

Learner Support Services in Distance Education System (A Case Study of Turkey)

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INTRODUCTION

A distance education program must design and applicate effective learner support services and systems. Unfortunately, in many distance education systems, more resources are invested in the technical system at the expense of the learner support system. Equivalent or more resources should be invested in the learner support system if the distance education enterprise is to be successful (Gunawardena, 1996, 271). Dillon and Blanchard (1991) described four types of support systems:

- 1) Learner support and learner needs
- 2) Learner support and content
- 3) Learner support related to the institutional context, and
- 4) Learner support and technology.

The aim of this study is to review and determine the applications and important problems of the learner support services and systems and present a number of suggestions to enhance learner support in the Turkish distance education system, Open Education Faculty (OEF). Firstly, let's review the learner support and support services in distance education;

LEARNER SUPPORT AND SUPPORT SERVICES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

Garrison and Baynton (1987, 7) define learner support as the resources that learners can access in order to carry out the learning processes. Garrison (1989, 29) observes that in distance education "support is concerned with a range of human and non-human resources to guide and facilitate the educational transaction". He observes that these resources may be library facilities, various media and software programs, community leaders, or they could be various socio-economic variables such as student's financial self-sufficiency and capacity to cope with their roles and responsibilities in the family and community. Also he determines that the most important form of support in an educational transaction is the teacher, who through guidance and direction can assist the students to achieve their goals and develop control of the educational process. The importance of the role that the teacher plays in distance education systems that use real time interactive television was observed in a study that examined the student support systems in a statewide telecommunications program (Dillon, Gunawardena, and Parker, 1992). The authors observe that when students were asked to name the factors that played an important role in aiding their learning, they cited the teacher. When students were asked to name the significant barriers to their learning experience, they named the teacher. So, the teacher in an interactive distance learning system can either make or break the system, and important consideration must be given to the role the teacher will play in such a system.

The dominant feature of distance education is the physical and often temporal distance that separates the teacher and learner. Because distance students are often placed in a unique situation in which neither teachers nor fellow students are physically present to clarify, discuss, or provide feedback, effective distance education requires a sound learner support system (Gunawardena, 1988). One important means of analyzing the effectiveness of the teaching-learning experience in a distance education system is through the analysis of the learner support system. "Support systems contribute to the 'process' of a course as do the learning materials" (Hodgson, 1986,56), and support systems developed in

recognition of student needs help the distance learner become competent and self-confident in learning, social interactions and self-evaluation (Rae, 1989). Prideaux (1989) observes that the effectiveness of the student support system of open/distance learning has not been adequately evaluated.

There are some systems or procedures that are purposefully created and effectively utilized by a distance education institution to support and/or facilitate teaching and learning at a distance.

They may include any or all of these:

- Record keeping and administration, pre-admission counseling
- Admission and registration information-administrative assistance
- Books dispatched by mail, library service
- Tutoring and counseling
- Weekend courses and study centers
- Electronic communication technologies such as phones, radio, audio tapes, video, television, etc. With the advent of technology, the list keeps on growing as new innovations are made by the day, especially in the developed world.

The amount of support services an institution can offer largely depends on that particular institution's capacity and resources at its disposal. However, these can be put into two categories which are the following:

- Academic, including such packages as tutorial, advising and counseling services.
- Administrative functions, such as enrolment; admission and registration; record keeping; information provision; and delivery of study materials (Molefi, 2002).

Support services are important from the emotional perspective. Traditional students have many physical clues of their attachment to the institution. Providing support services to the distance learning population is an important part of creating the feeling of belonging for students who do not have access to traditional clues. Some other important issues to consider have been proposed by Martin, Moskal, and Morse (1997). Some of the support services that should be considered have been detailed in the literature (Boettcher & Cartwright, 1997; Kovel, 1997). Other services have been detailed in the guidelines for distance education provided by various accredited bodies. These include access to library materials and facilities, delivery of course materials, traditional mail services, counseling, mentoring, job placement, and peer interaction. This is not a definitive list of the services needed by the students.

Students who do not come to the campus need access to academic advisory services. Student contact with trained academic advisors is crucial because both the students and the credit-granting institution need to be confident that information given to students is appropriate and accurate. Advising can be accomplished by telephone or e-mail, or by providing periodic on-site advice at off-campus locations.

Students also need access to outside resources that may be of educational interest to them. Think of all of the offices on campus, all of the services provided for traditional students. All of these should be considered and made available in some fashion for students studying at a distance.

