

## FEMALE ACADEMICS WORKING IN THE FIELD OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

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Dear readers,

We continue to invite female academics working at the universities in our country in the field of distance education. We publish their opinions about "women's education and distance education" and their contributions to the field of distance education in women's point of view. The guest of this issue is one of the faculty members in Anadolu University School of Foreign Languages: Instructor Dr. Nil GÖKSEL.

### My Previous Studies in Distance Education

I started my distance education studies in 2007 with great enthusiasm and learned a lot in my master's adventure. I completed my degree with the study entitled "Learner-Instructor Interaction within University-Community Partnerships by giving samples from Second Life (SL)" in 2009. In the postgraduate period, education in Second Life was indeed a very trendy subject. Like in the past, the site still offers a free 3D virtual world where users can create, interact, and learn from other users around the world. This interactive learning space was created for digital users through 3D images called avatars. On the immersive lands of SL, users could discover and utilize from the virtual learning systems individually or in group forms.

In my dissertation, I specifically focused on effective, flexible and individual learning within the scope of distance education and analyse the driving forces results with online learning from an avatar's perspective. The virtual worlds enriched by distance learning technologies can be viewed as effective immersive tools for education; however, the immersive platforms could be found inadequate in respect to virtual communication, joint applications, critical thinking skills, consistent and collaborative learning, engagement of users in online activities, deep and inert learning methods in terms of using SL as a learning mind tool.

In my doctoral studies, I addressed Personal Learning Environments (PLEs) designed upon Web 2.0 tools and especially bookmarks. PLEs can be regarded as virtual milieus, which distance learners find, keep, (re)use, share and archive information according to their learning needs. PLEs have been becoming increasingly crucial in distance education. With

their unique forms that allow creating personalized platforms, PLEs support distant learners who need to learn out of campus due to spatial, social, financial, and time related restrictions. Thus, distance learners have an opportunity to follow a more customized curriculum. Keeping those in mind, in my dissertation, I focused on online foreign language learning within PLEs. By taking an active guiding role, I tried to examine the learning outcomes for off-campus distant learners, to name their learning needs, to make suggestions for an original design and to create a holistic PLE that would be used for English learning.

### A Success Story



Last year, Europe's largest, but Turkey's first hackathon called DigiEduHack was organized on digital transformation at Anadolu University. Faculty members, teachers, entrepreneurs and students participated in this 24-hour event at Open Education Faculty of Anadolu University between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> October 2019. Supported by European Union Institute for Innovation and Technology, the main aims of the hackathon were identified as collaborating with stakeholders on the future of education in the digital age; gathering information about key trends resulting from digital transformation and identifying key challenges and possible

innovative solutions to promote innovation in education.

At the DigiEduHack event, which included participants from 29 countries and 54 cities around the world, my team members and I: Dr. Hasan Uçar, PhD candidate Lecturer Harun Bozma, Fatih Güngör, Burak Kutay and Hüseyin Emre Armağan tried to brainstorm and have new ideas to create a mobile application. We received the grand prize of Turkey by presenting our mobile app designed for a PLE and had chance to compete with other countries taking part in the event.

### My Current Studies in Distance Education

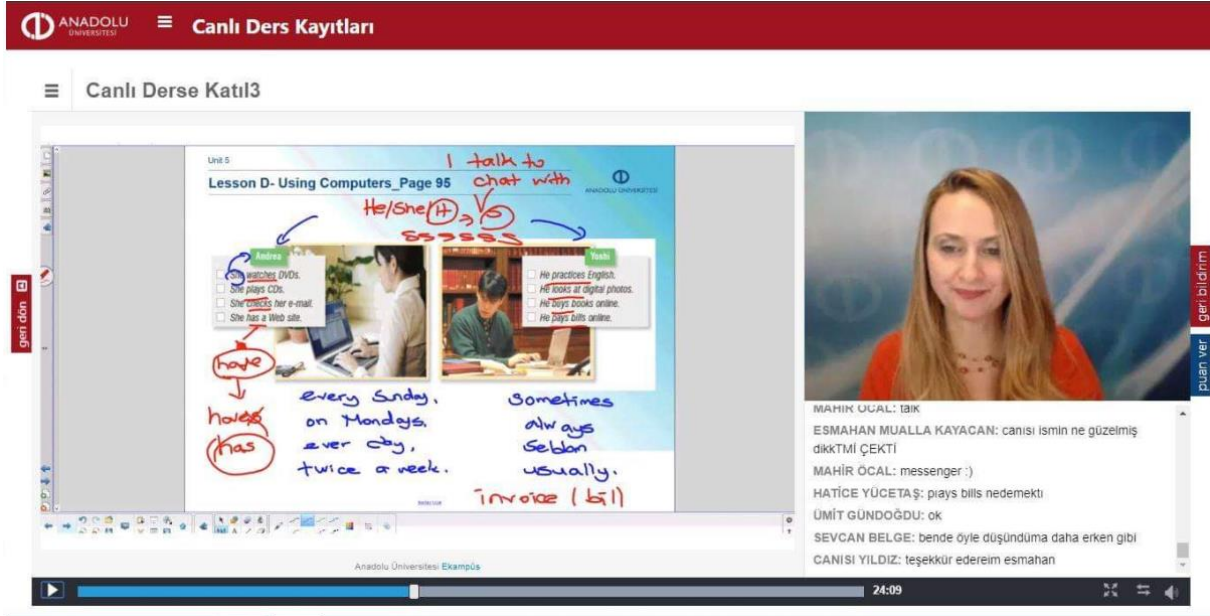
Currently, I am working on various academic works related to Distance Education and its potential use in foreign language learning, effects of automated feedback, digital literacy and self-regulation abilities of distant learners. In addition, I



am the Editor of Glokal.de journal, Reviewer in different distance education journals and Presenter in international conferences.

While teaching English on seminar courses, I also try to stimulate and sustain learners' motivation and enhance learners' engagement with supplementary activities on social networking sites. I have a closed Facebook group called 'Distant Learners', which was set up specifically for EFL learners and which has been carried out virtually since 2014 reaching more than 8500 members.

My other research interests lie broadly in the areas regarding Educational Social Networks, New Learning Technologies, Virtual Interaction, Augmented Reality, Web 2.0 tools used for foreign language learning, Mashups and Artificial Intelligence.



### Future Plans

Since I have been teaching English to both on and off campus students, it may be an ideal opportunity to work on various practices of PLEs within the broad context of Open and Distance Learning. In this connection, I plan to expand my experience as a lecturer and fulfil the requirements of a researcher academically. I feel that I will be able to make more of a difference with the experience I have gained so far but still have a desire to improve my teaching skills more and become a better researcher.

In the near future, I would like to expand my experiences internationally and share them with my students, colleagues and other instructors who would like to work with me on joint projects across the world. What I strongly want is to conduct studies that need to be specifically developed in my home institution focusing on social, cultural and pedagogical aspects pertaining to foreign language teaching and learning.

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