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# Ethic dimension and social consequences of distance education applications

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## Abstract

Although it has a history of approximately 30 years and its application areas increase each passing day, social and ethical dimensions of distance education are still being argued. Over time, it is understood that social side of the applications of distance education which was attempted with great expectations and visions at the beginning are very open to improvement. With the new technologies, distance education is considered in social reality as a very important factor that influences the structure of society in recent years. In addition, “the concept of education ethics” has gained a different meaning through the spread of internet and distance education. The increase in internet crimes is also a potential threat to distance education. Lack of communication and perception of social gap between individuals who receive education and educators who meet in different environment and geographies constitutes a dilemma along with the advantages of technical side of this application. The study is based on the ground of emphasizing on ethical dimension and social results of distance education applications rather than their technical aspect.

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*Keywords:* Distance education; ethical; social; dimensions; internet; web based education.

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## 1. Introduction

In the information and communication, where success appears faster and failure is punished cruelly, internet revolution and the improvements in web technologies are causing changes at elements of environment where communities of education sector are active (Erturgut, 2008). In other words, communication and education stand out as the most affected areas from technological reforms. (Ekici, 2003). Improvements in technology force current education system for changes and bring out the necessity of different education applications. (Ağır et al., 2008). Improvements, which are started with the usage of computers and internet in education, have increased the variation and form of learning. (Ünsal, 2004). By presenting the course activities supported with various assistant elements that are appropriate to individual characteristics of the person who don't have the appropriate time or sources, distance education capture the interest of many institutions (Akman&Güler, 2008). Especially, nowadays when the internet based distant applications are applied to every area with multiple dimension versions, ethical dimension and

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social results of these applications have started to appear in more tangible ways. In this study, some findings and evaluations are presented upon social results and ethical extensions created by distance education applications.

## **2. Theory of distance education**

With the plainest expression, distance education can be identified as an education technology where the student and teacher are not in the same environment. (Aydın, 2005; Fritsch, 2004). According to another wider description, distance education is an education style where the learners are in a different time and place from teachers and the communication between them is realized by published or electronic communication devices. (Erturgut, 2008). Distance education was encoded by UNESCO (1985) as an education which was carried out through posting, radio TV, phone and or newspaper without a face to face relation between teacher and student. Other studies defines the distance education as a method which is performed from a specific headquarters and in digital atmosphere through specifically prepared learning units and environments for communication and interaction between the drafters and operators of education activities apart from traditional teaching, learning methods and students. (Aklan, 1987; Orhan & Akkoyunlu, 1999; Miller, 2001).

Distance education was brought to life in relation to improvements in television broadcasting in whole world around 1980's and gained speed with the developing networks toward the end of 1990's (Mciseac, 2002). Williams and Pabrock (1999) pointed out that evolutions of distance education had 3 steps. (1999). First step (1860-1960), encoded the period when the published materials, radio communication and video tapes were used. In second step, (1960-1990) bidirectional voice and video communication and computer based education discs created the distance education technology. And third step (From 1990's to present) have is represented by the period when the hybrid technologies have been started to use, virtual classes have been established and most part of the education have been performed by using the internet technologies. Today, primarily as higher education, most of the curriculum of secondary education and adult education are held by distance education applications. (Ellis, et al., 2009). Distance education and information technologies have changed the general aspect of experimental education. Thanks to information technologies nowadays, laboratories used in traditional education left their places to the virtual laboratories which are available for distant access through internet. (Bayhan & Demirbaş, 2009).

## **3. Distance education and ethic**

According to Socrates, education is a learning process based upon ethics. Scientific meaning of ethical activity for individual is through ethics. As Plato specified; being educated isn't about arrival, but to continue the way with a different idea (Billington, 1997). Kant, (1980) in his ethical approach, stressed that one element of ethic was state; while the other was education while claiming "we arrange all our actions according to education the way we get (or can't get) or to law appreciation". Before, while studies on technical sides such as content preparation, background construction of distance education were more common, later studies on organizational, social, psychological and ethical dimensions have gained popularity too. (İbicioğlu & Antalyalı, 2005).

Predictions concerning that internet would harm family culture and create a depression on social ethics are no longer accepted. However, the responsibility of defending the children and teenagers and guiding them to the advantageous information primarily belongs to our administrators and teachers. (Akın, 2007). In distance education, ethics is not only related to teaching how this environment could be used, but it is also a main part of education applications.

