# Students' Views of Distance Education Provision at One University

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Providing university students with distance education is of great importance in the global world. Distance education provides advantages and benefits especially for students who don't have the chance to meet lecturers from other universities face to face. Distance education connects the learner and teacher to resources that are difficult to access otherwise. It is not necessary to gather students in one classroom at the same time in a distance program. Through distance education facilities students and lecturers can store, update and transfer information very quickly.

Furthermore, distance education helps save money in terms of accommodation and travel expenses. This paper describes students' perceptions and attitudes towards distance education based on their gender, school types attended, age and access to educational technology such as computer and internet. This paper also describes the specific program used by the faculty of Law at Akdeniz University, Turkey.

**Keywords:** Distance Education, Faculty of Law, and Educational technology

### **INTRODUCTION**

Distance education, if used well can make a great contribution to learning. University students can profit from distance education especially because of the way it enables frequent contact over great distances. Hence, the purpose of this paper is not to discuss the general advantages and disadvantages of the distance education. Rather, the paper relates to the students' opinions about distance education they have experienced and offers a few suggestions on how to use it effectively in future programmes. The paper first discusses the potential of distance education and then reports on research findings related to this distance programme.

The improvement of educational technology and the use of internet in educational life have created distance education. Distance education has much to contribute to university life, but it is not a panacea. The research has shown the importance of several crucial factors in the success of distance education. These factors include the role of the teacher, the

frequency and nature of interaction between students and teachers and the provision of suitable appropriate using appropriate materials. .

#### **BENEFITS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

According to Tait and Knight (1996), the greatest benefits occur where programmes are specifically designed for the students in order to motivate their work in lessons and to enable students to reach the stage where they can make choices in their own studies. Threlkeld and Brzoska (1994) point out that motivational factors are important for all learning but distance education requires more motivation and more patience because students are self-directed and unsupported. Bradshow and Hinton (2004) note that distance education provides both time and place for students who do not have enough time to commit to the traditional role. Distance education offers flexibility in terms of place and also allows simultaneous connection between students and teachers who are physically separate (Tait and Knight 1996).

#### INTERACTION AND THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

Distance education supported by the computer enables students to obtain every kind of data in their field, widen their horizons and save a great deal of time (Boyle: 1995). During distance education many students require encouragement and academic guidance, and consequently university lecturers' attitudes gain great importance. According to Willis (1993) technology has got a great role in the delivery of distance education but the lecturers should focus on the needs of the students and the content if they want to be successful and effective in this field.

Brooksfield (1990) explains how the skilful teacher can organize and develop the content of good curricula. Even though technological aids play an important role in the distance educational process, educators are crucial key factors for effective distance learning. It is clear that all distance learners are conscious enough of the importance of distance learning but they also want an attractive environment while learning on-line.

Distance education requires rapid communication with the teachers. Verduin and Clark (1991) state that distance education involves not only student- student discussion but also teacher-student interaction. Lecturers should engage students with distance education and encourage them to interact not only with each other but also with the teachers themselves. Similarly Kirkup and Jones (1996) maintain that students require good dialogue not only with their lecturers but also with other students to develop their ideas. Chen (1997) also explains the importance of student-lecturer dialogue in distance learning. White (2003) explains that distance learning and teaching is related to a student-centred approach and needs the right support from lecturers.

### **CONTENT AND MATERIALS**

In order to make distance education effective, lecturers at universities should carefully research the best methods and techniques. Junaidu (2004) suggests that the success of the distance education program is related to providing activities for students. In order to be effective in distance education, the teacher should know the needs of the students because students are the most important figures in distance learning environment. Forcier (1996) implies that technology has a great power over the educational process; however it

needs support to be efficient. Lecturers should try to discover how their students could learn effectively through distance education .Not only teachers and students but also the proper materials and correct usage of them play an important role for distance education programs, the selection of materials should be as important as the content of the course. All of the materials should be reorganized and adapted for distance education because traditional classroom materials may not be effective for distance education (Beare, 1989). Using the appropriate equipment enables students motivate in classroom atmosphere. Keller (1987) argues that students' interest, confidence and satisfaction in the distance educational process are main factors that influence the success and increase number of distant learners. Distance education also develops students' cognitive style (Sadler-Smith 1993). With the help of distance education, Students can be involved in a cooperative learning environment and furthermore they can be motivated and attain a high level of skill in analysing information (Grabe, et all. 2001).

