

CHARACTERISTICS OF MATERIALS TOWARDS THE STUDENT CENTRES IN THE DISTANCE EDUCATION

Assoc. Prof. Zeki KAYA

Gazi University, Ankara

Abstract. The distance education activities depend on self-learning. The learners in the distance education experience such problems as loneliness, disconformity, low motivation, lack of communication and interaction, being unable to use and test the information efficiently, lack of time and place, financial limitations, the beliefs related to low social and cultural status. The student centers appear to be an alternative to solve these problems. In order for such centers to achieve their goals, textbooks and supplementary books, radios, televisions, computers have a significant role. However, these materials should have some certain characteristics to play their roles effectively. In this report, after dealing with the concept of the distance education, the student centres and the characteristics of the materials towards the student centres will be discussed.

Key Words: The distance education, student centre, learning material.

Introduction

The importance and value of education continue to increase as a result of complex social environment and the individual desires to live in better conditions. In parallel to increase in the importance and value of education, people need education at all levels. However people's educational needs could not be met because of unequal opportunities, unproductive use of resources, unbalanced demand-supply structure, low qualifications, and other related reasons. Attempts to solve this actual problem focus on the distance education almost in all countries.

The Distance Education

The concept of distance education was found in 1892 Catalogue of Wisconsin University for the first time (Verduin and Clark, 1994; p.7). The concept was used in an article written by William Lighty who was one of the members of Wisconsin University and the distance education has been used in many areas since 1960s.

In the definition of the distance education, such terms as "nontraditional education", "nontraditional learning", "independent study", "out-of-school education", "out-of-school learning" were offered and used. However, none of these terms cannot express the distance education exactly in which teacher and learner are separated.

In order to explain the distance education, the differences between the traditional face-to-face education and the distance education must be stated. The distinctive characteristics of the distance education are as follows (Verduin and Clark, 1994; p. 10). 1.

During the education process, teacher and learners are separated sometimes and/or always. 2.

The planning and development of the learning materials and provision and organization of the supplementary services. 3.

The use of contemporary mass education devices and environments while presenting the topic. 4.

The educational use of mass communication techniques.

Based on the explanations of the distance education, it seem that the distance education provides individuals the self-learning opportunities, it is more flexible than traditional education and it can be adopted to the individual requirements. Also the distance education provides some ways to meet the educational needs of societies. Some of them can be summarized as follows (Kaya, 1996; pp.8-9, Ulug and Kaya, 1997; pp. 16-17): *

to provide different educational choices *

to reduce unequal opportunities *

to facilitate mass education *

to increase standards which are low because of different origins of teachers, inadequacy of materials, etc. and to provide a unified education *

to decrease finance but to increase quality in education *

to make learners free *

to provide a rich educational setting *

to support self-learning *

to make individuals responsible for their education *

to use the primary sources *

to provide professional support to many learners *

to assess the achievement in the same conditions *

to make education both large-base and individual-base

However, some limitations occur in a distance education setting although necessary steps are taken. The limitations of the distance education activities can be stated as follows; *

Some difficulties arise in the relations between instructor and learners. *

No social interaction occurs like in a school setting. *

The learners who do not have the habit of self-study cannot be supported efficiently. *

The working learners cannot find enough time to rest. *

It cannot be effective in the studies on the development of practice and attitudes (Büyükkaragöz and Cici, 1994; p.159). *

It is dependent upon the communication techniques.

Because of the introduction of multi-media tools, it has been difficult to define the distance education. However all the education activities based on the settings in which instructors and learners are separated in terms of both time and place are called the distance education activities. It can be claimed that such an education provides some certain solutions to the problem of unequal opportunity, and it provides continued education and also it contributes to the achievement of both individual and social goals. And it might be stated that the distance education is based on the use

of both printed materials and contemporary mass communication devices and it includes self-learning.

The Student Centres in the Distance Education

A student in the distance education setting learns himself or herself. It is known that independent learners have various problems. Some of them can be stated as follows; loneliness, disconformity, low motivation, lack of communication and interaction, being unable to use and test the information efficiently, lack of time and place, financial limitations, the beliefs related to low social and cultural status. In order to solve these problems, the following considerations can be effective: nontraditional use of the mass communication technologies, interesting learning process, the development of the instructional materials developed based on the interests and needs of learners. The fact that learners have some certain problems and these problems can be solved through some specific approaches constitutes a conflict.

In recent years, it has been regularly stated that the student centres which focus on the individual learning is needed to support learners. Also in Turkey there are some studies to establish such centres.

