WHAT PEOPLE IN TURKEY THINK ABOUT E-LEARNING? THEIR AWARENESS and PREFERENCES

Türkan Karakuş
Mersin University, Turkey
karakus@metu.edu.tr

Zehra Adıyaman
Ministry of National Education, Turkey
zadiyaman@meb.gov.tr

Cengiz S. Aşkun
Middle East Technical University, Turkey
askun@metu.edu.tr

Bahar Baran
Middle East Technical University, Turkey
boztekin@metu.edu.tr

Gülin Onat Bayır
Central Bank, Turkey
gulin.bayir@tcmb.gov.tr

Funda Demirel
Foreign Trade Undersecretary, Turkey
demirelf@dtm.gov.tr

Engin Kurşun
Ataturk University, Turkey
ekursun@metu.edu.tr

Erman Uzun
Mersin University, Turkey
euzun@metu.edu.tr

Sevcan Uzun
Central Bank, Turkey
sevcanuzun@yahoo.com

Serpil Yalçınalp
Baskent University, Turkey
serpily@baskent.edu.tr

Türkan KARAKUS, is a research assistant and PhD. student in the Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technology, Faculty of Education, Middle East Technical University, Turkey. Her research interests are education games, participatory learning environments, human computer interaction and e-learning.

Zehra ADIYAMAN has been working as the head of TQM Section at General Directorate of VET for Boys since 2003. She has worked as a teacher of English and teacher educator; and conducted some projects for educational media. She did her MA at METU. She took responsibility in holding international symposiums on distance education as a member of organising committee in 1996 and 1998

Cengiz S ASKUN is a Ph.D. candidate in the Instructional Systems Technology Department at Indiana University and works as a research assistant at Middle East Technical University.

Gulin ONAT BAYIR finished her Masters and Doctor's Degree at the University of Ankara in the field of Educational Technology, Computer Aided Instruction and e-learning. Since 1989 she has been working at the Central Bank of The Republic of Turkey as a System Specialist in the Educational Department.

Bahar BARAN is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technologies, Middle East Technical University, Turkey. Her research interests include topics in professional development, communities of practice, e-learning and technology in education.

Funda DEMIREL was graduated from department of Mathematics at Middle East Technical University. She is now working at Foreign Trade Undersecretary. She is also continuing her PhD studies at the department of Educational Sciences at Ankara University.

Engin KURSUN is a PhD. student and research assistant in the department of Computer Education and Instructional Technology at Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey. My interest areas include human-computer interaction, technology integration in education, instructional design, and e-learning.

Erman UZUN is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technologies, Middle East Technical University, Turkey. His research interests are e-learning and virtual laboratory use in vocational education, and instrument development for these environments.

Sevcan UZUN, after graduation from department of Business Administration at Middle East Technical University she has been working as researcher in Central Bank Human Resources Department, she is working on in-service training in her department.

Serpil YALCINALP is an assistant professor of Management Information Sciences at Baskent University. Her current areas of research include web based programming, web based database systems, distance/e-learning, interactive design, and use of emerging technologies in education.

ABSTRACT

People's awareness on e-learning influences their expectations and preferences about it. Revealing these expectation and preferences will allow e-learning providers to meet their prospect students' needs and improve themselves. In this study it is aimed to investigate the preferences and expectation of people, living in urban setting and using technology more than other settings, by considering their awareness about e-learning and distance education. Results of the study which 663 people participated showed that people's Internet use rates are high, they are looking for flexible learning environments for several fields and most of them have a job; most of them prefer classroom setting. Although their mostly preferred tool is Internet for education, it seems they are not ready for attending pure online courses.

INTRODUCTION

Developing technologies make people improve their capabilities and knowledge, while making it easy for them to reach any kind of information. Today Internet based distance education provides people to learn in any context, at any age, and at any time. Distance education in Turkey has been available since 1927s (Yazici, Altas, Demiray, 2001, Usun, 2004), and with the emergence of Internet e-learning has become more popular for the last decade. Although distance education and e-learning provide some advantages, the demand for this kind of education is reasonably low. To understand the reasons for this situation, whether people are aware of distance education, e-learning, and their opportunities should be understood. Their needs and preferences about learning and the reasons behind them must also be explored. The aim of this study is to reveal the awareness of Turkish people for distance education and e-learning. Furthermore, it was tried to explore why people participate in an e-learning program (professional development, taking a career, or changing their profession); their preferences for the educational medium (face to face, blended or online); and their aims to attend a distance education program.

