# Chapter 12
# Turkey

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## Introduction

Bridging Asia and Europe in geography and culture, Turkey assumes a special role and unique position for South East Europe. Since its foundation in 1923, it has developed into the "18th largest economy in the world" (The World Bank, 2015, "Turkey Overview"). According to 2016 data, Turkey has a population of about 79 million with a median age of 31.0 years (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2016), which makes provision of educational services a critical public service for the country's economic and social development and realizing its transition into a knowledge society (Yilmaz, 2012). However, a digital divide between Turkey and the European Union as a direct neighbor exists (Yilmaz, 2012). Hence, providing quality education has been one of the top priorities in Turkey in its struggle to accomplish both the transition to knowledge society and its economic goals. Educational provision simultaneously constitutes a central political and societal challenge.

This chapter[1] provides an overview on the organization and practice of open and distance learning (ODL) in the context of higher education in Turkey with regard to its historical, legal, organizational and social context and role. Also addressing

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[1] Passages of this chapter have previously been published in: Zawacki-Richter et al. (2015) or originate from earlier drafts of this article.

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current student enrolments in ODL and touching upon its major institutions, this overview closes with a brief discussion on future perspectives for ODL in Turkey.

It needs to be noted that in this chapter, the main lines of differentiation occur between open and distance education due to the fact that while open education constitutes a specified form of distance education, it follows different regulations in the Turkish case (cf. Section "Organization and Legal Framework"). ODL, on the other hand, is an umbrella term that refers to formal, informal and non-formal learning processes in which learners are separated from each others and learning resources (including instructors, materials, etc.), interaction among learners as well as learners and resources happen via telecommunication technologies.

## Function and Position of ODL Within Turkish Higher Education

The increasing need for a more qualified labor force have forced Turkey to implement major educational reforms. Ensuing investments have resulted in expanded numbers and types of higher education institutions. The number of universities increased from 27 in 1982 to 53 in 1992, to 93 in 2006, and to 165 in 2011 (Günay & Günay, 2011). In 2017, there were 112 public and 67 foundation universities, i.e. with exceptions less competitive and equivalent to private universities, and five foundation vocational schools in the country (HEC, 2017). Following the significant expansion of its quantitative capacity, the higher education system now faces the challenge to also improve and maintain its overall quality (Altinsoy, 2011; Simsek, 2007).

Turkish higher education is organized in a centralized manner; the Higher Education Council (HEC) regulates all structural and functional issues (Simsek, 2007). Higher education is organized into pre-undergraduate (associate degree programs), undergraduate (bachelor degree programs), and graduate (masters degree programs and Ph.D. degree programs) levels. This three-cycle structure had already been in place before the country joined the Bologna Process in 2001. Student admission to higher education is regulated through a competitive, centralized, standardized and multi-stage examination that is annually conducted by ÖSYM, the Measurement, Selection and Placement Center, a government agency. Students have to pass with certain scores for specific study programs and universities; otherwise they need to choose a different study program at a lower-ranked university or repeat the exam.

The provision of ODL constitutes an important part of recent developments in higher education in Turkey. It is one of the main pillars in providing higher education for the masses and also constitutes the main educational practice for realizing lifelong learning; responding to in-service development needs of employed personnel in the public and private sectors who want to continue learning and update their qualifications (Selvi, 2006). Based on their analysis of Ankara University Distance Education Center, Sakarya University Distance Learning Research and Development Centre and Ahmet Yesevi University, Latchem, et al. (2009) found that: "The major-

ity of the distance education students are aged 26–45, with around 50% in the 26–35 age group, indicating a strong demand from employees and older learners keen to improve their qualifications" (p. 11). Another core purpose of ODL is to contribute to vocational training for employed citizens, considering the large number of associate degree programs on offer. The number of four-year undergraduate programs has also increased; thus it can equally be argued that ODL also serves certification purposes. Extrapolating Latchem's et al. (2009) observation, it seems that a smaller number of ODL students seek regular higher education qualifications, while employees wanting to extend their theoretical and practical knowledge in their fields of work constitute the larger group.

