

LIBRARY SERVICES FOR THE ELECTRONIC MBA STUDENTS AT ISTANBUL BİLGİ UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

There have been important changes in educational systems and institutions parallel to developments in information technology. The need for education is increasing and a lifelong education is becoming essential as traditional educational systems prove insufficient. Thus, in addition to traditional educational systems, various new systems such as, computer-based or internet-based education are being put into place. Therefore, university libraries, which have an important place within the educational system, present distance learning students with the opportunity to reach information rapidly and efficiently with these developments in communication and technology.

In this study, the development of distance education in Turkey is briefly introduced and the library services for the electronic MBA (e-MBA) students, who are distance learning students, at Istanbul Bilgi University are explained. In addition, the targets of the library to meet the utmost information needs of distance learning students are presented.

Keywords : Distance Learning; Istanbul Bilgi University Electronic MBA Program; Istanbul Bilgi University Library Services

Introduction

Knowledge is becoming obsolete faster than even before and the need to obtain up-to-date information is growing. Furthermore, the need for qualified personnel with up-to-date knowledge is also growing. Parallel with the developments in information technology, teaching and learning techniques are becoming varied to enable life-long learning. New education concepts like computer-based learning, online learning and web-based learning are used along with traditional education techniques. Among these education models, web-based learning is used extensively by education institutions and companies.

To get better results from education, whatever the education model is, the process has to be supported by information sources. These sources can either be used by academicians to prepare course material, or they can be used by students to assist in their learning process. This research uses a documentary analysis and it is based on the idea that libraries and information centers should use information technology to offer effective services to students who receive their education through the internet. The aim of the study is to give information about the historical development of distance education in Turkey, to analyse the services supplied by the Istanbul Bilgi University Library to Istanbul Bilgi University e-MBA students in order to assist them in their learning process and the new projects of the Istanbul Bilgi University Library for distance learning students.

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There are different definitions for distance education. Distance education can be defined as “distance education is an education system model which all the teaching-learning activities between students and teachers who are living in different environment are conducted via communication technologies and traditional postal service. (İşman, 1999 : 93)”. “Distance education is any educational process in which all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and / or time from the learner, with the effect that all or most of the communication between teachers and learners is through an artificial medium, either electronic or print (Moore, 2002 : 22)”. In other words, distance education is an education model in which the student and the educator are in different geographical locations and the courses are delivered via various communication media

History of Distance Education in Turkey

Development and applications of distance education in Turkey can be investigated in three phases. First; discussion on distance education and recommendations phase, second; education by mail and the third one is applications of the use of communication technologies in the field of education.

In the first phase, discussion on distance education and recommendations, there are important recommendations and suggestions. One of them was proposed by John Dewey in his “teacher education report” that was put forward in 1924. In this report, Dewey suggests using the distance education system for teacher education (İşman, 1998, 39). Other important suggestions related to this subject are; (a) implementation of “education by communication” in order to achieve teaching of reading-writing in 1927, (b) starting courses by mail service between 1933 and 1934, (c) use of distance education method at Ankara University-Faculty of Law - Banking and Trade Law Research Institute in 1950, (d) use of distance education for vocational high school students through the postal service in order to give them opportunity to attend university in 1960 and (e) implementation of education by postal services people who want to further carry on their education and increase their education level but do not have the means to attend schools (Alkan, 1996 : 20-21).

The second phase is “education by mail”. At the beginning of this step, primarily, programs in different countries, which had a well-established “education by mail” system were analysed and knowledge about these programs was gathered. The “education by letter” program was first applied by opening “education by letter” courses in 1958-1959 for bank staff who were living outside of Ankara. In 1960, a governmental body, Council of Education by Letter was established by the Ministry of National Education within Undersecretariat of Professional and Technical Education-Directorate of Statistics and Publishing. In 1962, related guidelines were implemented, the afore mentioned governmental body was formed as a directorate and “education by post” was implemented successfully. Although Higher Educational Centers of “education by post” and pilot Higher Education Schools to educate teachers were established, it was agreed that both of these educational implementations were insufficient and they were discontinued in 1975. In the same year Widespread Higher Education Foundation (YAYKUR) was established and it served distance education in secondary school teaching in various subjects and also

for primary school teaching. But, since this program was not successful either, YAYKUR was discontinued in 1979 (İşman, 1998 : 43-45)

By that time, it had been observed that distance education by printed material was not successful. Nevertheless, this type of education has been carried out up to now by planned and modern application. In the 1982 Constitution, according to Act 2547, the duty to carry out distance higher education is granted to universities.