Even a glance at the literature in the field of distance education hints at the diversity of factors beyond technology choices that are required for successful delivery of programs: special advisers and student orientations (Westbrook & Moon, 1997); non-traditional schedules and customized programs and services (Speer, 1996); academic, business, and institutional partnerships (Froke, 1995); and internal marketing to faculty, chairs, and deans (Olcott & Wright, 1995). Faculty participation depends on appropriate administrative support as an important factor (Betts, 1998). Students require services that are user-friendly not only to on-campus students (Olcott, 1996), and studies have long shown that classroom management issues outside of instruction and specific technologies are vitally

important to student satisfaction (Biner, Dean & Mellinger, 1994).

Gunawardena (1992) describes a model of a learner-centered distance education system that can be facilitated by the use of interactive communications technology. The learner is connected to several resources such as other learners, both on and off-campus, and the library and databases. The connection is interactive with the learner constantly interacting with the resources and receiving feedback. The teacher is only one type of resource that the learner can access and the teacher's role would be that of a facilitator linking learners to other resources and providing adequate support to empower the learner to exercise control over the learning experience. In such a model, it is necessary to provide adequate support services to help the learner take control of the learning experience. In order to link learners to resources, it is important that they are taught how to use electronic networks. Further, it is important to set up a peer learning arrangement or a collaborative learning network so that students can teach and assist each other without depending on the teacher. It is also crucial that learners are taught cognitive strategies and self-directed learning skills so that they would be more capable of taking charge of their learning experiences. These skills can be taught in orientation programs before classes begin.

Dillon and Blanchard (1991) note that the review of literature offers evidence that those systems which utilize teleconferencing technologies provide greater opportunities for learner control and tend to be higher in dialogue and lower in structure. However, the literature also suggests that, in general, two-way interactive systems tend to be more responsive to institutional needs and structure rather than to learner needs, that is, the need for dialogue. They further note that in interactive systems, the amount of dialogue and structure is more a function of the instructor than of the learner.

In a study that examined learner support systems in a state-wide instructional television program, Dillon, Gunawardena, and Parker (1992) noted that students listed the following factors as hindering their performance in the interactive television courses:

- (1) Instructor's negative attitude toward off-campus students
- (2) Lack of instructor contact outside class
- (3) Lack of feedback from instructor
- (4) Unavailability of library resources
- (5) Technical Problems related to audio
- (6) Lack of training in the use of media for both instructors and students
- (7) Poor "courier service," (distribution of course materials to sites), and
- (8) Unruly behavior of students at remote sites.

From their analysis of literature on learner support, Dillon and Blanchard (1991) provide a useful framework for designing learner support systems and criteria that needs to be considered for each type of support. They describe four types of support systems:

- (1) Learner support that addresses learner needs,
- (2) Learner support and the needs of the content,
- (3) Learner support related to the institutional context, and
- (4) Learner support and technology.

As above mentioned, effective learner support services and systems are very important elements and parts of a distance education program. These services and systems are the human and nonhuman resources that learners can access in to carry out the learning process. In a distance education system analyzing the effectiveness of the teaching and learning experiences is very important. Although, there are some efforts in the World, in many distance education systems more resources are invested in the technical systems at the expense of the learner support system and the effectiveness of these services and systems in distance teaching and learning have not been adequately evaluated. Turkish distance education system, the Open Education Faculty(OEF) of Anadolu University, was established in 1982 and according to the World Bank, Anadolu University is ,now, the largest university on earth. As the other distance education systems on earth, Turkish distance education programs must design and applicate effective learner support

services .Now, let's review and evaluate the learner support services of Turkish distance education system, the Open Education Faculty(OEF);

LEARNER SUPPORTSERVICES IN TURKISH DISTANCE EDUCATION

The four types of support systems described by Dillon and Blanchard (1991) provide a sound framework for designing support for distance learners. We shall now review the Turkish distance education system, the Open Education Faculty (OEF), according to these four types of support systems;

Learner Support and Learner Needs in the Turkish Distance Education

Learner support that addresses learner needs will depend on the unique needs and characteristics of the learner. Dillon and Blanchard (1991) observe that one important factor that contributes to success is the motivation or confidence of the learner. Less motivated students may benefit from interaction with the teacher or tutor. Less confident learners may need more group support than more confident learners. Older learners may need more support in testing environments. Learners in distance(higher) education system are adults and so ,if we want to know learner needs in a distance education system, we must know the adult learner characteristics; Ference and Vockell (1994) gave a list of adult characteristics. These characteristics were the following:

- 1) Active-learner,
- 2) Experienced-based,
- 3) Experts,
- 4) Independent,
- 5) Hands-on,
- 6) Life-centered,
- 7) Task-centered,
- 8) Solution-driven,
- 9) Value-driven,
- 10) Skill-seeking,
- 11) Self-directing,
- 12) Motivation (External),and
- 13) Motivation (Internal).