## Development of Turkish ODL

History of ODL goes back to early years of the Turkish Republic. In 1927, John Dewey recommended to the Ministry of National Education to adapt ODL for training teachers (Alkan, 1987). The first real implementation took place in 1956 in the corporate setting, a bank collaborated with Ankara University to initiate a correspondence study program for providing further training to its employees (Simsek, 2004). Later, several other incidents occurred in which ODL was implemented as a means to promote teaching and learning—however, these attempts give the impression of being rather tentative in nature (Aydin, 2011). In 1980, the Army in Turkey took power with the claim to end political violence between different ideological groups. The Army dissolved the Parliament and repealed the Constitution. The new military government involved in a new political and bureaucratic design with the motivation of bringing more control to state bodies. Education and specifically higher education was no exception from the new redesign of military government. After the military intervention, various reforms and paradigm shifts took place with the aim of restructuring the Turkish higher education system. Despite a new constitution and a centralized system of higher education, possibilities emerged for new types of higher education institutions.

In 1981, the existing 27 universities in Turkey could accommodate only 5.9% of the relevant age cohort (Simsek, 1999). Since ODL is usually associated with lower operational costs, this form of education is often considered as an alternative to residential higher education, particularly in developing countries (Berberoglu, 2010). Hence, one of the aims associated with its introduction was to substantially increase opportunities for higher education. During the 1980s and 1990s, ODL was also considered as a means of realizing equity by offering access to students from low socio-economic backgrounds who could not afford residential higher education programs (Selvi, 2006).

A notable milestone for ODL in Turkey was the establishment of Anadolu University's[2] (AU) Open Education Faculty in 1982. McIsaac, Murphy and Demiray (1988) state that one of the central aims of this endeavor was to "increase the availability of higher education to those for whom further education was not available before" (p. 108). Due to the number of approximately 500,000 students in the open education system in the late 1990s, AU has been considered to be a "mega-university" (Daniel, 1998, p. 29). In 2010, Istanbul University and Ataturk University established open education faculties with the prospect of sharing the load on AU—and serving as an indicator for the need to accommodate students' learning aspirations. At the turn of the twenty-first century, offering ODL alongside residential programs has become of increasing interest to Turkish universities. Recent statistics of the Higher Education Council (HEC, 2017) support this claim and show that 65 Turkish higher education institutions, including universities and vocational high schools, now offer study via distance education programs and many more provide some of their core courses (e.g. Turkish Language, English, Ataturk's Principles and History of Turkish Revolution, etc.) by means of distance education.

## Organization and Legal Framework

In 1981, the first legal amendment was made to the existing higher education law and Turkish universities were given the authority to develop and deliver distance education programs. In 1982 a governmental decree authorized Anadolu University to do so. Later advancements in information and communication technologies (ICT), particularly computer networks, helped many other higher education institutions to offer ODL programs and courses. Due to ever increasing numbers of ODL offerings, several issues concerning quality and legislation have been raised. As a result, HEC differentiated the ODL implementations as Distance Education (DE) and Open Education (OE).

The basic legal document regulating DE is the "Rules and Principles of Distance Education in Higher Education Organizations" issued first in 2012 and modified in 2014 by the HEC (2014). This document does not only define DE but also regulates practices related to DE including opening programs and offering DE courses both in public and foundation universities. In this legal document, the authority of opening DE programs is given to the HEC upon the recommendation of individual higher education institutions. It also allows universities to deliver up to 30% of their total course load in the form of DE. According to this document, DE refers to an instructional model in which learners and instructors are separated geographically, and instruction is delivered mainly via synchronous ICT. In these synchronous DE programs that follow a specific course schedule, students are required to be present in front of their computer at specified times to attend online classes. Moreover, the final

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[2]https://www.anadolu.edu.tr/en/about-anadolu/institutional/anadolu-at-a-glance (Retrieved April 10, 2016).

exam must be administered face-to-face (proctored) and constitute at least 80% of overall course grade. Additionally, because of its synchronous structure, the number of students in DE programs is limited in contrast to OE programs.

