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An implementation of distance education program for
teaching common necessary courses in formal education:
karabuk university sample

Gözde Çakır^a, Bengi Yurtsever^{b*}

^aKarabuk University, Safranbolu Fethi Toker Fine Arts and Design Faculty, Department of Industrial Design, Karabuk 78600, Turkey

^bKarabuk University, Safranbolu Fethi Toker Fine Arts and Design Faculty, Department of Architecture, Karabuk 78600, Turkey

Abstract

Increase of student numbers by higher education institution in post-secondary educational institutions causes various problems in the sense of teacher and learner. It is known that the quality of education given in crowded classes by single instructor decreases. It is thought that improving this situation with developing technology and common internet usage is possible. From this point, distance learning program has been applied in the education of compulsory common courses determined by Higher Education Institution throughout Karabük University since fall semester of 2011-2012 academic year. In the process of application it is aimed to discuss experiences of students and instructors, the sufficiency of technological infrastructure of program, advantages and disadvantages of the program with end of term assessment reports for Safranbolu Fethi Toker, Faculty of Fine Arts and Design, Department of Architecture.

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1. Introduction

There have been many changes in Turkish education system recently. The main reason of these changes is thought to be the rate of literacy which is expected to increase and the rate of unemployment which is not expected to increase due to increasing population of the country. With the changes of education and exam in elementary schools and high-schools; similar changes are done in universities as well, this change is rather thought to have the aim of increasing the number of students. While all these changes were done, a system in which the quality is not given much importance but things were determined through quantity has begun to take place in education. It is possible to assert these both for undergraduate and for associate and postgraduate education. The thought of enabling occupation for

* Bengi Yurtsever. Tel.: +0-370-712-8707

E-mail address: bengiyurtsever@karabuk.edu.tr

everyone is naturally favorable. However taking such step without any infrastructure causes insubstantial growth and expansion. In fact it is more important to be an individual who can improve himself in every way and completely comprehended critical thinking and inquisition for this aim. All these actions are regarded important for self-discovery. Providing these to students must be one of the primary aims of education.

Within the scope of this subject it is aimed to determine whether these attainments – critical thinking, inquisition, designing – can be achieved within the frame of distance learning which is a relatively new education system for Turkey and to analyze the issue through the instance of Karabük University. Evaluation of reciprocal views of students and instructors after one year process has importance at this point.

As it is briefly mentioned above, the number of students accepted in universities has been increasing day by day. Measures taken for this problem and the infrastructure of schools are most of time insufficient. This insufficiency in the infrastructure can be due to specific technological deficiencies, being primarily instructors.

The importance of technology cannot be denied in present period. In recent months when fast developing technology gathers societies together and intercommunal interaction becomes indispensable, reconstruction of education system in harmony with changes experienced have been discussed nearly by all the nations.

The approach of unconditioned truths leaves its palace to more sensible and intuitive approaches; having belief in the necessity of nature integrity, people began to adopt a life style which compatible with all the living species and nature (Yaşar, 2001, 1). In this frame it is important for the students to participate “actively” in the education and produce technology as well as to have the skill of using technology. The way of using technology should be discussed and it must be provided to students sufficiently within the process of education. This usage can be during courses and it is possible to support with various education strategies.

It is thought that participation of such a process, in other words usage of newly developed technologies is quite important for education. However when there is no infrastructure, there would be specific problems soon and then these problems would get bigger. In this sense innovations should be included in the system after inquisition and discussed within the scope of a specific strategy. Cases which are thought to have solved the problem for short term may rather make the situation worse and this in turn may result in unsolvable problems in the future.

In the education system which is called distance learning, students can participate in the education from their houses or from the places where they want or where they are at that moment. Electronic learning (E-learning) or distance learning can be defined as web-based education system which is provided through internet/intranet or a platform on a computer network. Although the greatest difference of e-learning from traditional education seems to be the technology it included, in fact it predicts a radical change. This approach is a student-centered model which motivates students in attaining knowledge and gives them priority. In e-learning, education is conducted with training activities where the student and instructor do not have to be in the same place simultaneously. E-learning occurs in two ways: a. Individual’s receiving education on their own from computer. b. a group of students and course instructor synchronously meeting in a class in a live computer environment.