A number of universities in Turkey have taken up the challenge of providing stimulating educational opportunities through distance education programs. Distance education programs represent an additional option to faculties, especially those situated in remote parts of Turkey, and it can be a bridge in order to overcome the difficulties emerging from distance. The Faculty of Law at Akdeniz University is not able to provide certain courses related to law to graduate students due to staff shortages. In order to overcome this problem the faculty supplies programs through distance education. Some courses using distance education were designed as an opportunity for students to receive courses from lecturers at other universities in Turkey. In this way distance education can benefit students where traditional education is not available. Students in this study, however, expressed a number of concerns about the distance education they received. These concerns are described and discussed in this paper. They confirm the importance of careful attention to the role of the teacher, frequent encouraging interaction between students and teachers and the need for well-designed content appropriate to the media used.

# **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Distance education provides students with the chance of better quality education, the achievement of required standards within a limited period of time, and easy access to lecturers and educational resources. This paper investigates how these aims were achieved in one particular programme and presents some suggestions for distance education in universities. The purpose of the study is therefore to discuss ideas and attitudes of the students at Akdeniz University Faculty of Law towards distance education based on their age, gender, school types, access to computer and internet, and to introduce some practical solutions to improve distance education facilities. The study aims to answer two questions:

- 1. What do the students think about the distance education implementation at Akdeniz University Faculty of Law?
- 2. What can be done to improve distance education facilities?

#### **DATA COLLECTION**

A questionnaire was administered to 50 students in the Spring term of the 2003 - 2004 academic year at Akdeniz University Faculty of Law. Out of 50 students participating in the

course 46 responded to the questions. The questionnaire was designed to elicit the students' ideas and attitudes towards distance education in general, and their programme in particular.

In the first part of the questionnaire students' personal information was asked. Among the respondents 43.5 % were between the ages of 17-20 and 56.5 % were between the ages of 21- 24. 41.3 % of the respondents were female and 58.7% of them were male. 34.7 % of the students had attended state high schools, 58.6 % Anatolian high schools and 6.52 % other schools with intensive English program.

The second part had 6 questions on students' expectations concerning distance education. This questionnaire was administered in order to find out whether students are experienced participants in distance education programs (see Appendix 1). 45.2 % of the students used Internet for their education, 35.7 % for pleasure and 19 % for both.

#### **DISCUSSION**

### **The Students' Viewpoints Concerning Distance Education**

The second part of the questionnaire focused on the two research questions. The results indicated that the students from Faculty of Law at Akdeniz University had taken courses via distance education but they did not achieve the desired objectives due to lack of technological equipment and inappropriate methods. In spite of this, students were still interested in and support the programs based on distance education. The following findings illustrate the students' ideas. (Also see Appendix 2).

#### Q1. Is there a full time lecturer's problem in your faculty?

75 % of the respondents stated that they were not satisfied with the number of lectures at their faculty. This staff shortage was the reason why distance solutions were sought by the faculty. This view was held by 87.5 % of the students who had attended state schools, 70.4 % Anatolian high schools and 66.7 % high schools with intensive English courses were not satisfied with the number of lecturers at their faculties (73.7 % of the female and 77.8 % of the male students)

# Q2. If there aren't enough lecturers, how can you access information?

87 % of the students believed multimedia in the classroom would help them access information in the absence of sufficient lecturers. Only 13 % of them felt the Internet was the best source. This shows that majority of the students at Akdeniz University Faculty of Law's students support the use of appropriately designed new educational technology.

