INVESTIGATING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON FEEDBACK IN DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAM: A CASE STUDY IN TURKEY

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ABSTRACT
Feedback in distance education plays a crucial role as it gives one of the few opportunities for teacher-student interaction. Since the effectiveness of distance education can be improved by enhancing the quality of feedback, which significantly affects students' subsequent learning, teachers need to acknowledge the importance of students' involvement and place room for their needs and expectations in formulating their feedback (Hyland, 2010, Jara&Mellar, 2010). In this respect, the study attempts to serve the first step toward understanding students' perceptions on feedback in order to open a room for negotiation between students and instructors and subsequently to be able to shape the feedback process in our institution accordingly. The data for the study were gathered from 304 volunteering students studying at different programs in distance education utilizing a Likert-Type questionnaire. The results of the study are meant to bring valuable insights to students' opinions regarding the nature of feedback in distance education and to provide implications for learning process in our context.

Keywords: Distance Education, Feedback, Feedback in Distance Education

ÖZET
Uzaktan eğitimdedönüt, öğretmen-öğrenci etkileşimin epek çok fırsatlar sunması nedeniyle önemli bir rol oynamaktadır.Uzaktan eğitimin etkililiği, öğrencilerins onraki öğrenmelerine anlamlı bir şekilde etki eden dönütün kalitesinin arttırılmasıyla geliştirilebileceğinden,öğretmenlerin, öğrenci katılımını kabuletmesi ve dönütlerini oluştururken öğrencilerin gereksinimlerine ve beklentilerine yer vermeleri gerekir. Bu bağlamda çalışma, öğrencilerile öğretmenler arasında uzlaşmaya yer verme ve bunun sonucunda, kurumumuzda dönüt sürecini buna göre şekillendirme amacıyla öğrencilerin dönüt algılarını anlama konusunda ilk adımı oluşturmaya çalışmaktadır.Çalışmadaki veriler likert-tipi bir anket kullanılarak, üniversitenin uzaktaneğitim veren meslek yüksekokulundaki farklı bölümlerinde eğitim gören 304 gönüllü öğrenciden toplanmıştır. Çalışma sonuçları, uzaktan eğitimde uygulanan dönüt süreci hakkındaki öğrenci görüşlerini ortaya koyarak öğrenme sürecine yönelik çıkarımlar sağlamaktadır.

AnahtarKelimeler: Uzaktan Eğitim, Dönüt, Uzaktan Eğitimde Dönüt.

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1. Introduction

The immense development in technology has altered the way communication in educational contexts held from traditional pencil-paper style toward online or electronic contexts. This shift has led to fundamental changes in the field of education providing various alternatives to the traditional classroom teaching to meet the demands of the global technology web in various aspects of life. As one of the new trends to accommodate this increasing demand, distance education based on computer technology, also termed as e-learning, has been implemented by many institutions of higher education all around the world (Govindasamy, 2002). The need to timely access relevant and useful information and to provide training to anyone, anywhere and anytime has made e-learning an imperative. E-learning is defined as a way of instruction delivered via any electronic media such as the internet, intranets, or extranets (Govindasamy, 2002). With the spatial and temporal freedom it provides, the introduction of e-learning for distance education has led to an explosion in demand (Moller, Foshay&Huett, 2008; Desai, Hart, & Richards, 2009).

However, as an alternative way of teaching and learning to traditional face-to-face classrooms, pedagogical considerations of e-learning has been much debated (e.g. Swain, 2000; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Woo & Reeves, 2007; Lin & Yang, 2011).Among the mostly debated issues, online assessment, as one of the most important aspects of teaching and learning, is still among the challenges that today's educators face (Costa, Mullan, Kothe, &Butow, 2010). The traditional ways of assessment, which rather focus on the examinee's performance at a specific moment, also referred as summative assessment, are highly criticized for lacking continuous learning assistance to students and for failing to support deeper learning in both face-to-face and in distance education contexts (e.g. Wang, 2010; Costa et al., 2010; Yang & Tsai, 2010; Chang & Petersen, 2006; Govindasamy, 2002). Viewing assessment as a part of the learning process, many educators propose that assessment should be dynamic in a way to provide constant interaction between teachers and learners by constructive feedback (Wang, 2010). This approach to assessment is defined under formative assessment which aims to assist students all through the learning process. It is usually conducted with the aim to contribute to the students' learning process by providing timely information about their performance levels. Contrary to summative assessment, which is geared towards determining what students have learnt and serves usually administrative purposes such as assigning a grade (William, 2001); formative assessment is constructive and can take place all through the learning process via interaction between students and instructors (Yorke, 2003).