OE on the other hand, is considered as a more flexible distance-teaching model for massive audiences. The instructional strategy consists of mainly self-paced learning by using traditional educational media (textbooks, television, radio, etc.). Hence, interactivity between students and teachers is rather limited. However, synchronous or asynchronous technologies can also be used to deliver or support the instructional processes.

These two implementation models, DE and OE, also differ in terms of financial and organizational structures. In DE, the money collected from the students is an item in the overall budget of the university and all the expenses are made according to the limitations and regulations indicated in the 2014 "Rules and Principles of Distance Education in Higher Education Organizations". Meanwhile, the fees in OE go into the revolving funds of the university where there is more flexibility in expenditures. In terms of organizational structure, OE providers can have more vice-rectors than others, since organization of the OE systems requires more attention and at least one of these vice-rectors usually focuses on the OE system of the university.

In Turkey, there are four ways to enroll in an ODL undergraduate program, the *first* one being embedded into the general university entrance exam regulations and thus being subject to changes made to this centralized admission procedure over time: Before 2011 there were no quotas for OE programs (not for DE) and every student was able to enroll into their program of choice, then this was changed to the requirement of having at least 140 points in the university entrance exam that students take after graduating from secondary school. In 2017, the minimum points were raised to 180, which needed to be obtained in the second phase of the entrance exam and made students eligible for studying the 4-year undergraduate degree programs, while the two-year associate degree programs could be entered with the score from the first phase of the exam. For 2018, however, further changes to the legislation are expected, whose influence on enrolment will then need to be evaluated. *Second*, graduates of the face-to-face vocational or OE pre-undergraduate programs may choose to continue their higher education to complete their undergraduate degrees in ODL programs. In order to do so, they have to take the **external transfer exam**, organized by OSYM, and receive a score high enough to be able to register for an ODL program. Up until the beginning of 2016, students who wanted to register the OE programs (not DE) did not need to take this exam however new regulation now requires all those students to take this exam. These students can continue their education from the third year after completing required prerequisite courses (HEC, 2002). *Third*, students who are pursuing their education in a face-to-face, distance or open education program in any institution, may continue their education in an ODL program if they meet the requirements, i.e. students of an ODL program must have at least a 80 grade point average out of 100 to be able to transfer to another ODL program (HEC, 2010). *Fourth*, students who are currently pursuing an associate (pre-undergraduate) or bachelor degree may enter any OE programs without taking any exam and pursue simultaneously a second higher education degree. Similarly, those who hold a degree

can also benefit from this opportunity, entitled 'second university chance'. There are a few regulations for this opportunity and the major one is about the program a student can choose to enroll: The associate degree holders or students can register for only the two year associate degree programs while bachelor degree holders or students have flexibility to choose any associate or bachelor degree program (Anadolu University 2015). In the light of above explanations, one can easily infer that opposed to the philosophy of open education, residential and distance education students are accepted according to almost the same regulations in Turkey.

Degrees gained from open, distance education and residential programs in Turkey are legally equal, thus increasing the popularity of distance programs, particularly among workers in the public sector, as diploma certification is a strong criterion for career promotion. Many distance education programs issue exactly the same certificate as the residential program offered by the particular university. In contrast, some of the degrees obtained through open education have this indicated on the certificate. However, despite equivalent legal status, open and distance learning degrees do not have equal status in practice. In most cases, a residential program diploma is preferred to an open and distance learning one, by both private and public employers (Gursoy, 2005). Even in legal graduate level, those online non-thesis degree programs are not considered as equal to face-to-face ones and graduates of these programs are not allowed to continue their studies in doctorate or PhD level (HEC, 1996).

In Turkey, accreditation and quality assurance practices are at their infancy level. Since 1980, accreditation and quality assurance practices have been scattered across different national and international bodies. During the same period of time, the HEC acted as a control mechanism for opening and executing programs in higher education, including ODE. However, the HEC had espoused a controlling role rather than giving feedback for improvement as an institution and program. In 2015, the HEC pioneered the efforts to establish an open and transparent body for accreditation and quality assurance. As a result, in 2015 the Higher Education Quality Council was established as an autonomous body for accreditation and quality assurance in Turkey. Among different roles of this body, the key one is to develop basic quality indicators for accreditation, internal and external evaluation of higher education programs (HEC, 2015), that are being applied to both residential and ODL programs. Being at the initiation stage, the Higher Education Quality Council has so far neither announced any set of quality indicators for ODL programs nor has it conducted an accreditation practice on these programs. However, individual institutions, including AU, have applied to international accreditation bodies for their programs; AU received the Pearson Assured accreditation in February 2015 for the 28 associate degree programs offered,[3] the E-xellence Quality label by the European Association for Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) for a duration of three years followed in 2016.[4]

