



## EXAMINING THE ACADEMIC COUNSELING COURSES AS A SUPPORT SERVICE IN DISTANCE LEARNING

### UZAKTAN ÖĞRENMEDE BİR DESTEK HİZMET OLARAK AKADEMİK DANIŞMANLIK DERSLERİNİN İNCELENMESİ

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**ABSTRACT:** Academic counseling courses, in which learner support is provided in a face-to-face environment, maintain their importance and continuity since the beginning of the distance education system in Anadolu University. Academic counseling courses, which are carried out by getting support from various universities, are conducted by bringing the instructors that are experts in their fields and learners together in pre-arranged places out of working hours (in the evening on weekdays and at weekends) in 74 town center. Learners could make use of this service by asking questions about the content they haven't understood, discussing it, and consulting the instructor. In this study, it is examined learners' attitudes towards learning environment and the instructors' behaviors in academic counseling. The findings indicate that those who tend to academic counseling courses have positive attitudes towards both the instructor and the environment.

**Keywords:** distance learning, support service, academic counseling courses

**ÖZET:** Öğrenen desteğinin yüz yüze ortamda gerçekleştirildiği akademik danışmanlık dersleri Anadolu Üniversitesinde uzaktan eğitim sisteminin başlangıcından beri sürekliliğini ve önemini korumaktadır. Türkiye'deki çeşitli üniversitelerden alınan destekle gerçekleştirilen akademik danışmanlık dersleri 74 şehir merkezindeki önceden ayarlanmış dersliklerde, çalışma saatleri dışında (hafta içi akşamları veya hafta sonları) öğretim elemanları ve öğrenenlerin bir araya gelmesiyle yürütülmektedir. Öğrenenler, öğretim elemanına danışarak, tartışarak, anlamadıkları konulara ilişkin sorular sorarak bu hizmetten yararlanmaktadırlar. Bu çalışmada, akademik danışmanlıkta öğreticiye ve öğrenme ortamına ilişkin öğrenen tutumları araştırılmıştır. Bulgular, akademik danışmanlık derslerine katılanların, öğretim elemanı ve ortama ilişkin pozitif tutumlara sahip olduklarını göstermektedir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** uzaktan öğrenme, destek hizmet, akademik danışmanlık dersleri

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Although there are positive and negative thoughts about the effectiveness of Open and Distance Education (ODE), the number of institutions applying this program has increased considerably, in the last ten years. Especially today, around 30 open universities and countless of educational institutions and other organizations operating in not only developed but also in emerging regions of the world have launched or started to think of launching ODE programs mainly in order to be able to reach more students with fewer expenses (Duffy & Kirkley, 2004). That is why, ODE is considered to be "the fastest growing sector in education worldwide" (Simpson, 2002).

In parallel with this development in the world, the demand for distance and open education in Turkey also indicates a constant increase. Anadolu University, which meets this demand to a great extent and is accepted as one of the mega universities in the world, has over one million students studying at its three different faculties (Economics, Business Administration and Open Education) and over one million graduates. The fact that 41 % of university level students were enrolled for the distance education programs of Anadolu University in 2007 is an indicator of the share and the role in higher education system of Turkey (Sürmeli, 2008). Open education system of Anadolu University offers various support services to learners. Learner support services, which aim to provide learners with learning support with the aid of different media and environments in the learning process, are viewed as one of the most important components of the system (Simpson 2002; Gibson & Gibson 1997; Holmberg 1989; Moore & Kearsley 1996). Same place-same time support or face-to-face meeting is one of these means. Supporting learners through face-to-face meetings in remote locations has been taken into consideration for years. This way of

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support can be regarded as the ancestors of blended learning. Activities that learners and support staff engage in during the meetings: working on projects, drill and practice, lecture (Simpson, 2002).

Academic counseling courses which are used as a learner support in Anadolu University open and distance education programs are the only face-to-face environment in which learner-instructor interaction is at the highest level. With the help of academic counseling courses, distance learners can ask the instructor questions about the content and get answers, have the opportunity to reinforce what they have learnt, get rid of the sense of isolation and acquire a sense of belonging by establishing in-class interaction with other learners. Moreover, distance learners view this environment as a place in which they strive for learning and feel responsible for it.

Open Education Faculty's face to face academic counseling courses were first launched in 16 cities with 398 instructors in 1982-1983 educational years (Serter & Çekerol, 2002). By the year 2008, face-to-face counseling courses are offered in 74 centers with about 860 faculty members on local cooperating university campuses at evenings or weekends. The courses start at the first week of January and continue through the end of May and include 10 most challenging courses over a variety of fields. Academic counseling courses include 3 different courses at the first year, 3 courses at the second year and 4 courses at the third year. Every year approximately 25.000 learners regularly attend those courses.

Compared to the distance education practices around the world, it is evident that this service provided to the learners in the distance education system has a unique structure. When the extent of the academic consultation organization and the demand for this service are taken into consideration at the point arrived during the past 25 years', it can be seen that the assessment of this system which tries to meet the demands of a qualitatively large mass carries considerable importance in terms of the system's improvement and sustainability. For this purpose, this study tries to reveal the attitudes of learners who take these academic counseling courses towards this environment and to find out their satisfaction with the service.