The attempt to implement formative assessment via constant feedback in e-learning contexts will necessitate intensive and constructive interaction among the parties, i.e. learners, teachers and administrators. As a social constructivist model for learning suggests, acquisition of knowledge occurs in a social context where learners are encouraged to work on a variety of tasks via elaborated conversations to be able to organize, synthesize, interpret and evaluate complex information (Peters, 2006). Thus, feedback, as one of the fundamental tools that is used to provide such effective interaction in distant teaching-learning contexts, holds acrucial role.

1.1.   Feedback in Learning and Teaching

The term "feedback" is defined by Narciss(2008) as "[the] post-response information which informs the learners on their actual states of learning and/or performance in order to help them detect if their states corresponds to the learning aims in a given context" (p.292). The quality of feedback provided by a teacher will determine the progress of learners, the pedagogical and assessment intentions and expectations of the teacher and the institution, the degree of student engagement in the learning process and the revision responses expected from learners (Parr &Timperley, 2010). Hence, the nature of feedback has a vital impact on the process of any specific learning or assessment situation. Depending on its focus, feedback can promote surface or deep learning. When the focus is on the correctness of content, feedback can hinder the development of knowledge construction and can lead to surface learning. If directed toward a deeper learning, it may then encourage learners to work on the information provided by searching for relationships and elaborating on it and eventually to develop cognitive processing skills (Parr &Timperley, 2010). When delivered timely and effectively, feedback can increase the learning potential and provide learners greater opportunities for autonomous learning and improvement (Narciss, 2008).

Although the positive impact that feedback can have in students' academic development is widely recognized (e.g. Gonzales-Bueno, 1998; Matsumura, 2004; Li & Barnard, 2011, etc.), it is also well-documented that feedback interventions don't always result in increased performance (e.g. Kluger&DeNisi, 1996; Crisp, 2007; Walker, 2009; Price, Handley, Millar & O'Donovan, 2010, etc.). The studies report various reasons for this widespread yet persistent problem. One of the main reasons indicated in these studies for limited effectiveness in feedback practices is the lack of mutual understanding of expectations between students and tutors (Higgins, Hartley & Skelton, 2002; Carless, 2006; Hyland and Hyland, 2006; Orsmand& Merry, 2011). For such an understanding to occur, there is a need to establish continuous interaction between students and teachers where students are perceived as valuable and active agents like the teachers and other members of the institution (Hyland & Hyland, 2006) where they will be anchored in the social and institutional context of learning.

1.2.   The Role of Feedback in Distance Education

The growing trend in providing distant education via the internet has reshaped the profiles of learners with different characteristics, needs and expectations. The challenges that educators face when attempting to develop and evaluate online education programs are multifaceted. Among these, creating an interactive atmosphere where learners can receive individualized feedback and assistance, rather than getting a grade as a result of summative assessment at specific intervals, has been one of the important issues. In this respect, as one of the vital tools for such an interaction, feedback has been highly valued by educators (Peters, 2006; Yang & Tsai, 2010). It offers educators the opportunity to constantly monitor students' learning, work together via concurrent and continuing dialogue, and assist them accomplish tasks that requires higher-order thinking (Peters, 2006). However, in order to optimize the benefits of feedback tool in on-line contexts, there is a need to rethink how feedback should be

tailored to meet students' needs and expectationsin distance education while maintaining the continuity of the interaction between the parties.

The new standards for feedback in distance education should encompass technological, pedagogical and humanistic aspects of the learning environment. As Carless (2006) suggests, there should be a dialogue between teachers and learners on the understanding each party's roles, expectations and needs. Such a negotiation can help to establish communal standards and to maintain student-centered education since it encourages learners' participation (Inoue, 2005; Hamp-Lyons, 2001).

