MORE INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY,
MORE DISTANCE LEARNING?

Hakan Ergin

ABSTRACT
In recent days, internationalization of higher education and use of distance learning in higher education are two issues I - as an academic - have heard frequently in Turkey. On one hand, internationalization of higher education is a policy of the Council of Higher Education (Çetinsaya, 2014). On the other hand, the number of the students accepted to open and distance education programs and the number of those programs at universities are increasing day by day (AUZEF1, 2014). However, at the end of a search about these topics in the academic databases EbscoHOST and ERIC, I discerned that no study has focused on the relationship between these two topics. Therefore, in this study, I attempted to relate two early theoreticians’ indications about these topics: Knight’s rationales for internationalization of higher education (1997) and Perraton’s (1983) key statements for distance education. I supported and exemplified my arguments in the context of the Turkish higher education system as the processes of internationalization and the extension of the use of distance learning are still ongoing processes in it. Thus the exploration of the relationship between these two processes can facilitate and re-shape the ongoing internationalization policy of the higher education system in Turkey. In the end, I came up with the inference that internationalization process of a university can be facilitated by distance learning programs.

KEYWORDS:
Internationalization, distance learning, university rankings.

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Introduction

The first time when I heard the concept of internationalization of higher education was four years ago. As an international graduate student at the State University of New York at Binghamton, US, I participated in an orientation program for international students. In this program, one of the people who addressed us was Professor Claude Peter Magrath, the president of the university at that time. In his speech, Prof. Magrath summarized his opinions about the significance of the internationalization of a university in a simple but meaningful way: “A good university is international”.

It has not been quite a long time since I listened to the above-mentioned speech. However, what I noticed is that now I hear much more about internationalization of higher education in Turkey where I live. That is, not only Prof. Magrath, an experienced administrator of a higher education institute abroad, but also more and more stakeholders of higher education I meet in Turkey including academics, students and parents have the belief that a good university should be international enough. Beside the people in the higher education system, the institutions in it are interested in internationalization as well. One example is the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) in Turkey which co-ordinates all the universities in Turkey. Accordingly, the CoHE has the agenda of internationalization. That is to say, Professor Gokhan Cetinsaya, the former chair of the council, stated that CoHE had three major objectives. These are: quality growth, the improvement of the human resources and internationalization (Çetinsaya, 2014).

Another topic that has become more and more popular in Turkey is distance learning. That is, until recently, there was just one faculty of open and distance education; however, right now, there are three faculties of open and distance education and universities in Turkey has centers of distance education (CoHE1, 2014). Additionally, the number of the distance learners in Turkey is increasing as well (AUZEFl).

I believe that above-mentioned two increasingly popular issues related to higher education system in Turkey, internationalization and use of distance learning, can have a relationship as they are parts of the same system in the same country. However, at the end of a search about these topics in the academic databases EbscoHOST and ERIC, I came up with the finding that no study has focused on the relationship between these two topics. Therefore, in this study, I attempted to relate two early theoreticians’ indications about these topics: Knight’s rationales for internationalization of higher education (1997) and Perraton’s (1983) key statements for distance education. I supported and exemplified my arguments in the context of the Turkish higher education system as the processes of internationalization and the extension of the use of distance learning are still ongoing processes in it. Thus the exploration of the relationship between these two processes can facilitate and re-shape the ongoing internationalization policy of a higher education institution in Turkey. In the end, I came up with the inference that internationalization process of a university can be facilitated by distance learning programs.

1. Internationalization of Higher Education

Under this title, the definition of and rationales for internationalization of higher education and the outlook of the internationalization of higher education in Turkey will be provided.
1.1. Defining Internationalization of Higher Education

We frequently use or hear the word ‘international’ in political sciences like in ‘international relations’ or in our everyday life like in ‘international company’ etc. Nevertheless, we may not try to define or describe the concept of ‘internationalization’. This is why a good starting point to discuss the internationalization of higher education could be an attempt to define it.

Merriam Webster (2014), an old ‘international’ dictionary, provides the lexical meaning of internationalization as “the development of an increasingly integrated global economy marked especially by free trade, free flow of capital, and the tapping of cheaper foreign labor markets”. It is obvious that the focus here is on the worldwide economic mobility. Beside this definition, Turkish Language Association (2014) defines the same concept in a similar way. According to it, internationalization is “a concept that is known since the colonial period and related to the transnational mobility of the economic activities”.

