

Instructors' Perspectives on Teaching Massive Open Online Courses

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Abstract

The massive open online courses (MOOCs) movement has gained its popularity during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of the instructors on teaching MOOCs during the pandemic. A case study design as one of the qualitative research approaches was used and content analysis was conducted to analyze the findings. Total 41 volunteer instructors have participated the study. In the present study, what the instructors think about MOOC practices, their motives for teaching, to what extent they could transfer the experiences they gained while teaching MOOCs to their regular courses during the pandemic, which materials and practices they have used more frequently, favorite features of their MOOCs, and what they suggest for the improvement of the MOOC portal they used were sought for. The analyses shown that the instructors found the MOOC quite useful, and they think that more resources should be allocated to improve and extent these courses. The primary motivations of the instructors to launch MOOCs were sharing their knowledge and experience, financial income, gaining experiences that will increase their effectiveness in face-to-face courses, and strengthening their professional visibility in the field. It was also emphasized that they used their experiences in MOOCs while they transfer to the emergency remote teaching during the pandemic. The instructors mostly used self-prepared online reading resources, self-recorded videos and self-prepared visuals. Instructors pointed out the gathering of learners with diverse characteristics, flexibility of time offered by the system and system's ease of use as their favorite features of the platform through which they offered their MOOCs, Namely, AKADEMA of Anadolu University. Their suggestions for the improvement of AKADEMA portal concentrated on the need for better promotion of the portal, and provision of ETCS equivalence and certification.

1. Introduction

Open and distance learning is one of the practices that has emerged to meet the changing needs of individuals and societies as a result of the developments and changes in technology. Altering needs force traditional paradigms of education to transform, and lifelong learning emerges as a necessity. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are one of those practices that emerged to meet this need and are growing in popularity. MOOCs are virtual courses that are largely provided by universities, and volunteers can register and follow the content online. By taking learning outside the classroom environment, it has become a medium that is independent of time and place, learner-centered and that provides flexible learning opportunities for the learner. It is a medium that enables individuals to access up-to-date information they need for both their professional and personal development without any restrictions.

The concept of MOOC was coined by Dave Cormier to describe the course named "Connectivism and Connective Knowledge - CCK" given by George Siemens and Stephen Downes in 2008 (Yuan, & Powell, 2013). With the widespread use of MOOCs, different practices have emerged. Although these practices have common features in many ways, they differ from each other in terms of learning-teaching approaches they adopt. According to Siemens (2013), MOOCs have basically two different types: Connective (c)-MOOCs and Traditional (x)-MOOCs. Whereas the MOOCs designed with the connectivist approach are intended for the production and enhancement of knowledge using social networks, xMOOCs have an instructive philosophy and a structure that focuses mostly on the transfer of information and practice of the content. Besides, in recent years, hybrid Massive Open Online courses that use cMOOC and xMOOC models together, adopt the blended learning approach and appeal to a wider range of participants, have started to emerge (Siemens, 2013; Artsın, 2019; Sayın & Seferoğlu, 2015).

One of the most defining features of MOOCs is that they are grounded on the philosophy of openness. When considered as a continuum that starts with open universities, then extends to open access, open educational resources, and to massive open online courses respectively, openness refers to the learning scenarios in which the boundaries between learners and information resources are eliminated. Today, the principle of openness in education provides opportunities such as ubiquity of education and flexibility in terms of admission to and graduation from universities in addition to constituting the basis of open and distance learning (James & Bossu, 2014). The concept of openness in MOOCs has two primarily distinguishing features: MOOCs' being open to

learners outside the organizing institution without any prerequisites and using open educational sources (Sanchez-Gordon, & Luján-Mora, 2014). In other words, these features can be summarized as being open access and using open content. As for Niadu (2019) in addition to being open access and open source, MOOCs should also include open access to educational opportunities and the adoption of open learning strategies in learning and teaching.

Reviewing the definitions of openness in the literature, it is seen that while Walker (2005) emphasized its being accessible to everyone by virtue of affordability, Wiley (2009) pointed out its being reusable, copiable, adaptable and editable. Openness was defined by Rumble (1997), too, as a concept in which limitations in the learning process are minimized and decisions for learning are made by the learner. When put together, the concept of openness in education can be defined as providing equal opportunities in education, and in line with this, being accessible to everyone free of charge or being affordable for every income group, being freely usable, distributable and continuous. When we examine the definitions, it is seen that each of them emphasizes different aspects of the learning process. With the changing needs, developing technological infrastructure and scientific developments, the concept of openness has brought about different ways of usage. Within this framework, it can be thought that the concept of openness is a notion that undertakes different missions in order to meet different needs in different periods of humanity.