The social constructive view of learning perceives learners as active agents of their learning who control, relate, engage, and construe each learning item throughout the learning process. Therefore, there is a need for a dynamic interaction between the teacher and learners to communicate the needs and the expectations of both parties in any given learning context. Since the way they receive feedback will determine their course of action and the possible subsequent learning (Black and William, 1998), teachers need to acknowledge the importance of student involvement and place room for their needs and specific contexts in formulating their feedback (Hyland, 2010). Researchers also maintain that students are willing to play an active role in managing their own learning (William, 2001; Jara&Mellar, 2010; Sung & Mayer, 2012) and are eager to experiment with different feedback options and to gain opportunities to voice their needs (Leki, 1991; Lee, 2007). In the context of distance education, providing accessible and continuous communication faces many challenges such as lack of social presence and connection (Hughes, Ventura &Dando, 2007; Cobb, 2009), being in different locations (Moore &Kearsley, 2005), lack of personal attention and frequent contact with students (Smith & Bailey, 1993), lack of consideration of students' feelings (Goge& Broiler, 1992; Gagne, Briggs & Wager, 1992). Since feedback process, when tailored to meet the needs of distance education students, can accommodate these lacks and improve the effectiveness of distance education (Fetherston, 2001; Desai, et al., 2009; Koehler & Mishra, 2009), itdeserves a deeper consideration in any attempt to improve the quality of distance education.

Moving from the assumption that any decision in the process of receiving and giving feedback should be based on the learning context and should place a greater emphasize on identifying students' opinions (Jara&Mellar, 2010); the present study attempts to serve the first step by having a better understanding on distance education students' perceptions on feedback in order to open a room for a negotiation between students and instructors and subsequently to be able to shape the feedback process in our institution accordingly.In this respect,based on students' self-reports, the study specifically focuses onthe learners' opinions regarding (a) the amount of feedback they receive and the amount they prefer, (b)their actions upon the received feedback, (c) the impact of the received feedback on their academic development, and (d) the impact of the received feedback on their feelings. The following research questions guided the study:

1) Is there a correlation between the amount of feedback learners actually receive and the amount they prefer?
2) How do students act upon the feedback they receive?
3) How do students evaluate the impact of feedback they receive on their academic development?

4) What are students' affective dispositions toward the feedback they receive?

2. Method

2.1. Context

Turkey, with its significant young population and their educational needs, started to provide distance education programs in 2000 (Gülbahar, 2009). With the accompanying technological opportunities, today nearly half of the students in higher education are enrolled in distance education programs (Güneş, 2009). However, although this sudden and enormous increase in the demand could be met quantitatively, the quality of these programs and their impact on students' academic improvement has been much debated (Alkan, 1996; Gülbahar, 2009; Güneş, 2009). In addition to providing well-structured programs geared toward distance learning and the qualified staff to deliver these programs, meeting students' individualized needs and assisting them considering their specific social and psychological circumstances still remains among the challenges that we face today. Furthermore, the scarcity of the research in the field indicates the urgent need to voice the shortcomings of such programs and to search for ways of improving them.

In an attempt to reflect on the distance education application process, the study was conducted at a Vocational College at a state university in Turkey. The Vocational School was established in 2002 and has been providingdistance education in four different undergraduate programs: Computer Technology and Programming, Child Education, Electronic Communications, and Accountancy and Taxation. Each program lasts two years (4 terms) and students have to take between 6 up to 9 online courses each term. The school does not provide hybrid (face-to-face plus online) education. It provides web-based education where students can access to the course contents, tests, videos, forums and other educational databases.