It is possible to conclude from the definitions above that there is a tendency of making relationship between the concept of internationalization and global economic affairs. When I took a more specific perspective and dealt with the attempts to define the internationalization of higher education, I came up with the finding that there is actually no one definition on which every researcher agrees. Criticizing this, De Wit (2002) states that:

Even if there is no agreement on a precise definition, internationalization needs to have parameters if it is to be assessed and to advance higher education. This is why the use of a working definition in combination with a conceptual framework for internationalization of higher education is relevant” (p. 114).

The parameters of internationalization could be another matter of debate. However, to give a definition, one by Knight (1994) can be provided here. That is, Knight regards the internationalization of higher education as the “process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution” (p. 7). In order for a better understanding of this international/cultural process, the rationales for this process stated by the same researcher will be provided next.

1.2. The Rationales for Internationalization of Higher Education

Upon defining internationalization of higher education, it is worth mentioning the rationales for it. While there is no agreement on the definition of internationalization, there is no one on the rationales for it as well. Here, four rationales by Knight (1997), which are among the earliest suggested one, are discussed. Accordingly internationalization of higher education has academic rationale that a higher education system may seek ways for meeting international standards or a higher education institution may have a desire to take place in international top university rankings. However, as Knight (1997) notes internationalization of higher education has not only academic, but also economic, political and social/cultural rationales.

Regarding economic rationale, Knight (1997) states that “…there can be a direct and beneficial relationship between an international market orientation and the internationalization of the primary functions of a university, college or institute” (p. 10). This is why she adds that “income-generating motives” (p. 10) are among the factors that drive a higher education institution internationalize.

Next, political rationale is another motive for internationalization of higher education. Stating that “education, especially higher education, is often considered as a form of diplomatic investment for future political and
economic relations” (p. 9), Knight (1997) has the belief that even sponsoring international students by providing them with financial aids or scholarships can politically help the sponsoring country in the future.

Last, cultural/societal factors can also be a source of motivation for internationalization of higher education. In this respect, Knight (1997) attributes the internationalization of higher education to “the need for improved intercultural understanding and communication” (p. 11). So that countries can both introduce their cultures and create opportunities for their citizens to learn about other cultures through higher education.

1.3. Internationalization of Higher Education in Turkey

Based upon the above-mentioned definition and rationales by Knight (1994, 1997), internationalization is a process that higher education systems or institutions go through for several reasons. Trans-national mobility of students and academics, European Union projects, international education or research agreements among universities in different countries and branch campuses of universities in different countries can be regarded as visible outcomes of this process.

Speaking of Turkey, it is not difficult to see the above-mentioned examples of internationalization in its higher education system. European Union projects and exchange programs has long been a field of interest for Turkish universities. Now, most universities in Turkey have offices of international relations to follow these international mobility programs (CoHE1, 2014). There are even universities which have branch campuses outside Turkey. For example, with a slogan of “My campus is the world itself”, Bahçeşehir University, a foundation university in Istanbul, has already established branch campuses in the US, Canada, Germany, Italy and Hong Kong (BAU, 2014). Next, universities in Turkey host international academics from different countries as well (Çetinsaya, 2014). In this sense, to have a better understanding of the internationalization process of the Turkish higher education system, some statistical information is provided here.

One of the indicators of how much higher education system in a country is international could be the number of the international students in that country. In Table 1 be-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number (10,000)</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>5.372</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>7.661</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>16.656</td>
<td>1.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>35.011</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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Table 1. Number and Ratio of International Students in Universities in Turkey between 1983-2013 (Çetinsaya, 2014)*

* 10,000 – 60,000: Number; 0.0 – 1.8: Ratio; 1983 – 2013: Years.
low, the number of the international students between the years 1983-2013 and the ratio of international students to domestic ones are provided.

As it is seen in Table 1, the number of the international students at universities in Turkey has increased more than ten times in the last three decades. That is, while the number was just 5,378 in 1983, it was 55,011 in 2013. However, the significant increase in the number is seen in the last five years, between 2009 and 2013. Accordingly, more than 20,000 international students participated in the system within this time interval. It could be as a result of the policies employed by the CoHE like increasing the scholarships and quotas for the international students.

Next, what else is provided in Table 1 is the ratio of international students to domestic ones. What is seen here is that the proportion decreased from 1.7% to 1.00% between the years 1983 and 2009, the number of the international students increased though. This could be attributed to the fact that more and more students in Turkey have had the chance of enrolling in universities now. A good indicator of this statement can be the schooling rate.

