

Chapter 10

An Action Research on Design, Delivery, and Evaluation of a Distance Course in a Vocational Higher Education Institution

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the main purpose is to explain design, development, delivery, and evaluation process of a new distance web design course for the needs of students in a vocational higher education institution. It is important to highlight how wisely instructional technology was designed and used to mitigate problems to effectively support the course. Proactive action research was used as a framework of the study. This research focused on an analysis of the existing face-to-face course to mitigate its problems in the new design. Then, strengths and weaknesses of the new design in the new context were investigated. It is important to highlight that technology comes with its unique problems and opportunities. Thus, teaching in a technological environment confronts instructors with a wide range of pedagogical, technological, and physical challenges.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of new and advanced technologies has led to specific jobs that require more knowledgeable people in their field than ever

before. Therefore, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has turned out to have a key role in knowledge economy to produce knowledge intense products, because today in many corporations, there is a lack of qualified

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staff who are knowledgeable on their job. This situation highlights the importance of vocational education for the labor market.

Vocational education institutions have important responsibilities with respect to social and economic life of the society, but today it is somehow underestimated in Turkey. The graduates of these institutions should have enough abilities, knowledge and skills for the needs of the market. That is why the modernization of vocational education to the current needs of society, market, and technology is vital. To cope with these issues special attention should be given because of its unique structure and needs. Most of the time, an adapted version of the general education approach is applied to the vocational education through some kind of adaptation, but this misguided approach hinders the development of TVET.

In Turkey, the main problem of TVET is staff and resource problems. Resources are not only related to physical infrastructure, or hardware. It is also, about how these resources can be effectively used to facilitate learning opportunities. In this regard, educational resources and approaches need revision for the requirements of the 21st century learning skills. Market demands should be taken into consideration while developing curricula in these institutions. According to Kayır & Kılıç (2008), 58.1% of instructors in vocational schools stated that the curriculum partially or completely insufficient. Curriculum does not respond to the realities of the market, and the graduates do not transfer their abilities and skills that they have learnt in their courses to their work life (Buğday, 2007).

Moreover, the quality of education in vocational schools is assessed as low and, in order to improve the quality of these schools, well-educated staff and integrating some technological support would be important for the solution of the quality issues in those institutions (Özsoy, 2004). The survey of Kayır and Kılıç (2008) indicate that only 30.1% of students think that instructors have suf-

ficient professional knowledge and skills. Teachers cannot adapt themselves to changing conditions of their field and education.

Today technology integration to support teaching and learning activities is still an important concern for educators. With the advent of every new technology, educators try to integrate it to the learning environments to support it. Although there have been many technological advances and they have been widely applied in educational settings, only a few of them can be effectively integrated into education according to their initial purposes (Surry & Ely, 2001). One of these new trends is technologically enhanced distance education (DE). However, in Turkey TVET does not benefit enough from the developments in the information and communication technologies (ICT). Technological improvements result in diversified course contents, and renewed academic research interests but often vocational education courses stay unchanged while other institutions are responsive to these changes somewhat more.. Today, the changes in the vocational education and technologies used in vocational institutions do not meet the new needs of the society (Özyılmaz, 2008). In this regard, the development of online programs or distance programs in vocational education is not growing as expected in Turkey. In some departments of online vocational higher education, quotas are not filled as expected because of limited interest of students in these departments (ÖSYM, 2011).

The changes in the field of educational technology caused fundamental changes in the way of instruction. Education is always considered in relation to technology since the beginning of correspondence studies, to the development of televised education. Today with the development in information and communication technologies, we have gained the opportunity to use digital age technologies. In recent years, the use of smart classes have become widespread all over Turkey with the support of Higher Education Council,

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