Student satisfaction with distance education courses and program is often correlated with student achievement and retention. Studies on student satisfaction can help instructors or administrators to identify course or program characteristics that impede these goals and suggest some strategies for avoiding problems, as well as for addressing them appropriately when they occur. Draper (1987) indicates that evaluation is a necessary component of any distance education program, and that it should include ways to assess attitudes of participants about their learning experience. Assessment of learner satisfaction is important in identifying problem areas and modifying the program. According to Kiefer (1992) attitudes are important predictors of academic success and indicators of program effectiveness.

### **1.1. Attitudes toward Distance Learning**

Eagly and Chaiken (2005) state that an "attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor". In the literature, many researchers in different cultures investigated learners' attitudes toward different distance learning environments. When comparing the attitudes of instructors and learners towards distance learning, it was found that instructors had conflicting attitudes about distance education. While they were willing to teach a distance learning class, they rated the courses as equal or lower in quality than traditional courses taught on campus. On the other hand, the learners were highly satisfied with these instructors and the distance courses taught. Also, they were not concerned about the interaction with the instructor (Inman, Kerwin, Mayes, 1999). Similarly Sorensen (1995) investigated college students' attitudes towards interactive TV instruction. She found that overall; students appear satisfied with the distance learning experience and they had positive perceptions of the instructors and the technology. According to Bisciglia and Monk-Turner (2002), learners who work fulltime and attend class off-campus have more positive attitudes toward distance learning when compared to others. They are also more likely to be motivated and willing to take other distance courses when given that option. Additionally Kahl and Cropley (1986) found that the learners who are typically enrolled in a distance based education system will be married, nontraditional learners who are most likely in the educational environment by choice. Consequently, most of these studies reflect that learners who demand opportunities for life long learning have higher level of attitudes towards distance education.

When the demographic characteristics of the students attending distance and open education programs at Anadolu University are compared to the findings of the studies in the literature, some

similarities and differences could be seen. In a study including students registered for undergraduate and two-year degree programs in 2007, it was found that 29.8 % of the learners are married, 58.9 % of them have a job, 54% are female and 47.2% are 24 years old or below. On the other hand, 23.6% of the learners state that they prefer these programs to have a certificate, 19.9% to have a job and 10.4% to catch the opportunity for education they have missed in the past. Moreover, distance and open education faculty learners mention that these programs are beneficial in not only solving problems and improving research skills but also in contributing to their family and professional experiences in a positive way (Sürmeli et al. 2008).

For an educational institution that has such a big learner organization to determine the attitudes of the learners towards basic and supportive learning materials is essential for making the programs efficient, effective and appealing. However, a good number of the research about distance learners' attitudes are on learning environments with a particular learning tool and especially over the past years they have focused on online environments. On the other hand, much of the research previously conducted favors distance education. However, in many of this research, only distance learning students were sampled. To achieve a more realistic picture of how students perceive distance education, it is important to question students who have participated in face to face academic tutorial courses. Because, face-to-face academic counseling services have a significant role in the distance education practice carried out in the country. Nevertheless, as there isn't such a face-to-face academic counseling service as this in the distance education practices of other countries, no research findings related to this environment and the attitudes of learners making use of this environment has been found.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze those attitude levels of Turkish distance learners' in academic counseling courses. Also, several questions concerning about these courses left unanswered. This study tends to answer some of these questions. In other words, general purpose was to investigate the attitudes of learners about face to face learning courses. So, answers of the following questions were sought:

1. What are learners' demographic characteristics who are attending academic counseling courses?
2. What are learners' attitudes towards the instructor and face to face learning environment?
3. Do learners' attitudes towards the instructor and the environment vary according to their demographic characteristics?
4. What are learners' perceptions about academic counseling courses' appropriateness of the days, time, duration and frequency (schedule)?

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Framework of the Research

The study consists of a questionnaire which aims to determine the attitudes of the learners that attend academic counseling courses. The research includes all learners attending academic counseling courses in Eskişehir. On the other hand, the sample of the research includes 1330 learners which are chosen randomly from the population and participate in the study voluntarily. After eliminating forms that were incomplete or missing some items, the sample of the study consisted of 1120 learners. Of 1120 learners participating in the study, 809 are the first year students, 169 are the second year students and 142 are the third year students.

3000 copies of each scale was printed out and administered to learners who were enrolled to academic tutorial courses in 2007. Administration of scales was completed one month before the end of semester on April, under the supervision of the researchers.

The survey instrument consists of three parts: The first part includes learners' demographic characteristics like gender, grade level, marital status, etc. The second part includes learners' attitudes about instructors and face to face learning environment. The third part includes learners' perceptions about face to face courses' the appropriateness of the time, days, duration and number of the courses.