Background of the Study

In working area most of people needs to improve themselves because in developing world people who catch the technological developments and continuously improvement improving themselves are given chance to live. Higher education is no unique preparation of career because in a dynamic and risky working environment, workers should be able to stay current in the workforce (Hanna, 1998). According to the study reviewing the literature about continuous professional development of nurses, Barriball et.al, (1992) suggest that important thing is improving nurses awareness about their need of practice and their need of continuous education by lifelong learning. So it can be implied that, lifelong learning efforts can provide awareness of audience as well as providing learning.

To improve educational quality and to prevent people to lose their competencies with years, technological developments are important factors. According to Goddard (1998) as cited in Oneil, Sigh and O'Donoghue (2004), by 2025, 150 million people will demand higher education and this rise will attribute acquiring a job will not be the norm for knowledge driven society, higher level skill and qualifications will be required (Oneil, Sigh & O'Donoghue, 2004). In Turkey also while higher education demand is increasing and new job acts which including the performance evaluations of workers are emerging. In this situation, after university education, people need additional and continuing education to improve their job skills. E-learning, the fastest way to meet needs for training and education, for training and education (Gold, 2001), might be the most common delivery method for continuing education with the increasing spread of Internet and increase the population demanding continuous education. Gold (2001) explain the growing of e-learning as its demand factors (cost-effectiveness, flexibility, individual learning) and supply factors (growth of Internet, increase bandwidth, standardization of technology).

Increase of demand and technological opportunities might not be enough to make people to buy available e-learning services, because of cultural norms and habits of

people their readiness also important to provide effective learning. According to Kaur and Abas (2004), readiness of e-learning means ability and capacity to facilitate e-learning and because cultures and backgrounds of people differ. That is the reason why readiness and expectations of different context are differ. So readiness studies for e-learning are required for institutions and e-learning programs to understand the perception and response of people about e-learning. Clark and Shatkin (2003) also stated educational institutions should identify the learning need of their adult audiences and if this process can be made with audience it will be more benefited. To provide readiness, increasing awareness of people about opportunities of services might make easier to increase readiness of people.

Although distance education is available in Turkey since 1927, in 1982 the first formal and systematic implementation was begun (Yazici, Altas, Demiray, 2001, Usun, 2004,) in Anadolu University. While all education was conducted with TV programs and printed materials and recordings until 1999, Anadolu University has been providing Internet supported materials from that date (Anadolu University Web Site, 2006). From 1997 also different universities offer e-learning programs for graduate program, vocational school of higher education and certification. Also several IT companies provide IT certificates with e-learning programs in Turkey (Yazici, Altas, Demiray, 2001). Therefore today it is not to wrong to say that Turkey has several opportunities for formal education and lifelong learning. With the improvement of Internet connection speed, also context of implementation is becoming more suitable for implementing different educational programs on Internet according to needs of people.

Revealing the awareness and readiness of adults and young people about e-learning and their preferences can provide important information for planning and implementation of e-learning programs as efficiently and effectively With this aim this study investigates whether the people who have enough Internet use, want to continue their education, their preferences about learning environment and their preferences about topic. According to Bentley, Tinney and Chia (2005), revealing educational values and cultural expectations of learner provide internet-based education providers to improve quality of their education. Also they state that "cultural norms, the philosophy of learning to which we adhere" and "our personal preferences for learning" shape the educational values. Therefore, it seems that we need to investigate our audience's awareness and preferences of e-learning to improve quality of e-learning as well as investigate their readiness. With the aim of investigating the awareness and preferences of young and adult people's living an urban city, this study purposes to find answers the following research questions;

1. What is the internet use habit of people living at urban setting?

2. What people think about conception of distance education and e-learning?

3. What are the preferences of people about education programs they would like to take?

METHOD

Data Collection Instrument and Procedure

In the study, a descriptive methodology was used since our main aim was to reveal Turkish people's profiles living in an urban city, Ankara, with regard to distance education. All questions were asked by pollsters, participants were asked to response questionnaire questions that included 30 multiple choice and open ended questions regarding demographic information, participants' Internet usage statistics and their aims, and information regarding distance education awareness such as awareness of e-learning and distance education concepts, distance education tool preferences, educational method preferences, or their aims to attend a distance education program. Open ended questions were coded as categorical data. Frequencies for the multiple choice items were analyzed in SPSS statistical analysis program.

Data analysis

All multiple choice questions entered data analysis program and all open ended questions were coded. Data analysis is based on frequencies of these choices and codes.

