Chapter 8
Distance Education Students’ Opinions on Distance Education

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ABSTRACT
This research aimed to determine the opinions of undergraduate and graduate level distance education students about the education they received. Phenomenology design, one of the qualitative research designs, was used in this study. Semi-structured interview form was used as data collection method. In this research, focus group interviews were conducted in three sessions with a total of 27 distance education students (14 master and 13 undergraduate). Distance education students prefer distance education because they work in a job; they consider distance education as a great opportunity for those who cannot receive formal education. The students stated that the distance education infrastructure of the university is technically very good; they have almost no technical problems, but they have problems when connected via mobile applications. They stated that the course contents related to informatics are old because they have received education especially in the field of informatics and emphasized the importance of renewal.

INTRODUCTION
The rapid developments in technology have brought about changes in social and cultural areas and gained importance for lifelong learning. Lifelong learning and education are not limited to schools but have led to the emergence of educational activities that can take place in all areas of life, at home, at work, independent of time and space. Durnalı, Orakcı and Aktan (2019) stated that “for thousands of years, education and training that manifested within a triangle of school-teacher-student has now used new, multifaceted, multi-channel alternatives with the use of technologies in the education system” (p. 228). One of the most important of these activities is distance education. Open and distance learning is one of the fastest growing fields of education and training today as a force contributing to social and economic development. Distance education has become an indispensable element for the expansion of learning and teacher education in education systems in both developed and developing countries (UNESCO, 2000). Distance learning activities, which started with a letter, were implemented in the form of television,

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video conferencing, asynchronous learning, web, internet based live class, live voice, application sharing. Nowadays, with the development of computer and network technologies (Internet, intranet), web, internet-based live classroom applications or interactive teaching via a teaching platform has become available. Distance education, which has started to be seen as an alternative to face-to-face education, has developed applications by adopting higher education institutions (Akdemir, 2011).

In distance education applications, the teaching and learning process has experienced major developments over the last decade (Simonson, 2012). While these developments in distance education have been experienced, different definitions of distance education have been put forward. Distance education is the education given by using media tools remotely (Koper, 2014). Distance education is an institution-based formal education in which educational resources and tutorials are brought together by using telecommunication tools of learners in different places (Schlosser, & Simonson, 2009). Lee (2017), on the other hand, described distance education as bringing together students and teachers in separate spaces by using media. With the rapid development of technology and internet, definitions such as online education, e-learning and co-education have emerged (Moore, Dickson-Deane, & Galyen, 2011). While some academics can use online education and e-learning interchangeably, others define them according to the technologies used to provide education. In other words, while some scientists define e-learning as training on the Internet in addition to other electronic media such as CDROM, satellite and television, online training is defined only as training on the Internet or published on the internet (Lee, 2017; Moore et al., 2011). Online education / e-learning, which is used interchangeably, is often described as a unifying bridge between teachers and students using web-based technologies (Lee, 2017; Moore et al., 2011). Although the concepts of online and distance education are defined separately, these concepts are intertwined today. There is no standard on how much technology should be used to define education as distance education or online education. It is now described in the literature as teaching using instructor and technology-directed instruction (Alammary, Sheard, & Carbone, 2014).

Distance education offers many advantages due to being student and learning oriented and internet supported information and teaching technologies. These advantages include less time, lower cost, more service to students, more education opportunities, more information generation and dissemination, easier and faster access, more learning, more satisfaction, more value creation and gain (Balaban, 2012). Thanks to these advantages of distance education, the number of individuals receiving distance education continues to increase day by day. For example, in the United States at the end of 2015, more than 6 million students participated in at least one distance education program. This rate increased by 3.9% compared to the previous year (Allean & Seaman, 2017). According to the data of Higher Education Institution 3,933,387 students took advantage of distance education in Turkey in 2018-2019 academic year in different levels of education. The number of students enrolled in the previous year is 3,672,689. The number of students increased by 6.62% in the previous year of Yükseköğretim Kurumu (YÖK) (2019). The most preferred method of distance education as an internet-aided education began in 2001 with Anadolu University in Turkey (Durnalı, 2015). Afterwards, many universities have introduced internet-supported distance education applications.

Problem Statement

Despite the increasing interest in distance education all over the world, it is known that there are some problems. Administrative issues, social interaction, academic competence, technical skills, learning motivation, technical support, the cost of access to the Internet, are some of these problems (Muilenburg,
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