ATTITUDES OF DISTANCE EDUCATION STUDENTS ABOUT DISTANCE EDUCATION BASED ON DEMOGRAPHIC DATA[α]

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore distance education students' views of distance education in terms of certain demographic data. In line with the aim of the research, the existing situation was evaluated with respect to distance education students' gender, age, views of distance education in verbal and numerical courses, study habits, reasons for their choice of distance education and parental level of education. The research was carried out in survey model. The research data were collected during the academic year of 2012-2013 from distance education students enrolled in a university in the city of İstanbul. The data collected were analyzed by means of a statistical package program and interpreted according to the findings. Based on the research findings, some suggestions were presented for further research and researchers.

Key Words: Distance education, distance education students, views of distance education, distance education students' demographic features

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1. INTRODUCTION

Distance education is defined as a way of teaching from a certain center where interaction and communication between students and education planners are created by means of specially designed instruction units and various settings when it is impossible to carry out in-class activities due to limited methods of learning and teaching (Kaya et al., 2004). Distance education, which provides individualized learning independent of time and place, is known to be the most modern way of education enabled by means of communication technologies and the Internet today (Baturay and Bay, 2009). The number of institutions which provide distance education is increasing due to advancing technology and needs around the world as well as in Turkey. Distance education comprises associate degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, in-service training, certificate and course programs (Höçük, 2011).

Students who receive distance education have different demographic features than students who receive face-to-face education (Yükseltürk, 2005). Students who are enrolled in distance education programs of universities in Turkey are composed of equal number of female and male students (Baturay and Bay, 2009; Şahin, 2007). According to the studies on students who receive distance education, students prefer distance education due to the limitations of time and money (Hyatt, 1992; MacBrayne, 1995). Besides, many of them are known to have a job (Baturay and Bay, 2009). In addition, students receive numerical and verbal courses as part of distance education programs. Therefore, their views of study habits and delivery of numerical and verbal courses by means of distance education differentiate. On the other hand, when the impact of family in an educational process is considered, these students are also expected to be affected by parental level of education.

This research was planned moving from the fact that distance education students' demographic features play a role in their views of distance education. As suggested by Kaya (2002), learning is an individual and independent activity in the context of distance education. Therefore, it is observed that distance education students' individual characteristics affect their choice of distance education. Therefore, it is necessary to explore distance education students' demographic features.

As is known, the aim of the researches into student profile is to describe certain features of individuals who hold a certain level of education and present these features statistically. The impact of individual features in education is emphasized in the literature and these features are also essential for e-learning (Karataş and Üstündağ, 2008). Therefore, the research findings are supposed to contribute to the literature and provide a prediction in the learning and teaching process of distance education. Moreover, these findings are expected to pave the way for further research.

1.1. Problem Statement

This research aims to explore distance education students' views of distance education in terms of demographic data. With this aim in mind, the current situation was investigated taking into account distance education students' gender, age, views of distance education in verbal and numerical courses, study habits, motives to prefer distance education and parental level of education. Accordingly, the following sub-problems are presented:

1- Is there a relationship between distance education students' gender and their views of quality in teaching numerical courses in distance education?

2- Is there a relationship between distance education students' gender and their views of quality in teaching verbal courses in distance education?

3- How are distance education students' study habits in numerical courses distributed?

4- How are distance education students' study habits in verbal courses distributed?

5- How are distance education students' motives to prefer distance education distributed?

6- How are distance education students' parental level of education distributed?

2. METHOD

The research was designed in a survey model. The scope of this research is composed of Computer Education and Instructional Technology students enrolled in a distance education program of İstanbul University. The research sample consists of 106 randomly chosen Computer Education and Instructional Technology students enrolled in a distance education program of İstanbul University during the academic year of 2012-1013. The research data were collected

using a demographic information form prepared by the researches. Three experts were consulted for the content validity of the questions in the form and the form was developed as a result of the feedback. SPSS 16.0 Statistical Package Program was used for the statistical analyses of the data. Frequency and percentage values were calculated and chi-square test was used in the data analysis. The collected research data were discussed and interpreted respectively under suitable headings.

3. FINDINGS

Distance education students in the research sample consist of 54 (50, 9%) females; 52 (49,1%) males. Their age distribution is as follows: there are 68 (64,2%) students at the age of 17-22 and 38 (35,8%) students at the age of 23 and over.

Distance education students were first asked whether a distance education course is of the same quality as a face-to-face course. The results were examined in terms of gender for numerical and verbal courses separately. The related findings are presented in Table 1 and 2 and Figure 1 and 2.