The third phase of distance education in Turkish education system is applications of the use of communication technologies in the field of education.

Visual and auditory mass communication tools such as radios and TVs were primarily internalised as communication tools by people and since these tools influence large populations, they have been used in distance education up to now.

In Turkey, radio broadcasting began in 1927. In 1936, this service was transferred to National Mail Institution (PTT) and then it was transferred to General Directorate of Publishing, Printed Press and Tourism in 1940. It became an autonomous governmental body after its transfer to the Turkish Radio and Television Institution (TRT) in 1964. Several educational programs were prepared in collaboration with the Bureau of Radio and Ministry of Agriculture in 1941, 1952 and 1954. After re-organization of TRT in 1964, there was an increase in educational programs on the radio (İşman, 1998 : 47).

Use of TV in distance education is widespread in Turkey. TRT which started broadcasting in 1968 aired educational programs as well as other types of programs (İşman, 1998 : 48).

The Center for Educational Films-named shortly FRTEB (Directorate of Education by Film, Radio and Television)-established by Ministry National Education in 1951 has produced distance education materials since its establishment. In 1974, TV programs entitled School Television, Towards Exam and Preparation to Exam were shown on television in collaboration with TRT (Özfirat, 1997 : 54).

Over time, it has been demonstrated that TV is important in distance education. In 1982, the first university level distance education body –Anadolu University Open Education Faculty- was established. The programs, which were prepared for the students in vocational education programs at Anadolu University Open Education Faculty, were shown on TRT television. Apart from university level education, Radio-TV Anadolu Technical High School and Open High School were established by FRTEB in 1992-1993 and TV was as an educational tool for the students of these schools. (Özfirat, 1997 : 54). Within the Sixth 5-Year Development Plan (1990-1994), it was proposed to establish a separate TV channel for education and TRT 4 was assigned this purpose (İşman, 1998 : 54).

Today, lectures of Anadolu University Open Education Faculty and Open High School are still broadcasted on TRT television.

Apart from the communication technologies mentioned above, in the 1990s, especially computer and internet technologies began to be used in education, and radical changes occurred in distance education system. Universities started distance education using these new technologies and they intensified their practices in this subject. Thus, the most important development in the distance education field has happened at the university level in Turkey. Today, universities use distance learning in vocational, undergraduate and graduate learning programs. Asaf Varol, Member of the National Committee on Enformatics of Turkish Higher Education Council (YÖK) describes the current situation at the universities which apply distance education effectively in his related article (Varol, 2002:46-52). The universities mentioned in the article are Anadolu University-Open Education Faculty, Fırat University, Middle East Technical University (METU), Bilkent University, Selçuk University, Sakarya University, Istanbul Bilgi University, and Istanbul University. Briefly, details about some of these universities are given below.

Anadolu University

At Anadolu University, the distance education program has been operated successfully via Anadolu University Open Education Faculty since 1982 and has been expanded by television. The Anadolu University Open Education Faculty is carrying on broadcasting of its educational TV programs in collaboration with TRT.

Anadolu University, which first introduced distance education in Turkey in the modern sense, has been using television, web tools, videoconference etc. successfully for educational purposes.

Fırat University

Fırat University is also applying distance learning activities. Educational television programs, which started on 2nd October 1992, have received wide interest and serve to the people of Elazığ with programs especially prepared for educational purposes.

Fırat TV, which is the first local TV channel of Turkish universities has broadcasted TV programs about computer technologies, in order to teach people how to use computers and various computer programming languages.

