STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS AND FUNCTIONS OF STUDENT CENTERS IN THE OPEN EDUCATION FACULTY PRACTICES:

Three Metropolis Sampling - Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir

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ABSTRACT

The Open Education Faculty Students Centers have been offering many services to students in Turkey since 1982. Building up bridges between students and faculties; student centers have had technological improvements since 1998 and thereafter quality of services have been increased and services given to students at the student center have been variated by implementing a low-cost computer network. Operations of the student centers in The Open Education Faculty system, modifications taking place in the automation systems of the centers and qualifications of services given to students have been examined comprehensively in this article.

Keywords: Students Services, Students Centers Automation System, Students Support System, Face to Face System, The Open Education Faculty, Anadolu university, Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

Today education process has been shifted from tutor-oriented activities to student-oriented ones. Its been studied that students having distance learning technologies, possibilities and practices enabling self-research and self-development have each been an independent factor in learning. Improvement of individual capacity at the highest rank by self-approach, implementation of the facilities which educational technologies offer both for individual and cultural education, exercising consistent and independent educational process, reaching wider number of people by offering alternatives to traditional classroom education limitations are amongst the reasons of the historic development of distance learning.

For the so-called reasons, importance of distance learning system is being increasingly well recognized each day.

UK has pioneered the distance learning system on the basis of higher education. An effective consultancy and guidance counseling system on distance learning have been improved and implemented in UK. Japan, USA, Canada and India are amongst the other countries which have been practising distance learning system.

Successful educational practices throughout the world have also influenced Turkish education system. Converting into a national, secular and democratic state following the declaration of Republic has caused a necessity for a well-organised and effective education system and requirement for qualified people has led way to search for some other alternative answers. Following long research years, in 1961 Ministry of Education has established Education by Mail system and this has been the first serious practices of distance learning in Turkey. National Education Commission has decided to educate the students who have not been able to attend their schools but still would like to graduate by following the Education by Mail system (in other word correspondence education).

The center has been given an organizational structure in 1966 on the basis of General Directorate. Implementations at this stage have consisted of preparation for exams, professional education, and development in profession, follow-up subjects which do not have tutors and activities for leisure time. In order to reduce accumulation of students in higher education level and increase effectiveness in education, Center for Higher Education by Mail has been established in 1974 (Alkan, 1998 p. 29–30). Initially programmes designed for tutor education have been practised in this center.

In 1975, 45.000 tutor applicants have been enrolled to distance higher education learning. Only lecture notes and books have been offered as learning sources to students in the first year. Inefficiency of the practise has been experienced by the end of that year and extensive higher education institution YAYKUR has been established. Students who have enrolled in distance learning in 1974 have also been included in the lists of this institution. Including tutor applicants, number of students studying in distance learning has increased to 85.122 in 1975 (Ozer, 1989, p.2). Education by mail, extern and formal higher education programmes have been carried out through YAYKUR.

Education by Mail programmes have offered distance learning opportunities in secondary education schoolteaching section in various subjects such as Science, Mathematics, Tourism, Trade, Religion etc. and formal higher education programmes in Technical, Natural and Social Sciences and Foreign Languages. Written documentations, television, radio and audio materials including discs and academic counseling services rather limited but still have been offered to the students.

However, likewise in the previous enterprises YAYKUR's long-termed target of converting into an Open University have not had the chance to cherish and spread.

In 1979 YAYKUR's practices have completely been closed. Students have been shifted to Education Institutions, Technical Schools for Females, Higher Technical Schools, Trade and Tourism Teaching Schools and Higher Islamic Institutions in where face-to-face education systems are used. (Hzal, 1983, p. 14).

In the following process; reading and writing campaigns have been initiated throughout the country by Television School programmes in 1981 and these campaigns have made important contributions for illiterate people to learn how to read and write. In the same year; law code 2547 regarding rearrangement of Turkish Higher Education system has been put into effect.

Distance education is not a concept or phenomenon which Anadolu University has used as a first time in 1982. Anadolu University has hold the academic and technological experience through television broadcasting programmes of Eskişehir Academy of Economics and Trade Sciences and Communication Sciences since 1970s. Researches on how to use communication materials in education have continued, national and international scientific meetings have been held, publications have been issued and distance learning oriented projects have been practised in this institution for more than ten years. Besides, technological infrastructure has been developed and technical staff have been trained with the help of external financial support.(Ozer, 1989, p.5)

With this experience, Anadolu University has put the contemporary model of distance leducation into effect with the help of Open Education Faculty. The model is a multimedia distance education model which consists of written publications, television and radio programmes and academic counseling activities. Exams which have been performed by Students Election and Replacement Center initially are being carried out by Anadolu University today.