A short list of characteristics of the typical American distance learner (Moore & Kearsley, 1996) looks like this:

- Most are adults aged 25-50.
- Distance learners take courses for many reasons, particularly to learn new subjects and skills or update old ones. They may enroll to fulfill a personal goal or for work-related reasons.
- Most participate in a distance education course voluntarily.
- Most are not strangers to formal education.
- The more experience the learner has with formal education, the better his/her chances are of completing a distance learning course.
- Distance learners tend to be more field independent and self-directed than traditional learners.

Above mentioned adult learning characteristics are very important to design an effective learner support system suitable for learner needs.

In the Turkish socio-cultural context, which supports a group ethos, distance learners will benefit from group work or collaborative projects with peers (Gunawardena, 1996, 277).Murphy (1991a, 227) notes the differences in roles and status between males and females in Turkish society and points out that barriers to achievement in the Open Education Faculty (OEF) may be gender-related. In her study, she observed that expectations for success differed across gender: the young males generally expected high marks, while the young females either expected low marks or did not speculate. When designing support systems for Turkey, it is important to understand the influence of the

socio-cultural context and student characteristics of the OEF.

Socio-cultural Context in Turkey

Numerous researchers support the importance of understanding a culture and ways of learning before implementing a solution: Ong (1982, as cited in Murphy 1991b) reports that Turkey's roots in an oral tradition, along with its emphasis on rote memorization and the sacredness of text, make independent textbook learning less suitable. Ong (1982, 44) suggests that "those who live in cultures with strong oral roots are [more] likely to express themselves in terms of practical situations rather [than] in abstract terms". These types of learners are doomed to failure in unstructured environments.

Guy (1991, 163) advises that "it may be more appropriate to identify the cultures of the learners prior to the development of an institutional response so that it is sensitive to those cultural forms".

Chute (1989) applies Hofstede's (1980) model, which describes some dimensions of national culture such as uncertainty avoidance; individualism-collectivism, and masculinity, to discuss the need to take into account cultural considerations when designing tele-training for Turkey. He notes that in Turkey, there is a high level of uncertainty avoidance, low degree of individualism, and a higher degree of feminine values such as quality of life, interdependence, and service (Gunawardena, 1996, 277).

Understanding the socio-cultural context is the key to developing appropriate support systems for distance learners. In her study of the socio-cultural context of Turkish distance learning, Murphy (1991a, 225) observes that "two elements of Turkish culture - patronage and an oral tradition - seem to play a significant role in distance learning even in modern Turkey." Patronage systems that foster values of obedience, honor, and respect for authority are evident in Turkey's educational system through students' respect and loyalty toward their professor and bonds of friendship and mutual assistance among classmates. She further observes that Turkey's roots in an oral tradition imply that people are likely to express themselves in terms of practical situations rather than in abstract terms.

Traditionally, the Turkish socio-cultural context has been characterized by close interpersonal relationships (Imamoglu, 1987; Kagitcibasi, 1984). The individual has a network of close ties, including the nuclear family, relatives, and close neighbors (Imamoglu, Miller; Imamoglu & Kuller, 1993). The traditional socialization processes emphasize obedience, closeness, and loyalty to parents rather than independence and self-reliance (Imamoglu, 1987; Kagitcibasi, 1984). For example, by comparing the values of Turkish and American university students, Hyman, Payaslioglu, and Frey (1958) reported individualistic, or personal, values to be more prevalent among U.S. students, whereas loyalty to the family and society were predominant among the Turkish sample.

In Turkish society, where women's social status is inferior to that of men, the segregation of the sexes strongly reinforces traditional gender role expectations among Turkish adolescents. Especially in rural areas, lack of sharing between males and females and same-sex friendship contribute to the separation of the sexes. In terms of their behavior and roles, young females are, by and large, subject to stricter social control. While young females spend most of their spare time in their home environment, young males do so outside with peers. This situation continues into adulthood where the wife is of lower status than the husband. The male usually makes the decisions and has a low level of communication with his spouse (Kagitcibasi, 1987).