In December 1999, a course named “Robotik” was introduced to the web environment by academic staff of Fırat University and this course was taught to students of Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University in the spring term in academic year 2000-2001 within the distance learning program. In academic year 2000-2001, in the fall term, the same course was taught to students of Sakarya University. All the materials including scenario, video records, visual animations, fiction etc. were prepared in the studios of Fırat University Television. Thus, Fırat University Television can be used as an effective component of education program.

Middle East Technical University

Another university offering distance learning is Middle East Technical University (METU). In 1997, The Enformatics Institute was established at METU in order to start a distance learning program on the Internet. This institute first offered a project to the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) in order to encourage the establishment of

Department of Enformatics at Turkish universities. As a part of this project, web-courses on information technologies aiming to give a certificate were introduced and academic staff from different universities attended these web-courses. Part of these web-courses were carried out in classrooms and the rest of the program was carried out as distance learning.

Sakarya University

Sakarya University sent teaching staff to these certificate programs at METU in 1998 in order to build a well-qualified team for an Enformatic Department. As a result of intensive efforts of this team, some web-based courses were prepared for educational purposes and offered for the approval of the National Committee on Enformatics. Distance learning began in two new vocational school programs, Computer Programming and Information Management, at Sakarya University in academic year 2001-2002.

Istanbul Bilgi University

The decision on distance learning in MBA program at Istanbul Bilgi University was given by the National Committee on Enformatics at 18th September 2000 in its 8th usual meeting. Istanbul Bilgi University is the first private non-profit university to offer distance learning officially in its MBA program.

There are 53 state and 22 private, non-profit universities in Turkey (Üniversiteler..., 2003) Istanbul Bilgi University (BİLGİ) initiative started as Istanbul School of International Studies (ISIS) in 1994. The aim was to introduce a fresh outlook to the existing education system and to establish an independent international institution of education in Istanbul. Istanbul Bilgi University took its place as a private, non-profit institution within the Turkish system of higher education in June 7th ,1996 in accordance with the decision of the Turkish Grand Assembly.

Since its foundation the University has developed rapidly with its 6,750 students in undergraduate and graduate degrees in various programs

Today, Istanbul Bilgi University has three campuses located close to the main centers of Istanbul. At Bilgi University, a variety of study programs under 13 different departments are offered, research projects are carried out, academic and social activities take places in its research center.

Istanbul Bilgi University is an associate member of the European University Association (EUA) and has academic links with several European Universities - the London School of Economics and Political Science of the University of London, the University of Portsmouth , Manchester Business School, Leiden University, and Lund University.. (History .., 2003).

Istanbul Bilgi University Electronic Master of Business Administration (e-MBA) Program

Developments in technology require new methods to supply education opportunities to more people. In view of this idea, Istanbul Bilgi University developed a new project to find an opportunity to find new ways of delivering education to graduate students. The initial idea was to design a web page to assist Bilgi MBA students both in administrative issues and in their courses. This idea was transformed into starting a new MBA program that would be delivered completely via the Internet. In 2000, accreditation was granted by the Council of Higher Education to establish the first MBA program uses distance learning techniques and principles in Turkey. The e-MBA programs has been active since 2000 with approximately 400 students (Mestçi, 2003 : 9).

The courses are delivered on the internet and the student-faculty interaction is achieved through various means. e-MBA courses make use of a "bulletin board" or "newsgroup" as a way to exchange announcements. There is also a forum where students can present their ideas and engage in group discussions. These tools are simple text-based communication systems that enable students and instructors to post, and reply to messages. Students are expected to follow and participate in the discussions. Online synchronous discussion "online contact" enables students to "talk" to the instructors and classmates on-line. Each course has its own room where students can discuss topics related to their courses. Students can ask questions, contribute their ideas and take part in discussions on various issues (Online brochure..., 2003).

Istanbul Bilgi University Library

The Istanbul Bilgi University Library aims to support the university degree programs, as well as research and teaching at the University.