In fact this system is regarded positive for making use of technological opportunities of today, and making use of educational opportunities rapidly within the conditions of daily life. However, it must be questioned whether providing education only as knowledge would be sufficient for an undergraduate student. What kind of an educational environment is expected for an undergraduate student? These are the questions which forms the complications within the system and which are ignored. Through which approach the distance learning can be more efficient?

Output of the process in the case of Karabük University can be evaluated in negative and positive terms. It can be regarded as positive side that such a recent university has been able to adopt such a

system and has taken a distinctive place in recent years. Students can program their time thanks to distance learning; create himself a studying environment at home. Moreover it prevents the loss of time in transportation from campus to residential area, students feel free about time. The negative side is the matter of infrastructure/strategy which is generally discussed in this study. Although it is regarded positive for the universities to be open to new ideas, there are many problems when adapting this to education strategy. The process brings along many problems such the problem of instructor, environment, computer etc. Since the system is not comprehensible in the computer environment and students are not interested in computer adequately causes the system to be an environment in which only the instructor talks to himself rather making the process of distance learning a mutual, active one. However as it is mentioned, it is important and is getting important everyday for students to participate in the education process actively and make a process in which students and instructors mutually share and acquire information. This mentioned process is valid not only for distance learning but also for formal education.

In parallel to all these thoughts, students were interviewed in order to mutually evaluate positive/negative sides of distance learning carried out within a year.

2. Distance Learning

Application of distance learning in education started towards the end of 18th century. In the definition made by California Distance Learning Project (CDLP, 2006) it is stated that distance learning is a kind of education system which is carried out through connection with student and educational tools, and it is underlined that the fact that distance learning programs provide education opportunity even for those who are not registered to any educational institution is a case which increase education opportunities provided for students in recent years. Another side of distance learning is that it has to follow developing technology closely by making use of current resources adequately (CDLP, 2006).

According to United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA, 2005) distance learning means providing education to students with the help of tools such as satellite, video, audio, graphic, computer, multimedia technology. USDLA states that student and instructor is geographically far from each other and electronic devices or written or printed materials should be used in this education program. Distance learning is composed of two basic parts, teaching which includes teachers and learning which includes students (USDLA, 2005).

Opportunities provided through developing technology and increase of computer literacy made it possible for web-based distance learning applications to increase. Distance learning which is a kind of student-centered education is an education model which is prepared considering student's inclination towards technology, functional literacy, visual literacy and learning styles.

2.1. Distance Education Application in Turkey

Since there was no widespread usage of internet until the beginning of 1990's in turkey, Open Education University, Open high school and open elementary school used to provide distance education through TRT 4 and books prepared for this aim served as resources for students.

As internet usage became widespread, IDEA (Web-Based Asynchronous Education, <http://idea.metu.edu.tr>) sustained E-learning studies which are completely carried out on internet environment and asynchronously. Today, E-MBA program organized many intercampus courses, education of foreign language and certificate programs. (E-MBA: an online post-graduate program in which course will totally be given web-based) (Çallı, Bayram, Karaağaç, 2002).

For the course of Informatics which is taken commonly by 1800 students in ITU, students arrive at computer laboratories in the campus and have their exam in virtual exam environment with the questions chosen randomly from question bank which includes 10.000 questions (Çallı, Bayram, Karaağaç, 2002).

Istanbul Bilgi University initiated the first electronic management program which is named Bilgi E-MBA and approved by YÖK. This interactive program provides accomplishments about marketing, entrepreneurship, finance, human resources etc. MBA diploma will be given as a result of the program which can be followed through internet all around the world (www.bilgiemba.net).

2.2. Karabuk University Distance Education Applicaitons

With the developing technology it has become a necessity to remove time and place restriction of higher-education and make the information produced in higher education independent from time and place.

In the process of transition towards information society, scientific and technological studies should be done and recommended in order to make quality education which assists improvement and development of Turkey widespread through e-learning.