Today, we are going through a period in which the whole world is affected by the Covid 19 pandemic. The crisis that the pandemic created in the world has affected all spheres of health, psychology, economy, and social life, and education has received a large share of this situation. As a precaution, education has been suspended in almost all countries. As a result of the effect of the global spread of the virus, open and distance education practices have emerged as the easiest and most feasible solution to ensure the sustainability of education. While distance education, which eliminates space and time limitations, is becoming a more preferred educational system with the development of technology, it turned out to be a compulsory option due to Covid 19. In this context, it can be thought that in addition to supporting formal education, open and distance learning practices will provide an important advantage by closing the education gap in different situations of crisis. In this regard, the overall purpose of this study is to examine the teaching experiences of the instructors who teach on AKADEMA during the pandemic. In the literature, it is seen that there are only a few studies which reflect the instructor thoughts on MOOCs. However, it is believed that without including instructors and their views on the process, no paradigm change in learning environments can be comprehended. From this perspective, in order to run AKADEMA courses more effectively, attractively and efficiently, plan for the future and develop policies, evaluation of the platform from the viewpoint of instructors is to be made. It is believed that the data obtained will help to identify the problems and develop solutions in order to run MOOCs optimally. Moreover, it is assumed that the study will lead the way for other studies that will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of open and distance learning practices based on instructor opinions. Within the framework of this general purpose, answers to the following questions were sought for:

1. What is your general opinion on MOOC or OER (Open Education Resources) practices? Do you think that they can change the university education?
2. What are your reasons for teaching on AKADEMA?
3. Which learning materials and practices do you use more frequently in your courses?
4. To what extent has having taught on AKADEMA helped you in transferring your courses online during the COVID-19 Pandemic?
5. What features of AKADEMA courses do you like most? What would you suggest for improvement?

2. Method

In this study, case study design which is one of the qualitative research approaches is used. According to Creswell (2007), case study is an in-depth examination of a well-defined system based on large and comprehensive datasets. In the case study, a well-defined research subject is described and analyzed in detail in its real environment (Birinci, Kılıçer, Ünlüer & Kabakçı, 2009). With the obtained results, why the case has developed in that specific way and what should be focused on in future studies is revealed (Davey, 1991). Within this framework, in this study, AKADEMA platform is evaluated and analyzed in detail from the perspective of instructors. Based on the opinions of the instructors, it is believed that the present study will guide the studies that will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of MOOC practices. For this purpose, a content analysis was conducted on the responses received from instructors.

2.1. Data Collection and Analysis

An online questionnaire was prepared for the collection of research data and was shared with 80 instructors who taught on AKADEMA between November-December 2020. With this questionnaire, instructor opinions about MOOC practices, specifically about AKADEMA, were tried to be collected. 41 instructors who had taught on

AKADEMA, the MOOC platform of Anadolu University, participated in the study voluntarily. Instructors were asked to fill in the semi-structured web-based questionnaire. The opinions of field experts were consulted in order to check the extent to which the questionnaire serves the research purpose and its usability. Corrections were made based on the expert opinions. The research process and the procedures used in this process were explained in detail to increase the validity of the study. To this end, the research method, study group, data collection tools, data collection and analysis procedures and how the findings had been organized were explained in detail. The responses of participants were electronically recorded. Following the collection process, participant responses were transcribed, and content analysis was performed. The primary purpose of content analysis is to find concepts and relations that can explain the collected data. The fundamental process in content analysis is to collect similar data within the framework of specific concepts and themes, and then to edit and interpret them in a format that the readers can understand. (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In accordance with this, first, the data are conceptualized, then the themes that explain the data are identified by organizing the emerging concepts logically. For this purpose, the data were coded by the researcher and theme and sub-themes were created. In the coding phase, the researcher selected and coded the meaningful chunks of responses as words or sentences so that the themes in the responses could be inferred. In this way, the qualitative data obtained from the responses of the participants were summarized in plain language and themes related to each sub-problem were created. In order to ensure the reliability of the study, another expert on open and distance learning carried out the same process. Next, the codings of the two researchers were compared. At the end of the comparison, it was seen that although there were stylistic differences in the expressions used in the coding, there was no semantic difference, and the inter-coder reliability was high.

2.2. Study Group

One of the MOOC practices in Turkey is the learning platform named AKADEMA which serves as a massive open online course practice served by Anadolu University. Within the framework of this model which corresponds to the declaration of openness in the tradition of open education, courses which were intended for lifelong learning and prepared with the know-how and experience of Anadolu University have been made available to the masses on the Internet at <http://akadema.anadolu.edu.tr> without any prerequisites or cost. The aim of AKADEMA platform, which was initiated with the provision of seven courses in 2015, is to provide an environment and materials that would provide learning opportunities for everyone of all ages and backgrounds and to ensure that they have a structured learning experience that would support lifelong learning processes. As of 2020, it has been serving with a total of 120 courses under fourteen different categories. The courses within AKADEMA employ xMOOC practices that are characterized as "traditional" and adopt a behaviorist pedagogical approach. In other words, the open online courses on AKADEMA platform serve as courses which are free and open to anyone who wants to learn. AKADEMA courses, which serve as xMOOC practices, include short video lectures, other course materials prepared by instructors, discussion forums and assignments for assessment and evaluation.