Istanbul Bilgi University Library has been offering services based on the principle of a "Library Without Walls". As the Library Director Mr. Serdar Katipoglu states, "Bilgi Library had an important role in receiving the consent from the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) for the inception of e-MBA programs at the university." Mr Katipoğlu represented the library in the presentation of the e-MBA program to the Council of Higher Education and informed members of the Council on how the library will function in the program. Mr. Katipoglu emphasized that the courses must be supported by a rich variety of resources and contemporary knowledge in print or electronic forms, in order to reach a good result in distance learning (Katipoglu, 2003).

Bilgi Library has been carefully following developments in the library science world all around the globe and implementing developments in its policy. Therefore, Bilgi Library has a positive approach to the Guidelines stated in The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) on Distance Education.

Library resources and services in institutions of higher education must meet the needs of all their faculty, students, and academic support staff, wherever these individuals are located, whether on a main campus, off campus, in distance learning or extended campus programs, or in the absence of a campus at all; in courses taken for credit or noncredit; in continuing education programs; in courses attended in person or by means of electronic transmission; or any other means of distance learning.”
(Guidelines for distance ..., 2003)

The impact of Bilgi e-MBA Program on the Library

Following the approval of the e-MBA program by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), the library has made major changes in administration, collection developments, user services and circulation policies.

Administration: Administration is one of the essential elements for an institution to reach its goals. Planning, organizing, auditing library services and maintaining staff training are all parts of library administration. With the start of the e-MBA program, the library administration formed new library policies in order to meet the needs of distance learning students

Cataloging: Providing the user with regular information resources is relevant with the availability and classification of information resources. Istanbul Bilgi University Library provides the user with the contents of the books, cataloging of books open to access for everyone over the internet and meta data cataloging are only some of the services relevant to the needs of distance learning students

User Services: User services have been rearranged to meet the needs of the distance learning students. In addition to providing the students with the online information resources, many library services have been made available online.

Systems: The distance learning program has been an important factor in modifications in library automation system. A new, more comprehensive library automation system was established, which is widely used throughout the world.

Library Services to e-MBA student at Istanbul Bilgi University

“Institutions must have clear, well-planned strategies in place in order to maximize their students’ learning experiences and overall satisfaction with distance education programs to avoid attrition and maximize retention” (Buchanan, 2001 : 141) As Buchanan stated, Istanbul Bilgi University Library made important changes in administration, planning and library policies, to meet the needs of the distance learning students. Some of the services and resources that the Library offers to distance learning students are as follows :

Online Library Catalog

The library catalog, is a bibliographic collection of every kind of informational and knowledge resource (books, e-books, journal, e-journal, tape, video tape, CD-ROM, article database, maps etc.) according to the pre-determined rules. With the development of electronic libraries, libraries have been providing users with the ability to reach the information resource with a system. Thus, the user is able to reach the text by the address of the information resource if it is a printed one or access it through an URL (Uniform Resource Locator) if it is an online resource. In addition, the online library catalog also has information on whether the required resources are available in the library, the location, and the format of the information and availability to the user.

The Istanbul Bilgi University Library offers its users online library catalog via a comprehensive and quality library automation program over the Internet (Özel, 2003 : 3). Users are able to reach many articles, dissertations, e-books written by Bilgi University lecturers and as well as online library catalog and the bibliographic information of print resources.

Print Resources

Print resources have been used since the beginning of distance learning. While they can be the resources of education alone containing texts, illustrations, pictures and drawings, they can also be supporting materials. Distance learning students can borrow print resources from Bilgi Library by visiting the library or they can receive the book through post by filling out the online Inter Library Loan (ILL) book request form over the library homepage.

E-Books

E-Books facilitate meeting the needs of distance learning students in a significant way. The e-book collection of Bilgi Library comprises online books open for everyone on the internet, ebrary, Safari Tech Books Online e-books database which requires subscription, and e-books written by Bilgi University lecturers. E-MBA students are able to access these resources both on campus and off campus.