## 2.2. Data Analysis

To assess the learners' attitudes about instructor and face to face learning environment in academic counseling courses were used 5-point Likert type scale. A scale with 15 items was developed by the researchers (see Table 1). Reliability of the scale Cronbach Alpha was found to be .74. 15 items are divided two component. Of those 15 items, 8 were designed to assess the learners' attitudes about instructors (Cronbach Alpha .713) and 7 were designed to assess the learners' attitudes about face to face learning environment (Cronbach Alpha .674).

The components of the questionnaire items were analyzed by factor analysis and both of their summability is tested. The total scores of all components were classified as low, middle and high by K-means cluster analysis. Also, Chi-square and correspondence analysis were used for studying their relationships with the demographic characteristics of the learners in other clusters. Statistical procedures were handled by using SPSS 14.0 and the results are interpreted at the end of the paper.

## 3. FINDINGS

It is found that women (54,8%) benefit from this service more than men (45,2%) do, majority of learners are single (96,7%) and that they are learners who are enrolled for undergraduate programs (90,2%). 72,2 % of first grade students, 15,1 % of second grade students and 12,7% third grade students benefit from academic counseling courses and the majority of learners (78,1%) do not have a job. It is also found that, in terms of the location where they live, 57,8% of the learners live in the town center where the academic counseling service is provided and take these courses in the town in which they live, that 22% take these courses by coming from district-sub district-village of the town where this service is provided and that 20,3% take them by coming from another town center. When the attendance to academic counseling is questioned in terms of frequency, the majority of learners (82,3%) report that they attend these courses regularly.

The appropriacy of the variables in the scale for the factor analysis was tested and it was mentioned that the factor analysis in which values KMO=0,804 and  $p=0,0001 < 0,05$  had been found was significant.

**Table 1. Factor Analysis for Determining the Learners' Attitudes towards Academic Counseling Courses**

Factor Result	Descriptive Statistics	Ext.	Mean	Std.	% of variance	Cronbach's Alpha
First Component	I believe that instructors' attitudes towards learners are positive	0,626	4,02	1,007	54,30	0,713
	I believe that instructors encourage learners to participate in the lesson (to ask questions, etc)	0,451	3,38	1,257		
	I believe that attending courses with the instructor will enhance my success in the exams	0,546	3,88	1,141		
	I believe that meeting the instructor and other learners will facilitate my learning	0,416	3,3	1,219		
	I believe that instructors are generally expert at what they are teaching	0,635	3,82	1,106		
	I think instructors use their time during the lesson effectively	0,623	3,72	1,068		
	I feel that I am a student when I attend courses with the instructor	0,577	4,07	1,085		
	I believe that instructors present the lesson in an appealing way	0,7	3,45	1,145		

**Table 1. Factor Analysis for Determining the Learners' Attitudes towards Academic Counseling Courses**

Factor Result	Descriptive Statistics	Ext.	Mean	Std.	% of variance	Cronbach's Alpha
Second Component	I feel more comfortable when I learn a subject in a face-to-face environment	0,706	4,21	1,084	37,70	0,674
	I prefer attending face-to-face courses to studying on my own	0,323	3,4	1,526		
	I remember what I have learnt in face-to-face courses more easily	0,796	4,39	0,908		
	I believe that attending face-to-face courses facilitates my learning	0,826	4,48	0,823		
	I think face-to-face learning is more effective than learning by self-study	0,722	4,33	0,968		
	I usually don't find face-to-face courses boring	0,427	4,18	1,095		
	I think face-to-face learning requires less time than self-study does	0,382	3,82	1,212		
Total					92	0,736

As a result of the factor analysis, the correlation between two components (learners' attitudes about instructors and face to face learning environment) was 0,686, varimax rotation was applied. While the percentage of variance description of the first component was calculated as 54,3%, the variance percentage of the second component was found to be 37,7%. Explained total variance percentage was found to be 92%. As the correlation between these two components is 0,686, these two could be used as a single factor if necessary.

In the cluster analysis done for the first component (Table 2), initial cluster center for 8 items was calculated minimum 8 points and maximum 40 points by 5-point likert scale. Cluster process was started by taking these points as starting points and the meaningful score of the three clusters were found to be 19,63 in the lowest cluster, 27,63 in the middle one and 33,93 in the highest one. According to this, there were 122 learners in the cluster having low scores, 485 in the one having middle attitude scores and 513 in the one having high attitude scores.

**Table 2. K-Means Cluster Analyses for the First Component**

		Group	Ni	Total Score	Mean Score
Cluster	1	High	513	33,93	4,24
	2	Middle	485	27,63	3,45
	3	Low	122	19,63	2,45
ΣN			1120		

Whether there was a relationship between learners' attitudes towards the instructor and their gender or not was tested as the first component by using Pearson Chi-Square analysis and it was found that there was not a significant relationship between the variables ( $p > 0.5$   $p = ,862$ ). However, women have higher attitudes than men towards the instructor in all three clusters (low-middle-high attitudes). Likewise, whether there was a relationship between attitudes towards the instructor and the type of the program they are registered for (undergraduate and two-year degree) or not was tested as the first component by using Pearson Chi-Square analysis and it was found that there was not a significant relationship between these variables ( $p > 0.5$   $p = ,777$ ). However, it was found that learners attending undergraduate programs had higher attitudes towards the instructor in all three clusters (low-middle-high attitudes) in proportion to those attending two-year degree programs. Whether there was a relationship between attitudes towards the instructor and the learners' marital status or not was tested as the first component by using Pearson Chi-Square analysis and it was found that there was not a significant relationship between these variables ( $p > 0.5$   $p = ,70$ ).

