

TRENDS TOWARDS DISTANCE EDUCATION OF NURSING EDUCATION IN TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary world, developments, changes, transformations, globalization, information and communication technologies developments, diversification of the educational environment and life-long education to become compulsory in education, learning-teaching process efficiency and effectiveness in their discussion raises, while the educational technology, the concept was put forward. With the concept of educational technology and communication technologies bigi be used effectively in the field of education has become compulsory. Next to this case, the individual's formal education at any time and anywhere access to educational programs that allow participation distance education has led to the need to.

In today's world rapidly changing, evolving and increasingly complex area of a state health care services, nursing education from the issuing institution, advanced human and professional members of the advanced characteristics and has adopted the lifelong development of nurses are required to have graduated. Resources in this direction was examined, the distance education of nurses after graduation various vocational courses, certificate programs until completion and graduate degree (master and PhD) education in maintaining the successful results to indicate.

Therefore, distance education, nursing education to university level upgrade accelerated nursing education experienced in the quality-quantity to the solution of the problem, the continuity of nursing education and contribute to the professional will provide a large group of educational opportunities will be taken into consideration must be considered and appropriate studies, arrangements should be made.

Keywords: Distance Education, Nursing Education, Education, Nursing

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary world, developments, changes, transformations, globalization, information and communication technologies developments, diversification of the educational environment and life-long education to become compulsory in education, learning-teaching process efficiency and effectiveness in their discussion raises, while the educational technology, the concept was put forward. With the concept of educational technology and communication technologies bigi be used effectively in the field of education has become compulsory. Next to this case, the individual's formal education at any time and anywhere access to educational programs that allow participation distance education has led to the need to (Adams & Timmis, 2006; Billings, 1999; Blakeley & Smith, 1998; Taşocak, 2000; Taylor, 2003).

When the sources about education are studies, it is emphasized that efficient and effective utilization of modern information and communication technologies is possible through "distance education" which provides a solution for inequalities of opportunity, supports life-long education, and is based on taking advantage of learning technologies and individual learning (Aydın, 2002; İşman, 2005; Kaya ve ark., 2004; Taylor, 2003).

DISTANCE EDUCATION

The concept of distance education, which is also known as flexible university, open learning or open university, is defined by Keegan (1996) as: "an educational system where during most of the educational process, the instructor and the student are in different environments, information and communication technologies are used to create interaction between the instructor and the student, and to communicate the content of the course, and a two-way reciprocal communication is established between the instructor and the student," (Keegan 1996), and by Alkan as: "an educational format which differs from conventional educational practices in that it aims to provide educational services to individuals of different age groups, cultures and in different locations, independent of time and space by means of advanced media such as books and other written/printed resources, experiment materials, radio and television programs, computer programs, multi-media, interactive videos, computers, tele-conference, computer and television technologies designed for distance education." (Alkan, 2000).

In a general approach, distance education is an educational format independent of time and space, with a curriculum arranged to meet the needs of individuals who are left outside the educational system for some reason, or working individuals who would like to develop themselves on different subjects or large groups with whom face to face education is not possible, where the student decides to actively participates in education, and communication and interaction is based on technological tools (Blakeley ve Smith 1998; Diekelman, Schulte 2000; Ertuğrul, 1999; Kışla, 2005; Taylor 2003).

In distance education, which was mainly provided through printed materials until 1970s, different media such as radio, audio tape, fax, videos and phone were tried, but the printed materials remained the basic tool until the advancements in television broadcasting.

Particularly starting from the early 1980s, it was understood that television could be a cost-effective way of educating masses, which increased the number of distance education programs. Distance education programs were initiated in many countries focusing on equal opportunity purposes such as:

- increasing literacy rates,
- providing life-long educational opportunities for all individuals,
- providing educational services to individuals living in rural areas and unable to benefit from educational services,
- providing education to large masses and meeting the increasing demand for education by exceeding the geographical limits utilizing educational technology,
- providing an individual learning environment independent of time and space,
- making students more active in the process of learning-teaching,
- reducing the costs in education,
- raising qualified individuals and professionals for economic growth (Kışla, 2005; Ruzgar, 2004; Turkoglu 2003).

