

# Distance Education - Public Policy and Practice in Higher Education: The Case of Türkiye.

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## ABSTRACT

The paper presents a review of the past, current and future situation as regards the use of Distance Education (DE) in Higher Education (HE) in Türkiye (Turkey). The emphasis of the paper is on the development of distance education technologies in higher education institutions in Türkiye. The nature of the distance education programs, regulations, and funds are summarized. Anadolu University Open education Faculty program is highlighted as an example or model for developing countries who intend to integrate distance education technologies into their education systems.

## RESUMO

O presente artigo revê a situação do passado, presente e futuro do uso da Educação a Distância no ensino superior na Turquia. A ênfase do artigo é no desenvolvimento de tecnologias de educação a distância nas instituições de ensino superior na Turquia. A natureza dos programas de Educação a Distância, seus regulamentos e financiamentos são sumarizados. O programa da Anadolou Open University para professores é destacado como um exemplo ou modelo para países em desenvolvimento que pretendem integrar, aos seus sistemas educacionais, as tecnologias de Educação a Distância.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta una revisión del la situación pasada, presente y futura del uso de la Educación a Distancia en la educación superior en Turquía. El énfasis del artículo esta enfocado en el desarrollo de las tecnologías de la educación a distancia en las instituciones que ofrecen educación superior en Turquía. La naturaleza de los programas de educación a distancia, sus regulaciones y formas de financiamiento están resumidos. El programa para el profesorado de la de la Universidad Abierta de Anadolu se resalta como un ejemplo o modelo para países en desarrollo que intentan integrar tecnologías de educación a distancia dentro de sus sistemas educativos.

## Introduction

Being educated is very important, especially for developing countries like Türkiye. Therefore, improving the resources that are used to provide education opportunities is the best way to be able to become a developed country. Since resources are limited and insufficient to provide conventional education opportunities for every Turkish citizen, providing distance education opportunities is an alternative solution to increase the overall level of education provision. Prof. Dr. Ali Ekrem Ozkul, Dean of Anadolu University Open Education Faculty in Turkey, emphasizes that:

"As a developing country with considerable economic and cultural potential, education is a vitally important issue for Turkey. Parallel to population growth, the demand for all types of education is increasing whereas the resources such as schools and teachers are limited and not possible to reach adequate levels in a short period of time. Therefore it seems quite difficult for Turkey to achieve an overall education level required by a modern society using conventional educational approaches and techniques."(Ozkul, 2001).

In Türkiye, the Ministry of National Education is responsible for all educational services rather than just higher education. All higher education institutions and universities are connected to the Council of Higher Education (YÖK). YÖK is responsible for planning, coordinating and policy making of the activities of the higher education institutions (Ozkul, 2001).

Students who are in their last semester in high school and people who have a high school diploma can take a university entrance exam to be able to be admitted to higher education programs. The university

entrance exam is a nation-wide test exam administered by the Student Selection and Placement Center (ÖSYM) once a year. Around 1 400 000 high school graduates took the test and only about 280 000 of them were admitted to conventional higher education institutions in the 1998-1999 academic year (Ozkul, 2001). Admissions to conventional higher education institutions are very competitive because of the limited number of universities, instructors and resources that are necessary to supply the demand for conventional education. Therefore, open education and distance education (DE) admissions are alternatives to increase the number of students in higher education (HE) and provide education opportunities to students who have to work and adults who want to improve their knowledge and skills in their jobs.

Anadolu University Open Education Faculty integrated the major distance education opportunities in higher education in 1982, and became one of the mega universities of the world in the distance education field (Ozkul, 2001). According to the 1997 census, the rate of participation in higher education, including open education, is 22.4 %, and about 35% of the higher education population is in the Anadolu University distance education system (Ozkul, 2001). The Open Education Faculty was organized as a faculty body, which runs the system on behalf of Anadolu University, but it is now Turkey's largest faculty. In this manner, Anadolu University, is now the largest university, with over 240.000 students, of which only about 18 000 are conventional campus-based students of faculties in Anadolu University (Demiray, 1990).