There is a significant relationship between learner attitudes towards the instructor as the first component and whether learners had a job or not ( $p < 0.5$   $p = ,002$ ) and the mean of attitude values in all three clusters of learners who did not have a job was higher than that of the learners having a job.

The relationship between learners' attitudes as the first component and the places where learners lived was studied and a significant relationship was found ( $p < 0.5$   $p = ,000$ ). The mean values of attitudes in all three clusters of those who lived in the town in which the academic counseling service was provided and who made use of this service were higher than those of others. Whether there was a relationship between high-middle-low attitude levels of the learners which is the first component and their grade levels or not was tested by using Correspondence Analysis and Pearson Chi-Square value was calculated to be 38,101,  $p = 0,0001$ . Taking this result into consideration, it could be said that there was a significant relationship between learners' grade levels and their attitudes towards the instructor. According to the Correspondence Analyses, first year students had near middle and low attitudes while second and third year students had high attitudes.

When the relationship between learners' attitudes towards the face-to-face learning environment as the first component and the frequency with which they attend academic counseling courses was investigated, it was seen that the relationship between them was significant ( $p < 0.5$   $p = ,025$ ), that learners attending academic counseling courses regularly showed higher attitudes when compared to those attending them when they had the opportunity and attending them only before exams in all three clusters.

In the cluster analysis (Table 3) for the second component, initial cluster center for 7 items was calculated minimum 7 points and maximum 35 points by 5-point likert scale. The clustering was started by taking these points as the starting points in the clustering analysis and as a result, the significant score of three clusters were found to be 13,2 in the lowest cluster, 24,46 in the middle cluster and 31,28 in the high cluster. According to this, there were 25 learners in the cluster having low attitude points, 338 in the one having middle attitude points and 757 in the one having high attitude points.

**Table 3. K-Means Cluster Analysis for the Second Component**

	Group	Ni	Total Score	Mean Score	
Cluster	1	High	757	31,28	4,47
	2	Middle	338	24,46	3,49
	3	Low	25	13,20	1,89
$\Sigma N$			1120		

Whether the learners' attitudes towards the face-to-face learning environment as the second component were related to variables such as their gender ( $p > 0.5$   $p = 090$ ), marital status ( $p > 0.5$   $p = ,337$ ), the type of the program they were enrolled for ( $p > 0.5$   $p = 231$ ), whether they had a job or not ( $p > 0.5$   $p = ,771$ ) and the place where they lived ( $p > 0.5$   $p = ,237$ ) was studied using Pearson Chi-Square analysis and it was found that there were no significant relationships among these variables. However, when the relationship between learners' attitudes towards the face-to-face learning environment as the second component and the frequency with which they attend academic counseling courses was investigated, it was seen that the relationship between them was significant ( $p < 0.5$   $p = 0,41$ ).

Whether there was a relationship between learners' low, middle and high levels of attitudes towards face-to-face learning environment and their grade levels or not was investigated using Chi-Square and Pearson Chi-Square value was found to be 9,091  $p = 0,059$ . However, as there were 25 learners in the lower cluster and their expected values were below 5. Fisher Exact test was used and as this result was found to be  $p = 0,05$ , this also proved us the existence of a relationship. This result indicated that there was a significant relationship between learners' grade levels and their attitudes towards the face-to-face learning environment. As a result of the correspondence analysis, first year students had middle and low attitudes while second and third year students had high attitudes.

In the last part of the study, four likert type questions were asked the learners to determine about perceptions whether the academic counseling courses are suitable in terms of days, time, duration and numbers of courses. Majority of learners stated that the days of the courses were suitable for them (71,2%), the duration of the lesson was enough for them (62,8%), the time at which the courses start was usually suitable for them (52,6%) and that crowded classrooms didn't inhibit their learning (65,7%).

Furthermore, the majority of learners making use of this service mentioned that the number of courses provided as academic counseling courses was not adequate (52,3%). In other words, learners reported that they wanted to benefit from more courses within this service. Also, learners were asked an open-ended question about the academic counseling courses and in parallel with this finding, 290 learners were found to be of the opinion that the number of the academic counseling courses should be increased and that this service should be provided for each lesson.

Furthermore, whether the days, time, duration and number of the courses has any relationship with learners' grade levels, job status and the frequency which they attend the courses was studied by using Chi-Square analysis. The findings were as follows:

When the appropriacy of the days of the courses was associated with the classroom variable, no significant relationship between them was found ( $p=,113$ ) and most of the first, second and third year learners stated that the days of the courses were suitable for them in general.