2.2. Participants

The participants of the study consisted of students studying at the Vocational College of Cukurova University (n=304). Since the whole population was aimed to be included in the study, there was no sampling conducted. There are 808 students enrolled in the programs and were requested to participate in the study. However, 304 students responded and formed the data presented in the study. The distribution of the participants in terms of gender and the program they are in is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Participant Students

		f	%
GENDER	Male	138	45,4
	Female	166	54,6
	TOTAL	304	100,0
PROGRAM	Computer Technology and Programming	102	33,6
	Electronic Communications	52	17,1
	Accountancy and Taxation	33	10,9
	Child Education	117	38,5
	TOTAL	304	100,0

As Table 1 displays, 138 of the participants were male and 166 of them were female. The programs they study are Child Education (n=117), Computer Technology and Programming (n=102), Electronic Communications (n=52), and Accountancy and Taxation (n=33).

2.3. Data Collection Instrument

The data for the study were gathered from "Student Questionnaire on Feedback in Distance Education". Based on a comprehensive literature review in the field and discussions with the teachers in Faculty of Education, a questionnaire was developed to explore distance education students' opinions on the feedback they receive from their tutors during their learning process. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part contained questions to obtain demographic information such as gender, the program and the grade the students are in. The second part, consisted 62items in 5-point Likert Scale format, anchored by strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (5). The questionnaire includes five subcategories comprising items directed toward eliciting students' perceptions on (a) the amount of feedback they receive; (b) the amount they prefer to receive; (c) their actions upon the feedback received; (d) their affective dispositions toward the feedback received; and (e) the impacts of feedback received on their academic development.

Following subsequent discussions with the teachers(n=3) at the institution on the items of the questionnaire, 9 items were eliminated on the grounds that they had either repetitive focus or ambiguous wordings. The administered questionnaire comprised 53 items.

2.4. Data Collection Procedure and Analysis

The questionnaire was first transformed into a google document to be able to deliver it online. Then, it was sent to instructors in the four departments who later requested students to complete the questionnaire in their distance education system. In the following two months, only 39 students responded to the request. Thus, the questionnaire was administered to students in paper during their visits during the exam week.However, out of 808 students enrolled in distance education programs, the number of students who completed the questionnaire was only 304 (including the 39 students who responded online). Yet, since the questionnaire could still be administered to a large sample of students (n=304), the final total number meets Gorsuch's (1983) criteria of having a minimum of five participants per variable for a valid statistical analysis.

After participants completed the questionnaire, the data were electronically transferred to computer environment. For the evaluation of both first and second part of the questionnaire SPSS 17.0 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) was used. For the analysis of the first part, which was comprised of demographic information of the participants, descriptive statistics were used and the results are presented in Section 2.2. For the second part, on the other hand, Mean scores were calculated for descriptive statistics and Pearson's Correlation Test was conducted to find out any possible significant correlations.

2.5.   Findings
2.5.1.   The Amount of Feedback
The questionnaire includes 3 items regarding the amount of feedback students receive (AF)and 5 items related to the amount they preferred (AP). Table 2 displays the items in these subcategories and the results of descriptive analysis.

Table 2: The Amount of Feedback

Subcategory	Items	Mean	SD
AF	I_1. I receive feedback for all my academic work.	3.3783	1.06473
	I_{16}. I receive feedback for some of my academic work.	3.4145	.95055
	I_{53}. I don't receive feedback for any of my academic work.	2.8618	1.05961
AP	I_{20}. I prefer not to receive feedback for any of my academic work.	3.0691	1.23153
	I_{23}. I prefer to receive feedback for all of my academic work.	3.5526	1.03910
	I_{26}. I prefer to receive feedback for some of my academic work.	3.2928	1.07006
	I_{31}. I prefer to receive feedback for some weak sides of my academic work.	3.6250	.97366
	I_{33}. I prefer to receive feedback for all weak sides of my academic work.	3.6711	1.01654

AF: Amount of Feedback Students Receive on Their Work;
AP: Amount of Feedback Students Prefer to Receive on Their Work

Considering the amount of feedback students receive, the results indicate a tendency toward agreement responses for receiving feedback to some or to all their academic work (I_1=3.37 and I_{16}=3.41).Also, disagreement rate to receiving no feedback was high (I_{53}=2.86). From the results of Mean scores, it can be claimed that the majority of the students reported that they received feedback, though they had divergent views about amount of feedback they received. When asked for the amount of feedback they preferred to receive, however, they did not strongly agree to any statements. Yet, the highest score for disagreement was reported for Item 20, which suggests that they did not prefer receiving no feedback(I_{20}=3.06). The highest rates toward agreement was to receive feedback to all or some of weak sides of their work (I_{33}=3.67; I_{31}=3.62).When asked for their preference regarding their academic work, they tended toward agreeing on receiving to all or some of their academic work (I_{23}=3.55; I_{26}=3.29). Overall, the results imply that students prefer to receive feedback, however, they could not express definite amount for it.