Since the end of 1990s, distance education has become internet/web-based as computer networks have started to be utilized in education. Web-based Distance Education, which has become popular with the advancement of web-based technologies, has allowed students to easily communicate with others, learn on their own, take responsibility and manage their time (Atack & Rankin, 2002; Aydın, 2002; Blakeley & Smith, 1998; Christianson, Teine & Luft, 2002; Harrison, 2006; Hawatson, 2004; Merisotis & Phipps, 1999; Rovai & Barnum, 2003; Taylor, 2003).

As stated by Wylid (1997); "internet and web technologies, not only allow for communication between people, provide access to wide range of information, meet different types of learning, but also support student-centered learning and provide real life experiences." (Wylid, 1997, Aktaran: Türkoğlu, 2003).

DEVELOPMENT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN THE WORLD AND TURKEY

When the sources about the historic development of distance education in the world are examined, it is seen that there are distance education programs, in addition to conventional education, and distance learning is practiced in many developed and developing countries. Distance education, which has become popular in educational systems of countries such as United States of America (USA), Germany, England, India, Australia, France and Japan, covers a wide range of subjects such as engineering, law, cinema, management, medicine, nursing and computing, and provides qualifications such as certificate, associate degree, completing undergraduate degree, undergraduate degree, master's degree, postgraduate degree and continuing education.

The historical development of distance education in Turkey started with the idea of mail-education courses in 1933-1944; works of Ankara University Faculty of Law Banking and Business Law Research Institute in 1956; mail-education works to provide university opportunity to secondary school vocational school graduates in 1960, and the resulting "Mail-Education Center" established by the Ministry of National Education in 1961.

Articles 5 and 12 of the Law No: 2547 on Higher Education, which came into force on 6 November 1981, vested the responsibility of "Continuous and Open Education" on universities, and distance education started to be practiced upon establishment of Anatolian University Open Education Faculty (AUOEF) in order to provide centrally managed distance education with the Law No: 2809 in 1982, and associate and undergraduate degrees, as well as researches and publications were started to be provided within distance education programs.

In addition to the programs provided by AUOEF, some undergraduate courses, certificate and graduate-post graduate programs are provided through the most advanced information and communication technologies; internet/web, by the Ministry of National Education, and universities such as Middle East Technical University, Istanbul Technical University, Boğaziçi University, Yıldız Technical University, Fırat University, Bilgi University, Beykent University, Sakarya University and Istanbul University (Kaya, Odabasi, 2002; Ruzgar, 2004; <http://www.bilisimsurasi.org.tr>).

Distance Education Practices in the Field of Nursing Training in the World and Turkey

The distance education practices, which are limited but rapidly increasing, have become a requirement in educational activities relating to professions which face with problems due to lack of economic, political and physical facilities, and instructors. Nursing is one of these professions.

In today's world rapidly changing, evolving and increasingly complex area of a state health care services, nursing education from the issuing institution, advanced human and professional members of the advanced characteristics and has adopted the lifelong development of nurses are required to have graduated.

Resources in this direction was examined, the distance education of nurses after graduation various vocational courses, certificate programs until completion and graduate degree (master and PhD) education in maintaining the successful results to indicate (Adams & Timmis, 2006; Atack & Rankin, 2002; Carr & Farley, 2003; Yu & Yang, 2006).

In addition, it is emphasized in the sources that with distance education the nurses can get access to a distant program/university without any time or geographical restrictions, therefore many nurses can be trained simultaneously within a short period of time, they can improve their life-long professional and individual qualifications/roles, develop themselves and continue their training activities (Armstrong, Gesser & Cooper, 2000; Blakeley & Smith, 1998; Carr & Farley, 2003; Christianson, Teine & Luft, 2002; Hoeksel & Moore, 1994; Mahoney et al., 2005; Mallow & Fredricka, 1999; McGreal et al., 2006; Taşocak, 2000; Taylor, 2003).

The national and international nursing organizations point out that distance education is vital/essential for nurses in terms of their life-long individual and professional development and continuing their education while working on the field (Farrel et al., 2006; Glen, 2005; Hawatson, 2004; Heidari & Galvin, 2002; McNeil et al., 2003).