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[3]https://tr.pearson.com/en/Higher-education/qualifications-development/pearson-assured.html (Last accessed Dec. 5, 2017).

[4]http://e-xcellencelabel.eadtu.eu/e-xcellence/qualified-institutions (Last accessed Dec. 5, 2017).

According to 2014 data, Turkey spends an annual 8,193 USD per tertiary education student; the country's overall spending on education being below the OECD average (OECD, 2014). The cost of ODL is quite reasonable when compared to residential programs. For instance, Anadolu University requires around US$80 for each semester-long course work, materials, and exams in its associate and bachelor degree programs. The other OE programs also ask around US$100-120 for their undergraduate programs. Although varying a bit (US$100-300), even DE providers require reasonable fees in their undergraduate programs. However, the variation in masters' level DE programs is quite high. Average fee for a semester long DE course is about US$200 but it may go up to US$1000–1200 in some institutions. Another interesting point about funding of the ODL programs is about the government's substitutions. In general, the Turkish government subsidizes nearly 95% of the tuitions in residential programs while only 5% in ODL programs.

## Major ODL Teaching Institutions and Research Outlets

*Anadolu University*

Anadolu University's[5] OE faculty is the first and the largest institution offering OE programs in many different disciplines and is located in the city of Eskisehir. Anadolu University was established as a successor to Eskisehir Academy of Economic and Commercial Sciences in 1982 (Anadolu University, 2016a, "Anadolu at a Glance"). McIsaac, Murphy and Demiray (1988) point out that the concept of offering OE at Anadolu University was built after the already operating Open University in the United Kingdom. Recently, the OE Faculty underwent a major restructuring and now operates under the name of "open education system" (OES), which is constituted by the faculties of OE, economics, and business administration. Through the OES, Anadolu University offers nineteen four-year undergraduate degree programs in different fields of social sciences, economics and management and over 39 associate degree (pre-graduate) programs in various vocational-technical fields (Anadolu University, 2017a).

Currently, around 3 million students are enrolled in the OES at Anadolu University, herewith making it a "mega-university" (Daniel, 1998, p. 29) in that sense that it fulfills the criteria of "distance teaching, higher education, and size" (p. 29). Just taking these numbers means to acknowledge the importance and size that ODL assumes within the Turkish higher education landscape—and despite its still rather mediocre reputation regarding quality (Simsek, 2007). However, among those 3 million 1,213,352 students actively pay their fees, participate the course activities and take exams while other nearly 2 million is considered as passive students. (Anadolu University 2017b). AU is a member of the EADTU and is thus linked to the international community at the institutional level.

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[5]https://www.anadolu.edu.tr/en/universitemiz.

*Istanbul University*

Like Anadolu University's OES, Istanbul University's open and distance education faculty[6] offers various programs at different levels including associate degree and undergraduate programs as well as distance undergraduate completion degrees in various fields. However, the real asset of Istanbul University's ODL faculty is related to the fact that it offers graduate programs. Undergraduate programs in OE cover history, geography, economics, management and philosophy, while DE programs cover the traditional fields of social sciences as well as some fields from hard sciences (i.e., mathematics) and media programs.

*Atatürk University*

The third university to offer OE is Atatürk University in Erzurum. Atatürk University's OE faculty[7] offers 20 associate degree and undergraduate degree programs in various fields of social sciences (e.g., children development, management, banking), health, media, and religious studies. Atatürk University's undergraduate programs cumulate around traditional fields of social sciences (e.g., management, sociology) as well as social work studies and public relations studies. Atatürk University explains its mission for this faculty to provide an opportunity for learning without constraints of from time and space to those people who, because of different numbers of reasons, cannot participate in any other formal higher education programs (Atatürk University, 2013). Thus, the university argues from a point of view that stresses access to higher education for a more diverse group of people.