To be able to find out the correlation between the subcategories AF and AP, the data in theitems in each subcategory (AF: I_1, I_{16}, I_{53} and AP: I_{20}, I_{23}, I_{26}, I_{31}, I_{33}) were transformed into a single mean value for the total items in the same subcategory by computing each single student's score for each item. Following this step, Pearson's Correlation Test was conducted to search for a possible correlation between these two variables. The results are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3: The Correlation between Feedback Received and Preferred

		AF	AP
	Pearson Correlation	1	,323[**]
AF	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	304	304
	Pearson Correlation	,323[**]	1
AP	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	304	304

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The subsequent Pearson Correlation analysis indicated that there is a significant positive correlation between the amount of feedback that students receive and the amount they prefer to receive (r=0,323, p<.01).This statistical result indicates that students generally receive the amount of feedback they prefer. Yet, this correlation impliesstudentscannot exhibit definite amounts not only for the amount they actually receive but for the amount they prefer as well, which can explain the significant correlation between these two variables.

2.5.2. Students' Actions upon Feedback

Another subcategory of the questionnaire is directed towards students' actions upon receiving feedback on their work (A1). A1 comprised 11 items (Item 5, 8, 12, 13, 18, 25, 28, 35, 38, 40, and 46) and the results of the analysis of students' responses are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4.Students' Actions upon Feedback

Subcategory	Items	Mean	SD
	I_5.I consult other teachers about the feedback I receive	3,3487	1,08552
	I_8. I consult my family members about the feedback I receive	3,1809	1,21194
	I_{12}. I don't revise my work after I receive feedback on it	2,3849	1,11983
	I_{13}. I don't know how to revise my work upon receiving feedback on it	3,6776	1,08456
	I_{18}. I ask for help from my friends about the feedback I receive	3,7171	1,02714
A1	I_{25}. I ignore the feedback I receive	2,3783	1,05226
	I_{28}. I try to learn the information in the feedback I receive	3,2796	,99708
	I_{35}. I ask for further explanation from my teacher after I receive feedback	3,6349	,96894
	I_{38}. I change my work according to the feedback I receive on it	3,7434	,93340
	I_{40}. I check on other sources (e.g. internet, journals, etc.) about the feedback I receive	3,7796	,99542
	I_{46}. I forget to revise my work after I receive feedback on it.	2,5033	,96472

A1: Students' Actions upon Receiving Feedback

The results indicate that students most frequently check on the other sources ($I_{40}=3.77$), ask for help from friends ($I_{18}=3.71$), change their work based on it ($I_{38}=3.74$), or ask for further explanation from their teacher ($I_{35}=3.63$). They mostly disagreed with not revising their work after receiving feedback on it ($I_{12}=2.38$), ignoring the feedback ($I_{25}=2.37$) or forgetting about it ($I_{46}=2.50$). The results also reveal that trying to learn the information in their feedback ($I_{28}=3.27$) or to consult other teachers about the feedback they receive ($I_5=3.34$) are also among the actions they took upon feedback.

Another significant result from this subcategory can be the relatively high frequency of students who agreed that they do not know how to revise after they get their feedback ($I_{13}=2.67$). This finding is particularly important since students in distance education programs have a very limited chance to interact with their tutors on their learning process and the necessary study skills that they should be equipped with. This problem is well reported in literature and indicated that when students cannot figure out how to work on feedback they receive; feedback fails to result in improvement and cannot fulfill its constructive purpose (e.g. Carless, 2006; Draper, 2009; Walker, 2009; Orsmond& Merry, 2011) even can lead to decreased performance (Kluger&DeNisi, 1996). Thus, assisting students in the feedback process in terms of understanding the feedback and working on it is very important.

