Chapter V

Integrating Computer-Supported Learning into Traditional Distance Courses

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Abstract

This chapter describes how a traditional distance education provider, Anadolu University of Turkey, integrated computer-supported learning into its traditional distance courses. Anadolu University has been struggling with offering quality education to their large body of distance learners (approximately 1 million). To do so, the university tries to integrate computer-supported learning environments into its traditional correspondence programs. Building supplementary e-learning portals, through which learners can access videos, textbooks, audio books, computer-assisted instruction materials, self-tests, pedagogical and managerial support is one of the important steps taken. The authors hope
that those who are interested in distance learning and computer-supported learning in different contexts will benefit from the efforts of Anadolu University explained in this chapter.

Introduction

Distance education, the structured teaching-learning process that is not limited by time and place, is one of the fastest growing fields of practice and study. Advances in computers and computer related technologies have fostered this growth and have provided distance learners better opportunities and freedom to determine when, where, what, and how to study. Not only new providers, but also traditional distance education programs, have had to adapt their services according to these advances.

Anadolu University of Turkey, as one of the largest distance education providers (Daniels, 1996), has started to integrate computers into its distance courses, as well. However, transferring a textbook-based (correspondence type) self-paced learning system into computer-supported learning system was not an easy job, and required a thorough planning due to large number of students, technological infrastructure, access issues, and so forth.

This chapter mainly focuses on how a traditional distance education provider, Anadolu University, integrated computer-supported learning into its traditional distance courses. The chapter consists of three parts: the first part covers the related literature about computer-supported learning and traditional distance education programs, while the second part gives details about traditional distance higher education programs of Anadolu University, and the last part introduces how the university attempts to integrate computer-supported learning into its traditional distance programs. The last part also includes the results of selected studies in which effects of integrating computer-supported learning into the traditional distance courses were investigated.

Computer-Supported Learning

The computer is a technology written and talked about frequently in the literature on education. Although its roots can be traced back to the 1960s or even 1950s, the widespread applications of and studies on using computers in the learning processes were started in the early 1980s right after the invention of microcom-