Chapter 13
Turkey—Commentary

Soner Yildirim and Müge Adnan

Changing the face of higher education with its functions and missions revisited has made it difficult to define the 'modern campus', which may require various descriptions. Nonetheless, it is easier to see the picture through certain specific commonalities that modern campuses have (e.g. learning opportunities available anytime/anyplace, classes constructed of modular learning objects, continuous collaboration, applied research, accessible digital library) where learners are 'everybody the institution connects with teachers' in an interactive and learner-centred environment (Langenberg & Spicer, 2001, p.11). New possibilities offered through the Internet and other technologies have become a challenge for traditional higher education institutions, yet providing brand new opportunities for learners. In the case of Turkey, the Human Development Report 2004 for information and communication technologies (ICT) indicated that "with a cautionary, caring, informed and well-rounded approach, communication and Information Technologies can make substantial contributions to Turkey's human development" (UNDP, 2004, p. v). However, the report also warned that:

> Turkey's approach to policy surrounding the use of ICT within education should not therefore be driven by a need to keep pace with international developments but should be led by the need to find appropriate niches where ICT can enhance Turkey's multiple yet specific educational needs. (pp. 48–49)

The mid-2000s in Turkey witnessed many traditional universities' primary efforts to integrate online education modules in response to the needs of geographically dispersed students with a differing profile from traditional students, embracing a multi-dimensional interaction opportunity between and among learners, instructors

S. Yildirim (✉)
Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey
e-mail: soner@metu.edu.tr

M. Adnan
Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Ankara, Turkey
e-mail: muge@mu.edu.tr

and media, offering flexibility, individualisation, and cost-effectiveness. Yet, as Kondakci, Bedenlier, and Aydin indicated in their contribution to this volume, the 'distance education' adventure for Turkey dates back to the 1920s. After the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, a well-organised and effective education was of paramount importance for the young national, secular, and democratic state. The government's efforts to restructure the higher education system were grounded on Professor Albert Malche's report on Turkish university reform, and with the valuable contribution of John Dewey, 'distance education' was prioritised among other alternatives to reach all segments of society in the shortest time, particularly for teacher-training activities towards the aim for national literacy. Yet, low literacy rates made it impossible to consider correspondence education until the 1950s (Adnan, 2016).

The initial years of distance education in Turkey were challenging due to the limited available resources of the period. Yet, increasing demand for higher education required additional measures to increase capacity, and facilitate higher education accessibility to the larger audience. Hence, as pointed out by Kondakci, Bedenlier, and Aydin, universities were bestowed the legal responsibility for distance higher education in 1981, and Internet-based distance education has become increasingly important and communal as a natural consequence of the development of accessible information and communication technologies since the mid-90s. Soon enough, the Internet became an integral part of daily life at most Turkish universities. Besides fully online distance education programmes offered at the associate, undergraduate and graduate levels by Turkish higher education institutions, many universities have also integrated online technologies into on-campus teaching for delivering certain courses fully online or in blended learning environments.

Major affordances of distance education such as time and space flexibility, and particularly effective solutions for logistics and instructor shortages have led higher education institutions to transform compulsory common courses at the undergraduate level into fully online courses delivered synchronously or merely asynchronously. Such adoption of online learning technologies requires meticulous strategic planning covering the establishment of a sound technological infrastructure, orientation of instructors and students, the professional development of instructors in order to teach online competently, and most importantly the adequate design and development of content and instructional materials. Several universities have acknowledged their institutional, technological or manpower shortcomings, and formed official collaboration with other universities to utilise their established technological infrastructure or their human resources for online teaching. Nevertheless, this has not always been the case, with many institutions starting out with inadequately designed courses, untrained online instructors and unprepared online learners, which resulted in poor and unsatisfactory teaching-learning experiences through mere online replication of conventional classroom environments (Adnan, 2018; Bates & Sangrà, 2011). This has also resulted in a resistance to online teaching and learning both by instructors and learners.

Online distance education remains as a significant alternative for the Turkish Education System. With more than 17 million students and teachers in K-12 schools, and nearly 6 million students in higher education, the Turkish education system remains

a big one. In order for this mass population to access quality education, online distance education may become a great opportunity for those who are especially in the disadvantaged group to access to formal education. On the other hand, the successful integration of Internet-based distance learning programmes, as with any innovative initiatives on this scale, is dependent upon thorough planning, a sound technological infrastructure, high-quality content, and most importantly, acceptance, readiness, and active involvement of administrators, instructors, and learners. If Turkey wishes to reach the greater masses, providing them with effective learning opportunities and not merely ticking the boxes for the required numbers, the next step in Turkey's Internet-based distance education journey needs to focus carefully on quality assurance, considering all factors that impact on both educational settings and products at all stages of e-learning.

References

Adnan, M. (2016). *E-Learning at higher education: A roadmap for Turkish higher education institutions*. Istanbul: Kriter Yayınları.

Adnan, M. (2018). Professional development in the transition to online teaching: Voice of entrant online instructors. *ReCALL, 30*(1), 88–111.

Bates, A., & Sangrà, A. (2011). *Managing technology in higher education: Strategies for transforming teaching and learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/John Wiley & Co.

Langenberg, D. N., & Spicer, D. Z. (2001). The modern campus. *New Directions for Higher Education, 115,* 3–15.

UNDP. (2004). *Information and communication technologies: Human development report turkey 2004*. Retrieved from http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Turkey/Turkey%20HDR%202004.pdf.