3. Findings and Interpretation

The study examines the experiences of instructors who teach on AKADEMA during the pandemic in detail. Within the framework of this general purpose, answers to what the instructors think about MOOC practices, their reasons for teaching on this platform, which materials and practices they use more frequently, their thoughts on transferring their experiences to their formal education courses, their favorite features of AKADEMA courses and what they suggest for the improvement of these courses were sought for.

Table 1. Do you find AKADEMA and similar MOOC or OER practices meaningful and useful in general?
Should our university allocate resources for such practices?

	Certainly Yes	Yes	I am not sure	No	Certainly No
In general, do you find AKADEMA and similar MOOC or OER practices meaningful and useful? Should our university allocate resources (human, financial, physical, time) for such practices?	25	15			

According to Table 1, all of the instructors have found the practices useful and responded “more resources should be allocated to similar practices” with “certainly yes” ($f = 25$) and “yes” ($f = 15$).

Table 2. Do you think MOOC or OER practices can change university education in general?

Yes, it will change in a positive way	Yes, but I don't think there will be a positive change	I am not sure	I don't think it will change a lot	It will not have an effect

Do you think MOOC or OER practices can change university education in general?	24	2	11
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When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that instructors think that MOOC or OER practices will impact university education positively ($f=24$). Besides, it is seen that the number of those who do not think that there will be a positive change is very low ($f=2$). It is seen that the number of those who responded “I am not sure” is quite high, too ($f=11$).

Table 3. Do you think that the certificates of completion obtained from AKADEMA courses should have a value (credit) in the students' regular degree programs?

	Yes, it should	Yes, but it should be similar to a certificate program	No, it shouldn't have, it should remain as personal development
Do you think that the certificates of completion obtained from AKADEMA courses should have a value (credit) in the students' regular degree programs?	18	11	10

According to Table 3, it is seen that the number of those who think that the certificate obtained from AKADEMA courses should have a certain credit is high ($f=18$). Yet, it is also seen that there are instructors who think that they should be certificate programs ($f=11$) and they should remain as personal development courses ($f=10$).

Table 4. What is your reason for teaching on AKADEMA?

To share my knowledge and experience as a faculty member	52
To earn financial income	16
To gain experiences that will increase the effectiveness of my face-to-face courses	12
To increase or enhance my professional visibility/image in the field	11
To reach student groups with diverse characteristics	10
To improve my online teaching competencies	9
To be interested in online course design and implementation	8
Upon the request of the managers	7
To start up different for-profit initiatives through online courses by using the experiences gained from AKADEMA	2
To learn the ways of producing educational materials on my own	1
To utilize the experiences on AKADEMA in other projects (research or practice) in my field	1

In Table 4, the reasons why instructors want to launch a course on AKADEMA are shown. As demonstrated in the table, instructors stated that they launched courses to share their knowledge and experience ($f=52$), earn financial income ($f=16$), gain experiences that would increase the effectiveness of their face-to-face lessons ($f=12$), increase and enhance their professional visibility / image in the field ($f=11$). Furthermore, they also stated that they launched courses to reach a diverse population of students ($f=10$), to improve their online course competencies ($f=9$), because they were interested in online course design and implementation ($f=8$), and upon the request of the managers ($f=7$). Very few instructors stated that they started courses in order to start up different for-profit initiatives through online courses by using the experiences gained from AKADEMA ($f=2$), learn the ways of producing educational materials ($f=1$), and utilize their experiences on AKADEMA in other projects ($f=1$).

Table 5. What is your reason to continue teaching on AKADEMA?

Enjoying interaction with a diverse population	71
Enjoying teaching online	26
To increase or enhance my professional visibility/image in the field	15
Enjoying sharing my knowledge and skills	15
To gain experiences that will increase the effectiveness of my face-to-face courses	8
To benefit from different teaching strategies and activities	8
To prepare and benefit from different educational materials	8
To improve my online teaching competencies	5

To start up different for-profit initiatives through online courses by using the experiences gained from AKADEMA	5
To utilize the experiences on AKADEMA in other projects (research or practice) in my field	2
Upon the request of the managers	1

Table 5 demonstrates the reasons for instructors to continue teaching on AKADEMA. When we examine the table, instructors expressed that they substantially enjoyed interacting with a diverse population ($f=71$), enjoyed online courses ($f=26$), wanted to strengthen their professional visibility / image in the field ($f=15$), and enjoyed sharing their knowledge and skills ($f=15$). It is seen that the same number of people ($f=8$) stated that they want to gain experience that will increase the effectiveness of their face-to-face lessons, try different teaching strategies and activities, prepare and try different educational materials. In addition, instructors emphasized that they wanted to improve their online teaching competencies ($f=5$), start-up different for-profit initiatives through online courses by using the experiences gained from AKADEMA ($f=5$). Besides, a small number of instructors indicated their willingness to utilize their experiences gained from AKADEMADA in other projects in their fields ($f=2$) and the request of the managers ($f=1$) as their reasons to continue teaching on AKADEMA.

