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The opinions of academicians regarding distance learning: a sample of Dicle University

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Abstract

This research is conducted in order to define the opinions of academicians in Dicle University regarding distance learning. This research is carried out with 61 academicians from Ziya Gökalp Eğitim Faculty of Education, Faculty of Science and Engineering and Architecture. The data of the research are collected in through a 5-likert type "distance learning questionnaire" of 24 questions. As a consequence of the analysis, it is found out that the majority of academicians believe that rather than a replacement model for traditional learning, distance learning is a supportive method.
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1. Introduction

Internet becomes more wide-spread and the dissemination of information have been gaining momentum, the share of information is more effective and this increases the importance of distance learning. Distance learning at first started with published materials and with the developing technology it is now in different platforms. Internet, one of these platforms, has taken its place as the dominant medium of distance learning. (http://www.degree.net).

Education's being expensive and different learning requirements are major factors in dissemination of distance learning. Internet provides large amount of data and it is easier to access information, these are the main attractions. Moreover, such limitations as the crowded classes, the lack of teachers, and inflexibility of time in traditional education system increased the orientation to distance learning (Karaağaçlı, 2008). With the popularity that distance learning has, the number of debates increase, too. The most important problem regarding this issue is about whether distance learning yields better results when compared to traditional learning (Miller, 2001; Russell, 1999). Some research show that the results are even, however it is added that not everyone uses distance learning in same levels (Dellana, Collins, & West, 2000; LaBay & Comm, 2003). According to Henckell (2007), Spooner et al. (1999) results, it is proven that distance learning is an alternative to face-to-face education.

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However, both students and teacher experience some problems in transition to distance learning. Teachers have difficulty because of the extra burden while transferring class materials (Lee, 2002) and the obstacle in student-teacher communication (Arbaugh, 2005; Ausserhofer, 1999; Gibson et al., 2001; Wiesner, 2000). On the other hand, most of the classes in distance learning require students to have some computer skills and there should be some time for this in the first place (Deming, 2000). Moreover, the opinions of students and teachers which are important in distance learning may be determining.

The aim of this study is to define the opinions of academicians concerning the effective use of distance learning in education. In parallel to this aim, the perspective of academicians about learning effect, customization, instruction design challenges, geographic and source integration and management challenges are taken into consideration.

2. Method

This study is a descriptive research. The data collected are analyzed by using the descriptive statistical techniques; with SPSS 12.0 and the significance rate is determined as ".05".

2.1. Participants

This research is carried out with 61 academicians from Ziya Gökalp Eğitim Faculty of Education, Faculty of Science and Engineering and Architecture

2.2. Data collection tool

In this study, "distance learning questionnaire" was used as data collection tool. The original form of the questionnaire was developed by Yu-Hui Tao and Chu-Chen Rosa Yeh (2006) and it includes 24 questions, 5-likert type. "I totally agree.", "I agree.", "I am hesitant.", "I don't agree." and "I totally don't agree" levels were used in the study. The sub-categories of the questionnaire were as follows: learning effect, customization, geographic and resource integration, instructional design challenges, and administrative challenges. Learning effect includes learning outcomes and the efficiency of teaching. Instructional design includes creating appropriate learning environment for students. Geographic and resource integration includes integration of teaching materials into distant learning and geographic limitations. Management category includes the management of distance learning, medium and school.

The data collection tool was translated into Turkish from its original language. Afterwards, an English language linguist proofread the translated version with the original source one and edited the mistakes if there were any in order to ensure conceptual and linguistic equivalency. The questionnaire was conducted among 112 students from Ziya Gökalp Faculty of Education German Teaching Department, Physics Teaching Department and Elementary School Math Teaching Departments and the Cronbach alpha value was calculated and found as .86.

3. Findings

In order to evaluate the answers and form standard opinion ranges, n=5 was set (n-1/n)* and item number Formula was applied Opinion ranges were arranged as follows:

If the arithmetical mean of total scores in the total data collection tool is in ($\overline{X}$); $1.0 \leq \overline{X} < 1.8$ range, the opinion of the participants regarding relevant question is taken as "totally disagree", if it is $1.8 \leq \overline{X} < 2.6$ "disagree", if it is in $2.6 \leq \overline{X} < 3.4$ range "hesitation", if it is in $3.4 \leq \overline{X} < 4.2$ range "agree" and if it is in $4.2 \leq \overline{X} < 5.0$ range "totally disagree", the evaluation is done accordingly.

The distant learning questionnaire includes sub-groups such as learning effect, customization, instructional design challenge, geographic and resource integration and administrative challenges. These categories are shown in Table 1.

Categories	Questionnaire Items
Learning Effect	1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 11, 12, 14, 15
Customization	13, 16, 20, 21
Administrative Challenges	2, 18, 19, 23, 24
Geographic and Source Integration	5, 7, 9
Instructional design	10, 17, 22

Questionnaire items regarding effective learning are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean, Standard Deviation and Significance Levels of Items of Effective Learning Sub-Group.