Open and distance education regulations are also provided by YÖK in the higher education level. On the other hand, the Ministry of National Education has provided open primary education schools and open high schools to students who could not complete the basic and secondary educations since 1992. These open and distance education opportunities contribute to provide equal opportunities in education to all Turkish citizens as a predominantly government financed activity. The support of the Turkish government for distance education technologies is an important factor that helps to develop, implement, and evaluate the open and distance education opportunities.

The most commonly used technologies have so far been based on textbooks and other printed materials, television and radio broadcasts, and academic counseling centers in Anadolu University Open Education Faculty. Videotapes and face-to-face lectures in local universities to open education students are also provided throughout the country (Yazici, Altas, & Demiray, 2001). The assessment method of the open education system is based on multiple choice type examinations that are offered in a variety of locations in big cities and larger towns (Yazici, Altas, & Demiray, 2001). Broadcasting services have been carried out by the state owned Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) Corporation. In 1994, Internet counseling services started to be used. In 1995, computer assisted instruction was implemented. 'Local computer Web', 'Internet Web System', 'Satellite Communication System' and 'Video-Conference System' are some of the technologies that have been put into service since 1997 (Agaoglu, Imer, & Kurubacak, 2002). In addition to these technologies, Anadolu University has launched the Open Education 2000 Project to implement communication and informatics technologies to reach students via the Internet (Agaoglu, Imer, & Kurubacak, 2002).

## **1. The role and nature of DE in HE**

All Turkish citizens want to take all opportunities to access formal education and also lifelong education opportunities in this developing country that has limited resources. There is a high demand for university diplomas and having a job is extremely competitive in the economic conditions of the last twenty years in Türkiye. Therefore, distance education has become very popular in Türkiye especially at the higher education level. There are political, economical, social and cultural factors that influence the acceptance and growth of distance education in higher education (Demiray & Mclsaac, 1993; Usun, 2004). Distance education programs provide education opportunities to the young population who want to continue higher education and to adults who want to update their knowledge and get a university diploma. Demiray (1990) emphasizes that the Open Education Faculty's significance lies not only in making higher education available to adults who can only obtain it through study in their spare time, but also in the variety of teaching methods used.

The authority for the regulation of higher education belongs to the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), which is an independent national board without political and governmental affiliation. YÖK regulates the law of higher education and the integration of distance education into higher education institutions (Bologna Declaration, 2003). All state and private universities and other higher education institutions are under the supervision of the YÖK. The definitions of some categories of universities and other higher education institutions in Türkiye are as shown below (Bologna Declaration, 2003):

Faculty: An institution of higher education conducting high-level education, scholarly research and publication; sub divisions may be attached to it. It may be divided into various departments.

4-Year Higher School: 4-year higher school institution, which is mainly concerned with providing instruction for a specific profession.

2-Year Vocational School: An institution of higher education carrying out two-year education programs aimed at training manpower in specific areas.

Second Education: A higher-level education, which offers two-year and four-year conventional education in the evenings in the university buildings.

By the 2002-2003 academic year the number of students registered in Bachelor's or Associate's programs conducted in higher education institutions are given in table 1 (Bologna Declaration, 2003):

Table 1: Students in Bachelor's or Associate's programs in 2002-2003.

Formal Education		The Number of Students
Faculties (552)		1.394.656
4-year Higher School (175)		61.104
2-year Vocational School (446)		323.971
TOTAL		1.779.731
Second Education	Bachelor's	155.565
	Associate's	124.208
TOTAL for Second Education (**)		279.773
Open University	Bachelor's	421.215
	Associate's	240.639
TOTAL for Open University (***)		661.854

(\*\*): This number has already been included to the total number of 1.779.731.

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At the undergraduate level higher education is provided by 53 state universities, including 2 state higher institutes of technology, and 23 private universities (Bologna Declaration, 2003). Some of the universities started to integrate distance education technologies via web into their programs in the last years. However; Anadolu University Open Education Faculty has offered a unique open and distance education system with a large variation of distance education technologies since 1982. There are 13 Associate's level (2-years) and 7 Bachelor's level (4-years) departments offering distance learning for approximately 800.000 students in the Anadolu University Open Education Faculty (Bologna Declaration, 2003).