Table 6. To what extent have you used the following learning materials in your courses?

To what extent have you used the following learning materials in your courses? Leave it blank, if you have not used it.	Very often	Often	Rarely	Never
Educational videos (Self-recorded)	22	3	2	5
Educational videos (Open education resources)	4	1	4	21
Educational videos (Work by someone else - no copyright issue)	3	4	7	15
Interactive videos (Self-recorded)	13	1	1	13
Interactive videos (Open education resource)	2		2	24
Interactive videos (Work by someone else - no copyright issue)	1	1	3	22
Online reading resources (My own lecture notes, excerpts from my works)	22	8	2	3
Online reading resources (Open education resource)	2	3	2	20
Online reading resources (Work by someone else - no copyright issue)	4	5	7	13
Must buy book (My own work)	2		2	24
Must buy book (Work by someone else)	1		2	22
Images (illustration, photo, chart, etc. – Self-prepared)	14	6	4	8
Images (illustration, photo, chart, etc. – Open education resource)	1	4	2	19
Images (illustration, photo, chart, etc. – Work by someone else - no copyright issue)	3	7	4	14
Animations (Self-prepared)	7	1		20
Animations (Open education resource)	2	2		24
Animations (Work by someone else - no copyright issue)	1	2	1	23
Simulations (Self-prepared)	5	1		20
Simulations (Open education resource)	5		1	20
Simulations (Work by someone else - no copyright issue)	1	1		24
Interactive e-learning materials (Self-recorded)	13	5	1	11
Interactive e-learning materials (Open education resource)	5	3		22
Interactive e-learning materials (Work by someone else - no copyright issue)	2	1	1	23

Table 6 displays how often the instructors use the learning materials. It is seen that the learning materials that instructors use “very often” and “often” are online reading resources (their own notes, excerpts from their works) ($f=30$), self-recorded educational videos ($f=25$), self-prepared visuals (illustration, photo, chart, etc.) ($f=20$) and self-prepared interactive e-learning materials ($f=18$). When we look at the responses “rarely” or “never” as a whole, it is seen that interactive videos (Open Education resource) ($f=26$), must buy books (their own works) ($f=26$), interactive videos (work by someone else - no copyright issue) ($f=25$) are the least used materials.

Table 7. How often do you do the following activities in your AKADEMA course(s)?

Table 7. How often do you do the following activities in your AKADEMA course(s)?	At least once almost everyday	At least once or twice a week	Once in two weeks	Rarely	Never
Posting an announcement	2	18	8	9	
Posting on the discussion board	8	10	7	8	2

Assigning homework and providing feedback to submissions	9	11	9	5	
Making quizzes or surveys	1	6	11	8	
Launching synchronous sessions (live lessons)		5	5	2	23

In Table 7, activities that instructors use most in their courses are shown. According to the table, it is seen that the most common activity of instructors is posting announcements almost every day at least once ($f=2$) and at least once or twice a week ($f=18$). It is followed by assigning homework and providing feedback to the submissions at least once almost every day ($f=9$) and at least once or twice a week ($f=11$). It is seen that posting on the discussion board is one of the most frequently used activities with a frequency of at least once almost every day ($f=8$) and at least once a week ($f=18$). It is remarkable that the least used activity is launching synchronous sessions ($f=23$).

Table 8. Which instruments / methods do you use in evaluating success in your course (s)? You may mark more than one.

Which instruments / methods do you use in evaluating the success in your course (s)? You may mark more than one.	
Completing learning activities	31
Doing homework	31
Final exam	11
Teacher opinion	1
Participation	3

In Table 8, assessment tools/methods used to evaluate learner success are demonstrated. When the table is examined, it is seen that instructors use completing learning activities ($f=31$), doing homework ($f=31$), final exam ($f=11$), participation ($f=3$), and teacher opinion ($f=1$) as the methods or instruments for evaluation.

Table 9. Has having taught on AKADEMA given you different ideas on conducting your face-to-face lessons? Are you inspired? Has it caused a change in your face-to-face lessons?

Has having taught on AKADEMA given you different ideas on conducting your face-to-face lessons? Are you inspired? Has it caused a change in your face-to-face lessons?	
Yes, it has given an idea, and I have changed my regular f2f courses at least slightly.	18
Yes, it has given an idea, but I could not apply it.	11
I cannot say that it has given much idea.	7
No, it hasn't given any idea.	4

When we examine Table 9, a big majority of the instructors ($f=18$) stated that having taught on AKADEMA gave an idea about conducting face-to-face lessons and caused a change in their face-to-face lessons. In addition, it is seen that some teachers have expressed their opinions as “It has given an idea, but I could not apply it” ($f=11$), “I cannot say that it has given much idea” ($f=7$) and “No, it hasn't given any idea” ($f=4$).