That is to say, as Çetinsaya (2014) notes, the schooling rate in higher education in Turkey increased from 1.3 to 74.9.

In addition to their number, the home countries of the international students could enable us to frame the way a country’s higher education system is internationalized. In Table 2, home countries of the international students who were in Turkey in 2012 are provided.

As can be concluded from Table 2, home countries of the international students in Turkey in 2012 are various. The three countries from which international students come most are Turkish or Turkic: Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and the TRNC (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus). Besides, neighboring countries including Greece, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Bulgaria and Georgia are on the list. Although there are international students from distant countries like the US and China, the numbers of them are not that high.

Last, not just the number of the international students, but the number of the international academics facilitates better understanding of internationalization higher education. In Table 3, the change in the number of the international academics in Turkey between the years

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>7379</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>573</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
<td>6136</td>
<td>Macedonia</td>
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<td>4221</td>
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<td>1704</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
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<td>Iran</td>
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<td>Somali</td>
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<td>China</td>
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<td>302</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>713</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
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Table 2. Number of International Students in Turkey in 2012 by Their Home Countries (Çetinsaya, 2014)
1984 and 2014 and the ratio of international academics to domestic ones are provided.

According to Table 3, there is an obvious increase in the number of the international academics in Turkey between 1984 and 2013. That is, while this number was just about 200 in 1984, it exceeded 2,500 in 2013. Especially in the last five years, between 2008 and 2013, there is a significant increase in this number. In other words, more than 1,000 international academics joined the system. This can be due to the policies of the CoHE, like providing international academics with more scholarships/grants and advertising Turkish universities more in the international environment.

Speaking of the ratio of international academics to domestic ones, it could be concluded that despite the increase in their numbers, international academics were still minority in the Turkish higher education system. That is, while 0.8 % of the academics in Turkey in 1984 was international, the proportion was 1.9 % in 2013.

2. Distance Learning

Here, the definition of distance learning and a brief historical overview of it in Turkey will be respectively provided.

2.1. Defining Distance Learning

With the continuously developing communication technology, distance learning has been among the concepts that we hear more and more frequently today. A good starting point to discuss it can be the way it is defined.

Lexically, the word ‘distance’ is defined as “the amount of space between two places or things” (Merriam Webster, 2014). When we relate the word space to learning, we can find out that space or distance in a learning process is not new. According to Battenberg (1971), in 1728, a newspaper advertised stenography lessons by post. Thus, it could be stated that the history of distance learning dates back to centuries ago. One who defines this old concept is Holmberg (1977). According to him, distance education -used interchangeably with distance learning in this article- is:

various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms or on the same premises, but which, nevertheless, benefit from the planning, guidance and tuition of a tutorial organization (p. 9).

Table 3. Number and Ratio of International Academics in Universities in Turkey between 1984-2013 (Çetinsaya, 2014)**

** 0 – 3,000: Number; 0.0 – 2.0: Ratio; 1984 – 2013: Years.
It is possible to conclude from his definition that Holmberg underlines the lack of teacher’s presence in distance learning environment. Agreeing with Holmberg, Moore (1973) adds that the communication between teacher and learner still exists and it “must be facilitated by print, electronic, mechanical or other devices” (p. 664). While this communication was established by a newspaper centuries ago (Battenberg, 1971), today, it is actualized by the latest technology including the Internet. A good example for this can be open universities that teach masses of people anywhere in the world like Indira Gandhi National Open University in India that teaches 3.5 million students (Balawati, 2012).

2.2. Distance Learning in Turkey

The time distance learning was first spoken in Turkey dates back to the early republican period. As Uşun (2006) indicates, it was first used in a report on teacher training by Dewey, an American researcher who was invited to Turkey at that time. Nevertheless, it is obvious in Kaya (1996) that the first example of distance learning was only after the first half of the 1950s. That is, in 1958-59, people working for banks in different cities were taught by post sent from Ankara, the capital city.

In the following years, several more steps were taken to utilize, spread and institutionalize distance learning in Turkey. This includes the opening of the Center of Learning by Post at the Ministry of National Education (MNE) in 1960 which focused on the continuation of vocational education and the Institution of Informal Higher Education (YAYKUR) which taught high school graduates (Özdil, 1986). Last but not least, the establishment of the Open Education Faculty at Anadolu University in 1982 could be regarded as a significant development (Demiray, 1999). That is, the number of the students enrolled in this faculty has increased each year and today, as Balawati (2012) notes, with its more than one million students, Anadolu University is among the top five universities in the world that teach the highest number of distance learners. Up until 2010, the only open education faculty was at Anadolu University in Turkey. As Aydın (2011) indicates, in 2010, two more were founded; one was at Istanbul University and the other was at Atatürk University.