These three major institutions are dual-mode universities. As can be seen in the table below, the number of students enrolled in an ODL program is relatively high in comparison to residential students at those universities. Even more striking is the difference when compared to the other 65 universities, which have some form or initiative of distance education; numbers of ODL students at those universities often range in the low and medium hundreds (HEC, 2017). One interpretation could be that, if the necessary infrastructure and institutionalization is in place, students actually do enroll in large numbers. Among the 65 DE providers 17 are foundation institutions (HEC, 2017). This indicates that not only public but also private institutions are interested in offering ODL. The majority of these DE providers try to focus on graduate education (masters' level degrees) due to the fact that they have more flexibility in financial issues including tuitions and fees. HEC does not allow any doctoral or PhD level ODL programs (Table 12.1).

It is also notable that Anadolu University has been internationalizing its programs by opening them to Western European countries, the Balkans (Bulgaria, Kosovo, and Macedonia, and Albania), and Azerbaijan and Northern Cyprus. It is also in preparation to offer two special bachelors program in English to reach more international students. Istanbul University and Atatürk University internationalize some of their programs by offering them to Azerbaijan.

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[6]http://auzef.istanbul.edu.tr/.

[7]http://www.ataaof.edu.tr/#.

**Table 12.1** Distribution of student numbers at Anadolu, Atatürk and Istanbul University (HEC, 2017)

| University | Open education | Distance education | Residential (regular + evening classes combined) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Anadolu University | 2,984,049 | 54 | 39,091 |
| Atatürk University | 204,369 | 4,083 | 67,992 |
| Istanbul University | 118,379 | 14,815 | 118,579 |

*TOJDE and TOJET*

A central means to disseminate results of research and practice in DE in Turkey is *The Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*[8] *(TOJDE)*, which published its first volume in 2000 and has since then been published by Anadolu University (TOJDE, 2015, "Past issues"). As a peer-reviewed and open access journal, it aims at publishing articles on DE in order to inform both, theory and practice. A second Turkey-based journal is the *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology (TOJET).* It primarily focusses on educational technology and its relation to topics, such as "assessment, attitudes, beliefs, curriculum, equity, research, translating research into practice" (TOJET, no date "Submission guidelines") and is equally published as an open access journal.

## Who Studies at a Distance: Enrolments in OE and DE Programs

Students who study in ODL programs are diverse. For once, they are graduates from high school who could not gain access to the residentially offered programs (Simsek, 2004). However, based on their analysis of ANKUZEM, UZEM and Ahmet Yesevi University, Latchem et al. (2009) state for programs offered at a distance that these primarily accommodate students who can be considered non-traditional. Recent figures by Anadolu University (2016b) confirm this trend: among the roughly 1.2 million active students, 44% are female, only 15% report not to work, and the largest age group is 28+ (41%). In other words, the majority of the OE students at AU are working adults or students pursuing their education in another field. These results can be regarded as an indicator of a transition from tertiary education to lifelong learning in Turkish ODL.

Hence, especially public sector workers and employees wanting to advance their careers or extend their theoretical and practical field knowledge are the primary beneficiaries of ODL. Additionally, citizens, who are not able to realize higher edu-

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[8]http://tojde.anadolu.edu.tr/index.php?menu=33.
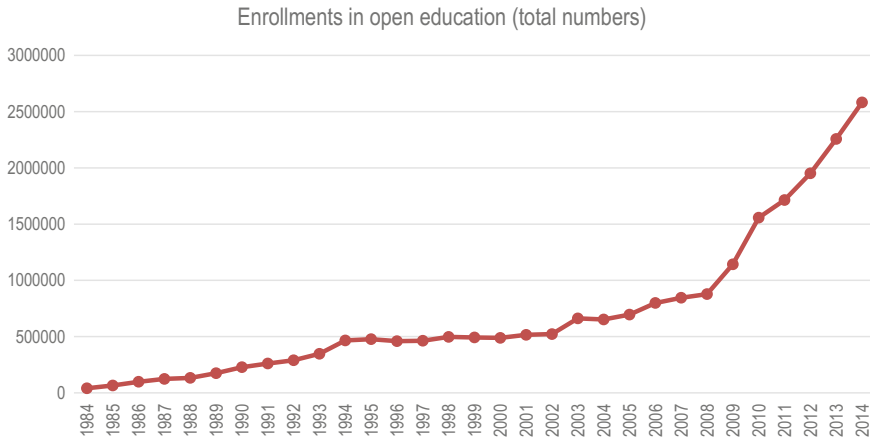
Enrollments in open education (total numbers)



