



A SHORT REVIEW OF DISTANCE EDUCATION FROM LANGUAGE LECTURERS' PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

As advancements in technology and expansion of the internet blur the boundaries, new approaches and trends are getting inevitable in education including language teaching. Distance education, dating back as early as to 1700s, has proved to be an effective way of education under some specific circumstances. In 2012-2013 academic year Ataturk University started to carry out some courses including Foreign Language I and II through distance education. In this study, it is expected to reveal the expectations, attitudes, experiences, and problems of the English lecturers of Foreign Language School of Ataturk University, Turkey regarding the implementation of language courses through distance education. The findings of the study are expected to contribute to this field and inspire further studies.

Keywords: Distance education; Language teaching; Research study

INTRODUCTION

It is indispensable not to see the technology and its effects in every single aspect of our lives in our age which is called as "the Information Age". However developed the societies are there are always demand for education. Throughout the history of human communication advances in technology have powered paradigmatic shifts in education (Frick, 1991). According to Yusuf (2006) every nation invests in education due to its numerous benefits for individuals, organizations, and the society as a whole. Integrating technology with education is obvious in all types of educational settings.

Education is provided through formal and informal means. In formal settings the conventional (face-to-face school instruction) and distance education (offered with separation in terms of physical location of instructors and students) have been used to provide educational opportunities to recipients. Wilson (2002) emphasized that distance learning is an educational approach that integrates technology, connectivity, curricular content, and human resources. Higher education institutions, in which several issues are converging (Easton, 2003) as follows: 1) advances in computer technology; 2) rapidly growing enrollments; 3) changing student demographics; and 4) continued cost containment requirements, are coming to deliver their formal education via the Internet.

The role of educational technology has become increasingly important since the 1980s, when computer technology began to be widely explored, and has now become indispensable to all areas of distance education. Nasser and Abouchedid (2000) state that as a tool for meeting a universal and continuously increasing information economy, the most crucial movement of the 21st century draws on the role of distance education. Radford (1997) asserted that 75% of the colleges and universities in North America, Asia, and Europe would use distance-learning technologies as the main medium for the cultivation of global knowledge.

It is usually referred that (Liu, 2005) in online education students and teachers are separated from each other and students connect via the use of a computer or the Internet to the materials unlike traditional education, which requires face to face instruction. Nowadays online education is the primary method for distance education. The number of the institutions offering online courses to their students are increasing steadily. Waits&Lewis (2003) note distance education has grown fast in recent years.



It is obvious that distance education is becoming more and more popular with higher education institutions. Nevertheless, one of the most important components of education, teachers, are they ready to adapt themselves from conventional education to distance one? Although much of the literature on distance education emphasizes the significance of teachers in this setting, this group has been largely neglected by the research (Beaudoin 1990; Sariola 1998, cited in DeVries&Tella, 1998). Both teachers' knowledge and skills and their perceptions and attitudes of the use of technologies for the purpose of education are needed (Nasser and Abouchedid ,Tobin, Tippins and Gallard 1994).

The purpose of the study is to determine the perceptions and attitudes of language lecturers' toward components and issues relating to online distance education.

Literature Review

Distance education opportunities expand in Turkey as well as all over the world. A variety of issues are related to the successful development and delivery of an e-learning course. Teaching staff who are teaching distance courses can suggest valuable insight and council to those developing or teaching such courses. Both students and teaching staff perceptions and attitudes toward distance education are valuable to provide information on issues related to the learning and participating or developing a distance education course. The review of the literature includes the nature and history of distance education, online education, and the researches revealing and stressing the perceptions of teaching staff towards distance education.

The Nature of Distance Education

Distance education as a concept started to be used in 1970s and was first put into words officially in International Postal Tuition Council in 1982. Distance education is a distinct education type which cannot be regarded as an alternative of conventional face to face education due to embracing adults who are working or have constraints because of their family, face to face interviews, classrooms and freedom of general place and time, the combination of mass media and individuation, the potentials regarding student's freedom and peculiar administration (Kaya, Karataş and Karataş, 2012).

When having a look at the definitions of distance education, it could be seen that there are four components of it, which are the institutional foundation, the difference between teachers and students, the share of video, sound and data (teaching experiences) and interactive telecommunication .