Table 10. Has having taught on AKADEMA given you different ideas on conducting your other online courses (courses in distance education non-thesis master's degree programs, etc.)? Are you inspired? Has it caused a change in your other online courses?

Has having taught on AKADEMA given you different ideas on conducting your other online courses (courses in distance education non-thesis master's degree programs, etc.)? Are you inspired? Has it caused a change in your other online courses?	
Yes, it has given an idea, and I have changed my online courses at least slightly.	25
Yes, it has given an idea, but I could not apply it.	9
I cannot say that it has given much idea.	5
No, it has not given any idea.	1

In Table 10, responses of the instructors regarding whether having taught on AKADEMA inspired instructors in conducting their other online courses (courses in distance education non-thesis master's degree programs, etc.) and whether it caused a change in their other online courses are presented. When the responses of the instructors are examined, it is seen that they have stated their ideas as “Yes, it has given an idea, and I have changed my online lessons at least slightly” ($f=25$), “Yes, it has given an idea, but I could not apply it” ($f=9$), “I cannot say that it has given much idea” ($f=5$), “No, it has not given any idea” ($f=1$).

Table 11. To what extent has having taught on AKADEMA helped you transfer your courses online during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

To what extent has having taught on AKADEMA helped you transfer your lessons online during the COVID-19 Pandemic?	
It has helped a lot	33
It has helped to a degree	2
I cannot say that it has helped much	4
It hasn't helped at all	6

Table 11 demonstrates to what extent instructors think having taught on AKADEMA helped them transfer their courses online during the COVID-19 Pandemic. According to the table, the instructors responded to this question “It has helped a lot” ($f=33$), “It hasn’t helped at all” ($f=6$), “I cannot say that it has helped much” ($f=4$), “It has helped to a degree” ($f=2$).

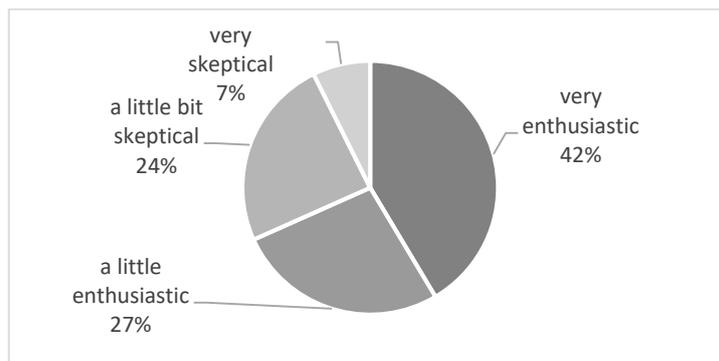


Figure 1: Feelings about the effectiveness of the courses conducted entirely online BEFORE teaching on AKADEMA

According to Figure 1, instructors stated that before teaching on AKADEMA, they had been very enthusiastic ($f=17$), a little enthusiastic ($f=11$), a little bit skeptical ($f=10$) and very skeptical ($f=3$) regarding the effectiveness of online courses.

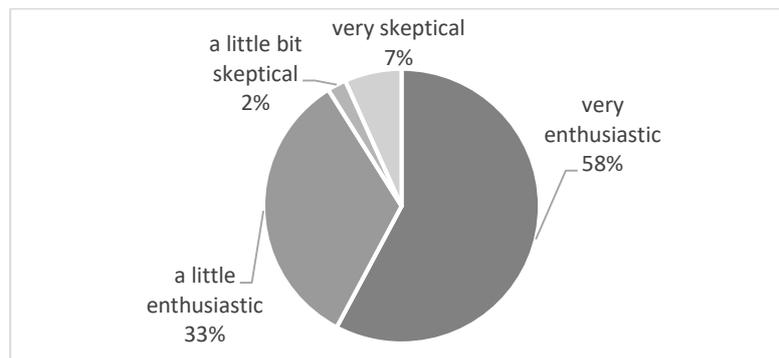


Figure 2: Feelings about the effectiveness of the courses conducted entirely online AFTER teaching on AKADEMA

As displayed in Figure 2, instructors expressed their current feelings about their fully online courses as “I was very enthusiastic” ($f=26$), “I was a little enthusiastic” ($f=15$), “I was a little bit skeptical” ($f=3$), “I was very skeptical” ($f=1$).

Table 12. What are your most favorite features and components of AKADEMA courses?