In parallel to these necessities, Distance Learning Application and Research Center was founded in Karabuk University in order to conduct plan, program, coordination and applications within the scope of undergraduate, associate and postgraduate distance education program and activities which are carried out in the basis of information and technology technologies of the university.

Karabuk University which aims to increase its success in education with opportunities of interactive media and multimedia presented by the university provides distance education in 5 associate programs, 9 undergraduate and 2 postgraduate programs.

2.3. Application of Distance Education Program for Common Compulsory Courses within Formal Education

Increase of student numbers by higher education institution in post-secondary educational institutions causes various problems in the sense of teacher and learner. It is known that the quality of education given in crowded classes by single instructor decreases. It is thought that improving this situation with developing technology and common internet usage is possible. Considering the age, computer literacy, technology inclination, functional literacy, interests and learning motivations of individuals, distance education program has been applied in the education of common compulsory courses determined by Higher Education Institution throughout Karabük University since fall semester of 2011-2012 academic year.

2.4. Introduction to Distance Education Program

Login of students who completed preparatory education and are to start 1st grade education was defined before the fall semester begins. The student can log in with students number and the password he created. The home page that occurs when system is logged in is shown in Figure 1.

There are videos with lecturing and lecture notes for every course in the system. Students can access these information whenever they want. In addition to these, days and hours were determined in course programs for common compulsory courses of each department. Students who log in at these determined days and hours can access the coordinator of this course on-line, watch the lecture live and ask question to the coordinator (Figure 2). With LMS (Learning Management System) software coordinator can apply quiz, exam or survey to the students and can make assessment.

Log in and log out of students are recorded by the software and their attendance can be monitored in this way.

When the student logs in, he can create his own calendar from his personal page and access forum of the courses he receives, introductory video of the courses and course resources (Figure 3, 4).

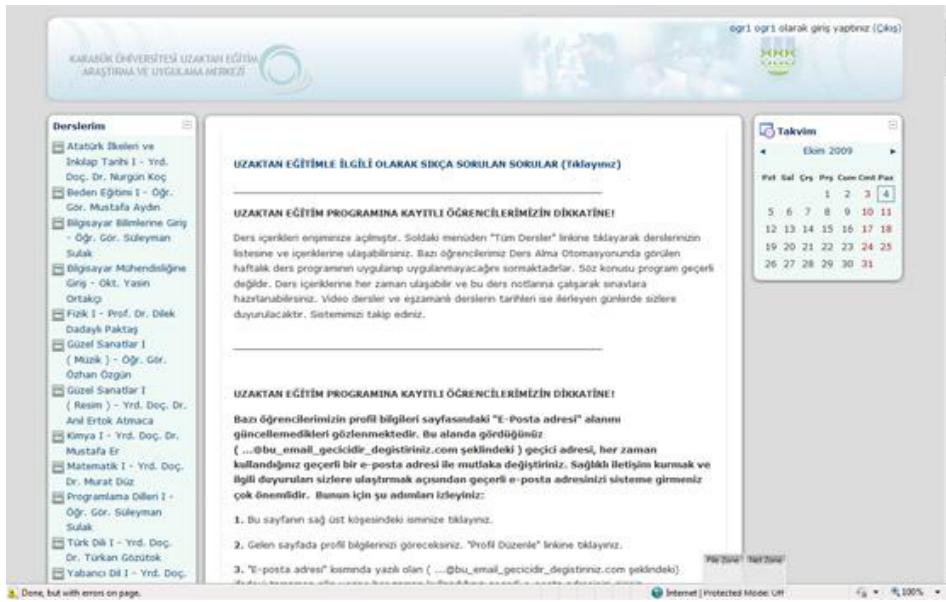


Figure 1. View of distance education home page



Figure 2. Video page including lecture

There are two forums for each course in the system. One of them can be defined as the area in which coordinator of the course makes announcements about the course (Figure 5). Students cannot intervene in this area. The second one is the course forum. Coordinator shares his opinions when he expects feedback from students. Students can share their opinions and questions with the coordinator. The interaction between coordinator and students is visible for every student. Students who are active in the system can see other active students and share information (Figure 6).