According to Wang and Sun (2001), the nature of distance education could be summarized as follows:

1. physical separation of learner and educator i.e. physical distance preventing face to face education (Holmberg, 1977, Keegan, 1983, Cunningham, et al., 1998).
2. mediated subject matter presentation (Holmberg, 1995).
3. mediated student-tutor interaction (Holmberg, 1995) or a student-tutor relationships (Dallos, 1984), in Keegan's (1983) words, provision of two way communication.
4. use of technical media (Keegan, 1983).

The origins of distance education go back to 1700s. The first distance education effort within the institutional context announced on Boston Newspaper on March,20 1728 that with the advertisement called "Calep Philips, the teacher of stenography which is a new method" it could teach this method through letters in a few weeks to the people living in Boston (Kaya, Karataş and Karataş, 2012). Since then, there has been a great many of differences and innovations both in the implementation and the characteristics of distance education, which is summarized in Table 1 (Harper, Chen and Yen, 2004). Harper, Chen and Yen (2004) state that The United States Distance Learning Association defines that distance education requires teaching via the use of telecommunication technologies transmitting and receiving numerous materials through voice, video and data.

As long as used effectively, distance education holds e great promise for education in terms of its advantages such as the potential reduction of financial burdens for institutions, reducing overcrowding, improving student and teacher ratios, and allowing students to interact with a diverse group of fellow students.

Online Education



Online e-learning concept refers to the application of electronic communication in distance education (Kaya, Karataş and Karataş, 2012). Volery and Lord (2000) state that: "The literature of online delivery in the field of education has flourished since the early 1990s with the rise of the Internet". Similar terms have been used in the literature since then such as computer-based learning, distributed learning, and lifelong learning. Online delivery is undoubtedly beneficial by making the course material easy to access anywhere and anytime. It offers to the users both collaborative and interactive tools, which facilitate the education in an effective way.

Lecturers' Attitudes, Perceptions and Characteristics

The increasing demand for universities courses taught online makes the higher education institutions offer online courses through distance education (DE). DE in Turkey is not a new one, Open Learning Faculty in Anadolu University in Turkey, which was opened in 1982, the idea and organization of which goes back to 1970s. According to the item 44 of the law of 2547, Higher Education Institution of Turkey offers the Turkish universities to conduct the courses 30% out of all through DE. Thanks to this incentive almost twenty universities have started to teach some of their courses through DE.

Ataturk University has begun offering a number of courses via DE as part of its ongoing efforts to meet the needs of today's students, build a distance learning component, and enhance teaching and learning through the use of technology. The courses taught are on campus classes such as Ataturk's Principles and History of Turkish Revolution, Foreign Language I, II English, Turkish Language, and The Basic Concepts of Law.

The learning outcomes of distance education partly or some extent largely depend on the lecturers' attitudes toward the technology, teaching styles, and control over the technology.

Dillon and Gunawardena (1995, cited by Hackley&Webster, 1997) suggest that the attitudes of lecturers' toward technology-mediated distance learning systems could be highly beneficial in assessing the DE systems. They also state that the teaching style of a lecturer as well as interaction and the lecturer's control of the technology are all related to the learning outcomes.

According to Siaciwena (1989) integrated DE systems lecturers are the ones who are responsible for the entire teaching and assessment processes. The lecturers' attitudes to or acceptance of DE could be significant to the accomplishment of DE in a certain settings, thus draws attention.

Siaciwena (1989) shares the results of a study conducted by Clark, Soliman and Sungalia (1984) at the University of New England in Australia, which attempted to reveal the perceptions of internal and external teaching. This study revealed that external teaching are more demanding compared to internal according to the staff. Also the part time staff found it difficult to avoid doing distance teaching. Another finding of the study was that most staff considered distance students as being better prepared compared to on campus students.

Another researcher, Scriven (1986) surveying staff attitudes to DE at Brisbane College of Advanced Education in Australia found out that 47% of the participants were on the opinion that they did not have enough time write distance study notes although they were given adequate guidelines to help them to prepare materials. 68% of the participants were pleased with the process by which were involved in producing the materials. %25 of the participants indicated they would avoid DE if they could, 31% of them disliked marking distance students' assignments, and 21% felt the college's student support services were adequate.

Mani (1988) tried to reveal the teaching staff's attitudes toward DE in the Institute of Correspondence Education of the University of Madras in India and found out that just 10% of the participants were in favor of avoiding teaching distance students if they could, and 13% liked to teach regular students. Whereas 82% of the participants regarded the support services for distance students were inadequate. 40% of the teachers disliked marking assignments, and 60% wished the teaching staff to be sufficiently educated in the some areas of DE.