Gathering of learners with diverse characteristics	12
Time flexibility, enabling use at any time	6
System's ease of use, successful set-up with no possibility of making mistakes	5
Encouraging participation with discussion forums	4
Providing social service	3
Being free of charge	3
Subject diversity	3

Presence of synchronous sessions	2
Being able to plan the courses as I want	1
Promoting self-learning	1
Demonstrating how courses in various disciplines can be taught at a distance	1
Ensuring the formation of learning community	1
Being able to make quick assessments	1

In Table 12, instructors' favorite features and components of AKADEMA lessons can be seen. When the table is examined, it is seen that a large majority of the lecturers ($f=12$) highlighted the gathering of learners with diverse characteristics as a reason. Following that, "Time flexibility, enabling use at any time" ($f=6$), "System's ease of use, successful set-up with no possibility of making mistakes" ($f=5$), "Encouraging participation with discussion forums" ($f=4$) were the responses respectively. In addition, other responses were expressed as; "Providing social service" ($f=3$), "Being free of charge" ($f=3$), "Subject diversity" ($f=3$), "Presence of synchronous sessions" ($f=2$). A small number of instructors ($f=1$) stated that "Being able to plan the courses as I want", "Promoting self-learning", "Demonstrating how courses in various disciplines can be taught at a distance", "Ensuring the formation of learning community, and "Being able to make quick assessments" were the aspects they enjoyed.

Table 13. What should be done to improve AKADEMA platform and courses?

Promotion should be done better; more participants should be targeted	15
ETCS equivalence should be provided, certification should be issued	12
Instructors should be motivated by the institution	5
The exam system should be improved	3
The number of synchronous sessions should be increased	2
Technical support should be provided for the transfer and transformation of the lessons	2
Video-supported training should be provided on the production of lessons	2
Course participants and instructors should be interviewed to improve the system	1
Contents should be prepared more interactively	1
Number of course weeks should be increased	1
The interface should be designed more effectively	1

In table 13, the suggestions of instructors for the improvement of the courses on AKADEMA platform are presented. When we examine the answers, it is seen that most of the instructors ($f=15$) think that this platform should be better promoted, ETCS equivalence should be provided, and a certificate should be issued ($f=12$). In addition, it is stated that instructors should be motivated by the institution ($f=5$), the exam system should be improved ($f=3$), the synchronous lesson hours should be increased ($f=2$), technical support should be provided for the transfer and transformation of the lessons ($f=2$), video-supported training on the production of lessons should be provided ($f=2$), and course participants and instructors should be interviewed to improve the system ($f=1$). Some of the instructors suggested that contents should be prepared more interactively ($f=1$), the number of course weeks should be increased ($f=1$), and the interface should be designed more effectively ($f=1$).

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

According to the research, all of the instructors stated that the practices made on AKADEMA are meaningful and useful. Furthermore, it is emphasized that these practices will affect university education positively, therefore resources should be allocated for such practices. According to the results of the research, it is seen that the primary motivations of the instructors to start courses on the AKADEMA platform are to share their knowledge and experience, to earn financial income, to gain experiences that will increase their effectiveness in face-to-face lessons and to strengthen their professional image in the field. Likewise, in the studies in the literature, it is seen that instructors are motivated by gaining experience from using new technologies when teaching online, applying new teaching techniques and methods (Green, Alejandro & Brown, 2009; Hiltz, Kim & Shea, 2006) and by the financial support provided by the institution (Gannon-Cook & Ley, 2004; Moore & Anderson, 2003). In similar studies, instructors stated that using new teaching methods and techniques in open and distance learning practices, integrating new technologies into learning processes and the experience they gained in this way motivated them (Green, Alejandro & Brown, 2009; Hiltz, Kim & Shea, 2006; Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003). Correspondingly, parallel to the results of the research, Menchaca and Bekele (2008), too, mentioned that open and distance learning practices strengthen the image and increase the visibility of institutions. There are also some studies which show that the leading factor in motivating instructors is the financial support by the institutions to those who are involved in online practices (Gannon-Cook & Ley, 2004; Moore & Anderson, 2003). At this point, it is seen that the results of the research are in parallel with similar studies in the literature.

Reasons for why the instructors continue teaching on AKADEMA have also been questioned in the study. When we examine the results, the motivation for the instructors to start teaching on AKADEMA are expressed as gaining experience, strengthening their professional image and earning financial income. On the other hand, majority of the instructors have stated that their reasons for continuing to teach on AKADEMA are communicating with diverse populations and enjoying the online course environment. In this context, it can be said that the more experiences instructors gain in teaching in online environments, the more positive their attitudes towards the environment become. Studies in the literature have also concluded that there is a negative relationship between online teaching experience and resistance to the environment (Alshangeeti, Alsaghier & Nguyen, 2012; Lloyd, Byrne & McCoy, 2012; Manderbach et. al., 2012). It is noteworthy that the investments made by educational institutions in technological infrastructure have escalated recently, and accordingly, improvements in technology knowledge and skills of instructors have been observed. At this point, it can be said that the positive developments discussed above can expand from learning processes to the whole system via digital tools. Thus, it can be argued that open and distance learning practices can both support the education system during the period we have been experiencing due to Covid 19 and make it possible to increase the quality of higher education.