ANADOLU UNIVERSITY'S OPEN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Open Education System has been implemented in accordance with 5. and 12. articles of Law number 2547, under the 41. item which is put into effect in 20 July 1982. This process has authorized Anadolu University for performing ''Continuous and Open Education''.

29.500 students have enrolled to the Economy and Business Administration Degree programmes in 1982–1983 semester and this number has increased to 361.000 by 1990-1991 semester. Up to now, in other words in a quarter year since 1982, nearly 3, 5 million students have enrolled into Anadolu's distance education system. Total of 948.315 students have received their degrees during in this period (Ulutak, 2007).

There are total of 1.100.000 students who have enrolled in 7 Bachelor's and 28 Associate's Degree programmes.

Increasing demand for a university degree, equal opportunity in education with low-costing, university education for individuals who can not attend traditional education, implementation of education technologies developments, increase in professional education opportunities are amongst the alternatives which open education system offers and printed materials are becoming the core of this system.

Course books which are Anadolu University's fundemental materials for teaching-learning process are being published in accordance with distance learning technics since 1982 and in a planned and organised study which would enable students' self-study. Course books have been designed and written by and under the supervision of experienced and expert science men, editors, education technologs, television editors, art consultants, language and measuring and evaluation experts (Hakan and others, 2004, p.6).

Student Centers have undertaken an important role in course books distribution process in Anadolu University distance learning system. Course books are being distributed by student centers both to first-time enrollments and to registration renewals. Students who have not recieved their books during enrolment or registration renewals are given some extra time to collect their books from students centers until mid-terms and for students who have not been able to collect their books by this time, Dean's Office sends books either by post or by cargo provided students ask for them along with their petition letters (Bodur, 2002).

Printed materials have been forwarded to students by post and exam organisations have been undertaken by Students Election and Replacement Center during this period.
Secreterial services given by Students Election and Replacement Center until 1997 have been transfered to Anadolu University along with a protocol.

Audio-visual programmes broadcasted through radio and television channels which support education given by printed materials are being produced creatively and effectively by educational technologs and by collaboration of an experienced team who use advanced technical equipments.

In order to intensify and enrich information given by printed materials, television programmes of 20 to 25 minutes have been put into use in every two weeks for the first time in 1982–1983 semester. One year later, 30 radio programmes consisting of 30 minutes fragmans for English lessons have been prepared and broadcasted.

Television programmes are being produced in order to support education given by printed materials. Content and number of television programmes for any course is being determined by the collaboration of an author, editor, television editor, director and scenario author. There are about 200 experienced and qualified expert personnel working in production center including directors and technical team.

Collaboration is being set up with TRT prior to the planning to be made regarding educational television programmes. Programmes are being broadcasted for 3 hours daily at weekdays during night time for 24 weeks.

For this reason planning regarding broadcasting programmes is made prior to the semester. Besides, programme DVDs are sent to students who wish to have them in return for their fees.

Broadcasting days and hours of the television programmes are being notified both by students centers and through internet. Complimentary booklets about television programmes are being distributed to students during enrolment and renewal period (Hakan and others, 2004, 18).

Academic consultancy is one of the most important elements of distance learning. With this method, students would have the chance to consult and intensify the subjects which they have not comprehended with face to face interactions with their tutors and other students. The main objective of this service which is supported by various universities is to get expert tutors and students together and provide better learning by offering interaction with students (Ulutak, 2007).

Academic consultancy courses start in January each semester and finish in May. Days and times regarding consultancy courses are notified on boards at Open University Students Centers by December.

STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS OF STUDENT CENTERS IN OPEN EDUCATION FACULTY PRACTICES

In order to decrease workload and time spent at the centers, a particular number of students were appointed to each student center. On their registration form students were asked which students center they're going to get service from. Even in case of address change, students had to continue to get their services from the former student center until registration renewal time in December when they could submit their new address.

Computer systems were not introduced so extensive as today between 1982–1993. Documents at the students centers were prepared by checking through the printouts which central students center have sent and they were typewritten on printed materials.
In 1994 students centers have been equipped with computers and laser printers and doing so has quicken the service given and minimized usage of typewriters. Updates on students have been transferred to student centers by computer printouts and floppy disks.

Student centers have offered offline services until 1997. For reasons such as technological difficulties and expensive on-line systems students centers were stopped from getting on-line data directly from central student center. Services given by student centers have been limited for that reason. Being distant from Eskisehir and its difficulties were reflected on services given to students and students getting address change oftenly were having real difficulties.

Centers were organized to operate along with students in the region and only for students of the particular area. Students moving to a different region were limited to go to the old center they used to go before their address changes occur.

In a shortwhile an increase on number of students centers was necessary in order to reach to students profile which have spreaded nationwide. Students were having economical difficulties in reaching services which were given in particular cities. Initially number of student centers was only 8 and today this number has increased to 88 in 81 cities. Physical states, computer equipments and number of employment are sufficient in these centers. In relation to institutional identification, renovations in the centers have been continuing.