When the sufficiency of the lesson duration was associated with the classroom variable, it was seen that the relationship between them was significant ( $p=,000$ ). In proportion to second and third year students, especially first year learners stated that they found the duration of the lesson adequate to a great extent.

When the adequacy of the counseling courses in terms of their number was associated with the classroom variable, it could be seen that the relationship between them was not significant ( $p=,119$ ).

When the appropriacy of the time of the courses in general was associated with the classroom variable, the relationship between them was found to be significant ( $p=,000$ ). Especially most of the first year learners, in proportion to second and third year students, stated that the time of the courses was suitable for them.

When the appropriacy of the days of the courses was associated with whether the learners had a job or not, it was found that the relationship between them wasn't significant ( $p=,348$ ). Also, most of the learners both having (68,6%) and not having a job (71,9%) stated that days of the courses were suitable for them. When the appropriacy of the days of the courses was associated with whether learners had a job or not, it was found that the relationship between the variables was significant ( $p=,003$ ) and that especially 61,3% of learners having a job said that the time of the courses was suitable for them and 50,2% of those not having a job stated that they found them suitable.

The appropriacy of the days of the courses was associated with the frequency with which the academic counseling courses were attended to, which is another variable, a significant relationship was found ( $p=,000$ ). 73,1% of the learners attending the academic counseling courses regularly stated that they found the days of the courses suitable while 64,4% of those attending the courses when they had the opportunity and 42,8% of those who made use of this service only before the exams stated that the days were suitable for them.

When the duration of the courses was associated with the frequency with which learners attended the academic counseling courses, it was seen that there was no significant relationship between them ( $p=,596$ ). Similarly, when the frequency of attendance to this services was associated with whether their numbers were adequate or not, it was also found that the relationship between these variables was not significant ( $p=,3069$ ). When the variable 'frequency with which learners attend the academic counseling courses' was associated with other variables such as the physical conditions of the buildings in which the courses were carried out ( $p=,066$ ), whether the time of the courses was suitable for the learner or not ( $p=,667$ ) and whether crowded classrooms made learning more difficult or not ( $p=,523$ ), no significant relationship was found between them.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Results revealed that majority of learners had a positive attitude toward the tutor and face-to-face environment. Learners granted highest ratings to two item: "I feel more like a student when I attend academic tutoring" and "I believe face-to-face classes improve my learning". These results show that in the open and distance education approach emphasizing individual learning, learners' desire to make use of the counseling courses and their positive attitudes towards this service can be associated with the learning

culture existent in Turkish education system. For various reasons, Turkish learning culture has a structure in which instructor rather than the learner is the determinant, teaching rather than learning is the focus, and there is one way interaction from instructor to learner (Alkan, 1997). That's why distance learners' positive attitudes towards the academic counseling courses which schools people with a traditional educational mentality are an expected situation.

Second year and third year students who attended academic counseling courses regularly maintained higher attitudes than first year students. Furthermore, unemployed students who live in town had higher attitudes compared to employed students who live in other cities and work. This result shows that attitudes are affected by the level of convenience to attend classes. In the same vein, being on campus for face-to-face classes improves both the level of ownership in the system and attitudes. Literature suggests that attendance in distance programs, compared to traditional programs, is lower due to several factors such as economic reasons, changing work environment, limited academic support, and low self-esteem (Beser & Donahue, 1996; Tinto, 1993; Twigg, 1997). Being away from the instructor, other learners, and learning resources solidifies the level of attendance. Distance education institutions should provide support to the learner in order to eliminate physical or psychological barriers and increase their interest, satisfaction, commitment, and involvement. Another way would be to create a strong community feeling amongst students. Studies posit that learners who feel like being a part of a strong community are more persistent and demanding, compared to students who feel like alienated and alone (Tinto, 1993). In order to create such a strong community feeling, the learning environment should be designed regarding the physical and psychological needs, interests, and expectations of the learner. The difference in attitudes toward academic counseling courses among first year, second year, and third year students can be explained by the fact that older students in general are more capable of analyzing both their needs and what is expected from them. Considering the high drop-out rates at the first two years of the school, it is crucial to further study the attitudes of first year students.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Academic counseling courses started at the beginning of January and continued till the end of May in 2007 2008 academic year. When the demographic characteristics of those making use of the academic counseling courses in this process is analyzed, it can be found that women attend more than men do and those attending the courses are mostly single and enrolled for an undergraduate program. Considering that academic counseling courses are chosen among the courses existent in the curriculum of undergraduate programs, it can be said that the participation of two-year degree learners is lower as they can take only these mutual courses existent in their programs. Furthermore, the fact that the participation is considerably high for the first year classes is another striking finding. Questionnaire studies intermittently conducted at Open Education Faculty also verify that demand for the first year academic counseling courses is bigger than the one for second and third year counseling courses. One of the reasons for this may be that learners who are accustomed to the traditional educational style do not know this system based on individual learning very well when they start distance education. In this context, for learners breaking off the traditional education system and starting distance education for the first time, in the future, orientation trainings can be given explaining which learning material and environment can be made use of in the most effective and efficient way.