As another result of the study, it is seen that the learning materials that are most frequently used by the instructors are self-prepared online reading resources, self-recorded videos and self-created images. In similar studies in the literature, it is seen that instructors prefer video lectures and educational videos in their learning processes, too (Basilaia & Kvakadze, 2020; Burke & Dempsey, 2020; Mulenga & Marban, 2020; Roy, 2020). In the previous studies, it was emphasized that online learning activities are mostly teacher-centered (Özdaş, 2018; Akpınar & Gezer, 2010). In their study with learners, Karatepe et al. (2020) found that online lecture by instructors is the most useful method of instruction. In the study conducted by Valiente et al. (2020), it is seen that the top four most effective resources used in open and distance learning practices are oral presentations, videos, content and assessments. In the study conducted by Karadağ and Yücel (2020) in Turkey during the Covid 19 period, it is purported that the use of poor-quality materials which are not prepared by the instructors themselves and have little relation with the content of the course is a major source of problems. Analogous studies demonstrate that using content that is not self-prepared by instructors and presenting irrelevant content are among the factors that decrease the quality of online learning (Zhou, Li, Wu, and Zhou, 2020). In a nutshell, it is seen that instructors prefer using traditional teaching methods that they are accustomed to. Their belief that using self-prepared content would cause no copyright issues can be regarded as another reason for this. In this context, it can be said that instructors prefer using self-created materials, and the results of the study are parallel with the results of similar studies in the literature.

According to the results of the study, the activities most frequently employed by instructors on AKADEMA platform are posting announcements, assigning homework and providing feedback. In the evaluation process, doing homework and completing learning activities are prioritized. In the announcements section of the platform, all kinds of notifications about the learning process are made. In the studies conducted in the literature, the importance of the effective use of the announcement system is also mentioned, and it is emphasized that by using the announcements effectively in the online environment, it will be possible to attract the attention and sustain the motivation of learners (Kışla et al, 2014; Lim et. al, 2014).

Besides, many universities conducting open and distance education practices in Turkey consider assignments as a part of the learning process. In addition, universities that implement open and distance learning practices also use assignments as a means of evaluating students (Mutlu, Öztürk & Çetinöz, 2017). Likewise, Karatepe et al. (2020) point out that in systems based on open and distance learning, instructors mostly perform the evaluation process based on the feedback they give via assignments. Furthermore, an overview of other practices in the world reveals that assignments are one of the most widely used activities in online learning environments. The Open University of Britain, too, uses assignments for both formative and summative assessments (Hew, 2016; Baran, 2020). Also, Emine's (2015) study has revealed that weekly assignments would be a suitable method to sustain participation in distance education courses. The previous research emphasizes that instructor feedback in MOOCs increases the participation of learners in the courses and helps them focus their attention on the subject they are studying (Dong & Goh, 2015). As a result, student learning is reinforced by assignments and assessments thereby affecting student performance and learning motivation positively (Ok & Çalışkan, 2019; Buzzetto-Moreve Alade, 2006; Lynch, Goold & Blain, 2004). For this reason, assignments and activities should ensure new learnings and the use of skills, and they should be used as a means to make sense of prior learnings.

According to the results of the research, the instructors highlighted that having taught on AKADEMA has inspired them about conducting their face-to-face lessons and caused a change in the courses they have delivered both face-to-face and online. In addition, almost all of the participants think that having taught on AKADEMA helped them a lot to transfer their courses online during the COVID-19 Pandemic. For open and distance learning practices to

be successful, it is vital that instructors know how to integrate technology into learning processes and develop appropriate competencies (Berigel and Çetin, 2018). Cadlof (2020), too, mentioned that gaining experience from online learning practices is an important component for the effective execution of the process. In the study conducted by Ulmer et al. (2007), it is stated that in the courses delivered by instructors with online teaching experience, student performance and teacher-learner interactions are as effective as that of face-to-face education. Successful implementation of open and distance learning practices is highly influenced by attitudes and approaches of instructors towards these environments (Bakioğlu & Çevik, 2020). In this context, it is seen that the experiences that instructors gained on AKADEMA benefited them especially in managing their courses in formal education during the pandemic. Based on these findings, it can be said that the experiences of the instructors on AKADEMA both impacted their attitudes positively and made it easier for them to use the skills they gained from using technology in other courses. At this point, it can be claimed that having taught on AKADEMA during the pandemic provided an opportunity for instructors to improve themselves and helped them to feel self-confident.