Table:1
Number of Personnel at 88 Student Centers (April 2007)

Government Officials	270
Personnel on Contract	66
Students on scholarship	46
Attendants on Contract	11
Cleaners working for the cleaning company	82
Total	475

Table: 2
Education Levels of Office Managers (April 2007)

Post Graduate	5
Master Degree	12
Bachelor's Degree	35
Certificate	19
High School	17
Total	88

Table: 3
Active and Active-Inactive Students
Registered at Faculties (2006-2007 Semester)

Faculty	Active Students	Active-Inactive Students	Total
Open University	300.548	69.710	37 0.258
Economy	250.009	53.718	30 3.727
Business Administration	354.985	62.233	41 7.218
Total	905.5	18	1.0

	42	5.661	91.203

FUNCTIONS AND TYPES OF SERVICES STUDENT
CENTERS OFFERING IN THE OPEN UNIVERSITY PRACTICES

Students receive below services from the Open Education Faculty Student Centers:

- ➢ Distribution of the course books,
- ➢ Issuing Students identification card (to be submitted to the government and relevant offices as proof of being a student),
- ➢ Issuing Transcripts,
- ➢ Cancellation of registrations,
- ➢ Amending the changes of information,
- ➢ Issuing certificates and diplomas, Open Education Faculty
- ➢ Issuing documents of honour,
- ➢ Receiving new registrations,
- ➢ Renewal of registration
- ➢ Receiving students IDs
- ➢ Receiving military postponement documents
- ➢ Issuing diplomas for graduates

Workload on the student centers have increased in time as the changes have been brought on Higher Education Code and regulations on students remission have been put into effect by the Grand National Assembly. For instance 50 thousand people have applied to Open Education Faculty for registration following the students remission law put into effect in 2000. Likewise; students attending technical schools were given the right to attend 4 year faculties and following this fact; around 51 thousand students had gained right to subscribe to Open Education Faculty each year.

Besides students getting second university degree, degree integration and invited by protocols register in the Open Education Faculty. Registration and adjustment procedures for such students are easily performed at the student centers (Şenel and Kutlu, 2002).

Central student center is responsible for additional services such as cancellation of registrations, sending documents to official offices such as Military forces, pension funds and approval of the documents which are acceptable internationally. Each year student's military postponement documents are posted by central student center and information is transferred on CDs and sent to Ministry of National Defense, Military Department. Besides; central student center is the output center for information and documents to be sent to other student centers. While enriching the services given at the student centers and increasing the quality of the documents; decreasing the operational costs to minimum was also being targeted. Because number of documents given by student centers except central one was well over 150 thousand each year.

Information transfer to central student center such as number of documents given at the student centers, hours of computers being on, operations being

followed on computers, number of programmes loaded on computers and how and when they've been in use could have been amongst the important control mechanisms in administrative aspects.

Essential principles of the system which is planned to operate at the students centers are as follows:

1. All relevant information regarding the students will be kept on the computers at the student centers. These information regarding will be transferred to computers on cds during registration renewals and after new registrations are done and before the semester starts.
2. Laser printouts will be submitted to students. Documents will be designed in a way to contain photographs, maps, logos and adverts. Quick and high-capacity printers will be allocated to busy students centers.
3. Computer systems at the student centers will link to the central one twice daily and transfer the amendments made and will update the info on the local ones. Doing so will enable the synchronization of the system only with 3-4 hours delay.
4. Cancellation of registrations will be transferred to central computer in maximum 10 minutes.
5. Transfer of the new versions of the central computer programmes to the ones in each student center should be designed in a secure and faultless method.
6. Control parameters (timing, names of the authorized people to sign, dial-up timings, passwords and etc.) will be sent coded bilaterally.
7. In order to cut down the expenses on communication, data sent will be compressed and 128 bytes asymmetric coding technics will be used.
8. Distant control mechanisms will be used in order to solve problems which ocur at the students centers computers located geographically far from the central one.

Designing process of the project which has been prepared under the essential principles have commenced in September 1998 and gained an acceleration by March 1999. Following a trial process over a month in Eskişehir, documents have been started to be issued by this system since 25 May 1999.

One personnel from each student centers have been sent to Eskişehir for trainee on 19 July 1999. Getting acquainted by computers was one of the criteria looked for in personnel to be sent to the trainee. Basic computer skills and hardware information were presented to the trainees practically. Trainees have gained the ability to solve possible hardware problems following the instructions given over the phone. Technical pieces of the computers were introduced.

During the trainee; office programmes were instructed practically as they will be in common use in communication. Internet was introduced to trainees in a whole course day and broadening the scopes of the participants' was one of the aims in doing so. Assigned targets have been reached with this trainee

despite the facts that trainee duration being short and information to be given is extent.