3. The Relationship between Internationalization of Higher Education and Use of Distance Learning in Higher Education

Internationalization and use of distance learning are two popular issues in higher education today. Since I was interested in these topics and thought of them, I have come up with the idea that these two concepts or phenomena could be related to each other as they both have evolved recently and become parts of higher education. Thus I reviewed the early theoretical frameworks in both topics focusing upon the reasons why internationalization and distance learning occurs. In the end, I came up with the idea that Knight’s (1997) rationales for internationalization of higher education and Perraton’s (1983) key statements for distance learning can be a good couple of frameworks to deal with together. While the former suggests the reasons why a higher education institution or system internationalizes, the latter indicates what makes distance learning a good alternative to face to face learning. Relating these two frameworks to each other, I will argue that distance learning can help a higher education system or institution achieve its internationalization objectives. While making the arguments, I mostly took the context of the Turkish higher education system into consideration to illustrate my arguments as I reviewed more literature on it and have witnessed its recent internationalization processes as both a researcher interested in it and a lecturer teaching for almost a decade.

The first rationale for the internationalization of higher education argued by Knight (1997) is academic. Accordingly, having an in-
international dimension to research and training, meeting international standards and improving the quality of education can be listed among the academic rationales for internationalization. Here, I argue that distance learning can help a higher education institution or system achieve this more. One of the key statements by Perraton (1983) is that “you can use any medium to teach anything” (p. 37). By this, he implies that for quality education, the presence of the teacher and learner at the same place is not required. Accordingly, he adds that learner can learn by means of any media tools at the same quality as s/he can do in face to face education. In his following key statement, he supports the above-mentioned one by indicating that “distance education can break the integuments of fixed staffing ratios which limited the expansion of education when teacher and student had to be in the same place at the same time” (p. 37). With this, he believes that more and more learners can be reached by distance education than it can be reached by traditional face to face education. Taking the Turkish context, Anadolu University can be given as an example to illustrate this. Accordingly, Anadolu University has more than one million distance learners (Balawati, 2012). As Perraton underlines in his statement, it would not be possible to teach such number of students under any physical circumstances if traditional face to face education was employed. Thus distance learning can contribute a university to have an international dimension by increasing the number of its international learners.

What is else worth mentioning related to academic rationale could be the concern of universities to have international academic reputation today. A common way for universities to make their names internationally popular is to take place in international university rankings today. I could say that the situation is the same in Turkey. I mean, higher education administrators attempt to ensure their universities to take place in international top university rankings. For instance, being happy for the fact that her university took place in an international top university ranking, the rector of a university in Turkey states “I wish more Turkish universities took place on the list of top five hundred universities” (Star, 2013). In my view, this could be achieved more easily by distance education as well. That is to say, in the methodology of several international university rankings, international outlook of universities is taken into consideration. In other words, the more international students, graduates or academics a university has, the more points it is given. For example, in The Times Higher Education World University Rankings, top four hundred universities are ranked (THE, 2014). In this ranking, international outlook is among the five areas of performance indicators. Accordingly, the more a university attracts graduates and post-graduates all over the world, the higher ratio of international staff to domestic staff it has and the more journal publications with international co-authors it has; the more points it is given. Regarding this, I believe that more and more international students and academics can be a part of the Turkish universities by distance education as it provides teacher and learner with freedom of time and space. In this way, more Turkish universities can be given points for their ‘better international outlooks’ and they can take place in these international rankings.

The second rationale for internationalization of higher education suggested by Knight (1997) is economic. That is, financial concerns like economic growth can drive a higher education system or institution internationalize. In my opinion, this is also in accordance with what Okçabol (2007) indicates. According to him, today’s universities are in a struggle to find their own financial resources. Here, distance learning can come to the help of universities. In his another key statement for distance education, Perraton (1983) notes that “there are circumstances under which distance teaching can be cheaper than orthodox education” (p. 37). I think distance education can be one of those having a characteristic and a capacity of offering a kind of ‘cheap’ circum-
stances. To exemplify, as mentioned before, Anadolu University has more than one million distance learners from all the world. It would not be cheaper to teach those over one million students by face to face education as more academics, buildings and equipment would be needed. What is more, by distance education, more learners from anywhere can enroll in the university and the university can generate an income from tuition or registration fees paid by distance learners.

