Chapter 17
The Problems and Support Services in Web–Based Distance Education:
Expectations in Support Services

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ABSTRACT

The opportunities provided by the development of web technologies can be seen in all aspects of people's lives. One of the major advantages of this development is being able to use and share visual, audio or text materials as well documents either synchronously or asynchronously. This study can serve as a reference guide for course planners or course designers for web-based distance education services for universities. This study can help anticipate realistic potential problems and design the course as well as the support services in a way for the expectations of tutors and learners. University administrators and distance education centers and can read about the expectations of tutors and learners as well as their real experience problems and consider these while designing a web-based support system. This study can also provide guidelines for those who are currently involved in web-based distance education systems and make improvement in the current courses.

INTRODUCTION

Development of web technologies resulted in opportunities for people using and sharing synchronous/asynchronous visual, audio, document, text, etc. multimedia tools as well as improving people's interaction with the virtual world. The open plan education that has been practiced in pre-university and university level for many years is a part of distance education but distance education became more widespread by using web technologies as a result of the development of computers, Internet and information technologies. In this respect, web-based distance education concept which is an innovative education system that help tutors and learners from coming together in a campus or classroom with no space or time limitation allowing them to pursue interactive classes with live feed, visuals and audio through available computer, Internet and software technologies where participants can access visuals and materials of the courses whenever they want.

The rate of taking part in web-based distance education system keeps increasing in our country similar to the rest of the world. In addition to the 100% web-based distance education programs in our country; there are also some web-based distance education courses offered in many universities as part of blended education. Engin (2013) pointed out that there are 36 universities in total offering technology based distance education programs at associate degree, undergraduate and post-graduate level by 2011-2012 academic year. This shows that web-based distance education hold a significant place in the education system.

There are components to distance education just like in traditional education system. These components are: Software Technologies, Learners, Tutors, Hardware and Network Infrastructure, Measuring and Assessment (Balaban, 2012). The effective processing of the system depends on the availability of the components. Providing Software Technology, Hardware and Network Infrastructure components without any problems is especially important in web-based distance education.

There are problems experienced by the learners and the tutors within the workings of the system. The problems learners encounter are motivation issues, having face to face exams and lessons from time to time, cold attitude of individuals towards distance education, thinking that they will have employment problems after graduation, not receiving immediate feedback on their learning difficulties, planning and implementing problems due to being forced to study on their own; and problems of the tutors are overcoming learners' motivation issues, determining learners' needs, developing teaching methods by considering the needs and expectations of different learner audiences, pursuing the duty of guidance and providing content at the same time, and problems with communication (Özer, 2011).

This topic is generally handled together with concepts like student support, student services, student support system, etc. in the relevant literature. LaPadula (2003) used the term student support and defined it as information and guidance apart from and beyond the materials. Rogers(2002) on the other hand, used the term student services and put these services under 7 categories (guidance and career development, student management, student activities and student publication, student regulation management, student accommodation services, financial support, health services and athlete support). Morgan (2012) classified students support in two dimensions as academic and non-academic. Academic student support is based on the academic decisions provided by the academic staff regarding students' studying and teaching problems. These services are generally provided at department or faculty level. Non-academic student support included central services that are not directly academic but are provided by a higher education institute in order to enable appropriate studying conditions (e.g. psychological counseling, accommodation services, financial support and legal counseling).

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