Participants

The sample size was 663 (371 male and 285 female, 7 of them did not state) and they were randomly chosen from six different public areas in Ankara. 108 of them are between 17-20 ages (16,3%), 181 of them are between 21-25 ages (27,3%), 110 of them between 26-30 ages (16,6%), 119 of them are between 31-40 ages (17,9%) and 144 of them 41 and above ages (21,7%). Educational levels are mostly high school or above. 59 of them (8,9%) graduated from elementary 203 of them graduated from high school (30,6), and 400 of them (60,3%) either university students or graduate or continuing a graduate program. 313 of them working at a job while 347 of them university students (n=197), unemployed (n=38), housewife (n=44) or retired (n=64). Among working group, 123 of them are working for public sector, 130 of them are working for private sector and 49 of them are working independently.

FINDINGS

Apart from demographics, questionnaire includes internet and computer use habits and e-learning related questions.

Internet use habits

Because this study conducted in a big city most residents are students or official workers, it seems that Internet use rate is drastically higher than Turkey conditions. 514 of them (77.3%) state that they use Internet, while 144 of them do not use it (see Table 1).

Table 1: Rates of Internet use

Internet use	Frequency	Percent
Yes	514	77.3
No	144	22.7

These rates are very high for Turkey conditions because 2005 report of DIE (State Statistic Institute) says the rate of Internet use rate is 13.9% for Turkey and 18.57% for Urban cities. Among people use Internet 143 of them (28.2%) use Internet weekly 0-5 hours, 117 of them (23.1%) use 6-10 hours weekly, 132 of them (26.0%) use 11-20 hours in a week and 115 of them (22.7%) of them use Internet 21 hours or above in week (see Table 2).

Table 2: Rates of Weekly Internet use durations

Weekly Internet	Frequency	Percent
1-5 hours	143	28.2
6-10 hours	117	23.1
11-20 hours	132	26.0
21 -	115	22.7

With the revolution of ADSL homes have become the place used for Internet more than Internet café. Working places also provides its employees Internet for work-related aims or communication. In this study this two places also seem that mostly used places for Internet. 203 of participants use Internet mostly at their home (38.6%), 181 of them (30.4%) use Internet mostly at working place, because our participants mostly composed of university students 106 of them (17.7%) use Internet at school and 79 of the participants (13.3%) use Internet at Internet café (see Table 3).

Table 3: Rates of Internet use places

Internet use place	Frequency	Percent
Home	203	38.6
Working place	181	30.4
Internet café	106	17.7
School	79	13.3

With the revolution of ADSL homes have become the place used for Internet more than Internet café. Working places also provides its employees Internet for work-related aims or communication. In this study this two places also seem that mostly used places for Internet. 203 of participants use Internet mostly at their home (38.6%), 181 of them (30.4%) use Internet mostly at working place, because our participants mostly composed of university students 106 of them (17.7%) use Internet at school and 79 of the participants (13.3%) use Internet at Internet café.

Questionnaire includes Likert type questions for Internet use aims, because ratios are very different, we only sum up "frequently" and "always" answers to calculate overall use aims. Internet use aims mostly for communication and searching information for participants. 62.4% of participants use Internet mainly for taking information, 60.3% of participants use for communication, 47.2% of participants use for homework or research, 43.6% of participants use for job-related requirements, 20.9 of participants use for playing game, 19.5% of participants use for shopping and lastly only 7.2of them use Internet for taking education (see Table 4).

Table 4: Rates of Internet use aims

Aim		Frequency	Percent
Information		321	62.4
Communication		310	60.3
Homework	or	243	47.2
Job		224	43.6
Game-		107	20.9
Shopping	or	100	19.5
Education		37	7.2

It seems that using Internet for education is very low; actually the ratio of 7.2 mostly results from university students, because in universities some courses can be given by Internet.

E-learning Awareness and Preferences

To understand participant's awareness of distance education and e-learning, we asked whether they know about these two terms and we wanted them to give any example about them. Although most of the participants state they know about distance education a big proportion of them do not know about it as seen at Table 5.

Table 5: Knowledge about distance education

Distance	Frequency	Percent
I know what is	385	58.0
I do not know	276	41.6

According to Table, number participants knowing about distance education is 385 while the 276 of participants do not know about distance education. Examples given by participants are very different and it seems there are some misconceptions. Most of examples are about Anadolu University's implementations, 186 of participants gave TV based or Anadolu University programs at TV as examples. Totally 107 of them gave e-learning related programs or internet based applications. Also taking information from internet, computer supported courses even using computer was given as distance education implementation. By these examples it seems that participants tended to see implementations which they are free and required self working are an implementation of distance education.