### Accepted concepts and definition of DE

DE provides educational opportunities for everyone, at any place, time, date or age while teachers and learners are far away from each other. DE requires special teaching and communication methods and organizes the course curriculum by considering common characteristics of learner groups and the characteristics of media used to deliver instruction. DE in Open Education means that students have access to the course textbooks, use media such as watching pre-recorded course videos from television or computer, study by themselves, and take test exam from each course. DE is typically integrated by using one-way media such as printed materials, television and radio broadcasts, videocassettes, and software programs. Using electronic mail and computer conferencing for advising/tutoring supports the one-way delivered course.

### Institutions that provide DE in HE

Anadolu University is the only institute in Türkiye offering a full program of distance higher education, as part of the mission of raising the nation's overall educational level. Although Anadolu University Open Education Faculty (OEF) has integrated the major distance education opportunities in higher education since 1982, the discussions about distance education started in 1927 focusing on how to increase the

literacy rate among the citizens (Usun, 2004). The important dates and decisions in the growth of distance education are summarized in table 2 (Agaoglu, Imer, & Kurubacak, 2002; Demiray, 1990; Demiray & Mclsaac, 1993; Demiray & Akyurekoglu, 1997; Kocak & Kalender, 2002; Ozkul, 2001; Usun, 2003; Usun, 2004; Yazici, Altas, & Demiray, 2001).

Table 2: The history of the growth of Distance Education in Türkiye.

Years	Events
1927	First discussions of distance education to achieve an increase in the literacy rate among the citizens.
1956	The first distance education project was initiated at the Research Institute of Bank and Trade Law, Faculty of Law, Ankara University. The bank employees were educated through correspondence by mail.
1961	The Centre for Education through letters (by correspondence) was established as a sub-organization of Ministry of National Education.
1966	Advanced Teacher Education School through letters (by correspondence) established.
1975 & 1978	"Education Through Letters" was implemented but required efficiency and success were not attained to establish an "Open University".
1982	Anadolu University Open Education Faculty (OEF) was opened to integrate the major distance education opportunities in higher education with business and administrative programs, two-year associate degree programs, degree completion programs, and certificate programs.
1985	The Distance Education System of Anadolu University started a Department of Continuing Education for students coming from different backgrounds such as primary school teachers.
1987	West Europe Programs are started by Anadolu University OEF.
1990	The Department of Health Programs is established due to an act signed between the Ministry of Health and the Anadolu University under the name of 'Nursing Associate Degree Program'.
1990	Channel E Project began through cooperation with the Goethe Institute, the British Open University, Fernuniversitat, and Tubingen University, on behalf of the Council of Europe's Delta Project.
1992	The Department of Economics and Administrative Sciences of Anadolu University offered 13 associate degree programs in Anadolu University OEF.
1993	Anadolu University Faculty of Economics and Faculty of Business Administration are started in addition to the Open Education Faculty.
1996	Bilkent University initiated some synchronous distance education courses via satellite.
1997	Middle East Technical University (METU) has started an experimental distance education course via the Internet.
1997	Istanbul Technical University established remote classrooms via a microwave link connecting two campuses that are in different locations in Istanbul
1997	The National Academic Network (ULAK-NET) which consists of the national high-speed backbone and the fast node connections started to be used by the universities (state and foundation owned), R&D divisions of and information and documentation centers of state and private organizations and prominent libraries around Türkiye.
1997	'Technological Knowledge Project' was established at Anadolu University and 'Local computer Web', 'Internet Web System', 'Satellite Communication System', 'Video-Conference System' were put into service.
1998	Turksat 1-C satellite was used for a video-conference system between Ankara and Turkistan as an interactive distance education activity to give lectures on subjects of Economy, Business Administration, Law, History, and Turkish Literature.
1999	Internet, e-mail and fax connections between Turkistan and Ankara via satellite were started to allow students in Turkistan to communicate with the instructors in Anadolu University over the Internet.
2000	Undergraduate programs in the field of Preschool Teacher Education and English Language teaching were started in Anadolu University OEF.

