

THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION WORLD FROM WOMEN PESPCTIVE: Interview with Aysel OZFIRAT for intWOJDE

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Distance education is a powerful and growing force in education system of any country and especially in developing countries all around the world. It enables large numbers of individuals to access educational opportunities which might not be possible through conventional system of education. Harun SERPIL from intWOJDE team, has interviewed with Ms Aysel OZFIRAT whom she worked at the Educational Technologies General Directorate (now, name is changed as Innovations and Educational Technologies Directorate) of the Turkish Ministry of

Education between 1993 and 2005.

Being a part of the administration team, she was involved in various aspects of distance education applications of the Ministry of Education. These applications are Open High School, Vocational Open High School, Public Primary School, Vocational and Technical Open Education School, and Vocational Proficiency Certificate programs. Our "Interview" section will start with her views on distance education from the point of view of the Ministry of Education which started in the 1990s. Purpose of this interview was to explore her experience, feelings, perception about distance learning/education application in her working life. For this purpose semi-structured interview was constructed to have the complete and in-depth and valid information regarding distance education applications of the Ministry of Education in Turkey.

Int.WOJDE: Hi! How are you? Can you tell us who Ms Aysel OZFIRAT is?



ANSWER: I am fine, thank you. I am glad to have this opportunity to share my experiences about distance education applications of our National Ministry of Education -MONE-. The information I am going to give about distance education applications in Turkey will reflect only the works at the time when I worked at MONE. I graduated from the Samsun Education Institute Turkish Language Teaching, and started teaching at Sokullu Mehmet Pasha Middle School in Ankara. I completed the License

Completion program of the Anadolu University, Open Education Faculty which is a distance education program provided to teachers graduated from three-year university program. While teaching, I also attended to the Ankara University Communication Faculty.



Later on, I participated in the Public Administration Proficiency Program of the Public Administration Institute for Turkey and the Middle East (TODAIE). This program offered MA degree, and my MA thesis was on

"The Examination of the Educational Radio Programs Produced by the Film Radio Television Education Center, And the Effects of Those Programs on the Students". I

became a part of this institution later on and worked for 14 years serving the distance education system at different parts and levels starting from working as a designer and script writer to working as deputy general director.

Int.WOJDE: What are your views or perceptions about distance education?

How distance education supports your country's education system?



ANSWER: First of all, there are naturally many changes, new developments in distance education every day. In this interview, the information I am going to give about distance education applications in Turkey is going to cover only the works at the time when I worked at MONE. I consider distance education/learning as a significant part of the whole education system as it provides lifelong learning. It is important also because, with the rapid developments in technology, it enables a greater number of people to access education. Disadvantaged individuals have the

opportunity to receive education through distance education. It also provides variety in the educational services. Distance education is a second chance for some people and a first opportunity for the others. Through distance education, many individuals have the opportunity to access education independent of time and space, and thus the number of educated people in our country increases.

Int.WOJDE: How was your job experience at Ministry of Education regarding distance education/learning? What are the major differences you perceived during the job in distance and traditional learning applications of the Ministry of Education?



ANSWER: I took part in the establishment of some the distance education schools, and in the formation of education and teaching services those schools provide. I also, worked in the initiation process of the certificate programs. I would like to give a brief description of the distance education programs of the MONE. Open High School (OHS) and Public Primary School (PPS) provide education with distance education materials and give diploma. There is course completion system in the OHS, and class completion system in the PPS. In Vocational Open High School (VOHS), which uses course completion

system, vocational subjects are given through face-to-face education, and culture subjects are given through distance education materials. The VOHS students do their apprenticeship in enterprises to receive a certificate before they obtain VOHS diploma. And finally, in Vocational and Technical Open Education School (VTOES), students receive the theoretical information through distance education while working at the enterprises. They receive vocational qualification certificate according to their success at the workplace and the examination they take, and can start their own businesses with this certificate. Distance education is different from the traditional school system in that it provides individuals to access education through technologies such as satellite, internet, video, audio, graphics, computer, multimedia technologies. It also has the advantage of accessing education/learning without time, space, and age limitations unlike traditional schooling. The course completion system is another advantage of the distance education/learning over traditional education system.

Int.WOJDE: According to you, what are the advantages of distance education model of learning over traditional model of learning?



ANSWER: If we should speak in general terms, the flexibility, providing learning at one's own pace, being independent of the classroom environment, and having no age limit are the most significant advantages of distance education/learning over traditional model of learning.

Int.WOJDE: According to you, why people prefer attending distance education instead of traditional education?



ANSWER: Female and male individuals who were not sent to school, ones who could not go to school for the various reasons, the ones who did not somehow have access to schooling, and the ones who has to work and study at the same time, and finally, the ones who refuse to receive traditional education prefer distance education institutions. Distance education programs are preferred to traditional education for reasons such as giving a second, third chance, and being independent of time, space, and age.