Participants of this study are mostly use Internet for different aim, although their use for education is very low, it can be expected to know about e-learning because with the E-state (e-devlet) implementations, e-learning concept has become more familiar with us and because our participants mostly at young ages who are graduated university where e-learning implementations are available for some courses. However, according to results, 288 of them (43.4%) stated they know or heard about e-learning, while 371 of them (55.9%) stated they do not know about e-leaning as seen at Table 6.

Table 6: Knowledge about e-learning

E-learning	Frequency	Percent
I know what is	288	43.4
I do not know	371	55.9

Although e-learning programs are available since 1997, and some in-service training programs are given by e-learning programs, only 4.8% of participants stated they take a course given with Internet. Courses which they took are about computer or second language, university courses and job related courses.

To reveal participants educational needs participants asked whether they need a program which gives any certificate or diploma. According to their responses, 356 of them (53.6 %) wanted to enroll a certificate program while 298 of them (44.9%) stated they do not need any educational program. People wanted to take certificate program, respectively wanted computer and Internet, vocational education second language, personal improvement, some educations required application and university education.

Table 7: Rates of desired topics of education

Topic of education	Frequency	Percent
Computer and Internet	119	29.5
Vocational	116	28.8
Second language	106	26.3
Personal improvement	44	10.9
University education	10	2.5
Education required	8	2.0

As seen Table 7 after computer and Internet education, people mostly wanted to take educational programs related to their job. Actually computer knowledge and second language also related job because most of job want their employees know about computer and second language. Because job related training is important for people, they were also asked if they attend a program related job, for which aim they attend and they were given "acquiring a job", "improving job" and "changing job". Most of participants, wants to attend a program for improve their job (73.3%), acquiring a job (17.5%) and changing their job (9.2%) follow it. Awareness about e-learning programs are very low on the other hand when they asked sequence their tool preferences when taking an education program among Internet, TV, printed materials and CD or recordings, most of them put Internet as first as seen Table 8.

Table 8: Rates of desired educational tools in education

Educational tools	Frequency	Percent
Internet	300	49.6
TV	116	19.5
CD, recordings	111	18.8
Printed material	90	15.2

According to Table after Internet, namely TV, CD or recordings and printed material comes as preferred tools for education. Although people did not experienced with any e-learning program, they might think about its advantages and easy access feature. On the other hand, when they asked their preference about environment of education, they chose Internet least (see Table 9)

Table 9: Rates of desired educational environment

Education environment	Frequency	Percent
Classroom	282	42.5
Blended (face to face+	243	36.6
Full Online	129	19.4

According to Table most of participants (42.5%) prefer a classroom environment, 36.6% of participants prefer blended environment which composed of classroom and online learning, and 19.4% of them prefer online education. They also asked the reason of their selection. Among people selecting classroom environment, 41.2% of them thought classroom environment provides social interaction and effective communication which is vital for learning, 30.5% of them thought classroom provides more permanent and efficient learning, 11.8% of them stated they adopted classroom they cannot gave up this habit, 8% of them have trouble with using technology for education, and 1.5% of them thought their field is only suitable for classroom.

Participants selecting online education mostly prefer it because of its nature; flexibility, while 32.9% of them prefer online education thinking it is cheap, enjoyable, offering different and yielding resources and 30.3% of them prefer because of its time flexibility and 17.6 of them find it easy to reach lots of information at a time, 12.6 of them prefer online learning because their familiarity of technology and lastly 6.7% of them they bored from school environment as a reason for selecting online learning.

Because blended learning provides advantages of both classroom and online learning environments, reasons of selection of blended learning is also mix of the reasons of selection of both classroom and online learning environment. According to their reasons, it seems that people want social interaction in learning environment and permanent learning. Also they want learn in a flexible learning because most of them working or trying to find a job. Familiarity of technology or habit of classroom learning is also important for people selection.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSION

Results of the study aiming to reveal awareness and preferences of people living in urban setting and familiarity to technology showed that most of the participants of the study are using Internet and their aims to use Internet are mainly communication, and getting information. Most of them are accessing Internet from home or their work places while internet cafes are the least used places. On the other hand, about half of the participants reported that they did not know what distance education is and most of them stated that they did not know what e-learning is. There are only a few participants who have reported they have taken a course via Internet. Participants preferred classroom environment the mostly. The second mostly preferred medium was blended environment and the third one was online method. These results are slightly different previous research conducted by

Baran et. al. (2005) and of which participants are university students. According to the study's results most of university students want blended environments, and then namely classroom and pure online (Baran et.al, 2005). This might be caused from university students' familiarity of using Internet in their courses. The classroom environment was preferred mostly as people think they learn better and more easily in a social environment. The reason participants have chosen online education was it's anytime, anyplace nature. They mostly emphasized need of distance education program to get a better job. Participants who have reported no awareness of distance education or e-learning were aware that they need to improve themselves for their job and they mostly need a learning program to help them realize this aim.