Another finding of the study is that the majority of learners attending the academic counseling courses (78,1%) do not have a job. This result is contradictory with findings gathered as a result of distance and open education studies conducted in other countries. When the related literature is reviewed (Bisciglia and Monk-Turner, 2002; Kahl and Copley 1986), it can be found that learners prefer this educational approach for reasons such as their having a full-time job and being married individuals with responsibilities for their families. However, it is known that the demand for university education in our country has increased only for having a degree as well as personal growth and career development. Related to these reasons mentioned, the fact that formal university education doesn't have the necessary physical capacity to meet this demand causes the teenagers having just graduated from high school to prefer open and distance education. As a result of this, it is possible to say that people making use of academic counseling courses consist of young people who have not started working yet.



Academic counseling courses are carried out successfully in 74 town centers. What is crucial in choosing these town centers is whether there is a faculty or college where counseling courses can be given and whether or not there are enough instructors for this in that city. In cities where the adequate resources are provided, academic counseling courses are started immediately. In the study, it has been found that 57,8% of the learners can make use of this service in the cities they live in, 22% get this service by coming from other districts or villages near this town and the remaining 20% come from another city to benefit from this service.

Finally, the frequency with which they attend academic counseling courses was asked to the learners by taking their demographic characteristics into account. The majority of learners taking the questionnaire (82,3%) stated that they attend these courses regularly. At the end of the questionnaire, an open-ended question was asked to the learners to find out their suggestions for this service to be more satisfying for them and 290 learners stated that the number of these courses conducted in a face-to-face environment should be increased and added that they want to make use of this service for each course if possible. This finding clearly indicates that distance learners prefer academic counseling courses as a support service in the learning process.

In the study, the attitudes of learners towards the face-to-face learning environment and the instructor were questioned and these questions were divided into two components as a result of the factor analysis. In the cluster analysis carried out for determining learner attitudes towards the instructor as the first component, it was found that learners had positive attitudes towards the instructor. When whether or not learner attitudes towards the instructor vary according to the demographic characteristics or not was questioned, the findings were as follows: The attitudes of female is higher than male, those registered for an undergraduate program display higher attitudes than those registered for a two-year degree program, the attitudes of learners who are working is higher than those not working and the attitudes of those living in the city where the counseling service is provided is higher than those coming from another city to attend these courses. These findings are parallel with the general findings obtained in the study. Moreover, when whether or not the grade levels of the learners vary in their attitudes towards the instructor was questioned, it could be seen that second and third year learners have higher attitudes in proportion to second and third year learners.

It is a well-known fact that 72,2% of the learners taking the questionnaire is first year learners and the demand for first year counseling courses is much bigger than the one for higher levels. Then, why are the attitudes of the first year students towards the instructor is lower? It is possible to explain this as follows. The fact that first year students coming from a traditional educational approach and facing with a different educational approach perceive the instructor as the only true source for reaching information increases the demand for face-to-face academic counseling. Nonetheless, the crowd of people which can be seen in the classrooms may be a factor diminishing the efficiency and effectiveness of the instructor in conveying the content. On the other hand, the fact that second and third year learners know the system and its requirements very well and that they want to make use of face-to-face counseling services when necessary may be a factor that diminishes the possible density. This may lead to second and third year learners' communicating with the instructor more effectively and efficiently and their displaying positive attitudes.

When learner attitudes towards the face-to-face learning environment were studied, as a result of the cluster analysis, it was found that learners had high attitudes towards the environment. Especially those attending the counseling courses regularly had higher attitudes towards the environment than those not attending them regularly.

As in the assessment towards the instructor, a significant relationship between learners' grade levels and their attitudes towards the face-to-face learning environment was found. According to this, second and third year learners had higher attitudes than first year students.

How learners perceived the appropriacy of various criteria such as the days, time and the physical conditions of the academic counseling courses was tried to be determined with the last question of the survey. It was aimed that, with the perceptions of learners about these criteria, both their satisfaction with the academic counseling courses and their probable expectations about increasing their satisfaction levels were determined. Determining these criteria will be guiding in a more effective, efficient and appealing

structuring of the academic counseling courses as a service that distance learners demand intensely in the learning process. When the findings gathered were analyzed as a whole, it was found that learner attitudes towards each item were positive. In other words, it could be said that learners' satisfaction with the academic counseling courses was positive.

In general, it can be said that it exhibits that the attitudes and satisfaction levels of learners attending academic counseling courses in the Open Education system are positive, nevertheless, it may not be enough to make generalizations. More detailed studies related to the academic counseling courses in other cities with a similar aim should be carried out and the results should be compared. This study should also be supported especially with studies investigating cause-effect relationships and reasons why learners prefer making use of the academic counseling services. In this way, it will be possible to plan effective and appealing academic counseling courses and to develop sound principles that will be made use of in this planning process.