Stinehart (1998) conducted a study analyzing the factors influencing the teaching staff's attitudes towards DE in Iowa State University, in the USA, which revealed that support from the institution is a crucial component for fostering faculty involvement in DE.



According to the recent study (Gbomita, 1997; Snider & Gershner, 1999 cited in Atkins & Vasu, 2000) the attitudes of the teachers play an important role on one’s computer adoption or implementation behavior in the classroom. A number of studies conducted by many researchers examining and analyzing teaching staff attitudes toward distance teaching show that the teaching staff who teach at a distance are positive toward DE (Dillon 1989; Mani 1988; Taylor&White 1991).

Findings by Clark, Soliman, and Sungila (1985) show higher-level teachers, i.e. senior faculty and professors find distance teaching both more enjoyable and more demanding than faculty in lower ranks. As citing the positive aspects of DE, teaching faculty describe intrinsic rewards such as prestige and self-esteem rather than extrinsic or monetary rewards (Dillon&Walsh 1992; Taylor&White 1991). Even though Taylor &White (1991) found the teaching staff to have positive attitudes toward DE, their study also revealed that teaching faculty prefers conventional face-to-face education.

Table 1: The History of Distance Education

Years	Characteristics	Milestone
1700-1900	Use of mail to deliver course material	Establishment of US Postal System Use of correspondence education in higher Education
1920-1960	Correspondence Education Use of radio and television for Correspondence education	States pass laws requiring students to attend school Use of correspondence education in the military
1970-1980	Use pre-recorded video recordings Use of cassette recordings Use of “collections” Limited number of broadcast channels Mainly used in research and sciences to share Information	
1980-1990	Teleconferencing Video Conferencing Less expensive video recorders Cable networks start programming for K-12 students More televised programs	Emergence of Arpanet, which became the World Wide Web
1990-Present	Less expensive computers Greater access to technology The Internet in classrooms More educational institutions and Businesses utilize distance learning Computer based training (CBTs) Synchronous and asynchronous Communication	Dominance of World Wide Web Emergence of wireless technology More financing from private industry and universities

Based on interviews with teaching staff, the study conducted by Wolcott (1997) concluded that 1) DE occupies a marginal status; 2) DE is neither highly valued nor well-rewarded as scholarly activity; 3) DE is not highly related to promotion and tenure decision, and 4) rewards for DE are dependent on the academic unit’s commitment to DE.



METHODOLOGY

Research Setting

In this study it was aimed at revealing the attitudes of language lecturers of Foreign Language School of Atatürk University, Turkey toward distance education. A quantitative approach was employed to deeply understand the lecturers' attitudes towards to and concerns about teaching distance education courses. The managers of the School of Foreign Languages were informed of the study in advance and participating in the research was voluntary for the lecturers. The participants were handed the questionnaires towards the end of the first term of 2012-2013 academic years.

Participants

The participants in this study include 40 lecturers of English Language who have been actively taking part in distance education of English since the September of 2012. All the participants were Turkish and aged between 25 and under, and 46 and over. 8 of the participants were 25 and under, 19 were aged between 26 and 36, while 13 were 46 and over. 23 of them were female, and 17 were male respondents. Participants' weekly course load differed greatly, from 12 to 30 and over. Their experience in teaching varied from 5 and under to 21 and over. The majority, however, consisted of those who worked as lecturers of English Language for more than 5 and under years. Although some were more experienced in teaching than others, their experience in teaching distance courses was the same as Atatürk University switched to distance education for English classes in the September of 2012, and the respondents had started working at Atatürk University before the employment of DE.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part sought to obtain the following background information: age, gender, teaching experience, academic status, weekly course load, level of teaching. The second part of the questionnaire was adapted from Alexander, Perreault, Waldman, and Zhao (2002) and Yiong, Wah, and Sam (2008). 30 items were constructed, 5-point Likert-scale ranging from always to never (Cronbach alpha= .60). The main seven constructs focused on the worth, feasibility, quality time, training, effort, acceptance, and benefits of DE.

Analysis

The data gathered for this study were descriptively analysed. Firstly, to be able to decide which tests to make use of, the normality of the data and the homogeneity of the group variance were tested. With this purpose, Levene test was used to reveal whether the distribution was homogenous. The Levene Test indicated a homogenous distribution ($p=0.199$; $p>0.05$). After the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test this showed that the data were compatible with the normal range of distribution. It was then decided which parametric tests should be used. T-test was used to analyse the data which were not related to the parametric tests. In addition, with an aim to reveal the differences in total points of the scale when the independent variable was divided into more than two categories, we resorted to ANOVA for the analysis of the variance. The significance level was accepted as 0,05 .The scale was tested for reliability, and its coefficient of consistence was counted to be .60.