Turkish young females have a strong identification with their mothers and the mothers' traditional gender role attitudes (Kagitcibasi, 1987). They are more likely to obtain a low level of educational achievement, particularly in rural areas where traditional gender roles are adhered to more strongly (Erkut, 1987). Young females are generally less active and less likely to pursue higher education; young males appear to be less traditional in their gender role attitudes.

Moreover, in another study of values in Turkey (Imamoglu & Karakitapoglu, 1999),

university students' value orientations in the 1990s included socio-cultural normative, comfort-social recognition, love-peace, wisdom, stimulation-challenge, autonomy, and arid self-respect-achievement orientations, pointing to the existence of both individual and group-related concerns. In accordance with such studies, one might expect Turkish people to retain their conservation and self-transcendence-related values but, at the same time, to assume more individualistic, achievement, and self-enhancement concerns.

Student Characteristics of Open Education Faculty(OEF)

The composition of students in the OEF varies from program to program. In some programs, such as the Teacher Training program and the Nursing Education program, students are already working in their areas of specialization and they tend to be older students. In the Tourism Certificate program, on the other hand, students are typically younger and are not yet working in their subject area. In the Business Administration and Economics program, the percentage of working students has increased from 30% in 1983 to 70% in 1990. Overall, the percentage age of females enrolled is increasing. The general age range of students across all subjects in the OEF is older than that found in traditional institutions. The students range from 17 years to 80 years old. The majority of students are married and the family average is three children. Their incomes are less than the average equivalent to \$1200 USD per year income (Demiray, 2002).

As mentioned above, to design an effective support system and to determine learner needs we should first take into consideration the socio-cultural context in Turkey and student characteristics of OEF.

Learner Support and Content in Turkish Distance Education

This type of learner support will depend on the content and the learning environment. Is the content related to the cognitive, affective, or psychomotor domain? How has the learning environment been designed? The learner-centered and teacher-centered learning environments will be different (Gunawardena, 1996, 278).

The Turkish distance education system ,the Open Education Faculty (OEF) ,is a second generation one in that it integrates printed materials with broadcast media (Murphy, 1991b). Technologies used to deliver distance education programs in Turkey are typically one-way and Turkey integrates technologies in distance education primarily by combining the one-way technologies of text and television. Learner-content interaction in Turkey is therefore designed to occur through self-instruction with textbooks and optional television and radio broadcast (Murphy, 1996; Gunawardena, 1996; Demiray, 2002).

Murphy (1991c) notes that in her study, while first-year distance learners in Turkey generally described the textbooks as the "most useful" aspect of the OEF, some found that learning solely from textbooks posed challenges and restricted interaction. In another study, OEF students living in Bolu (Turkey) generally described the textbooks as the "unique and most useful" instruments (Nartgun & Esen, 1996).

The Open Education Faculty offers associate degree, degree completion and vocational programs in the following fields:

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|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Home Economics | Business Administration |
| Sales Management | Public Relations |
| Accounting | Municipal Administration |
| Tourism and Hotel Management | Foreign Trade |
| Banking and Insurance | Nursing |
| Office Management | Health Technician |
| Primary Education | Agriculture and Veterinary |

The program's contents at the OEF are generally related to the cognitive domain. The learning environment has been designed to encourage self-instruction with textbooks, and eight-five percent of the learning is expected to occur by means of the textbooks (Gunawardena, 1996, 276). Two elements of Turkish culture, patronage and an oral

tradition, seem to play a significant role in the (distance) learning environment. While the Turkish OEF system provides for various forms of interaction in distance learning, the socio-cultural context determines the extent of learning environment. Technologies used to deliver contents of distance education programs in Turkey are typically one-way and are designed to reach the masses. But the effectiveness and the quality of the learning environment are dependent on the usage of advanced distance education technologies.

Learner Support and Institutional Context in Turkish Distance Education

This type of learner support will depend on the type of distance teaching institution delivering the instruction. Open universities usually have a network of study centers and emphasize student-tutor interactions and flexible pacing. Institutional policies may also affect access to media and libraries and can be problematic in mixed mode institutions that may treat distance learners differently from traditional on-campus learners (Gunawardena, 1996, 278).

Before explaining the relationship between learner support and the institutional context of the OEF, we need to look at it from the point of view of organization, to which the institutional context is largely related.