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## Geniş Özet

Uzaktan öğrenme genelde öğrenenin öğreticiden uzakta olduğu ve etkileşimin çeşitli iletişim ortam ve araçları ile sağlandığı bir eğitim modeli olarak tanımlanır. Bu model içerisinde öğrenciye sunulan destek hizmetlerinin önemi son derece yüksektir. Türkiye ve Dünyada önemli bir uzaktan eğitim sunucusu

olan Anadolu Üniversitesi, eğitimin kalitesini ve öğretici-öğrenen etkinliğini artırmak için farklı öğrenen destek hizmetlerini kullanmaktadır. Bu destek hizmetleri TV ve Radyo yayınları, e-kitap, e-TV, e-alıştırma, e-sınav, e-danışmanlık, e-sesli kitap'ı kapsayan e-öğrenme hizmetleri, video konferans aracılığıyla danışmanlık hizmetleri ve yüz yüze akademik danışmanlık dersleri olarak sıralanabilir. Sunulan destek hizmetleri içerisinde akademik danışmanlık dersleri Anadolu Üniversitesi Açıköğretim Fakültesinin öğretime başladığı 1982-1983 öğretim yılından bu yana sistemin en önemli destek bileşeni olarak görülmekte ve uygulanmaktadır. Akademik danışmanlık dersleri, Türkiye çapında 74 merkezde, 65 üniversitenin desteği alınarak, çalışma saatleri dışında (hafta içi akşamları veya hafta sonları) gerçekleştirilen, uzaktan eğitim lisans programlarının bir, iki ve üçüncü sınıflarında ortak okutulan 10 ders için önceden belirlenmiş sınıflarda öğretim elemanları ile öğrenenleri bir araya getiren derslerdir. Öğrenenler belirlenen bu derslerde öğretim elemanına anlamadıkları konuları sorabilmekte, karşılıklı, tartışma ortamı içerisinde öğretici ile etkileşimde bulunabilmektedirler. Akademik danışmanlık derslerine duyulan yoğun öğrenen gereksinimi, gelişen bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerine dayalı öğrenme hizmetlerinin çeşitlenmesine ve artmasına rağmen sistem içinde sürekli olarak artış göstermektedir.

Özellikle bilgisayar ve İnternete dayalı çeşitli bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerinin uzaktan eğitimde yaygın biçimde kullanılmasına karşın geleneksel sınıf ortamında gerçekleştirilen akademik danışmanlık derslerinin yaygınlığı ve önemini koruması uzaktan eğitimin doğasına ters görünebilir. Çünkü akademik danışmanlık dersleri, istedikleri yer ve zamanda öğrenmeyi sağlayan bireysel öğrenmeye dayalı ortam ve teknolojilerden farklı olarak, öğrenenleri belirli zaman ve mekâna bağımlı kılan bir öğrenme ortamı olarak kabul edilebilir. Bu bakış açısıyla bu çalışmada, akademik danışmanlık derslerine katılan uzaktan eğitim öğrencilerinin demografik özellikleri, öğreticiye ve ortama yönelik tutumları ve tutumlarının demografik özelliklerine göre değişiklik gösterip göstermediği araştırılmaktadır. Bunun da ötesinde derslerin yapıldığı sınıfların, saatlerinin, sürelerinin günlerinin ve sayılarının uygunluğu öğrenen tercihlerinin yardımıyla açıklanmıştır.

Çalışmada 2007-2008 öğretim yılında Eskişehir'de gerçekleştirilen akademik danışmanlık derslerine devam edenler arasından 1120 gönüllü öğrenene yönelik bir anket uygulanmıştır. Anket, çalışmaya katılanların demografik özelliklerini (6 adet soru) ve derslere katılım sıklıklarının (1 adet soru) belirlemeye yöneliktir. Ayrıca araştırmacılar tarafından öğrenenlerin gerek yüzyüze öğrenme ortamına gerekse öğreticiye ilişkin tutumlarını belirlemek amacıyla 15 maddeden oluşan bir ölçek geliştirilmiştir. Ölçeğin güvenirlik katsayısı Cronbach alpha ile hesaplanmış ve .74 bulunmuştur. Ölçeğin 8 maddesi öğrenenlerin öğreticiye ilişkin tutumlarını belirlemeyi (Cronbach alpha güvenirlik katsayısı .71), kalan 7 maddesi ise yüz yüze öğrenme ortamına ilişkin tutumlarını belirlemeyi (Cronbach alpha güvenirlik katsayısı .67) amaçlamıştır. Uygulanan faktör analizi sonucu bu iki bileşenin açıklanan toplam varyans yüzdesi % 92 olarak bulunmuştur. Bu iki bileşen arasındaki korelasyon .686 olduğundan, iki bileşen tek bir faktör olarak da görülebilir. Yine faktör analizi ile test edilen iki bileşenin toplanabilirliği ve sonucunda elde edilen toplam skorlar kümeleme analizi ile düşük, orta ve yüksek olmak üzere sınıflandırılmıştır. Aynı zamanda ki-kare ve correspondence analizi ile kümelerdeki öğrenenlerin tutumlarının demografik özelliklerine göre değişip değişmediği test edilmiştir.