Table 1. Results of the Chi-Square Test Performed to Determine Whether Numerical Quality Perception Depends on Gender or Not

Groups			Numerical Quality						
			Quality Falls	Stays the Same	Quality Rises	Total	X2	Sd	p
GENDER	Female	Count	36	16	2	54	4,243	2	,120
		% within gender	66,7%	29,6%	3,7%	100,0%			
	Male	Count	30	14	8	52			
		% within gender	57,7%	26,9%	15,4%	100,0%			

Total	Count	66	30	10	106
	% within total	62,3%	28,3%	9,4%	100,0%

p>.05

As a result of the Chi-square test performed to find out whether a numerical course as part of a distance education program is of the same quality as a face-to face course, it was observed that there was no significant statistical difference. In addition, the number of those who said "the quality falls" (66; 62,3%) was high both among females (36; 66,7%) and males (30; 55,7%). This finding was followed by those who said "the quality stays the same" and "the quality rises". When Table 1 and Figure 1 are examined, it is observed that the rate of those who said "the quality rises" is very low (10; %9,4).

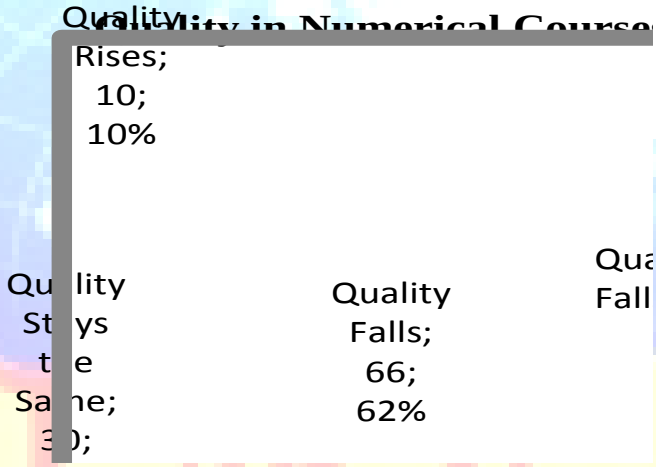

Figure 1. Quality in Numerical Courses

Table 2. Results of the Chi-Square Test Performed to Determine Whether Verbal Quality Perception Depends on Gender or Not

Groups			Verbal Quality						
			Quality Falls	Quality Stays the Same	Quality Rises	Total	X2	Sd	p
GENDER	Female	Count	10	38	6	54	0,944	2	,624
		% within gender	18,5%	70,4%	11,1%	100,0%			
	Male	Count	12	32	8	52			
		% within gender	23,1%	61,5%	15,4%	100,0%			
	Total	Count	22	70	14	106			
		% within total	20,8%	66,0%	13,2%	100,0%			

p>.05

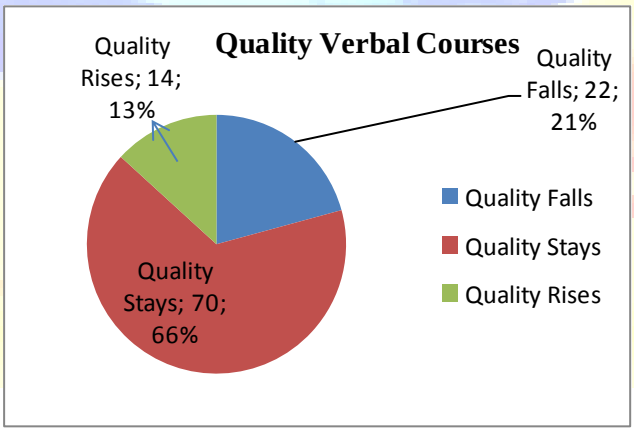

Figure 2 . Quality in Verbal Courses

As a result of the Chi-square test performed to find out whether a verbal course as part of a distance education program is of the same quality as a face-to-face course, it was observed that there was no significant statistical difference. In addition, the number of those who said "the

quality stays the same" (70; 66%) was high among both females (38; 70,4%) and males (32; 61,5%). Like in numerical courses, it was observed that those who said "the quality rises" were very few in number (14; %13,2).

Another research question is distance education students' study habits in verbal and numerical courses. For this aim, distance education students in the research sample were asked which of the following options they preferred to describe themselves. The related findings are presented in Table 3 and 4.

Table 3. Distribution of Study Habits in Verbal Courses

Study Habits	N	%
I can only study effectively from a computer screen	6	5,67
I can only study effectively using paper and pencil	46	43,39
I can study effectively using both methods	54	50,94
Total	106	100

Table 4. Distribution of Study Habits in Numerical Courses

Study Habits	N	%
I can only study effectively from a computer screen	4	3,78
I can only study effectively using paper and pencil	42	39,62
I can study effectively using both methods	60	56,60
Total	106	100

When Table 3 and 4 are examined, it is observed that a major part of the students study effectively using both the computer screen and paper&pencil and printed books in verbal courses (54; 50,94%) and numerical courses (60; 56,6%). Those who state they can only study effectively from a computer screen compose the least number of people in verbal courses (6; 5,67%) and numerical courses (4; 3,78%). Those who state that they study effectively using paper&pencil and printed coursebooks, in other words, traditional methods, compose the highest number of people in verbal (46; 43,39%) and numerical (42; 39,62%) courses.

