

Chapter 2

Integrating Field of Communication to the Distance Education (DE): A New Perspective for DE Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This chapter primarily focuses on integrating the field of communication science to the distance education to find out the roles, competences, and responsibilities of the distance education experts in Turkey. Within this context, the chapter aims to develop a new perspective for distance education leadership. The distance education leadership requires skills including designing, evaluating, managing, and sustaining communication processes. In this context, this chapter discusses building a new perspective that provides the integration of the communication field in distance education for the experts, stakeholders, and researchers in distance education leadership.

INTRODUCTION

The idea is there, locked inside, and all you have to do is remove the excess stone. (Michelangelo)

It is clear that the field of distance education is growing fast. For every year, number of online learner enrollments has increased at rates far in excess, but the growth rates in total enrollment in online courses have been decreasing for the last five years (Allen & Seaman, 2014). This growth causes not only the existence of new distance learning

implementations and technologies, but also many roles and competences come up for responsible people in these processes. Before defining who are distance education experts, it is appropriate to clarify the field of distance education through the paradigm shift within this growing progress.

The use of communication and information technologies in education has a long history, however distance education is not totally new (Shih, Hung, Ma, & Jin, 2007, p. 2). As technological developments open new horizons in distance education, it is always growing (Yuzer & Kurubacak,

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2010, p. 2). On the other hand, technology is not the only sufficient component of distance education. Bryant, Kahle, and Schafer (2005, p. 257) state that a fundamental component of distance education is the communication medium. Due to communication systems in distance education processes, interactions are provided between learners and learning resources (Aydin, 2011). The main purpose of using communication technologies in distance education is to transfer learning materials via different forms of media. The medium for transferring the learning material can be a paper or fiber optics depending on the situation. In this case, integrating the field of communication to the distance education has a crucial role for understanding the roles, qualifications and competences of distance education experts.

This chapter aims to present how the field of communication science enables a new perspective for distance education experts and leaders. In this context, the research questions of the chapter are:

1. Who are distance education experts and what are their roles, competences, qualifications, and responsibilities?
2. Why and how the field of communication science is integrated to distance education?
3. How a new perspective for distance education leadership could be conceived in consideration of the paradigm shift?

The chapter focuses on determining distance education field with in the scope of the communication science. It is a fact that, distance education implies major changes of the culture (Moore & Kearsley, 2005, p. 21) as well as the structure of the institutions, policies or learner requirements. In this sense, distance education could be defined as a field of applications that changes via cultural aspects and social requests in a community. Therefore, this chapter addresses the research questions within the frame of regarding literature, the conception and the policy of distance education implementations in Turkey.

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss how the field of communication science is integrated to distance education via defining the distance education experts and leaders. As it is stated before, the roles, competences, qualifications, and responsibilities of the distance education experts could vary upon cultural aspects and social requests in a community or a country. Therefore, at first step the chapter explores to demonstrate the processes, structures and organizations of distance education system in Turkey.

According to data obtained from Turkish Higher Education Council (2013) the number of universities in Turkey is 179 including 108 government and 71 private institutions. 57 of the 179 universities offers a distance education program. In addition to this, Turkish Higher Education Council designated the procedures and principles regarding the distance education issues in higher education institutions in Turkey. However, these procedures and principles include the organization of distance education processes, policies and structures in the institutions, there are no explanations on qualifications and competences of people in charge of distance education activities.

Anadolu University is the only specialized institution in the field of distance education, offering master's and doctoral degrees in Turkey. Graduates of these master's and doctoral degrees may continue their academic careers and/or work as distance learning and communication experts, designers, researchers and developers. The graduates may work in state and private universities, public institutions, private companies and media organizations (Anadolu University, 2014c). Therefore, Anadolu University (2014a), provides programs that enable graduates to obtain adequate qualifications in the field of distance education for:

- Using information and communication technologies in distance education,

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