The main purpose of the student centres is to support learners in their learning. However, these centres can achieve their goals if they are established based on the students' expectations and needs and if learners can easily access to these centres (Köster, 1994; p.2). The most important task of these centres is to contribute to their learning pertinent to their needs, directed to their conditions (autonomous) and without an instructor (independent). Realizing these contributions means that the following opportunities are provided to learners: *

individual learning period *

individual learning speed *

individual learning style *

individual learning place *

individual learning hour *

An individual social environment *

More freedom to achieve an educational goal.

For the student centres regarded as the ideal settings for individual learning, supplementary text books, practice books, bulletins, audio cassettes, video cassettes, diskettes, computer CDs, in other words audio-visual materials, are very important to achieve their goals. Because learners with these materials can; *

complete their missing information *

enhance their general information *

increase their achievement levels *

develop themselves pertinent to their educational interests *

prepare themselves to their examinations *

make different activities

Furthermore, learners are provided with guidance and consultation services through these materials.

Characteristics of the Materials of the Student Centres

In the face-to-face education activities, it is likely to solve problems related to learning. However it is very limited in the distance education activities. The materials produced towards the student centres should reduce this limitation. Because learner will meet with the materials instead of instructor in the centre. Thus these materials must have a teaching function like those produced towards the courses of the distance education.

It can be stated that effective educational materials are person-specific. Because learning styles differ from one person to other. However it does not seem to be possible to develop specific materials for each learners in the distance education. Thus, experience on the development of those for the student centres.

These materials should not be subject-centred. In other words, these materials should aim at providing learners some opportunities including the development of their own learning strategies.

These materials must be dependent upon the practices within a topic on which learners have some information. In other words, these should not take the place of the courses or educational materials. Because learners could access to information about the courses and the educational materials when needed.

The materials used in the student centres motivate students to study not to questioning. Thus, practices, assignments should be developed carefully.

Appropriate development of the practices is dependent on the question, "How can a difficult topic be explained?". The most important problem in dealing with this question is that there is nobody to do it by explaining or by using other related tools in a distance education setting. The ways below can be followed; *

to use graphics or short texts. *

to explain the structures leading difficulty. *

to provide practices related to the assignments.

The learners in the distance education activity are provided with many opportunities through assignments. Assignments should be developed in a manner that learners could deal with problems which occur in the courses. Therefore, assignments should be short, understandable and accessible. Assignments should have a supportive nature rather than a challenging nature.

It is not enough to provide learners an education package including practices and assignments and to state that these are the materials of individual learning. The answer keys of the practices are also need for learners to learn themselves.

Learners could see their correct answers and mistakes using these keys. However, these should be developed different from traditional ones. Exercises may have more than one solution. If the exercise has only one way to solve, it is easier to explain. However, if not, the keys should be different. The following suggestions can be taken into consideration while developing such a key.

*

If an exercise has only one solution, then it must be shown. *

If an exercise has more than one solution, all of them may be explained. *

If an exercise has much more solutions, some of them can be indicated.

Even learner has found the solution, the answer key must indicate its rationale. When learner cannot give the correct answer and understand its rationale, it must show the way to solve it.

Conclusion

The distance education activities have occurred as a result of either inefficient capacity in the formal education or higher financial requirements. The purposes of the distance education are to reduce limitations on the distribution of educational services and to educate more individuals. Learners in the distance education activities must be supported through student centres. These centres must aim at reducing their individual deficiencies and contributing to their learning rather than introducing the courses. Audio-visual materials, including supplementary textbooks, exercise books, bulletins, audio and video cassettes, diskettes, computer CDs, have a significant place for these centres to achieve their goals. These materials must be different from those used in the distance education courses. Instead these materials should motivate learners to deal with assignments and exercises and also these should provide them guidance and consultation services.

References

Büyükkaragöz, Savas and Cuma Çivi. General Teaching Methods. Konya: Atlas

Bookstore. 1994.

Kaya, Zeki. Textbooks in the Distance Education (Open High School

Sample). Ankara: Gazi University the Faculty of Industrial Arts Education

Publishing, 1996.

Köster, Diethard (1994). "Lernmaterial für Mediotheken Grundlagen".

Zielsprache Deutsch 25, 1, pp.2-6.

Ulug, Feyzi and Zeki Kaya. Basic Education with the Distance Education

Approach (Report). Ankara: The Foundation of Distance Education.

1997.

Verduin, John R. and Thomas A. Clark. The Distance Education: Principles of

Effective Implementation. (Tran: Ilknur Mavis). Eskisehir: Anadolu

University Publishing. 1994.

Close Window