

## **Online Newspaper as an Interaction Tool in Distance Education: A Sample Application of the Open Education Faculty in Anadolu University**

Associate Professor Halil İbrahim Gürcan, Ph.D.  
Journalism Department of Communication Sciences  
Anadolu University  
26470 Eskisehir, TURKEY  
higurcan@anadolu.edu.tr

Associate Professor Aydın Zıya Özgür, Ph.D.  
Open Education Faculty, Anadolu University  
26470 Eskisehir, TURKEY  
azozgur@anadolu.edu.tr

### **Abstract**

Using newspaper as a support material in distance education is a method integrated in almost every education applications. Newspapers are broadcasted monthly, bimonthly, every three months or quarterly to create a positive opinion in public, announce students' problems, produce solutions to these problems, release news related with students, improve relationships between students and institutions, and develop a belonging feeling of the institution, which is a very important function of education to encourage student learning. Hence, institution success and reliability are increased by providing information in detail to students and public opinions.

Developing and improving a broadcast opportunity with the Internet becomes necessary to provide a frequently updated Web site, which informs students and also help them avoid printed newspaper cost and time related problems by taking in consideration.

In this study, online newspaper has started to replace printed newspaper as a medium to provide interaction between students and institutions in distance education. This necessity will be discussed later, and also presented a sample project on an online newspaper in the Open Education Faculty of Anadolu University.

### **Introduction**

Distance education institutions, which provide education to students from different environments and geography, have been taking a significant place in contemporary education. Distance education is an educational method to provide education by using different ways, such as published, face to face education, guidance and academically counseling, and electronic materials to people who do not have the opportunity to get education in traditional educational institutions due to variety of reasons (age, health problems, geographical distance, family matters, time, money, etc.).

Besides, published materials are sent to students from different geography, radio and television broadcasts, and courses are carried on the Internet. Distance education institutions have also been publishing materials defined as a newspaper or bulletin which helps students follow developments about their institutions, and express their requests and problems.

With wide spreading of the Internet, online newspapers have also been added to student newspapers printed and aimed at communicating with students in the past. (Gurcan, 1998).

With the help of online newspapers, students must have either necessary computer hardware at their homes or centers having computer infrastructure provided by institutions or cyber cafes. Students can reach online newspaper URL address directly or via institution main Web page, and then read all developments about school by themselves on this site. Moreover, they can fill-in comment page to express their own problems, their requests and/or problems via email and bulletin board if it is provided.

In this study, it will be given general information about the newspapers published since 1982 in the Open Education Faculty (OEF) of Anadolu University. The main goal of this study is to focus on an online newspaper model. Students can access this virtual environment by using any Internet browsers.

### **What Is the Role and Importance of Newspaper in Distance Education?**

Institutional newspaper has a very important role and function for learners and distance education institutions that those points are listed below. (Demiray & Gurcan, 1998):

- Getting a warm relationship between learners and distance education institution.
- Providing information for learners about their institution and educational developments.
- Motivating learners to arrange useful leisure and social activities for their free time.
- Helping learners gain or have more critical personality by motivating them.
- Getting warm relationships and help them share and establish good contacts among students providing information about them.
- Getting warm relationships with others by sharing and establishing good contacts among themselves regardless of physical distance.
- It is possible to get ideas about reorganizing system processing or get self-criticism about system from the point of students' views.
- Providing more vocational guidance to learners in their field besides other teaching points.
- Providing more information on health subjects to learners for their daily life besides other teaching points.
- Providing more information on cultural and traditional values to learners for their daily life besides other teaching points.
- Helping students develop more sensitive perspective to protect their environments.

### **The Applications of Printed Newspapers at the Open Education Faculty (OEF)**

The newspaper to expand communication between students and institution in the Open Education Faculty (OEF) of Anadolu University was published one year after the establishment of the faculty. *Anadolu Newspaper* is the first newspaper, aimed at functioning as a communication organ of the open education students in Anadolu University. The first issue of *Anadolu Newspaper* was published in eight pages in February 1983. This first issue in a tabloid sized was sent to the student home addresses. It was published as 30.000 copies in accordance with the number of students, and, starting from the third year, they published 100.000 copies. *Anadolu Newspaper* was published in five years, and there were twenty-three issues published during this period. The main aim of *Anadolu Newspaper* was to establish a good contact with its readers who were the students in the OEF (Demiray & Gurcan, 1998).

In the succeeding years, Gençanadolu Newspaper, Open Education Special Issue, was published three copies (1991-1993), and Open Education Bulletin was published six issues. Gençanadolu Newspaper Special Issue was published in tabloid size and as 8 pages.