	N	t	$\overline{X}$	Sd	P
1. Distance learning enhances the understanding between teacher and student.	61	-1,217	2,84	1,052	,228
3. Traditional learning is being replaced by distance learning in time.	61	2,205	3,26	,929	,031
4. Through distance learning, students have access to information in a quicker manner.	61	7,859	3,93	,929	,000
6. Distance learning yields better results than traditional learning.	61	-,704	2,90	1,091	,484
8. Distance learning increases the attention of students to learning.	61	2,530	3,34	1,063	,014
11.Distance learning encourages schools' culture to provide education with a service-based approach.	61	6,169	3,67	,851	,000
12.In addition to funny aspect of education, distance learning provides basic learning.	61	2,452	3,31	,992	,017
14. Distance learning improves the teachers' ability to teach.	61	,660	3,10	1,165	,512
15. Distance learning helps to understand students' individual choices.	61	4,271	3,52	,959	,000

P<.05

As seen in Table 2, academicians agree on the items that distance learning encourages schools' culture to provide education with a service-based approach, distance learning helps to understand students' individual choices and through distance learning, students have access to information in a quicker manner. However, they are hesitant about the items such as traditional learning is being replaced by distance learning in time, distance learning increases the attention of students to learning and in addition to funny aspect of education, distance learning provides basic learning. Again for distance learning enhances the understanding between teacher and student, distance learning yields better results than traditional learning and distance learning improves the teachers' ability to teach items, it is observed that the academicians are hesitant and their answers were incoherent (P<.05).

Questionnaire items regarding customization of learning are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Mean Standard Deviation and Significance Levels of Items of Customization Sub-Group.

	N	t	X	Sd	P
13. Distance learning provides the desired content and information to students.	61	5,076	3,64	,984	,000
16. Distance learning makes the competition decrease through integration to global market environment.	61	1,158	3,13	,885	,251
20. Distance learning requires a flexible teaching content.	61	5,330	3,69	1,009	,000
21. It is not easy to make up a distant learning environment.	61	5,123	3,75	1,150	,000

P<.05

As seen in Table 3, the academicians agree on the items that distance learning provides the desired content and information to students, distance learning requires a flexible teaching content. and it is not easy to make up a distant learning environment. However, they were hesitant and their answers were not coherent for the item that distance learning makes the competition decrease through integration to global market environment (P<.05).

Questionnaire items regarding management are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Mean, Standard Deviation and Significance Levels of Items of Management Sub-Group.

	N	t	$\overline{X}$	Sd	P
2. Distance learning changes the current competition circumstances of the market.	61	6,291	3,66	,814	,000
18. Distance learning is not successful in protecting the copyrights of the information.	61	2,830	3,41	1,131	,006
19. Distance learning takes time in terms of preparing the teaching material.	61	2,249	3,34	1,196	,028
23. Distance learning makes supervision harder in class management.	61	3,973	3,59	1,160	,000
24. Distance learning is a long term investment strategy.	61	8,354	4,03	,966	,000

P<.05

As seen Table 4, the academicians agree on the items that distance learning changes the current competition circumstances of the market, distance learning is not successful in protecting the copyrights of the information and distance learning is a long term investment strategy. However, they were hesitant about the item that distance learning takes time in terms of preparing the teaching material.

Questionnaire items regarding geographical borders and source integration are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Mean, Standard Deviation and Significance Levels of Items of Geographical Borders and Source Integration Sub-Group.

	N		$\overline{X}$	Sd	P
5.Distance learning integrates teaching sources efficiently.	61	,686	3,82	,958	,000
7.Distance learning makes it easier to create student-customized teaching environme t both for teachers and schools.	61	,158	3,79	,859	,000
9.Distance learning is of utmost importance in eliminating geographical borders.	61	3,342	4,36	,797	,000

P<.05

As seen in Table 5, the academicians agree on the items that distance learning integrates teaching sources efficiently, distance learning makes it easier to create student-customized teaching environment both for teachers and schools. However, they totally agree on the item that distance learning is of utmost importance in eliminating geographical borders.

Questionnaire items regarding teaching design are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Mean, Standard Deviation and Significance Levels of Items of Teaching Design Sub-Group.

	N	t	$\overline{X}$	Sd	P
10. Distance learning increases the flexibility of forming teaching design at schools.	61	5,274	3,67	,995	,000
17. Distance learning increases the exchange of information among schools.	61	7,193	3,80	,872	,000
22. It is a difficult method to ensure face-to-face interaction in distance learning.	61	4,314	3,62	1,128	,000

P<.05

As seen in Table 6, the academicians agree on the items that distance learning increases the flexibility of forming teaching design at schools, distance learning increases the exchange of information among schools and it is a difficult method to ensure face-to-face interaction in distance learning.

4. Results

The academicians believe that distance learning makes exchange and share of information in a quicker manner and that the access to information is easier; however the information is copied and shared without consensus. They agreed on the idea that teaching environment can be arranged for students individually; however they are also of the opinion that such kind of an arrangement requires a flexible learning environment, that it takes time to prepare teaching materials and it is hard to provide student with such kind of an environment. What's more, they also agree on the idea that through distance learning a flexible teaching environment may be designed and distance learning integrates teaching sources effectively. However, they also consider that it is a difficult method to ensure face-to-face interaction in distance learning and it is harder to supervise student in distance learning. On the other hand, they have their doubts about the opinions that distance learning yields better results and it increases the attention of students and teacher's performance. They totally agree that distance learning eliminates geographical borders. When evaluated as a whole, it is found out that the majority of academicians believe that rather than a replacement model for traditional learning, distance learning is a supportive method. Moreover, it is seen that they can not give up on many subjects in traditional learning and they are doubtful about distance learning. This result may stem from the fact that the academicians do not want to spend more time and energy on preparing a distance learning environment.

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