Following the purchase of the computers; installation process has started by 1 August 1999.

Limitations have been put on usage of computers in order to diminish the user-errors and problems which may ocur during operation. Microsoft NT Workstation operational security systems have been adequately adopted.

Systems have been sent to the centers by 15 August 1999. Technical personnel have instructed how to install their systems over the phone so that they can be connected to the central one by September 1999. 72 student centers were connected to the automation network of the central one by 20 September 1999.

In these 72 centers which were online with the central one since 20 September 1999; cancellation of registrations, changes on addresses, registries, military status and impediment of the students have been done by mid-term for the first time.

By 22 September 1999, data loaded on students centers have started to be transferred onto the central one on a daily basis.

Bar-code reading system has been put into use and this system has decreased the timing of the process of entering students' numbers into the computers. Shifting most of the services to the student centers has decreased the workload of the central one on a large scale.

THREE METROPOLIS SAMPLING: ISTANBUL, ANKARA AND IZMIR IN THE OPEN EDUCATION FACULY PRACTICES

10 student centers are in service in three metropolises; Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir which are listed as follows:

Istanbul	Ankara	Izmir
Aksaray Bahcelievler Besiktas Umraniye Kartal	Anittepe Cebeci Aydinlikevler	Konak Bornova

There are total of 443.985 students enrolled to Open Education Faculty in three metropolises (1).

This number consists of 40% of the total number of students in the whole of Turkey and this fact creates considerable amount of workload to the student

centers in the mentioned cities. During registration and registration renewal period, services are given non-stop by appointing extra personnel and terminals in these centers.

Table: 4
Total number of students registered in
Istanbul-Ankara-Izmir student centers of distant education system

Total numbers students are

C ities	Total Number of Students enrolled in Faculties of Open Education, Economy, Business Administration
I stanbul	280.420
A nkara	115.988
I zmir	72.240
T otal	468.648

of

registered in Istanbul-Ankara-Izmir student centers of distant learning system by 04.04.2007

Table: 5
2006-2007 semester graduates of distant education system
who are registered in Istanbul-Ankara-Izmir students centers (2)

Student Centers	2006-2007 Graduates			2006-2007 Total number ofgraduates
	Open Education	Econ omy	Business Administration	
Istanbul	523 6	1712	6102	13050
Ankara	370 9	1347	2463	7519
Izmir	212 7	587	1497	4211
Total	11. 072	3646	10.062	24.780

2006-2007 semester graduates of distant education system who are registered in Istanbul-Ankara-Izmir students centers (2)

Number of personnel in Istanbul-Ankara-Izmir students centers by 25.07.2007

Table: 6
Number of personnel who are working in
Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir Student Centers (April 2007)

Lecturers	8

Government Officials	50
Personnel on Contract	27
Attendants on Contract	2
Cleaners working for the cleaning company	9
Total	96

Considering the documents given to students from student centers, it's well observed that half of the students get in touch with the center in person. Students getting services on the phone have been excluded from this number. Change of address, students' documentation and cancellation of registration are the preliminary services among the documents taken from students centers. Non-stop services are provided in all student centers as they keep all relevant information regarding students. For some services which need extra care and attention such as cancellation of registration and such; password and several user approvals are being asked during the procedures.

(1)   and (2)- Data-base dated 19.07.2007 of Anadolu University Computer Researches and Practices Center (BAUM) has been accounted

Table: 7
Types of documents printed at the student centers

Type of document
C2 (military postponement document)
Students' Status Documentation
Students ID
Letters to military forces
Students information
Exam entry documents
Transcripts
Cancellation of registration
Transcripts for LES and DGS
Changes of addresses
Changes of IDs

Two-step system is being used for procedures of address, ID and military status changings. Firstful students are being asked to fill in and sign a petition letter on which they notify their changes. Students sign the petition letter after making the necessary changings. Then the new information is loaded on computer and a printout is taken on which both old and new information are seen and approved by the students' signature. All the relevant communication regarding the changings are followed through password procedures.
Conclusion

One of the biggest organizations throughout the world on providing services

to students; student centers of Open Education Faculty practices operate as centers which students' problems are being solved and requisite documents and information are promptly reached.

Services were given manually at the preliminary stages of distant learning system. Students were limited to get services only from their registered center. Today centers contribute a lot to the system by their devoted personnel following the automation system at the student centers since August 1999.

Numbers of terminals and personnel have been increased at some of the student centers in order to provide all kind of services from any center and following the high demand of services from some particular centers. Workload of the centers can be easily followed by central student center and necessary arrangements can be done accordingly with the help of the automation system. Students can benefit from 24 hour non-stop and complimentary internet services of Open University which are broadcasted through technological developments experienced in the information era.

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