The bulletin, titled as Open Education Faculty Bulletin, of the OEF was published in A4 size and between from 8 to 16 pages. Open Education Bulletin published six issues in four years. The sort of students activities, students and graduates' opinions and administration messages were dealt with in those bulletins.

Since 1998, Open Education Faculty Bulletin has been published as Anadolu Haber Newspaper, the Open Education Special Issue for open education students.

Anadolu Haber Newspaper is a weekly in-campus communication newspaper of Anadolu University. The published issues have been sent to the eighty-three Open Education bureaus situated in all Turkish provinces and the staffs working in those bureaus have obtained information from Anadolu University. The newspapers sent to those bureaus were put on the bulletin boards where students could also read. In addition, starting from the year 2000, this newspaper has been broadcasting on the Internet and it provides information and developments about their University to open and traditional students. While Anadolu Haber Newspaper has been published in-campus issue as eight pages, the Open Education Special Issue has been published in 12 pages.

Besides, the in-campus issue of Anadolu Haber as a special issue for the open education students has been published both printed and online twice in a year. However, thanks to the cost of mailing the printed newspapers to 660.000 students and the lost of time, Open Education Faculty has been doing studies on publishing online newspaper starting from the point that publishing online newspaper would be more functional.

Open and traditional education students can access the weekly issues of Anadolu Haber in-campus from this address: [www.ahaber.anadolu.edu.tr](http://www.ahaber.anadolu.edu.tr). They can also access to the old issues from the archive. There have been 3-5 thousand entries to the Anadolu Haber issues published in-campus and available online. It can be accessed to the issue published as the Open Education Special Issue from a link in the same Web page address.

### **Technical Infrastructure**

The main problem is that a vast majority of students could not follow the bulletin easily, because of particularly the computer infrastructure of the eighty-three Open Education bureaus in Turkey, and they have problems to get a connection to the Internet. It is thought that many students have no any computers yet, and many of them have not familiar to use the Internet. Therefore, there will be a limited mass of students in reaching goals and benefits, which those are listed above.

For that reason, in the Open Education province bureaus, computer laboratories have been established and connected to the Internet.

In spite of this limitation, before the exams, using different Internet access opportunities (cyber cafes, from their friends' computers, etc.) students have prepared for the exams. In this period, there have been more than 50.000 entries to the Web page where the sample tests were published.

When the Internet has been accessed by many of students, and computer prices will be reduced day by day, online newspaper for the open education students will address majority of students.

### **Online Newspaper for Open Education Students**

Students are having education via distance education in Turkey. Not only provinces but also towns and villages will be included in the vast places where students spread in nation wide.

In the open education, the number of the students are 658.000, and 65 per cent of those are living in the provinces while 35 percent of those are living in the towns and villages of Turkey.

Having such a vast population of students, the Open Education Faculty has some problems in providing expected communication to its students-students and the faculty. The student newspaper has been carried out an important function to serve those aims.

### **Disadvantages of the Printed Newspaper**

Starting from the year 1998, there have been serious financial and physical problems to send the students Anadolu Haber Newspaper published as a special issue for the open education students, and also used as in-university communication.

These problems are:

- The high cost of newspaper publication (As special issue, approximately 660.000 copies and as in-university issues, 5,000 copies have been published).
- Publication takes too long. The newspapers, produced in the university printing house can be printed in approximately 5 days in Web offset.
- The difficulty of the processes of folding the tabloid sized published newspapers and sticking the labels where student names and addresses are written. The folding and labeling require manpower. For these works, 20 people can finish folding and labeling 660,000 copies of newspapers in 20 days.
- The newspapers delivered to the post office with the label where student names and addresses written can reach the student addresses all around the country between three and ten days.
- When time is consumed during publication, folding, labeling, and delivering is considered, it takes a month for printed newspapers to reach the students.
- Student addresses may be wrong. Students may not be found in the addresses, which they indicated in each registration period or they may not inform the faculty about changes in their addresses. Thus, they cannot to get the newspaper.
- Newspaper may get lost in the mail. It is possible that in the post office where thousands of newspapers are delivered, there may be some disorders, some newspapers may get lost or delivered to another city, so students may not get them.
- Newspaper may not be delivered to the students because someone else may get it. Delivering newspapers has been taken far less serious than the delivering letter so it is possible that someone else except for the students can take the newspaper and students cannot get the newspapers.