2000	Anadolu University initiated the Open Education 2000 Project to implement communication and informatics technologies in order to reach students via Internet.
2001	Anadolu University offered an on-line two-year degree or certificate program.
2001	Selcuk University started a distance education project that covers three obligatory courses for freshmen via Internet and television.

After 1996, Bilkent University, Middle East Technical University (METU), Istanbul Technical University, and some other universities started to integrate distance education technologies into their higher education program (Yazici, Altas, & Demiray, 2001). However, Anadolu University OEF has also added new programs to their system to bring creative solutions to higher education and continuing education problems in Türkiye since 1982. In the distance education field, Anadolu University is known as one of the mega universities that enroll over 100,000 students each year. It is one of the ten largest distance education institutions in the World (Ozkul, 2001).

**Who studies by DE: The case of Anadolu University**

The target population for distance education is composed of various adult groups that seek different conditions and opportunities and high school graduates who, for various reasons, could not receive or continue their university education. In addition to awarding bachelor's (four-year) and pre bachelor's (two-year) degrees Anadolu University has provided opportunities for improving academic or professional proficiency to people who are already engaged in professions (Ozkul, 2001). Therefore, there is a large range of student age groups, from 17 years to 80 years old. The students' characteristics vary from program to program in Anadolu University OEF. The majority of adult students are married and the family average is three children. Their incomes are less than the average equivalent to \$1200 USD per year income (Ozkul, 2001).

**Development of programs: The case of Anadolu University**

In Anadolu University, the distance education system is represented by three faculties that are Open Education Faculty (OEF), Faculty of Economics, and Faculty of Business Administration (Agaoglu, Imer, & Kurubacak, 2002; Ozkul, 2001). The programs that these three faculties offer are shown in table 3.

Table 3: The programs in the Anadolu University distance education system.

Open Education Faculty (OEF)	Faculty of Economics	Faculty of Business Administration
Sales Management	Labor Economics	Accounting and Finance Marketing
Office Management	Industrial Relations	Management and Organization
Banking and Insurance	Public Administration	
Business Management	Public Finance.	
Public Relations		
Nursing		
Health Institution Management		
Tourism and Hotel Management		
Accounting		

Home Economics		
International Trade		
Social Sciences		
Public Administration		
Midwife Training		
Health Technician Training		

Anadolu University Open OEF continues to expand the programs that are offered, recently adding such programs as Teacher Training, Tourism Certificate programs, Vocational Education, and the Western Europe project. The goals of these programs are summarized below (Demiray & Mclsaac, 1993).

Teacher Training: Two of the most recent programs are the Primary Teacher and Secondary Teacher Training programs. The goals of the programs were to help teachers become more effective in classrooms, update their subject area knowledge, and provide them with a better standard of living by rewarding them financially for participating in in-service training.

Tourism Certificate: The Tourism Certificate Program is another program offered to persons who are interested in working in tourism services. The goal of the program is to provide certified persons to the private sector who have fresh and detailed knowledge about tourism and the hotel business.

Nursing Education: Nursing Education at a distance is a two-year program and graduates will be awarded an Associate Degree. The goal of the program is to increase qualifications of the nurses and to provide higher education opportunities in nursing.

Private Sector In-Service Courses: Anadolu University offers selected in-service programs for employees of private sector companies via distance education to update their knowledge and skills.

West Europe Project: The West Europe Project is a degree completion program prepared for Turkish citizens who are living in Western European countries such as Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Austria, Switzerland and France. This project has focused primarily on courses in Business Administration, Economics and Teacher Training. The aim of this project is to provide educational opportunities for Turkish citizens who have to leave their home after high school to work in other countries.

Channel E Project: The Channel E Project is a certificate program and an informal distance education project. The most important objectives of Anadolu University's Channel E programs is cultural reinforcement, educational and informational support for Turkish immigrants living in Europe, and to increase the knowledge of Turkish workers abroad, especially in business and economics.

### **What media and technology are used: The case of Anadolu University**

Technologies used to deliver distance education programs are designed to reach the masses. The Open Education Faculty's distance education system is based on the combination of four components: printed materials, television and radio broadcasts, academic counseling centers, and computer-assisted teaching. The main elements of the system are described briefly as follows (Ozkul, 2001).