In this research Likert-type scale was used. The frequency and percentage distribution the collected data were calculated. We used t-test to examine the differences between the total points each independent variables, which were teaching experience, academic status, weekly course load, where you teach. In addition, where the independent variable was divided into more than two categories one-way variation analysis (ANOVA) was used. The significance level was accepted to be at least ,05. The statistical analysis of this study was performed using SPSS 17 for Windows.

FINDINGS

The results of the attitude scale implemented in the Higher School of Foreign Languages in Atatürk University are discussed in this section. The descriptive analysis of the questionnaire is showed below in Table 1.

Table 1. The Descriptive Statistics Measures of the Sclae implemented

Scale	n	\bar{X}	sd
Total	30	95,63	9,11

A closer look at the descriptive analysis measures show that the arithmetic mean of lecturers' of English attitudes towards distance education is $X=95,63$. Therefore, it can be suggested that the lecturers' attitudes towards distance education is positive.

The results of the t-test performed with an aim to trace a connection between the lecturers' gender and their attitudes towards distance education are shown below in Table 2.

Table 2. The results of the unrelated group "T-test "analysis of the total points of the implemented attitude scale in terms of the participants' gender

Female	23	97,74	7,6	1,752
Male	17	97,76	10,3	
S.d.=28	$p=,088$	$p>0.05$ Insignificant		

When we analyse the Table 2, it is seen that the mean of female participants' points attitude points is $X= 97,74$, whereas, the male participants' mean is $X= 97,76$. The means of these two groups were analysed to detect any statistical differences, however, it was concluded that the difference is not significant statistically. It clearly shows that the attitudes towards distance education are not affected by the gender. ($p>0.05$)

To be able to decide whether the lecturers' attitude towards distance education was influenced by age, one-way variation analysis (ANOVA) was performed. The results are demonstrated below in Table 3.

Table 3: The results of the ANOVA for the total points of the implemented attitude scale in terms of the participants' age

Age Variable	n	\bar{X}	s.s.	The Source of Variation	The Sum of Squares	Sd	The Mean of the Squares	F	p
25 and under	8	98,87	9,07	Inter-groups	122,945	2	61,473	,730	,489
26-35	19	95,42	6,81	Intra-groups	3114,430	37	,571		
46 and over	13	93,92	11,9	Total	3137,375	39			
Total	40	95,63	9,11						

$p=,489$

$p>0.05$ Insignificant

The Table 4 reveals that the lecturers of English have a positive attitude towards distance education when their experience in teaching is taken into consideration. The lowest mean ($X=90, 50$) belongs to the group experienced 6-10 years while the highest mean ($X=97, 62$) belongs to the group experienced 5 years and under. The results, however, do not show a meaningful variation among the different levels of experience. ($p>0.05$)

We used one-way variation analysis (ANOVA) to determine any meaningful variation in the lecturers' of English attitudes towards distance education according to their level of experience in teaching. The results are shown below in Table 4.



CONCLUSION

The way distance education has changed the education people get is quite obvious. It seems it will continue to change the education systems both in state and private institutions all over the world. Teachers who are one of the most crucial parts of education have some perceptions and attitudes toward the education systems, which affect both students and learning outcomes. This study aimed to find the attitudes and perceptions of the language lecturers towards DE, which has just begun to be implemented in Atatürk University, Erzurum, Turkey.

In the end of the study it was revealed that a significant number of lecturers were satisfied with the distance education courses they taught. The participants seem to be content with teaching DE courses, receiving good technical and administrative support, the flexibility of time and place DE offers, providing office hours, and student-teacher interactions.

Furthermore, a great majority of the participants expressed that they willingly accept giving DE courses, while a few number of the participants stated that they have difficulty in using technology.

After analysing the data it was found out that the participants of the study are mostly similar in terms of their attitudes towards DE.

The results of this study indicate that the language lecturers of Ataturk University have a positive attitude towards DE, which is not directly affected by the participants' gender, age, teaching experience, academic status, weekly course load, and where they teach.

To able to set better DE application and get more promising learning outcomes from DE, further studies are needed focusing on the other aspects and components of DE such as effective use of techniques for communication in distance learning atmosphere as well as fostering and facilitating student-teacher interaction.

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