### **The Advantages of Online Newspaper**

Because of these problems mentioned above, there is a necessity to provide establishment of communication with students via an online newspaper to get warmer and closer interaction with students. Particularly, due to high cost and long production period, online newspaper becomes an important means in student communication. In this context, the advantages of online newspaper can be listed as:

- The cost of publication for an online newspaper for students is limited (the cost of Web hosting and design), and there is not any other costs, such as producing (paper, ink, etc.) and/or delivering (folding, labeling and delivery, etc.) as printed newspaper.
- When we think that publishing and distributing the cost of the printed materials, preparing and broadcasting cost of television and radio course production materials and the cost of the face to face counseling, the costs of the Internet more inexpensive than other materials produced for courses.
- It can be updated frequently. Students can immediately learn subjects about themselves and the developments of their institutions.
- It provides interaction, and reinforces students to communicate with their schools and other students, and increase interaction. Students can create student-students or faculty-student centered communication opportunities by forming discussion and communication groups among themselves.
- They can express their opinions in the forums. Students can express their opinions by means of comments pages to be put on online newspaper. They can share their ideas/thoughts not only with their school administrators but also with their friends.
- While printed newspaper can be reached each student whose addresses are correct, the chance of the virtual addresses of online newspaper is more limited. It is difficult to declare that online newspaper addresses all students since it is hardly possible for all students to have an Internet connected computer.
- Each updated online newspaper can be delivered to student email boxes.

#### Online Newspaper Application in Open Education Faculty (OEF)

In order to provide communication almost 660.000 students studying in twenty-one different programs of Management, Economics and Open Education Faculties in the distance education system of Anadolu University, to develop students relationship with the University, to inform them not only about instruction period but also about news related with themselves and the university. The Internet has been used beside printed newspaper.

An online newspaper in real sense has not been established on the Internet for the open education students in Anadolu University at the times. When printed newspaper (Anadolu Haber Newspaper Special Issue) was being published, an online newspaper as a copy of printed newspaper was published and there were 12.000 hit for this newspaper in a week.

This indicates that there will be a great deal of student interest in an online newspaper to be published. It is also seen that students show great interest to the test publishing on the Internet before the exams (it has been seen that there were 50.000 students who access the Web page in a week).

Besides, the student discussion and communication groups have been formed and a background has been provided to let them communicate being members of those groups. More than one thousand students are the member of communication group and it has been expected that there will be an increase in this number of students.

However, thanks to the both technical and administrative problems, an online newspaper for the open education students has not been published functionality and continuously in accordance with these goals mentioned above yet.

But starting from the point that there is a need for an online newspaper, a study has been started in order to publish an online newspaper in a real sense for the open education students. In this study, first of all, the Web presentation related to faculty and program is started. There is a space to put for an online newspaper on the faculty main page. The work on preparation for an online newspaper was started with a team formed by the Communication Center staff at the Open Education Faculty, the reporters at the Anadolu University News Center and Web, animation and graphic designers from Open Education Faculty Computer-Assisted Education Center.

It is aimed that online newspaper must be condensed with news, involve news about the university and other faculties, besides, it has been aimed to deal with mostly Open Education Faculty, distance education system, study techniques in the distance education system, announcements about the exams and pieces of writing about the preparation for the exams, pages on which students can express their problems, the surveys related to students course contents, instruction and procedures, news and analyses about book, exhibition, magazine and

cinemas including culture and art news, sport activities where students playing in faculty sports teams can announce the sports activities, the news about the successes of the students who are taking place in the folk dance or theater activities, pages on which students can publish their own works (poetry, essay, article, cartoon, etc.) and the news related to life and technology which can attract student attentions.

According to this, it has been planned to include those sections into the Web page listed above: Faculty news, University news, culture-art news, sport news, student views, student works, and life and technology news.

To collect and write that news, it will be benefited from those reporters working in the Anadolu University News Center who are students at the same time, to collect and write the news about faculty, there will be co-operation with the OEF Communication Center staff. In other words, in forming the content of the online newspaper in the OEF will be mainly charged and the staff in the OEF Computer-Assisted Education Center will carry out the publication.

When those works are completed (about May 2003), it will be possible for the open education students to read their online newspapers updated weekly.

### **Conclusion**

Since the Internet became one of the given up communication means, it has been considered as a necessity to have an online newspaper for the open education students in Anadolu University. Being applied in many universities, online news broadcasting must be published due to its advantages, such as creating an environment for the student communications.

The most effective factor to reach the expected goal for the online newspaper in this study that online newspaper must be prepared for student interactions to meet all their needs and express their opinions.

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