Textbooks: Textbooks designed to provide self-learning are prepared by the academics of Anadolu University and other universities in coordination with a Distance Education Material Design Team. Books are sent to the students at the beginning of each academic year. Anadolu University has printing capacity to satisfy all of the university printing requirements. Distance education course materials, bulletins, and test booklets are printed in the university facilities.

TV Programs and Videocassettes: An experienced technical team produces TV programs, which support the printed materials in the open education system, in coordination with authors and editors of the course material. All the video and audio programs required by the distance education system are produced at the Educational Television Center (ETV). For most of the courses, the video programs are broadcast via TRT (Turkish Radio and Television) channels.

Academic Tutoring System: For certain courses academic support is provided via face-to-face lecturing sessions. In 55 provinces, face-to-face lecturing is provided for various courses. These courses are instructed either by OEF staff or local university staff. The lectures are conducted in the evenings and weekends at the study centers with support from local universities staff.

Computer Assisted Teaching: Beginning in 1994, computer laboratories were established in order to provide computerized lessons and exercises to the distance learners. As of 1999, computer assisted learning material was made available. The courseware used is supplementary software, based on a drill-and practice format that combines text, image and sound, developed by the Computer Assisted Teaching Center.

### **Web-Based Instruction in Higher Education in Türkiye**

There are some examples of efforts to implement web-based instruction in certificate and degree programs in Turkish Universities such as Anadolu University, Middle East Technical University (METU), Bilgi University, Bilkent University, Istanbul University, and Sakarya University. Most of these efforts of are still at the stage of development (Usun, 2003; Yazici, Altas, & Demiray, 2001).

## **2. Government policy and regulation of DE**

### **National and institutional levels**

All universities and higher education institutions were connected to the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) in 1981. The YÖK is a governmental agency that was established by the National Informatics Committee (EMK) by "Law No. 2547 dated 6 November 1981" (Bologna Declaration, 2003; YÖK, 2003). The YÖK is an autonomous organization having a public juristic personality within the framework of the duties and authorities given by the Higher Education Law, which regulates higher education and directs the activities of all higher education institutions" (FORSNET, 2000, p.1).

The YÖK regulates the integration of communication and information technologies into distance higher education programs. According to the YÖK (2003) regulations, "the aims of distance higher education based on communication and information technologies at the vocational, undergraduate, and graduate levels are:

- to facilitate academic cooperation by enabling the sharing of educational resources among universities;
- to increase the effectiveness of education by making use of the interactive medium provided by information technologies, with multimedia features and the ability to access unlimited information;
- to increase the efficiency of higher education and make it available to new student audiences."

### **Program level: The case of Anadolu University**

The YÖK regulations include the determination and accreditation of distance education courses and programs that are delivered by distance education technologies. "In order to open vocational, undergraduate, and graduate programs based on information and communication technologies, universities must apply to the YÖK. Universities must obtain the permission of the YÖK to design, offer, change or close courses that are within the scope of these regulations, but are only offered to their own students" (YÖK, 2003).

Instructors and faculty in Higher Education programs design, implement, evaluate, and manage the programs that have obtained permission from YÖK. For example, Anadolu University Open Education Faculty (OEF) is responsible for both the educational function of conducting the distance education programs and the tasks of student administration, course books printing, production of radio and TV programs, data processing services, academic counseling activities and the student examinations of the whole system (Agaoglu, Imer, & Kurubacak, 2002; Demiray, 1990; Ozkul, 2001). In addition, faculty in Higher Education programs review and revise the academic rules and regulations of the distance education programs in order to create an effective and efficient system that meets to the demands of open and distance learners.