Starting from 1990s, completing undergraduate degrees, graduate and post graduate studies and certificate programs have been given through distance education in countries such as the United States of America (USA), England, Germany and many other developed countries. Phoneix University (<http://online.phoneix.edu>), East Caroliana University (<http://www.nursing.ecu.edu>), Pennsylvania State University (http://deexel.com/Fields_of_study/nursing/RN_BSN/index.shtml) and Washington State University (<http://distance.wsu.edu/degrees/nursing.asp>) in the USA are some of the universities that provide undergraduate, graduate, post graduate and certificate programs through distance education (Armstrong, Gesser & Cooper, 2000; Blakeley & Smith, 1998; Billings, 1997; Glen, 2005; Hoeksel & Moore, 1994). The studies in the sources indicate that within the last decades, distance education has been used by the nursing instructors at the universities where distance learning is provided, as a means of training for nursing students/nurses who are away from the campus.

It has been found that the number of working nurses participating in graduate programs provided through distance education, particularly in Canada and the USA, has been increasing, and the number of nurses participating in distance education programs after graduation has increased over 50% in Canada Memorial University, and the number of nurses on the waiting list for registration has increased by the same rate. According to the 1995-1996 statistics of the US Registered Nursing Association, there were 5,514 registered nurses in Newfoundland, 90% of whom were unable to continue to any graduate programs or further education after graduation, and it was emphasized that distance education was appealing for nurses not only due to their residential location, but also life style and working hours (Mallow & Fredricka, 1999).

In their study Daugherty and Funke (1998) found that nursing students and instructors considered distance education essential in undergraduate and graduate education of the nurses living and working in different geographical regions, due to the

globalization of information, the importance of accessing information and the increasing significance of life-long education (Daugherty & Funke,1998). In their study, Christianson, Tiene and Luft (2002) emphasized the importance of distance education for nurses who worked/wanted to continue their education while working, receive education at later stages of life, and be with their families (Christianson, Teine & Luft, 2002). In a study conducted by Mahoney, Marfurt, daCunha and Engebretson (2005), it was argued that with the advancing web, internet and computer based applications, the nursing undergraduate completing programs, graduate and post graduate programs should be assessed, developed and organized according to such advancements.

At the end of the study the students stated that provision of graduate psychiatry nursing course, not also through conventional training, but also web-based distance education, developed their critical thinking, research competencies, allowed them to take more responsibility in their own learning as there were no time and space limitations, and to continue their education while working (Mahoney et al., 2005).

In another study conducted by Sit, Chung, Chow, Wong (2005), it was found that the nurses who were working and did not want to stay/live away from their families, and wanted to participate in continuous training programs for professional development were very satisfied with distance education (Sit et al., 2005). Yu and Yang (2006) found that the nurses had positive attitude towards distance education, and therefore, it would be possible to utilize web-based training in continuous education/in-service education programs.

They also demonstrated that nurses working at rural health centers had more positive attitude towards distance education than the nurses working in urban areas, and there was more demand for web-based in-service training from nurses working in rural areas as their access to resources such as journals, books, etc. were limited (Yu & Yang, 2006).

In another study conducted by Halter, Kleiner, Hess (2006) on the same subject matter, it was found that working nurses were satisfied with participating to web-based distance education, and they indicated that their desire for learning increased when the working people were given the opportunity to continue their education at home or work place, when they can take responsibility for their own education, when they could study on the basis of their own learning paces, and when they were provided flexibility in their study times, as well as training materials facilitating learning (videos, animations,, graphics, etc.) (Halter, Kleiner & Hess, 2006).

In Turkey, the first distance educations practices in nursing started in 1982 when the "Associate Degree Department for Health Administration and Health Personnel" was founded within the Open Education Faculty upon opinion of the General Directorate of Healthcare Education stating in order to "communicate the medical and paramedical developments to the assistant healthcare professionals working at healthcare institutions, and raising professionals meeting the standards of the European Community by improving the knowledge and skills of the intermediary workforce in healthcare industry", and by decisions no: 90, 30, 1074, dated 21.08.1990 of the Higher Education Institution.