**Fig. 12.1** Total student enrolment numbers in open education 1984–2014 in Turkey (own representation, data based on HEC, 2014, personal communication)

cation in residential programs due to physical handicaps, benefit extensively from ODL (Anadolu University, 2016b). In that sense, it can be argued that ODL crucially contributes to equal educational opportunity.

Figure 12.1 presents the trend in Turkish OE since its introduction. The figure shows that after the establishment of Anadolu University's OE faculty, the steady increase in student numbers also reflects the demand for OE. With the introduction of other OE faculties and multiplication of program types offered at different levels in OE faculties, enrolments experienced an even sharper incline (HEC, personal communication, December 3, 2014). While currently a total number of 91,880 students are enrolled in distance education programs (HEC, 2017), these cannot be traced back for the past years and therefore could not be included in this figure.

In addition to OE, in Turkey 65 higher education institutions offer associate, undergraduate and graduate degree DE programs. According to HEC statistics (2017), in 2017 there are 91,880 (57,521 male, 34,359 female) students enrolled in these DE programs. Out of the 65 higher education institutions, 15 offer undergraduate degree programs in engineering as well as social sciences, conferring degrees in mostly administrative sciences such as management, public administration, economics as well as media and communication sciences and engineering (computer and industrial engineering in one university). However, associate degree programs are offered by a larger number of these 65 universities in many different fields of vocational training such as health sector, public administration, tourism, banking, logistics, child development, electrical and electronics technology, ICT, etc. However, a great number of the institutions (48) offer masters' level distance education programs.

Table 12.2 reveals that ODL has a significant impact on the Turkish higher education system although these numbers might be a bit misleading due to the fact that most of the ODL student population is not active and there are some duplications (some of

**Table 12.2** Higher education and ODL student population in Turkey in the 2016-2017 academic year (HEC, 2017)

|  | Male | Female | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Total Students in F2F** | **2,037,573 (54.9%)** | **1,671,470 (45.1%)** | **3,709,043 (52.2%)** |
| Associate Degree | 679,173 (61.2%) | 430,453 (38.8%) | 1,109,626 (29.9%) |
| Undergraduate Degree | 1,089,559 (50.7%) | 1,059,607 (49.3%) | 2,149,166 (58%) |
| Masters' Degree | 268,841 (59.7%) | 181,410 (40.3%) | 450,251 (12.1%) |
| **Total Students in ODL** | **1,794,934 (52.8%)** | **1,603,743 (47.2%)** | **3,398,677 (47.8%)** |
| **Students in DE** | **57,521 (62.6%)** | **34,359 (37.4%)** | **91,880 (1.3%)** |
| Associate Degree | 20,149 (59.4%) | 13,760 (40.6%) | 33,909 (36.9%) |
| Undergraduate Degree | 11,816 (42.2%) | 16,191 (57.8%) | 28,007 (30.5%) |
| Masters' Degree | 25,556 (85.3%) | 4,408 (14.7%) | 29,964 (32.6%) |
| **Students in OE** | **1,737,413 (52.5%)** | **1,569,384 (47.5%)** | **3,306,797 (46.5)** |
| Associate Degree | 636,449 (45.1%) | 775,942 (54.9%) | 1,412,391 (42.7%) |
| Undergraduate Degree | 1,100,964 (58.1%) | 793,442 (41.9%) | 1,894,406 (57.3%) |
| **Total higher education student population** | **3,276,658 (54%)** | **2,786,228 (46%)** | **7,107,720** |

the residential students are also ODL students). Still, according to 2016–2017 academic year statistics, there are 3,398,677 students in the ODL system of Turkey. Of this number, 509,591 are newly registered ones. Finally, although there is not a big difference between male and female student numbers in ODL, male student population (52.8%) is a bit more than female. However, compared to the residential (F2F) programs, this difference is smaller. On the other hand, it is interesting to see that female students pursue masters' level degrees via ODL only limitedly. Only 14.7% of the total masters' level ODL students are female and this is quite low compared to the residential ones (40.3% of students are female).