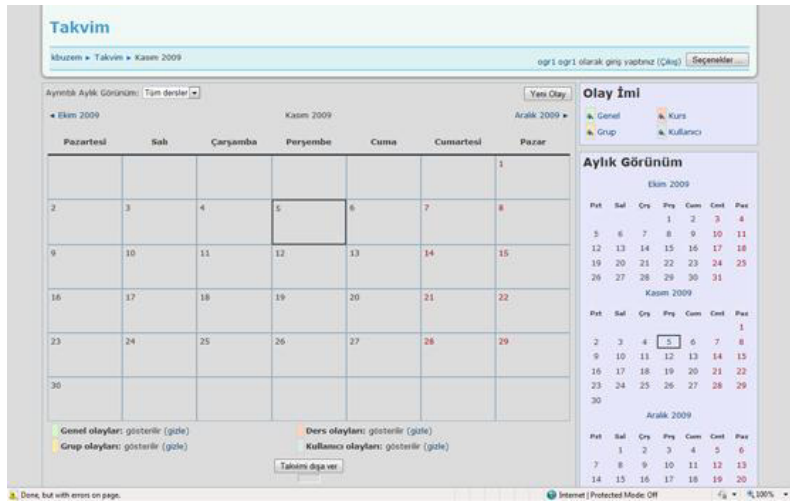


Figure 3. Calendar page of student

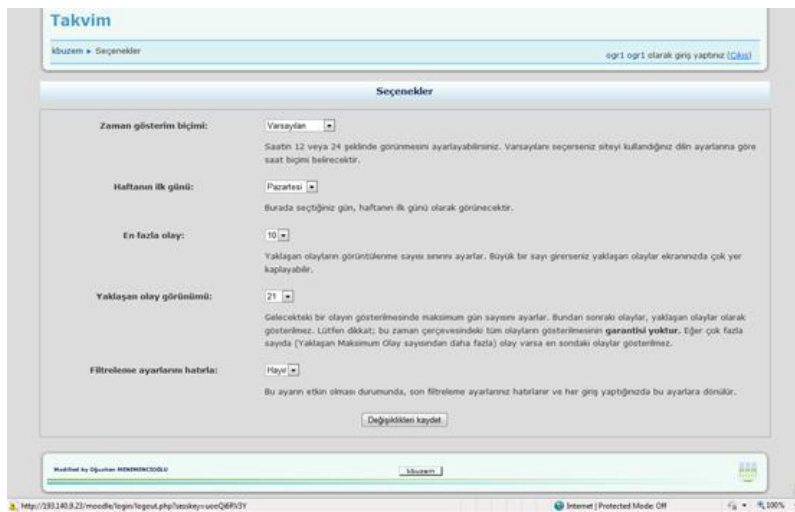


Figure 4. Calendar personalization page of student

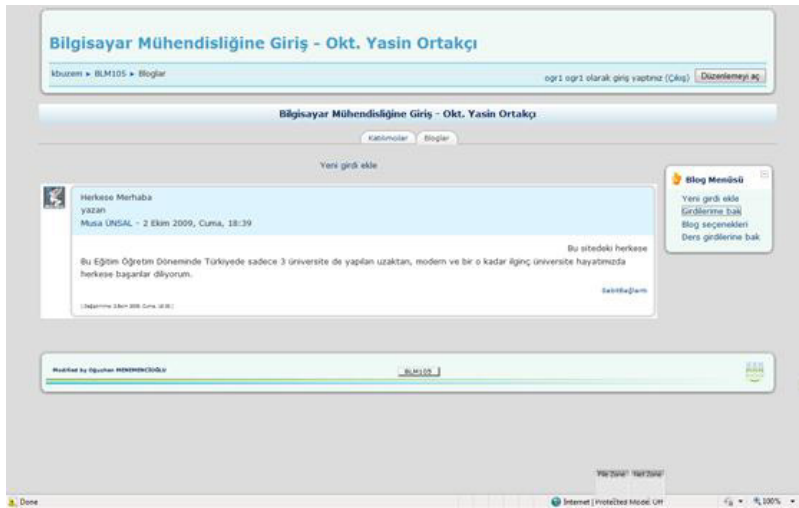


Figure 5. Coordinator forum page

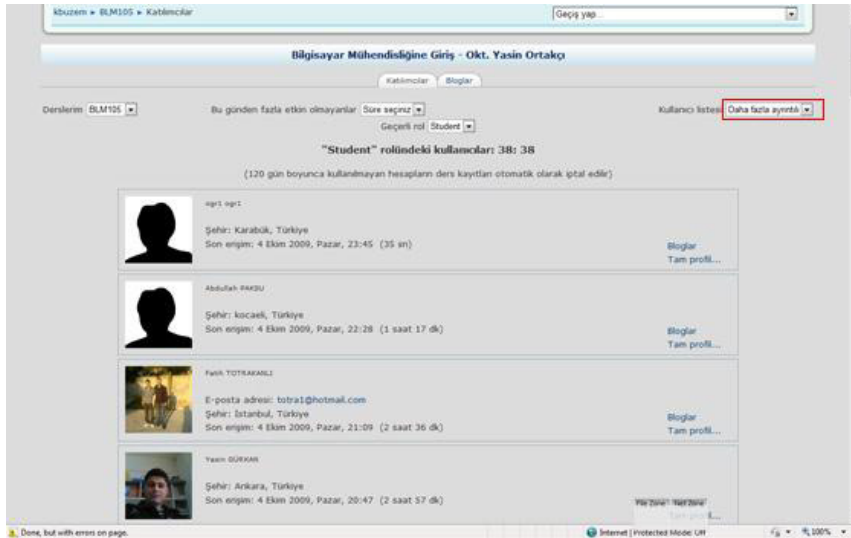


Figure 6. Active student page

2.5. Evaluation of Distance Education Application in Karabuk University, Safranbolu Fethi Toker, Faculty of Fine Arts and Design, Department of Architecture

Architecture is an occupation which is dynamic, open to innovation and constantly modifies. The greatest change is thought to happen in current time. In our day where modernism and latter movements are discussed and technology lives its golden age, it must be questioned that whether current architectural education programs can keep up with the times or not (Lökçe, 2002). With the development of construction technologies, due to improvement of various representation tools, many choices which can be the interface of architecture are provided every passing day simultaneously. Due to the change of way

of seeing and thinking; perspective towards art and philosophy, perspective towards life, architecture can fulfill the entire demand of people and society in this plentifulness. This situation makes it possible to carry out every kind of architectural study in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary basis. Architecture education must be kept up-to-date in line with daily life and conditions of the day in order to create up-to-date environment of architecture education; interrogator, critical student-instructor environment. It is observed that architecture students at first grade gain familiarity with the usage of computer and technology through distance education program applied within the scope of university.

Since common compulsory courses are provide through distance education system, students who have intensive design study in the courses of architectural project and construction can both prevent the loss of time during going to school and back and also continue their project studies after on-line course without changing environment.

3. Conclusion

Within the scope of distance education application, an architecture student at first grade was interviewed, and it was concluded that thanks to the application of distance education program in teaching common compulsory courses students can easily follow the courses since they can access the coordinator of the course face to face; they access the information whenever they want thanks to lecture notes and videos with lecturing; they can determine their learning deficiencies through exams whenever they want. It was determined that problems about the system are rather related with technical/infrastructure basis. Since the system has not been seated very well in the first semester, there have been problems for about one month at the beginning of the term.

Acquisition in the sense of time is especially important for architecture students. In this sense, students who learn to schedule themselves had rather comfortable term in the sense of course intensity. Since the courses provided with distance education program are not department courses but those with which students are familiar from high-school, there has not been any problem in the sense of conveying information – efficiency.

Technological opportunities of the present day should be certainly evaluated. In this sense distance education is a system which relieves the burden of education system. Yet, it must be discussed whether a proper education environment could be enabled or not.

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