2.5.3. The Impacts of Feedback on Students' Academic Development

There are 4 items in Academic Development (AC) subcategory which aim to find out students opinions on the impact of feedback they receive on their academic development. The results of the analysis are displayed in Table 5 and Table 6.

Table 5. The Impact of Feedback on Academic Development

Subcategory	Items	Mean	SD
AC	I_{11}.I believe my teacher's feedback contributes to my academic development.	3.8388	.98353
	I_{22}.I believe my teacher's feedback has a negative effect on my grades.	2.5263	1.04958
	I_{45}. I don't think my teacher's feedback contributes to my academic development.	2.1217	1.14681
	I_{51}. I believe my teacher's feedback has a positive effect on my grades.	3.7895	.94140

AC= The Impact of Feedback Received on Academic Development

As displayed in Table 5, students mostly disagreed that the feedback they received from their teacher had a negative impact on their academic development ($I_{22}=2.52$) or did not contribute to their academic development ($I_{45}=2.12$). Rather, the results were very close to agreement onitems that stated feedback contributed to their academic development ($I_{11}=3.83$ and $I_{51}=3.78$). This result suggests that students were aware of the benefits of feedback in terms of their academic development.

A further analysis was conducted to search for possible correlations between the amounts of feedback students received (AF) and its impact on academic development (AC). Table 6 presents the results:

Table 6: The correlation between AF and AC

		AF	AC
AF	Pearson Correlation	1	,262[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	304	304
AC	Pearson Correlation	,262[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	304	304

[**]. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The result indicates a statistically significant positive correlation between AF and AC (r=0,262, p<.01). Therefore, it can be claimed that when the amount of feedback students get increases, they feel they improve more. As reported in many other studies (e.g. Clariana&Wallace, 2002; Pommerich, 2004), this finding imply that students in our institution also viewed feedback positively and thought it assisted them academically.

2.5.4. Students' Affective Dispositions toward Feedback

The last subcategory in the questionnaire includes 10 items directed toward students' affective dispositions when they received feedback. The results of the descriptive analysis of these items are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Students' Affective Dispositions toward Feedback

Subcategory	Items	Mean	SD
	I_2.I feel demotivated when I receive feedback	2,6678	1,14241
	I_6.I feel frustrated when I receive feedback	2,5066	1,12866
	I_{10}.I feel insulted when I receive feedback	2,3849	1,20775
	I_{19}.I feel motivated when I receive feedback	3,7895	,97920
	I_{27}.I don't feel anything when I receive feedback	2,4572	1,00731
FE	I_{29}.I feel dissatisfied when I receive feedback	2,5493	1,00700
	I_{34}.I feel cared for when I receive feedback	3,7072	1,06077
	I_{41}.I feel disappointed when I receive feedback	2,4836	1,03394
	I_{47}.I feel less stressed about my work when I receive feedback	3,6349	,91282
	I_{50}.I feel assessed when I receive feedback	3,7467	,94309

FE=Students' Affective Dispositions toward the Feedback They Receive

According to the results of the descriptive analysis, students mostly feel in a positive way when they receive feedback. The highest agreement responses were for feeling motivated (I_{19}=3.78), cared for (I_{34}=3.70), and less stressed (I_{47}=3.63). The majority did not feel insulted (I_{10}=2.38), frustrated (I_6=2.50), demotivated (I_2=2.66), disappointed (I_{41}=2.48), or dissatisfied (I_{29}=2.54). Feeling assessed was also among the highly agreed items (I_{50}=3.74). The overall result indicates students' affective dispositions toward the feedback they receive on their work are mostly positive. This

finding is in line with the bulk of research reporting that the interaction provided by feedback is perceived positively by students (Rifkind, 1992; Gunawardena, 1995; Gunawardena&Zittle, 1997; Nicholson, 2002; Richardson & Swan, 2003; Vonderwell, 2003; Song, Singleton, Hill &Koh, 2004; Hwang & Yang, 2008; Cobb, 2009; Hughes, Ventura &Dando, 2007; Sung & Mayer, 2012).