# Q3. Do you think that distance education can be effective?

50 % of the students believed that distance education programs could be effective. On the other hand, 23 % of the students who had participated in distance education programs did not like them because of the previous dull atmosphere. 36.8 % of the female and 25.9 % of the\_male students believed that distance education programs could be effective. This result indicates that female students are more prepared to support technology based lessons more than the male. The result shows that about half the students who are not familiar with the technology still support distance education. 50 % of the students who did not use Internet claimed that good distance education programs would be effective 47.4 % of the students who used the Internet for educational purposes did not think that distance education programs would be effective.

#### Q4. Did you have any lessons by means of distance education?

65.2 % of the students at Faculty of Law had already received lessons by means of distance education.

## Q5. (If you said yes to question 4) did you find it useful?

45.2 % of the students using internet mentioned that distance education programs were useful. 85.7 % of the students who used the Internet said that they did not like the distance education lessons they had received.

#### **Q6.** Does distance education enrich your educational life?

80.8 % of the students aged 17-20 and 95 % aged 21-24 accepted that distance education could enrich their educational life. It suggests that more mature students at Akdeniz University seemed to be more conscious of the potential for distance education.

#### **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

In conclusion, the results clearly illustrate that the students at Akdeniz University Faculty of Law appear to be conscious of the potential of distance education programs. The results of the research indicate that students may show positive beliefs towards distance education if appropriate equipment and atmosphere are provided. It appears that distance education can be as effective as traditional face-to-face education when the methods and techniques are used properly through the technological aids. As Tait and Knight (1996) advise synchronous tools such as videoconferencing, desktop conferencing and audiographics support interaction and group working for effective distance education programs. Students can hear and see lecturers by means of big screens at the same time they have a chance to ask questions.

It is important to bear in mind that success with the distance education courses at Faculty of Law requires careful planning and reasonable objectives. Class size, atmosphere and the selection of materials are of great importance. In order to be successful, the students need to be encouraged and the importance of distance education should be presented to them in a positive way.

Computer rooms can be prepared and all of the students can use computers by asking questions and writing their ideas to the lecturers. Moreover a large screen may be necessary in order to pass over the difficulty during distance education and students will feel as if in a real class.

If they only hear or see the lecturers' faces on a screen, they will feel negative attitudes towards the distance education programs. All kinds of multimedia aids should be used in the classroom atmosphere in order to attract the students' attention. As Rumble (1992) states, successful management of distance education requires planning, good organization, leadership and control.

From the research it can be understood that the lecturer is a very important factor in a successful program not only for traditional education but also distance education. Lecturers, who teach via multimedia aids need to be trained to encourage the students, use different methods and should be aware of student psychology.

Another factor, which makes distance education effective, is the student. If the students are highly motivated and disciplined enough, they can benefit from distance education. This research study also found that distance education was not an obstacle when an easy and enjoyable educational period was provided.

The study highlights that distance education, if applied by the authorities correctly can meet the needs of the students at Faculty of Law in Antalya.

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	APPENDIX 1: THE Q	UESTIONNAIRE	
PART 1			
GENERAL INFORMATIO			
Please mark the alterna	itive which is true for you	J	
1. Age: 18-20	21-23 23 + .		
2. Gender: Male	Female		
3. High School Graduati	ion:		
State High School An	atolian High School Hi	gh School with Intensive English Clas	s
4. Personal Computer P	ossession: Yes No .		
5. Internet Access: Yes	No		
6. Purpose of Using the	Internet:		
Education En	tertainment Both .		
PART 2			
	O DISTANCE EDUCATION		
	tive which is true for you		
	full-time lecturers in you	-	
a) Yes	b) Sometimes	c) No	
2. If there aren't enoug	h lecturers, how can you	access information?	
a) By means of the Ir	· .		
u, z,e e. ee z.			
3. Do you think that dis	tance education can be e	ffective?	
a) Yes	b) Sometimes	c) No	
•	-	•	
4. Did you have any less	sons by means of distanc	e education?	
a) Yes	b) No		
E (If your choice is yes	to question 4) did you fi	nd it usoful?	
` -			
a) Yes	b) Sometimes	c) No	
6. Does distance educat	tion enrich your educatio	nal life?	
a) Yes	b) no		