Another sub-problem of this research, which aims to explore distance education students' current situation, is to discover why students prefer distance education. The regarding findings are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Distribution of Motives to Prefer Distance Education

Motives to Prefer Distance Education	Female		Male		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
My scores match up to the application	24	44,4	14	26,9	38	35,8
I want to be able to work and study	28	51,9	30	57,7	58	54,7
My parents do not approve of my leaving home to study	0	0	6	11,5	6	5,7
It is economically advantageous	2	3,7	2	3,8	4	3,8
Total	54	100	52	100	106	100

When table 5 is examined, the majority of students state that they prefer distance education to be able to work and study at the same time (58; 54,7%). The rates of distribution are similar among females (28; 51,9%) and males (30; 57,7%). The students who state they prefer distance education because their scores match up to the application compose the second major group (38; 35,8%). In terms of gender, female students (24; 44,4%) who state they prefer distance education because their scores match up to the application are more than males (14; 26,9 %). The options of "my parents do not approve of my leaving home to study" and "it is economically advantageous" were given to find out how important socio-economic status was. It is observed that the rate of those who prefer these options is very low as seen in Table 5.

Parental level of education was the last thing to study in order to understand distance education students' socio-cultural status. The related findings are presented in Table 6 and Figure 3-4.

Table 6. Distribution of Distance Education In Terms of Parental Level of Education

Level of Education	Mother		Father	
	N	%	N	%
Never schooled	12	11,3	4	3,8
Primary School	52	49,1	46	43,4
Secondary School	14	13,2	16	15,1
High School	18	17,0	26	24,5
University&postgraduate	10	9,4	14	13,2
Total	106	100	106	100

When distance education students' distribution according to maternal level of education is examined, it is observed that the majority of students' mothers are primary school graduates (52; 49,1%). This group includes those who are never schooled (12; 11,3%) and secondary school graduates (14; 13%) and compose the highest rate (76%). On the other hand, it is observed that the mothers who are high school graduates (18; 17%) and university graduates (10; 9,4%) compose the lowest rate. Similarly, the fathers who are primary school graduates (46; 43,4%) compose the largest group. When those who are never schooled (4; 3,8%) and secondary school graduates (16; 15,1%) are added to the previous group, they compose the highest rate of 63%. It is observed that the fathers who are high school graduates (26; 24,5%) and university graduates (14; 13,2%) have a rather low rate. Looking at these findings, the majority of distance education students can be ascribed as the children of families who are from the low and moderate levels of socio-cultural status. It is a matter of course for these students to prefer distance education which enables them to work and study at the same time when the small amount of financial support their families can offer is considered. Another reason could be that because these students can not receive sufficient pre-university education due to such hindrances, they get a low score. When this situation is considered, it can be concluded that distance education programs enable the children of families who are from the low socio-cultural status to receive higher education, and thus contributes to the equality in education.