E-Reference Resources

E-Reference Resources are the online resources such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, almanacs, statistics etc. It is the reference resources that lead to the transfer of print information into online resource format. The e-reference resources in Bilgi Library are as follows : encyclopedias, statistics, dissertations and other types of reference resources.

E-Journals Databases

Journals are among the major resources that contain up to date information. Transferring journals into online resources facilitated the road to information. In addition to reaching the present and former issues of journals, this transfer has also been useful in informing the user automatically through selective dissemination of information (SDI) or alerting services. Istanbul Bilgi University Library subscribes to many national and international journal databases. Individual e-journals are also available. E-MBA students may access all e-journals and databases by name, student identification number (ID) and personal identification number (PIN) off campus 24 hours. It is one of the most frequently used resources by e-MBA students.

Web Based Reserve/ E-Reserve

The e-reserve collection consists of e-books, e-journals, and various articles purchased by the Istanbul Bilgi University Library. These items are kept in e-reserve for distance learning students, paying attention to fair use. In addition, print resources can also be kept in the same section by scanning, considering their copy rights. Forming web based course material is achieved by co-work of the librarian and the course instructor. Electronic course materials offer distance learning students significant advantages. At the same time, many students are able to reach the same resource in 24 hours.

Inter Library Loan (ILL) Services

Although libraries are making an effort to serve the needs of their users through online resources, a great amount of information resources are still in print format (Çukadar & Çelik, 2003 : 39). Istanbul Bilgi University Library developed the ILL (Inter Library Loan) request form for books or articles over the library homepage. E-MBA student may fill out the forms in order to request books or articles from Bilgi Library collection or other library collection in Turkey. After receiving the request, Bilgi Library supplies resources as soon as possible from its own collection or by borrowing from other libraries' collections and sends the required item to e-MBA students by mail, fax or e-mail according to the type of resource.

User Instruction

User instruction for the user in the library and the information centres is usually given by the librarians. Librarians have taken over new responsibilities with the recent developments in technology, new teaching / learning systems and the transfer of information onto online resources. These are, giving user instruction, solving technical problems, having knowledge about copy right law, designing web pages and having the life-long education philosophy (Çukadar & Çelik, 2003 : 37). These new responsibilities also provide librarians with new titles such as; “system librarian”and “distance education librarian”. An example to this was that in a vacancy advertisement, for River Community College which stated that they wanted to recruit a librarian to serve in distance education field with the title “ distance education / electronic reference librarian”.

User instruction is a very important issue in Bilgi Library. There is constant training of users at different levels and content. Some of the user instruction services provided to e-MBA students are:

- Informing e-MBA candidates on library and information resources.
- Giving “hands on training” to students who enroll in the e-MBA program about library and information resources.
- Preparing “access to information” seminars to the users.
- Training for those who need to make detailed research and access to information.
- Giving user instruction by telephone or e-mail
- Distributing to students CDs prepared with “camtasi recorder” software on how to use library and access information resources.

The Use of Bilgi Library Resources by e-MBA Students

According to the library automation program, the library has 6512 registered users. 384 of those are e-MBA students. E-MBA students can also use the e-resources off campus in addition to borrowing books and other resources from the library. The number of off campus access to online resources throughout January, February, March and April was 1398 by e-MBA students. We are trying to improve this figure in cooperation with the e-MBA academic staff.

Conclusions

In this study the development of distance learning in Turkey and the services that Bilgi Library provides its students have been elaborated. Bilgi Library continues to improve and enrich library services for e-MBA students. Some of the new projects to meet the needs of e-MBA students are, (a) developing a special web site for the e-MBA students, (b) increasing the amount of e-books, e-journals databases and other e-resources, (c) allocating more time to the training of users (d) taking initiative for the formation of a consortium among libraries to enable distance learning students access to different resources in Turkey

As a last point, we should always remember that the function of library services has not changed. It still supports education whether its traditional, computer-based or web-based learning. The library taking its place within the educational system by adapting itself to new developments in technology and creating new services. So, libraries should continue to follow the developments in technology and support teaching and learning by providing full access for all users to all possible information resources

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