APPENDIX: 2
STATISTICAL RESULTS ACCORDING TO THE STUDENTS' ANSWERS IN PART 2

	Que	stio	1 1		Ques	tion	2	Question3			
	1	2	3	Т	1	2	Т	1	2	3	Т
	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
AGE	15	4	1	20	1	19	20	10	3	7	20
17 - 20	75	20	5	100	5	95	100	50	15	35	100
	20	5	1	26	5	21	26	4	8	14	26
21 - 24	76.	19.	3.8	100	19. 2	80.	100	15.	30.8	53.	100
	9	2				8		4		8	
			2	46	6		46		11		46
Total	35	9	4.	100	13	40	100	14	23. 9	21	100
	76.	19.	3			87		30.		45.	
	1	6						4		7	
GENDER	14	5	_	19	2	17	19	7	4	8	19
Female	73.	26.		100	10. 5	89.	100	<b>36.</b>	21. 1	42.	100
i ciliale	73.	3	2	27	4	5	27	8	7	1	27
Male	21	4	7.	100	<b>14.</b> 8	23	100	7	25. 9	13	100
	77.	14.	4	-30	1-11.0	85.	-50	<b>25.</b>		48.	100
	8	8	-	46	6 13	2	46	9	11	1	46
Total			2	100		_	100		23. 9	_	100
	35	9	4.	-00		40		14		21	
	<b>76</b> .	19.	3			87		30.		45.	
	1	6						4		7	
SCHOOL	14	1	1	16	2	14	16	5	4	7	16
State	<b>87.</b>	6. 3	6.	100	17. 5	<b>87.</b>	100	31.	25	43.	100
TYPE	5	7	3	27	4	5	27	3	6	8	27
Anatolian	19	25.	1	100	14. 8	23	100	8	22. 2	13	100
	70.	9	3.	3	-	85.	3	29.	1	48.	3
Intensive	4	1	7	100		2	100	6	33. 3	1	100
<b>English Class</b>	2	33.	-	46	_	3	46	1		1	4.5
	66.	3		46	6	100	46	33.	11	33.	46
Tatal	7		_	100	13	40	100	3	23. 9	3	100
Total	25	9 16.	2 4.	1		40 87	1	14		21	
	35	16. 9	4. 3			87					
	76. 1	9	3					30. 4		45. 7	
	1							4		′	
COMPUTER	22	5	1	28	4	24	28	9	5	12	28
Yes	<b>78.</b>	<b>17.</b>	3.	100	14. 3	85.	100	32.	25	42.	100
USER	6	9	6	18	2	7	18	1	4 22.	9	18
No	13	4	1	100	<b>11. 1</b>	16	100	5	2	9	100
	<b>72.</b>	22.	5.			88.		27.		50	
	2	2	6	46	6	9	46	8	11		46
Total			_	100	13		100		23. 9	21	100
	35	9	2	= = =		40	= = =	14		<b>45.</b>	= = =
		19.	4.			87		30.	1	7	
	76.	LJ.	7.			07		JU-			

INTERNET	34	6	_	40	6	34	40	11	11	18	40
Yes	85	15		100	15	85	100	27.	27. 5	45	100
USER	1	3	2	6	-	6	6	5		3	6
No	16.	50	33.	100		100	100	3	-	50	100
	7		3					50			
		9		46	6	40	46		11	21	46
Total	35	19.	2	100	13	87	100	14	22. 9	45.	100
	76.	6	4.					30.		7	
	1		3					4			
<b>PURPOSE</b>	17	2	-	19	3	16	19	5	5	9	19
Education	89.	10.		100	<b>15.</b> 8	84.	100	26.	26. 3	47.	100
<b>OF</b>	5	5	1	15	2	2	15	3	3	4	15
Entertainment	13	1	6.	100	13. 3	13	100	5	20	7	100
INTERNET	86.	6. 7	7	8	1	86.	8	33.	3	46.	8
Both	7	3	-	100	12. 5	7	100	3	37. 5	7	100
	5	37.				7		2		3	
	62.	5		42	6	87.	42	25	11	37.	42
Total	5		1	100	14. 3	5	100		26. 2	5	100
		6	2.					12			
	35	14.	4			36		28.		19	
	83.	3				87.		6		45.	
	3					5				2	