Administrative Structure of the Open Education Faculty (OEF)

The Open Education Faculty was established by Anadolu University during the reorganization of universities in 1982. The OEF was organized as a faculty body but it is now Turkey's largest faculty. Anadolu University is now the largest university on earth, according to the World Bank. The OEF, which runs the system on behalf of Anadolu University, is independently able to award its own degree to students who have completed their secondary education. Its administrative headquarters are in Eskişehir, in the northwest of Turkey mid-way between Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir and Bursa, with regional offices and study centers giving academic services throughout Turkey. The first Open Education Faculty degree courses began in December 1982 and the first graduation ceremony took place in November 1986. It has one dean and four deputy deans, each with different responsibilities. The four areas of responsibility are:

- Registration, regional offices, organization of academic counseling, exams,
- Course materials, media production and delivery from OEF Radio and TV studios,
- Development projects, and
- International relations and international projects.

The deputy deans report to the dean of the OEF who is responsible directly to the rector of the university.

Until 1993, the OEF was administered as a separate faculty within Anadolu University. After 1993, its status changed and the OEF became a service faculty of the Economics and Business faculties. These faculties are responsible for distance education separately from their own departments, in spite of the content being the same. The OEF continues to register students, organize exams, prepare and produce printed, visual and audio course materials and to dispatch them to students. These faculties are responsible only for designing the content of course material scientifically. Additionally, the OEF can only give pre-bachelor diploma or degree programs as it did before. Its administrative structure was not changed. It still has own dean and four vice-deans as mentioned above.

Finances of OEF

Like other public universities in Turkey, Anadolu University and its distance education branch, the OEF, are financed by the government. The salaries of all academicians and administrators are paid through government funds. Expenditure for all OEF operations including printing books, television and radio production, mailing, examination costs, administrative costs and salaries come from Anadolu University's operating budget. The revenue of the university comes from government allocations, foundation income and student fees. Although the percentage from each of these areas can vary from year to year, the majority of the income comes from the government.

Reports and Studies

There have been numerous research and evaluation studies during the OEF's 20-year history. These studies and various reports have been published primarily in Turkish and some written also in English. Many are Master and PhD theses in Turkish, and some have been written about the system by foreign researchers and observers who have visited the OEF.

All of the studies have been collected by Anadolu University library. More than 150 reports and studies have been abstracted in a review of the literature. Approximately 50 of these publications are written in English. Reports have appeared from authors based in Australia, Canada, the United States, Pakistan, India, and Sudan. In its 15 years of growth, the OEF has gained international recognition and has grown into an institution of considerable importance (Demiray, 2002).

Learner Support and Technology in Turkish Distance Education

Learner support related to technology will depend on the type of technologies used in the distance education system. Garrison (1989) describes the development of distance education by noting three generations of technology. The first generation uses primarily correspondence, delivered through the regular mail system. In this system, the availability of interaction becomes critical. Thus, the provision for interaction between the student and the tutor is important.

The second generation of technologies provides for real time interaction and is exemplified by audio, audio graphics and video teleconferencing. Because these systems provide for real time interaction, what is critical is the quality of interaction. The third generation technologies are microprocessor-based technologies such as computer conferencing. In these systems, the quality of interaction with the group becomes important and support systems must facilitate the collaborative learning process. In some studies, technologies that deliver instruction to distance learners are often classified as two-way interactive or one-way non-interactive (Bates, 1995; Murphy, 1996).

Gunawardena (1996) observes that if telecommunication technologies are to be used to move distance learners away from their dependency on instructors to take more control of their own learning, then adequate support systems must be provided to support learners who have been influenced by the patronage system and oral tradition in Turkey. He proposes the following guidelines for designing media-based support systems for Turkey:

1. Provide Study Centers or Video Education Centers that take into account both the learner-instructor and learner-learner interaction needs as well as access to technology such as videocassette records and computers.
2. Provide competence in the use of communications media, preferably in orientation programs which involves three aspects:
 - the ability to interface with the technology such as pressing a push-to-talk bar on a microphone,
 - the ability to clearly understand the unique strengths and weaknesses of each medium, and how to access information through that medium, and
 - the ability to use the medium to communicate with teachers and other distance learners.
3. Develop communication protocols for each medium providing guidelines on how to use the medium.
4. Organize group projects or collaborative work if possible through a group-based technology such as computer conferencing in order to take advantage of the group ethos of the socio-cultural context.
5. Provide orientation programs for students who are new to distance learning focusing on learning-how-to-learn skills, and learning from media.