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to identify distance education students' perceptions on feedback they received from their instructors as the first step toward enhancing the quality of feedback process in distance education. To collect the data, a questionnaire was administered to students from four different distance education programs. From students' reports, it is clear that students perceive feedback positively and think that it contributes to their academic development.

Considering the amount of feedback, they could not report precisely how much feedback they receive or how much they would prefer. However, the findings indicate that students receivea considerable amount of feedback on their work from their instructors, though the scores do not signal high amounts. However, when asked for their preferences on the amount of feedback, their responses indicated their desire for more feedback, which isin line withthesignificant amount of research that suggest the students' desire to receive more feedback from their teachers (e.g. Richardson & Swan, 2003; Hwang & Yang, 2008; Cobb, 2009; Sung & Mayer, 2012, etc.).

When students were asked about their actions upon receiving feedback, they mostly stated that they work on their feedback by checking on the other sources, asking for help from friends, or asking for further explanation from their teacher. This implies that they took the feedback given to them seriously. However, the majority did not know how to revise their work upon receiving feedback.This frequently reported problem may hinder the effectiveness of feedback and fail to result in improvement (e.g. Carless, 2006; Kluger&DeNisi, 1996; Draper, 2009; Walker, 2009; Orsmond& Merry, 2011). In most cases, students don't know what to do or how to work on the feedback they receive. Thus, within the rather hands-off policy of the institutions, students are left to figure out how they need to proceed on their own.

Similarly, Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Salem & Stevens (2012) point out to the lack of consideration among most distance education providers for stronger communication between students and instructors where the expectations of both sides can be clarified. In this case, an opportunity to establish a strong student-teacher connection by means of feedback is missed and students are left to find other ways to contact teachers when they need. To compensate for this shortcoming, the program in our institution does not offer extra face-to-face or online opportunities to students such as video tutorials, brochures or pre-scheduled office hours to assist students who lack these skills. Therefore, a considerable amount of feedback provided by teachers serves far less than it could. This result implies that one of the basic teaching goals of distance education programs can be to provide channels to equip students with the necessary study skills for this type of education. For this to happen, there needs to be a continuous interaction with the students to understand their expectations, to clarify the teaching goals and also to equip them with the necessary skills to work in this process. Researchers suggest that opportunities for face-to-face meetings (Güneş, 2009), or early

counselling (Cullen, 1994; Rovai, 2003) could be sought to equip students with the necessary skills to work on the feedback they receive. In our context, the distance education programs do not provide any electronic or face-to-face chance for teachers and students to communicate toward mutual understanding and clarifications. Thus, the findings imply that distance education schools can benefit from providing synchronous and asynchronous opportunities for feedback exchange in addition to opportunities for training students to assist them in how to work on feedback.

As for the impact of feedback on students' academic development, the majority agreed that receiving feedback had a rather positive effect on their academic development and were in favor of receiving feedback. In addition, their affective dispositions toward feedback were significantly positive.This positive perception toward feedback also necessitates the institution and teachers to reevaluatethe feedback process and search to improve it.

Overall, the findings suggest that students receive a significant amount of feedback and preferred to receive continuous feedback. They also reported willingness to work on it and felt positive toward it. This positive finding suggests that students are willing to utilize feedback as a tool for student-teacher interaction and can benefit from it. Considering our socio-cultural context, where social interaction is highly appreciated, feedback can also serve as a tool to compensate for the detachmentthat students feel in distance education.

Limitations of the Study

However, there is a need for further studies on improving feedback practices in distance education in Turkey. The scope of future studies need to include not only the views of students and teachers but also of the program developers and the administrative to be able to establish more efficient and continuous tools of constructive interaction with students. Furthermore, future studies can widen the scope of research by entailing investigations on the content and delivery tools of feedback. How effectively teachers utilize feedback as a tool for interaction and assistance should also be investigated.

The results of the study are based solely on students' self-reports in our institution and may not mirror the entire distance education context fully. As Jara&Mellar (2010) also report in their study, collecting students' opinions was a big challenge in this study. Thus, the findings may be inadequate or misguiding to generalize to the whole feedback process in our context.

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