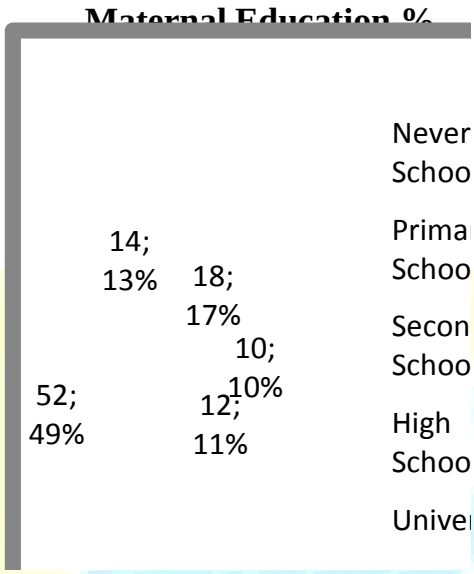

Figure 3. Maternal Education

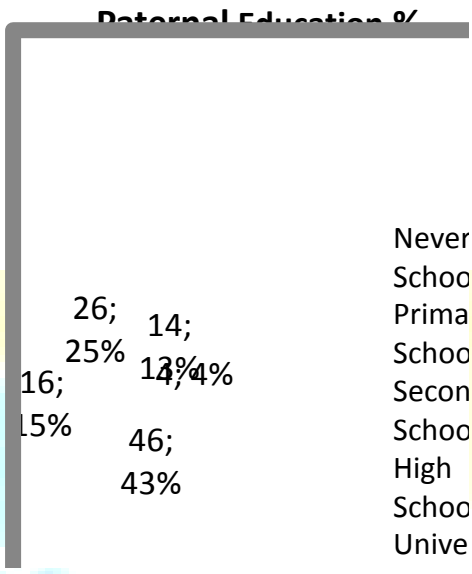

Figure 4. Paternal Education

4. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

When the research findings are evaluated, distance education students who state that the quality falls when a numerical course is given in distance education are high in number among both female and male students. This finding is followed by those who state that the quality stays the same and the quality rises. According to these results, it can be concluded that delivering numerical courses through distance education is not found to be satisfactory by the students. The reason can be that students are passive audience in numerical courses. Besides, the research by Antalyalı (2004) suggests that the view of numerical courses could stem from the inability to comprehend the possibility of teaching these courses by means of education technologies. On the other hand, the number of both female and male students who state that the quality stays the same is higher in terms of delivering verbal courses in distance education. Like in numerical courses, those who think the quality rises in verbal courses compose the smallest group. Accordingly, it can be concluded that students do not see a big difference between distance and face-to-face learning in terms of quality. The reason could be that students are passive audience in verbal courses both in distance education and face-to-face learning. Thus, they do not think that the quality falls in verbal courses as it does in numerical courses. They do not think that the

quality rises, either. These results overlap with the finding that Antalyalı (2004) suggests: The best model is to implement distance education and face-to-face learning together. The finding that there is no difference between distance education students' gender and their views of the quality in numerical and verbal courses overlaps with the researches by Demir (2008) and Höçük (2011).

According to the findings regarding distance education students' study habits in verbal and numerical courses, a major part of the students state that they use both the computer screen and paper&pencil and printed books to study effectively. Thus, it is observed that students use computers to support the traditional way of studying, however they cannot study using the computer only. These students consist of the distance education students who use computer technologies intensively and Computer Education and Instructional Technology students who deal with mainly computers and they do not think that using just the computer is satisfactory. Their view is significant in terms of shaping the future methods of education. As suggested by Kaya (2002), students use course books more than any other tools in distance education around the world. Therefore, it can be concluded that using only technology in education is not satisfactory to meet the needs, but instead the traditional system and methods of education should be supported and improved by technology.

Another finding of this research, which aims to explore distance education students' current situation, is related to why students prefer distance education. When their motives to prefer distance education are examined, it is observed that the majority of students prefer distance education in order to study and work at the same time. The distribution rates are similar among female and male students. Students who state that they prefer distance education because their scores match up to the application compose the second major group. When the findings regarding how important are socio-economic factors in pursuing distance education are examined, it can be concluded that distance education is not considered economically advantageous and the students in the sampling do not have serious issues as to leaving home to study. On the other hand, a high number of students who prefer distance education to work and study at the same time imply that distance education causes education costs to fall while lowering the income which is given up. When the literature is examined, there are other research

studies which support the finding obtained in this research: Students prefer distance education in order to be able to study and work at the same time (Moore and Kearsley, 2005; Sheet, 1992; cited in Höçük, 2011; Baturay and Bay, 2009; Çinici, 2006).

In addition, when the findings are examined, the majority of students state they prefer distance education because their scores match up to the application. This can be explained as that distance education is not their first choice. When the fact that distance education programs accept students with lower scores than formal education programs do, it can be concluded that these students' first choice was formal education, but their scores were not high enough to enroll in a formal education program.

The last thing examined in this research is how distance education students' parental level of education is distributed. According to the findings, it is observed that the majority of parents are primary school graduates and the rate of parents who are high school or university graduates is rather low. Looking at these findings, the majority of distance education students can be said to be the children of families who are from the low and moderate levels of socio-economic status. Since these families cannot give much financial support to their children's education, it seems a matter of course for them to prefer distance education which enables students to work and study at the same time. Another motive for these students to prefer distance education can be the low scores they received from the university entrance exam due to socio-cultural hidrances, and thus insufficient level of education. When this finding is taken into account, it can be concluded that distance education enables the children whose families belong to the low level of socio-cultural status to receive higher education, and therefore, it adds to the equality in education. In this context, it can be concluded that distance education contributes to the realization of individual and social goals of education resolving the issue of inequality in education and providing everybody with life-long education, which is also suggested by Kaya (2002).

As a result of the research findings, the following suggestions can be made for further research and researchers:

- This research is limited to Computer Education and Instructional Technology students enrolled in a university. Similar researches can be conducted with similar research samples in other universities or distance education students in different departments.
- Distance education students' views of verbal and numerical courses can be evaluated extensively with qualitative researches.
- Similar researches regarding views of verbal and numerical courses in terms of gender and views of distance education in general can be conducted with more extensive research scope and sample.
- Other researches can be conducted to determine individuals' motives to prefer distance education since their graduation from high school.
- Distance education students' study habits in verbal and numerical courses can be supported by qualitative research.
- Preference rank lists and socio-economic status of the students who are enrolled in the same departments of distance education and formal education can be studied comparatively.

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