As above mentioned technologies used to deliver distance education programs in Turkey are typically one-way and integrate technologies in distance education primarily by combining the one-way technologies of text and television. Taking into account Garrison's (1989) description, Turkey not using primary correspondence delivered through the regular mail system means that it is still not even in the first generation. Therefore, the main problem area is more the availability of interaction than the quality of interaction or quality of interaction with the group.

Learner-support related to technology depends on the type of technologies used in the distance education system. Learner-technology interaction is not part of the formal design of the distance education programs of the OEF. But in addition to facilities for live TV broadcasting, research is being conducted at Anadolu University for the utilization of new communication and computer technologies in the distance education activities of the Open Education Faculty. A videoconferencing center has been established to use this technology for live lecturing and tutoring. Using the Internet as a medium for providing course material and communicating with students is another goal to increase the quality and the effectiveness of the education. Computer-supported teaching is being improved utilizing the capabilities of new multi-media computer technology.

DISCUSSION

Although the Turkish distance education system provides for various forms of learner support such as learner support and learner needs; learner support and content; learner support and institutional context; and learner support and technology, but still there are some important problems concerning with these forms of support. According to the findings of the literature (Murphy, 1991a; Gunawardena, 1996; Demiray, 2002), patronage and oral tradition, which are two important elements of Turkish culture, seem to play a significant role in distance learning, even in modern Turkey. The cultural and socio-cultural context of the students enrolled in the Open Education Faculty affects the four types of learner support mentioned above. The institutional designers of the OEF first have to recognize the cultural and socio-cultural context, the unique needs and characteristics of students in the OEF, and then determine the services, manpower and economical resources. The designer should design the institution to enhance learner support and interaction and select technologies and media according to eight practical guidelines (Patsula, 2002):

- Cost
- Accessibility
- Social-political Suitability
- Cultural Friendliness
- Openness/Flexibility
- Interactivity
- Motivational Value, and
- Effectiveness.

Then the institution, the Open Education Faculty of Anadolu University , should delivery the technologies that bring about the self-instruction of students in the OEF.

Although the Turkish distance education system has the possibilities of advanced educational technologies, it already provides learner support through one-way technologies. The learning environment has been designed for self-instruction to occur by means of the one-way technologies of textbooks, radio, and television broadcasting. Video Education Centers have been established which use technology for live lecturing and tutoring in the OEF. But there are some important problems, such as effectiveness, suitability, accessibility, cost, cultural friendliness, interactivity, and the motivational value of the printed materials, radio and television broadcasts.

To produce learner-technology interaction, the Open Education Faculty has the opportunity to use new technologies such as computer-assisted education, the Internet, web-based instruction, or CD-ROM software. The OEF, in fact, established a foundation to develop a

"virtual" university in 1998. But the main problem for the OEF is how these technological possibilities can be used to design a media-based support system and to enhance learner support and interaction. The OEF can use radio to emphasize learner-instructor interactions. The other current technologies and media such as computer-mediated education, web-based instruction, CD-ROM software, video education centers, the Internet, virtual university, should be used to enhance cooperative learning. The Internet, such as radio, can be used to emphasize learner-instructor interactions, too.

To design a media-based support system and enhance interaction and learner support in distance education and the learning environment, the Open Education Faculty should apply instructional strategies and interactive technologies such as telecommunications that are inspired by the OEF students' socio-cultural context, unique needs and characteristics, and values. But the socio-cultural, socio-economic and political conditions of Turkey should be taken into consideration.

SUGGESTIONS

To enhance learner support in the Turkish distance education system, the following suggestions may be proposed:

- 1. Open Education Faculty students should be supported through Student Centers. These centers should aim at reducing their individual deficiencies and contributing to their learning rather than introducing courses.**
- 2. Students need to have access to music, drama, sports events, educational activities and employment counseling in their leisure time. Student Cultural Educational Centers should therefore be established to support the students in their leisure time.**
- 3. The Open Education Faculty should cooperate with established distance education institutions sharing common aims nationally and internationally.**
- 4. The Open Education Faculty's budget must be increased to provide good institutional support for its students.**
- 5. The number of studies about the characteristics, unique needs, and socio-cultural context of OEF student-learners are insufficient in the related literature. A lot of further research needs to be done about the learner support and learner needs, content, institutional context and technology.**
- 6. Library and publication support for OEF students should be increased from the point of view of quantity and quality.**

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