	Question 4				Question 5				Question 6			
	1	2	T	1	2	3	T	1	2	Т		
	N or	N %	N	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %		
	%	90	%	9/0	%	%0	9/0	%	%	%		
AGE	6	14	20	1	1	5	7	21	5 19.2	26		
17 - 20	30	70.	100	14.	14.	71.	100	80.8	1 5	100		
	24	0	26	3	3	4	24	19	_	20		
21 - 24	92. 3	2	100	-	3	21	100	95	6	100		
	20	7. 7	46		12.	87.	24	40	13	46		
Total	30 65. 2	16	46 100	4	5	5	31 100	40 87		46 100		
IOLAI	05. 2	34.	100	1 3.	4	26	100	07		100		
		8		3. 2	<b>12.</b>	83.						
				_	9	9						
GENDER	13	6	19	-	2	11	13	17	2	19		
Female	68. 4	31.	100		15.	86.	100	89.5	10.5	100		
	17	6	27	1	4	4	18	23	4	27		
Male	63	10	100	5.	2	15	100	85.2	14.8	100		
	20	37	4.5	6	11.	83.		40	_	4.5		
Total	30 65, 2	16	46 100		1	3	31 100	40 87	6 13	46		
lotai	05. 2	34.	100	1 3.	4	26	100	87	13	100		
		8		3. 2	12.	83.						
		3		_	9	9						
				_	_				_			
SCHOOL	12	4	16	1	1	11	13	14	2	16		
State	75	25	100	7.	77	84.	100	87.5	17.5	100		
TYPE	15	12	27	7	2	6	15	23	4	27		
Anatolian	55. 6	44.	100	-	13.	13	100	85.2	14.8	100		

Intensive	3	4	3		3	86.	3	3	l <b>-</b> -	3
English Class	100	-	100		1	7	100	100		100
Lingiisii Ciass	100		100		33.	2	100	100		100
	30		46		3	66.	31	40	6	46
T - 4 - 1		16			3	7				
Total	65. 2	16	100	1		<b>'</b>	100	87	13	100
		34.		3.	4					
		8		2	12.	26				
					9	83.				
						9				
	4.0			_						
COMPUTER	19	9	28	1	4	15	20	24	4	28
Yes	67. 9	32.	100	5	20	75	100	85.7	14.3	100
USER	11	1	18	-	-	11	11	16	2	18
No	61. 1	5	100			100	100	88.9	11.1	100
		38.				1				
	30	9	46	1	4	26	31	40	6	46
Total	65. 2		100	3.	12.	83.	100	87	13	100
		16		2	9	9				
		34.								
		8								
INTERNET	27	13	40	1	3	24	28	34	6	40
Yes	65. 7	32.	100	3.	10.	85.	100	85	15	100
USER	3	5	6	6	7	7	3	6		6
No	50	3	100	-	1	2	100	100		100
		50			33.	66.				
	30		46		3	7	31	40	6	46
Total	65. 2	16	100	1			100	87	13	100
		34.		3.	4	26				
		8		2	12.	83.				
				_	9	9				
PURPOSE	16	3	19	_	3	13	16	16	3	19
Education	84. 2	15.	100		<b>18.</b>	81.	100	84.2	<b>15.8</b>	100
OF	9	8	15	1	8	3	9	13	2	
			400		8					15
Entertainment	60	6	100	11.	_	8	100	86.7	13.3	100
INTERNET	3	40	8	1		88.	4	7	1	8
Both	37. 5	5	100	-	-	9	100	87.5	12.5	100
		62.				4				
	28	5	42			100	29	36	6	42
Total	66. 7		100	1	3	1	100	87.5	14.3	100
		14		3.	10.	25				
		33.		4	3	86.				
		3				2				
						1				