### **Course design, implementation and evaluation level: The case of Anadolu University**

Instructors and faculty in Higher Education programs design, implement, and evaluate the distance education courses. Anadolu University Distance Education System has adopted the conventional approach (Ozkul, 2001) in terms of student assessment. Prof. Dr. Ali Ekrem Ozkul (2001), Dean of Anadolu University Open Education Faculty in Turkey, states:

"Students who failed two or less than two courses can pass to a higher class. Students who fail more than two courses repeat the courses they failed and thus cannot register to higher-class courses. In addition to students who have not succeeded, all of the 1st (freshman) year students cannot register for 3rd year courses (sophomore). Similarly, students who have not successfully completed 2nd (junior) class courses cannot register for 4th (senior) class courses. Students must register at the beginning of each academic year. Students who have not registered in two successive years are dismissed. In each academic year, mid-term, final and final-make up exams are performed. Evaluations are based on a grading system with the highest score of 100. The weights of the mid-term and final exams are 30% and 70% respectively. An average score of 50% is required in order to "pass" a course. Associate degree students are allowed to hold student rights for four years and bachelor degree students for seven years." (Ozkul, 2001).

### **3. Funding of DE**

#### **National and institutional levels**

Distance education in Turkey is predominantly a government financed activity and the willingness of Turkish governments to support distance education, the attitudes of Turkish political system and Turkish policy makers affect the acceptance and growth of distance education technology (Usun, 2004).

Sources of income of higher education institutions are (Bologna Declaration, 2003):

- a. Annual budgetary allocations,
- b. Aids from institutions,
- c. Fees and payments received,
- d. Income from publications and sales,
- e. Income from movable and immovable property,
- f. Profits from the enterprises of the revolving fund,
- g. Donations, bequests and sundry.

The major part of financial support for distance education comes from the government. For example, the government finances the Open Education Faculty in Anadolu University. Additionally Faculty's expenditures are funded by Anadolu University budget that is received from its foundations' income, circulating capital services and registration fees (Demiray, 1990).

#### **Individual program or project level**

All academicians' and administrators' salaries are paid through government funds. The proportions of the financial support to each project and program are changing according to the program and project scope and the expenditure of faculty. For example, the expenditure of faculty in Anadolu University OEF are for printing, production of TV or Radio programs, mailing, personnel salary, examination organization and transferring new technologies (Demiray & Mclsaac, 1993; Ozkul, 2001). The expenditure of OEF also includes books, exams, registration fees and other services as broadcast, academic counseling, newspaper and mailing etc.

#### **Student Fees**

Every student has to pay tuition. Students have a chance to obtain tuition loans from the YÖK. The fees (tuition) vary according to programs. The regulations on fees are determined by the YÖK.

"The fees to be paid each year per student to the institutions of higher education are fixed and announced by the YÖK, taking into consideration the character and duration of the period of study in various disciplines and also the nature of the individual higher education institutions. The portion of these fees to be paid by the State is determined each year by the Council of Ministers and allocated to the budget of the

institution concerned on a per-student basis. The student pays the remaining portion of the fees. The portion paid by the State is to be a minimum of 50 %." (Bologna Declaration, 2003).

Distance education student fees are also determined by the YÖK. Ozkul (2001) emphasizes: "the budget allocated from the state is very low for distance education students compared to counterparts in conventional universities. Average state budget support for a distance education student is about 5% of a business student in conventional school."

Estimated on the basis of January 1990 prices, students pay 148.000TL (64.3 USD) per year in Anadolu University OEF. This amount is equal to 1/8 of conventional university student fees (Demiray, 1990).

Demiray & Mclsaac (1993) compare the expenses of both students and Turkish government in a traditional university versus Anadolu University OEF according to 1991 figures in table 4.

Table 4: The 1991 Figures to compare the expenses of a traditional university versus open university.

	Traditional University	Open University
How much did Turkish government spend per student attending Business Administration courses?	3,000,000 Turkish Lira or \$600 USD	55,000 Turkish Lira or \$110.USD
How much did student spend approximately per year for university studies rather than fees?	1,500,000 Turkish Lira (or \$300 USD)	500,000 Turkish Lira,(or \$100.USD)

Also, Demiray & Mclsaac (1993) state: "if OEF students were to attend traditional universities, there would have to be an additional 25 universities with 41,950 more academicians to teach them, and 67,400 more administrators than there are now. This would cost the Turkish government an additional \$860,000,000 USD." These statistics show that distance education is convenient both for students and the Turkish government in terms of the cost of resources that are used to complete a higher education degree.

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