The results of the study revealed that the favorite features of AKADEMA emphasized by the instructors are the gathering of learners with diverse characteristics, time flexibility offered by the system and system's ease of use. One of the most important features of MOOCs, which are open and distance learning practices, is that they can gather learners with highly diverse characteristics. They allow people from different countries, cultures, age groups and areas of interests to study together and meet in a discussion platform regardless of time and space constraints (Demirci, 2014). Previous research demonstrates that ease of access is one of the important advantages of open and distance learning practices (Gök, 2015). This reveals that being independent of time and space is one of the reasons for choosing distance education (Kılıç & Seyis, 2014). It can be thought that the target audience of MOOC platforms is people who would like to attend universities but somehow cannot; and this perspective would pave the way to the democratization of education. Within this frame of reference, it can be said that the philosophy of openness which facilitates the democratization and liberation of information and learning is the common ground of MOOC systems. MOOCs offer equality of opportunity in education by allowing participants to have ubiquitous access to education. It can be denoted that, that MOOCs disregard the regions participants live in, their ages, levels of income, ideologies and levels of education in providing these services is one of their characteristics that reflects the philosophy of openness (Peter & Deimann, 2013). It can be asserted that openness is one of the concepts that distinguishes MOOCs from smaller-scale online learning environments, and that their most fundamental components are open access and open content. MOOCs are also open to learners outside the organizing institution without any prerequisites and they offer open educational resources to all participants. In this context, it can be said that most favorite feature of AKADEMA for instructors is the system's philosophy of openness and the reflections of this philosophy in practice.

Additionally, instructors emphasized that AKADEMA platform is user-friendly. The user engages with the online learning system through its interface. For this reason, it can be argued that user-friendly interface design is one of the major determinants of the impact that the system will create (Bozkaya & Bozkurt, 2013). If one cannot use the features offered by the system, the features provided by the open and distance learning platform remain obsolete. It can be assumed that basic interventions such as logical division of the sections in the online learning system and designing graphic elements in a way that makes the system easier to use can ensure smooth adaptation of the users to the system because it can be said that the difficulties or ease of use encountered in the system while using MOOCs will affect participants' attitudes towards using the system.

The suggestions of instructors for the development of AKADEMA platform center upon the need for better promotion of the platform, the provision of ETCS equivalence and certification. According to the research, instructors think that AKADEMA platform should be promoted more effectively. Similarly, in their research that aims to identify the reasons for dropouts in AKADEMA, Aydın and Yazıcı (2019) state that AKADEMA should be promoted more. According to the previous studies, new technologies are used by educational institutions in learning processes to reduce costs, increase the quality of education and even ensure the visibility of universities (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009; Menchaca & Bekele, 2008). As the number of participants who join MOOCs increases globally every day, it is obvious that its significance will increase in Turkey, too (Ergüney, 2015). Based on this foresight, it can be postulated that in order to achieve success in this field, it is crucial for educational institutions to develop policies regarding MOOC practices. One of the important steps of these policies is the effective promotion of practices. To this end, social media profiles of the university can be used to promote AKADEMA platform; Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram can be considered as effective MOOC marketing channels.

Another strongly highlighted suggestion for the development of the AKADEMA platform by the instructors is that the courses should be accredited and certified. Previous research show that one of the most important reasons for enrolling in MOOCs is the desire to receive a certificate at the end of the course (Young, 2013). In line with this, the studies in the literature indicate that the chance to receive a certificate of participation may reduce dropout rates

(Waard, 2011; Zhou, 2016). In this respect, it can be anticipated that establishing the conditions for granting certificates to those who have completed AKADEMA courses will make these courses more attractive. Certifications and diplomas should be expanded and regulations regarding the validity of these documents should be made. Higher education institutions should develop a clear stance on this issue and be able to offer learners global opportunities for lifelong learning. Some of the available programs are incentive as they make it possible to be verified with a certificate or diploma. MOOC programs which are open to all students free of charge are also used for important teaching outcomes such as certificates and indicators of professional competence that are valid in many universities. Therefore, it is necessary to develop an international quality system in order to increase the reliability of these programs. The studies in literature highlight the increasing necessity for the quality and evaluation mechanisms of rapidly developing MOOCs (Wang et al., 2013). As an initial step, some criteria can be set to measure the quality of the courses in order to credit or certify MOOC courses. Certain standards on how the courses to be included in the MOOC platform should be designed, how their contents should be structured, and how learning materials should be designed to ensure interaction can be established. Thus, the way for the process of crediting and certification of courses can be paved.

In conclusion, the primary purpose of this research is to investigate the teaching experiences of instructors who teach on AKADEMA during the pandemic. At times, crisis periods accelerate change which thereby accelerates the development process. This period necessitated the instructors who teach on AKADEMA to adopt roles such as using technology, sharing information via technology, preparing course content and materials, and employing various teaching methods. In this respect, it can be said that instructors have kept up with the changes that they have experienced. The results of the study demonstrate that instructors have positive attitudes towards their teaching experience on AKADEMA. This also substantiates that instructors are open to innovations in using new technologies, and they could turn the process into an opportunity by transferring their experiences they gained through AKADEMA during the pandemic to their formal courses.

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