Conclusion

Distance education creates different ways and opportunities in order to transmit education to people by breaking out the bonds by aid of technology. Being knowledge society and necessity of expanding education, information and delivery systems of information are gaining more importance as time passes. Distance education ensures expanding education to offer instructions to people who are not able to obtain education because of various reasons with the advantage of limitless location and time; and it helped to actualize more wide educational purposes.

Although implementations of the distance education in Turkey began much more later than the developed countries because it were not supported and invested sufficiently, applications have been increased and advanced in time. The most fundamental improvement for Turkey was that founding the Open Education Faculty which is the first and biggest distance educational foundation of Turkey, and it has played a significant role in expanding higher education. The applications of the distance education system in Turkey have developed with technological improvements in time. Instructors and students, who considered that printed materials, are helpful in former applications because of familiarity of traditional education, started to benefit from technologic tools as adapting technologic developments. Rapid growth in computer and internet use has ensured that progress of the distance education accelerates in recent years. Particularly, a few university offer online undergraduate programs in 2008 illustrates the point that Turkey has come.

Turkey should raise quality of its education and number of educated people in order to increase its level of growth. It should invest in distance education practices and technologies and increase researches on distance systems. Primarily, the portion of education from the budget should be upgraded and infrastructure investments on technology and education should be expedited. Developments on computers and internet technologies, which integral parts of the distance education, should be followed closely and made essential adjustments. Access and utility of internet should also be raised. Private sectors that design educational software and educational institutes that offer distance education should be supported. Lastly, to actualize all these progresses, education models that compatible with Turkish sociocultural context should be formed and most importantly, Turkish researchers who are familiar with Turkish education system and culture, professional on distance education, follow technological developments closely should be educated and supported. The improvement of distance education in Turkey will be the best with contributions of Turkish researchers.

References


**Content**