Social/cultural rationale is another motive for internationalization of higher education stated by Knight (1997). With this, she believes that factors like the need for social and community development, introduction of national cultural identity to other nations and trans-cultural understanding could be social/cultural motives for internationalization of higher education. In my view, this could be facilitated by distance learning as well. In one of his key statements for distance learning, Perraton (1983) expresses that “distance teaching can reach audiences who would not be reached by orthodox means” (p. 3). Regarding Perraton’s statement, what I argue here is that a great quantity of learners can be reached by distance learning to satisfy the social/cultural reason for internationalization of higher education. To exemplify this, Istanbul University Open and Distance Learning Faculty offers a distance master’s program called Atatürk’s Principles and History of Turkish Revolution. Within the scope of this program, topics related to the historical, social and cultural foundations of the modern Turkish Republic takes place (AUZEF1, 2014). This distance graduate program can be an opportunity to introduce national Turkish identity to the people anywhere in the world. By orthodox means—as Perraton states—it might not be possible to reach many learners and teach them about Turkish culture at the same time. Nevertheless, by distance means, anybody in any country who has an internet access can be a candidate learner of the Turkish culture.

Last but not least, there is political rationale for internationalization of higher education as well (Knight, 1997). Accordingly, seeking for peace and mutual understanding and keeping national security are among the political factors that drive a higher education system or an institution internationalize. What I consider is that distance learning can be useful here as well. One of the key statements for distance education by Perraton (1983) can be linked with my claim. That is, he notes that “it is possible to organize distance teaching in such a way that there is dialogue” (p. 39). From my point of view, this “dialog-friendly environment” can be utilized as a tool for achieving the political objectives within internationalization process. As Knight (1997) notes, higher education already has a power or function of establishing a dialogue between two countries. In other words, she believes that a developing country can provide a potential candidate leader of a developed country with scholarship during his/her higher education. So that, future political or diplomatic affairs between these two countries can be facilitated. Kirmızıdağ et. al. (2012) exemplify this in Turkish context by stating that “an Arabic Prince who is a graduate of Middle East Technical University (METU) in Turkey can help Turkish companies’ business operations in Saudi Arabia” (p. 13). However, I believe that this could be achieved more easily by distance learning as well. That is, as I conclude from Holmberg (1977), in distance education, the space between teacher and learner is not a barrier for learning to be actualized and the physical presence of teacher and learner at the same place and time is not a requirement. So that neither teacher nor the learner has the obligation to go on an overseas journey to get together, which supports what Perraton (1983) notes. According to him, distance learning can be a more economical alternative to face to face learning. As distance learning makes education cheaper, more ‘potential leaders abroad’ can be provided with scholarships compared to face to face learners with the same money. And as a result, the possibility of reaching future’s leaders rises.
CONCLUSION

Based upon the established relationship between internationalization of higher education and use of distance learning in higher education in this study, it is possible to provide suggestions for universities in Turkey to achieve each rationale for internationalization of higher education:

- In order to achieve academic rationale for internationalization, academic planning or curriculum should be based on not only traditional face to face learning, but also distance learning as well. Therefore, on-line courses which have the same contents as traditional ones should be offered by universities.

- Next, providing international distance learners with scholarships can be a good way of attracting more international students. For example, international agreements can be made with several universities abroad and special discounts can be offered to students, graduates or staff of those universities. By this way, more international learners can enroll in a program and home university may make financial gain via this distance internationalization. An example for this argument can be the online survey given to the students at Istanbul University Open and Distance Education Faculty. According to it, out of 5558 participant, 570 (10,26%) state that they preferred to enroll in their current program because Istanbul University provides them financial aid (AUZEF3).

- Speaking of achieving social/cultural rationale for internationalization, it is possible to suggest that even in distance learning programs, courses introducing national culture or history can be offered. People who are expert at national culture and history can teach distance learners. So that international students can have direct and correct information about the country they receive distance education from.

- Last, in order to achieve its political needs via international distance education, a university can include country-specific distance programs. For example, participation to European Union as a regular member state has been a long-lasting agenda for Turkey (AB, 2014). Thus distance programs for European countries can include contents that support this official agenda of Turkey. So that the way the distance learners from Europe perceive or think about this issue can be re/ shaped.
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