## Looking Ahead: Issues and Trends

In Turkey, growing numbers in residential programs do not imply a decline in open and distance learning, as can be observed in Fig.12.1. However, there are several barriers for uptake of ODL in Turkey that are very similar to the ones indicated in the 2010 Policy Report of the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE). In this report, ICDE (2011) lists the major barriers as insufficient political goodwill, financial constraints, failure to engage allies, institutional challenges, professional deficiency, learner issues, and technological barriers. By looking at the policy declarations and programs of the government and the major political parties, it can be observed that there is no interest in ODL although it plays a crucial role in the Turkish higher education system. The HEC has adopted some policies supporting open and distance education but at the end they created conflicting results with expansion and improvement of ODL. For instance, the regulation issued in 2012 and revised in 2014 forces all the ODL providers to follow a standardized instructional strategy and does not support creative designs. During a workshop on issues of distance education in Turkey, held by Anadolu University in 2015 with the participation of major ODL providers, almost all but especially DE providers expressed their financial problems and the problematic items in the regulation. It is also observed that there is a shortage of professional organizations and meetings as well as professional programs focusing specially on ODL in Turkey. These shortages surely do not help the lack of qualified human resources (both staff and researchers). Anadolu University's graduate programs (masters' and Ph.D. level) are the only instructional programs that intend to train both researchers and practitioners.

In addition to the large young population, the growing economy pushes for an even further expansion of both residential and ODL programs. Developments in ICT suggest that not only will more programs be developed, but also that current open and distance education programs will increasingly rely on and integrate educational technology. As a result of implementing educational technology, course contents will be enriched and various delivery methods will be employed. Nevertheless, public opinion about this mode of delivery, technology literacy, technology infrastructure and the actual quality of ODL in its present form still constitute major handicaps.

So far, equality in status of degrees earned from open and distance or residential education exists only on paper. Accompanied by the traditionally held perspective towards higher education, which prioritizes traditional white-collar professions in conventional programs, DE programs as such do not receive broad interest of students. Likewise, changing employers' perception of degrees earned in open or distance education depends largely on increasing program quality.

Considering the currently available ODL programs, their quantity indicates an uncalculated expansion in ODL, which calls for a national-level strategy to become meaningful and purposeful. Along this line, a change or modification in the way DE programs are designed and delivered may be expected. This is closely related to the quality concern in DE. Factors related to academics are a major source of low quality implementation in DE (Düzakın & Yalçınkaya, 2008 as cited in Tuncer and Tanas,

2011). Academics believe that DE is more appropriate for social sciences and that it is not possible to create a conducive instructional environment (Can, 2004 as cited in Tuncer and Tanas, 2011) in other fields such as science and health.

And finally, internet use and internet access are very important indicators of broadening ODL in Turkey. According to Eurostat 2016 data (2017) Turkey is still in the low-tier countries in Europe in both household internet access (76%) and household internet use (73%). Despite the increasing trend in these two indicators, internet connectivity remains much below of the Euro Area average (internet access 85%; internet use 83%). Although these statistics do not show the distribution of these two indicators across different segments of the society, it can be suspected that disadvantaged segments of the society in Turkey have even lower access to and use of internet.

It is hoped that dealing with the problems mentioned will contribute to further expansion of ODL in Turkey. Considering the growing enrolment numbers in ODL in Turkey, it can be argued that it has the potential of serving life-long learning purposes in the country and herewith being supportive to further develop into a knowledge society. However, transforming Turkish ODL into this envisioned effective and efficient life-long learning tool as well as making it a prestigious certification mechanism relies both on transforming its present structure and function.

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