In parallel with this, upon Statutory Decree No: 496, dated 18.08.1993, an agreement was made with the Ministry of Health and the "Nursing Associate Degree Program" was started within the Open Education Faculty to allow the working nurses who graduated from vocational health high schools to complete the associate degree program.

Within one year, the program was enlarged to include midwives and healthcare technicians as well. This program which aimed "to relieve the pressure on higher education, and to provide advanced knowledge to professionals by increasing their educational level, and giving them the opportunity to get a higher education diploma in their field" 39,913 nurses and 16,916 midwives graduated including 2006-2007 academic year (Arar & Çakmakçı, 1999; Kaya & Akçin, 2005; Kaya & Odabaşı, 1996; <http://ogrsayi.anadolu.edu.tr/pdetay.htm>, 05.06.2007). Today, Article 1 of the "Nursing Law" stating that "the title of nurse shall be given to those who have graduated from faculty and schools providing undergraduate degree on nursing at Turkish universities, and whose diplomas are registered at the Ministry of Health, and those who have graduated from a foreign nursing school recognized by the State, and whose diplomas are approved to be equivalent and registered at the Ministry of Health" as published in the Official Gazette number 26510, dated 02.05.2007 upon Statutory Decree no: 5634, dated 25.04.2007, and the changes and developments in today's world have brought forward the subject that the nurses with associate degrees should complete the undergraduate degrees by means of distance education (<http://rega.basbakanlik.gov.tr/#>, 14.05.2007; <http://saglik.gov.tr/TR/Genel>, 17.02.2010).

In line with this requirement, the Ministry of Health and the Higher Education Institution have cooperated, and protocols have been signed with Samsun Ondokuz Mayıs University for Midwifery Undergraduate Degree Completion Program, with Erzurum Atatürk University for Nursing Undergraduate Degree Completion Program, and with Malatya İnönü University for Healthcare Training Undergraduate Degree Completion Program in the communiqué no: 9532, dated 05.08.2009 of T.R. Ministry of Health General Directorate of Healthcare Training, and the midwifery, nursing and healthcare training undergraduate degree completion programs have been implemented since 2009-2010 academic year through distance education. At the end of the program, it is expected that approximately 23,000 nurses, 14,000 midwives and 1,000 healthcare officers with associate degree will graduate from the program (<http://saglik.gov.tr/TR/Genel>, 17.02.2010). When the current situation in nursing training in Turkey is assessed in general in line with the resources, besides the requirements of modern education, considering the current status of the nursing and healthcare school which have been increasing in number since 1998 without sufficient quantitative and qualitative infrastructure, and qualified instructors, and that the nursing training has been provided at very different levels that create privileges (vocational health high schools, associate degree, undergraduate degree), it has become a requirement that nursing undergraduate degree completion, undergraduate, graduate, post graduate and certificate programs are provided through distance education.

This requirement has made it essential that universities with the necessary infrastructure play active role, and provide distance education centers, and support of qualified, expert instructors is utilized. In addition, it should not be overlooked that distance education programs carefully prepared in line with scientific and modern approach, and national and regional requirements will accelerate the process of upgrading nursing training to university level, contribute to the solution of quantitative and qualitative problems in nursing training, to the continuity and professionalization of nursing training and improving overall health in the country, provide educational opportunity to a larger group of people without geographical restrictions. However, when using distance education in nursing training, it is important to consider how the humanist and holistic essence and values of nursing will be preserved and enriched in today's world driven and shaped by technology (Kaya & Akcin, 2005; Tasocak, 2000; Ulker et al, 2007).

CONCLUSION

In short, distance education practices in Turkey are not sufficient particularly in the field of nursing, and the research and development activities are not enough either. In order for the necessary transformations to be made, it is required that the current legislation is amended. Therefore, distance education, nursing education to university level upgrade accelerated nursing education experienced in the quality-quantity to the solution of the problem, the continuity of nursing education and contribute to the professional will provide a large group of educational opportunities will be taken into consideration must be considered and appropriate studies, arrangements should be made.

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