Int.WOJDE: How does distance education contribute to the welfare of women in the country? What other measures does your country have to take for women development? Did you have any different distance education applications for women who are considered as the disadvantaged group?

ANSWER: Distance education help women obtain a profession, earn their living through this way, and thus have economic freedom and become equal individuals in the society. Only through the education received, can women then become better informed and conscious individuals and mothers which are crucial for the development of a society.

Int.WOJDE: Which aspects of distance education in your country should be improved more?

ANSWER: Distance education programs should be very well designed with more inclusion of new/advanced technologies in-service teacher training programs, diversification, increasing the certificate programs and their countrywide distribution.

Int.WOJDE: What are your suggestions for distance learners?



ANSWER: Distance learners may become distracted and confused as they experience something very different than the traditional classroom environment which may cause failure.

I suggest distance education students to plan their study program/timing well, and to develop disciplinary strategies to follow their plan. Distance education/learning requires study and research discipline.

Int.WOJDE: What are your suggestions for distance education teachers?

ANSWER: Distance education teachers need to apply DE methods and techniques consciously within contemporary curriculum, use DE tools effectively, and employ applications/activities to keep their students active. We should keep in mind that those are the basic factors directly affecting the student success in DE. There should be activities to encourage students do research.

Int.WOJDE: What are your suggestions for distance education administrators?



ANSWER: Orientation training should be provided for both students and teachers of distance education. DE students and teachers need to be informed that they are a part of the distance education/learning practice. Quality student and teacher materials should be prepared and distributed with care. Provision of examination safety is also important.

Finally, DE administrators need to take every step to provide up-to-date contemporary DE institutions around the world, should observe their applications, to be in contact with their foreign colleagues for sharing new developments and their implementation into practice, and so on.

Int.WOJDE: What were the areas of distance education application that your distance education experience covered apart from the Open High School, Vocational Open High School, Public Primary School, and Vocational and Technical Open Education School?



ANSWER: Apart from the distance education schools I mentioned, MONE Information Management, and Computer Programming courses were initiated in collaboration with the Sakarya University in 2002-2003 academic-years. I took the responsibility of the work in this process, and was actively involved in the planning of the service. Those programs provided the same opportunity for both university and high school students, and the credits they obtained through those programs were accredited in their diplomas and grades. The program was available also

for the individuals outside the school who wanted to learn computer programming or information management. I was also actively involved in the preparation of a pilot project in collaboration with the Sakarya University which is The Language Learning Certificate program via internet in 2003-2004 academic-years.

Int.WOJDE: Did you have different applications to provide support for the education of women and girls at the MONE distance education schools?

ANSWER: We provided face-to-face education to increase the school achievements of women at Public Primary Schools.

K12 Learning Centers were established in different provinces in collaboration with UNICEF to provide face-to-face education. Suitable physical conditions were provided to mothers to come to the centers with their children.

Int.WOJDE: As a woman, what would you propose to be paid attention or what do you consider that should be done for a more effective education of women with regard to distance education?



ANSWER: Women, especially those living in rural areas, need to be informed about the distance education programs they can attend. They need to be informed that attending distance education programs would not prevent them from doing their household duties. They need to be informed about and encouraged to attend different programs towards acquiring a profession.

Int.WOJDE: You must have had interesting experiences during your work with the distance education institutions of the MONE. Could you tell us some of those?



ANSWER: Distance education is a significant opportunity for those imprisoned (victims of misfortune). Thus, we had a large number of students in prisons. At once, we went to the Eskisehir Prison to give the diplomas of our graduates there. It was a very touching experience for all of us as a whole, but one thing made us speechless. When we asked one of the graduates the time of his release, he said he was sentenced to death.

"He knew he was going to be executed but had not given up education".

I have always been proud of what we did as a distance education providing institution. We had a father and son receiving their diplomas at the same time. One of our students was a shepherd who completed school with a high degree. According to him, he owed his success to the radio programs that he was listening to while shepherding his herds.

Int.WOJDE: Have you ever faced gender discrimination at your institution?

ANSWER: I have never experienced any kind of gender discrimination regarding my administrators or workers. However, research show that gender discrimination against women is quite widespread not only in our country but also worldwide.

Int.WOJDE: Our highly thanks go to Ms Aysel OZFIRAT for sharing her distance education/learning experiences as distance education student, and as staff in MONE as women with int.WOJDE which we consider valuable for our readers. Once more, many thanks to you for spearing time to us.

ANSWER: It is my pleasure to be given the opportunity to share my experiences regarding distance education/learning. My all respects go to the intWOJDE readers. And also, happy new year to all them. December, 2015.