Although Internet use is high, most of people do not feel themselves suitable for full online courses because of their learning habits. Also using Internet may not provide self-esteem for using this technology for different purposes and to adopt themselves as distance learners. So there should be some efforts to provide self-esteem and willingness to adopt them to create learning environments for themselves. According to Rogers (1995), first step of an innovation acceptance process was knowledge. To make people develop a positive attitude toward e-learning they should first be made aware of it. According to the results, it is clear that there should be some programs to make people aware of distance education and examples of its implementation should be provided before they adjust themselves as classroom learners only. According to Hall and LeCavalier (2000) as cited in Insook (2003), there must be systematic and strategic approach to provide individual learners, organizations and decision makers to understand the potentials of e-learning which is a innovative process. Because the most important reason for being far from technology in educational setting, awareness and readiness of e-learning opportunities can be provided in school years by providing Internet based courses as well as face to face courses both high schools and universities.

E-learning is especially offers some opportunities for lifelong learning and improvement of job performance. In this study also most people's concern is work and they are looking for educational programs to improve their job. Because in urban setting Internet opportunities are more achievable and people are more familiar with technology, working settings should provide Internet based education for their workers. Especially the jobs required computer and second language are two fields which can be easily forgotten and they can be continuously provided by e-learning programs. Because people like flexibility and interactivity in their educational setting, programs should provided as blended or the can be given chance to select their preferences. Online parts of courses should include face to face parts and vice versa.

As a conclusion, although adults seem not to be ready for pure online courses, while they want to use Internet in their education in rest of their life. And it can be said that to provide people to feel themselves self-regulated and independent learners, there should be adoption programs in previous learning settings. However, deeper researches are required to reveal the real needs of adults for lifelong learning and reveal how they can be adopted innovations around them.

REFERENCES

Anadolu University Open Learning System, retrieved at August 1 2006 from http://www.aof.edu.tr/

Baran, B., Kılıç, E., Bakar, A. & Çağıltay, K. (2005). Turkish University Students: How Do They Use Technology And What Do They Think About Distance Education?, AECT Convention, Oct 2005, Orlando, Florida, USA.

Barribal, K.L., While A.E. & Notman, I.J: (1992). Continuing professional education for qualified nurses: a review of the literature. Journal of Advanced Nursing. Vol. 17, pp.1129-1140.

Bentley, J.P.H., Tinney, M.V. & Chia, B.H. (2005). Intercultural Internet-Based Learning: Know Your Audience and What It Values. ETR&D, Vol. 53, No. 2, 2005, pp. 117-127

Clark, P.G & Shatkin, L. (2003). A New Challenge for Education: Addressing the Needs of Lifelong Learners. March - April 2003, The Technology Sourse Archives available at http://technologysource.org/article/new_challenge_for_education/

DIE. (2005). Hane Halkı Bilişim Teknolojileri Araştırması Raporu.

Gold, S. (2001). E-Learning: The nest wave of the Experiential Learning, Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, Vol.28, pp.76-79. available at http://sbaweb.wayne.edu/~absel/

Hanna, D.E. (1998). Higher Education in an Era of Digital Competition: emerging Organizational Models, Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, Vol.2 No. 1, available at http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/

Insook, L. (2003). E-Learning in Korea: Its Present and Future Prospects. Korea Journal, Autumn 2003, pp.61-88, available at http://dasan.sejong.ac.kr/~inlee

Kaur, K. & Abas, Z. W. (2004). An Assesment of E-learning Readiness at the Open University Malaysia, International Conference on Computers in Education (ICCE2004), Melbourne, Australia.

O'Neill, K., Singh, G. & O'Donoghue, J. (2004). Implementing e-learning Programs for Higher Education: A Review of the Literature, Journal of Technology Education, Vol. 3, pp.314-323

Rogers, E.M. (1995). The innovation-decision process. Ch 1 in *Diffusion of innovations (4th edition)*. The Free Press. New York. pp.161-202.9

Usun, S. (2004). Factors Affecting the Application of Information and Communication

Technologies (ICT) in Distance Education. Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education-TOJDE, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 52-67

Yazici, A., Altas, I. & Demiray, U. (2001). Distance Education on the Net: A Model for Developing Countries, Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education-TOJDE, Vol. 2 No. 2 pp. 24-35