Öğrenenlerin öğreticiye ilişkin tutumlarını ölçmeye yönelik 8 maddeden oluşan birinci bileşen için yapılan kümeleme analizi sonuçlarına göre, 122 öğrenenin öğreticiye ilişkin düşük tutum puanlarına sahip olduğu, 485 öğrenenin orta ve 513 öğrenenin yüksek tutum puanlarına sahip olduğu belirlenmiştir. Öğrenenlerin cinsiyet, kayıtlı oldukları program türü (önlisans veya lisans) ile öğreticiye ilişkin tutumları arasında anlamlı bir fark görülmemekle birlikte, bayanların erkeklere göre ve lisans programlarında kayıtlı olanların önlisans programlarında kayıtlı olanlara göre her üç kümede daha yüksek tutum puanlarına sahip oldukları yani, öğreticiye ilişkin tutumlarının daha olumlu olduğu söylenebilir. Bir işte çalışıp-çalışmama ile öğreticiye ilişkin tutumlar arasında anlamlı bir fark bulunmuş, bir işte çalışmayanların tutum değerleri ortalamalarının, bir işte çalışıyor olanlardan daha yüksek olduğu görülmüştür. Akademik danışmanlık derslerinin yapıldığı şehirden, bu şehre bağlı bir ilçe/kasabadan veya bir başka şehirden gelerek derslere katılanların, öğreticiye ilişkin tutumları arasında anlamlı bir fark bulunmuştur. Danışmanlık derslerinin yapıldığı şehirde yaşayanların tutumlarının ortalama değerleri diğer şehirlerden gelerek derslere katılanlarınkinden daha yüksektir. Benzer şekilde sınıf düzeyleri ile öğreticiye ilişkin tutumlar arasında anlamlı bir ilişki söz konusudur. Buna göre birinci sınıf öğrenenlerinin iki ve üçüncü sınıftakilere oranla öğreticiye ilişkin daha düşük tutum sergiledikleri görülmüştür.

Ölçeğin öğrenme ortamına ilişkin tutumlarının araştırıldığı ikinci bileşeni ile cinsiyet, medeni durum, kayıtlı oldukları program türü, bir işte çalışıp çalışmadıkları ve yaşadıkları yer değişkenleri arasında anlamlı bir ilişki bulunmamıştır. Bununla birlikte öğrenenlerin derslere katılım sıklıkları ile ortama ilişkin tutumları arasında anlamlı bir ilişki var olup, derslere düzenli katılanlar, fırsat buldukça veya sınavlar öncesinde katılanlardan daha yüksek ortalama tutum değerlerine sahiptir. Benzer şekilde, öğrenenlerin sınıf düzeyleri ile öğrenme ortamına ilişkin tutumları arasında da anlamlı bir ilişki bulunmuştur. Buna göre birinci sınıflar, iki ve üçüncü sınıftakilere oranla yüz yüze öğrenme ortamına ilişkin daha düşük tutumlar sergilemişlerdir. Ortaya çıkan bu durum, birinci sınıf öğrenenlerinin iki ve üçüncü sınıfta bulunan öğrenenlere göre açık ve uzaktan eğitim sisteminin gereklerini yeterince bilmemelerinden kaynaklanıyor olabilir.

Çalışma genel olarak değerlendirildiğinde, öğrenenlerin akademik danışmanlık hizmetlerinde gerek öğrenme ortamına gerekse öğreticiye ilişkin olumlu tutumlar sergilediğini göstermiştir. Başka bir deyişle, öğrenenlerin akademik danışmanlık hizmetlerine ilişkin tatmin düzeylerinin olumlu yönde olduğu söylenebilir. Bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerindeki önemli gelişmelere ve uzaktan öğrenen olmalarına rağmen öğrenenlerden gelen yoğun talep, açıköğretim sistemi içerisinde akademik danışmanlık hizmetlerinin önemini sürdürmesini sağlamaktadır. Sistem içerisinde özellikle bayanların erkeklere göre öğreticiye ve ortama karşı daha olumlu tutum sergilemeleri dikkat çekicidir. Derslerin zaman ve sürelerinin çalışanlara göre planlanmasına rağmen, çalışmayanların çalışanlara göre daha olumlu tutum sergilemeleri bir başka dikkat çekici noktadır. Sınıf ilerledikçe hem öğretim ortamına hem de öğreticiye karşı tutumların olumlu yönde artması öğrencilerin uzaktan eğitimi büyük oranda benimsedikleri ve sistemin gereklerini öğrendikleri şeklinde yorumlanabilir. Uzaktan eğitime olan talebin yıldan yıla büyük oranda artması ve gelişen teknolojiye rağmen akademik danışmanlık hizmetlerine yönelik ilginin artarak devam etmesi, bu hizmetin; yönetim, öğretici ve ders içeriklerinin tasarımı boyutlarında incelenip, öğrenen beklentileri dikkate alınarak hazırlanmasını gerektirmektedir.