Improvement of the distance education quality and removal of violation of rights in distance education via internet is the main problem of the government and its institutions that are in charge of education services rather than external establishments sensitive to this topic. (Erturgut, 2008) The ones who design distance education, which is also called "E-education" nowadays, must take the difference of political, ethical, social structure of the society into consideration (Marşap, et al., 2009).

## **4. Social consequences of distance education practices**

Distance education is the cheapest among other education systems in the case that there is sufficient number of students which can meet the cost of the investment made in accordance with formal education (Elmas, et al., 2008). However, the fact that the difficulties in making a continuous and subjective observation are not the same as they are in face-to-face education urged researchers to seek new approaches (Chen, 2005; Arıcı&Çiftci, 2007). This situation

shows that the social dimension of student-teacher communication in distance education is still open to improvement.

While conditional perceptions of educators on intelligence direct education practices, perceptions of administrators about situations and environmental conditions direct administrative implementations (Erturgut & Soysekerci, 2009). Within this context, they criticize online education practices where all the distance learning-teaching processes are based on computer networks and where the education strategies implemented in face-to-face education are trying to be imitated (Aydın, 2007). The fact that distance education practices depend on nation scale access facilities and communication technologies constitutes an obstacle in attaining the desired numerical target group in wide usage (Karaağaçlı, 2008).

Another problem that emerges as a result of rapid increase in institutions providing distance education and online education is lesson rights. Some institutions allege that right to teaching belongs to institutions rendering the service and make the implementations in this direction while some other circles state that this right should belong to the educator. Some institutions such as American Federation of Teachers argue that rights of educators are being ignored and practices like these will result in failure with the studies they publish (American Federation of Teachers, 2000).

Another issue is incompetency of educated personnel in distance education. In spite of the facilities provided by internet technologies, the importance of qualified man power in attaining the desired consequences reveals the human resource constraint in distance education in institutional terms (Erturgut, 2008). In 21<sup>st</sup> century not only students but also teachers need to be individuals who learn through open education and distance education and who learn throughout their lives. They are expected to be competent in subjects such as sexual education, peace education, conducting environmental studies, using information and communication technologies (Karacaoğlu, 2009). Furthermore, according to the researches, administrator behaviors in education institutions are influenced by conditions related to institutional processes and cliché problems of public administration in general as well as approaches in modern education practices (Erturgut, 2009). Hence, continuity of public interest in social dimension of distance education is of importance in terms of success of the practices.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Distance education enables education applications to be shareable and improvable through internet and web technologies anywhere in the world. The future will be shaped with wide distance education applications that cover the world which was established with such links. While accomplishing this, the ones who apply and manage the distance education should take their responsibilities and should use this environment for the purpose of a better world rather than a chaotic one. In this context, findings about ethical dimension and social results of distance education and relative recommendations are listed below;

- As well as being able to be an important factor for raising the level of coping with stress of the ones who receive education and for increasing the experiences with computer in the organization which render this service, distance education will also have positive impacts on behaviors of social communication and receiving social support.
- In distance education; along with the internet environment, students should be ensured to infer from knowledge by being involved in interaction with social environment, and to utilize from first information source rather than ready and objective information sources in accordance with cognitive and social constructivist understanding. (Karaağaçlı, 2008)
- Everybody should be able to take place within distance education applications on an equal basis. In case required and sufficient arrangements are not made for the usage of internet technologies which is inevitable in distance education, and it is not controlled with the principles of “education and educator ethics”, it will result in violation of rights for the ones who receive education, and also it will make the sustainability of distance education different and damage the concept of distance education in terms of social aspect.
- In this process in which we are witnessed to unbelievable number of crimes by using a computer; distance education applications should be kept out of the internet crimes such as pornography and illegal publications and duplication of computer software of which entire content is copyrighted
- In distance education organizations, organic qualities should be in the foreground rather than the mechanical figures; inter-function team work, free information flow, non-central decisions and low formalization should

dominate. A pure and consistent structure of organization should be established in organizations in which distance education is carried out, and bureaucratic trends should be alienated. Because, bureaucratic structure might pose an obstacle against the development of internet applications which live on innovations.

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