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EDUCATION OPPORTUNITY IN THE BALKANS: EXAMINATION ON BALKAN PROGRAMS AS OPEN EDUCATION

*Muhammet Recep OKUR**

ABSTRACT

Open education is an important structure in terms of providing individuals with the education opportunity independent from time and space. The 21st century has been an era that the access to information has been developed very rapidly by the possibilities offered by technology. Thus, the open and distance learning area has improved itself by not lagging behind the era. Open education has been practiced for many years within the country and has responded to the educational needs of the large masses. Thanks to previous experiences, open education programs were opened first in Western Europe then in the Balkans by Open Education Faculty of Anadolu University.

The study examined the programs in Bulgaria, Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which are among the abroad programs of Open Education Faculty of Anadolu University, in detail from different perspectives. Furthermore, the characteristics of the programs, matriculation, registration conditions, registration dates, education-learning structure, attendance conditions, registration opportunities for foreign students, assessment-evaluation, learning environments, and student support services were discussed in all dimensions. Based on the findings, it is recommended to increase program diversity and establish programs in different Balkan countries. In addition, different activities should be considered to introduce the open education programs and reach the target group. Also, it is thought that increasing the applications based on technological infrastructure in relation to overseas programs will provide significant advantages for both the institution and the student. It has been also seen that a significant technological infrastructure is used in learning environments. Lastly, it is proposed to introduce the online exam for assessment and evaluation activities.

* Doç. Dr., Anadolu Üniversitesi, E-posta: mrokur@gmail.com

Open Education is an important educational opportunity for people in the Balkan region since it allows learning that is independent from time and space. Therefore, it is seen that the introduction of programs, diversification of technology-based practices and opening of programs in different countries are important.

STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to investigate the open and distance learning activities conducted for the educational needs of people in the Balkan region. For this purpose, the Balkan programs of Open Education Faculty of Anadolu University are discussed. The characteristics of the programs, registration types and conditions, registration dates, educational activities, attendance conditions, registration opportunities of foreign students, passing a course, assessment-evaluation, learning environments and student support services are also examined.

Method: This study is a descriptive study designed according to survey model. In this research, descriptive survey model is used since Bulgaria, Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia Herzegovina programs, which are among the Open Education Faculty abroad programs, are examined in different dimensions in detail.

Survey models are the research approaches that aim to describe a past or present situation as it exists. The event, individual or object that is the subject of the research is tried to be defined in its own conditions and as it is (Karasar, 2017). Descriptive research tries to describe and explain what events, objects, assets, institutions, groups and various areas are. In this way, it is possible to understand them well, grouping and relations between them are determined (Kaptan, 2000). In this study, the open and distance learning activities carried out for the educational needs of the people in the Balkans are examined. For this purpose, Open Education Faculty's Balkan programs have been handled.

This research is limited to open education programs in Bulgaria, Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which are among the Open Education Faculty abroad programs. The data were obtained from university web pages and student guides, and the data obtained are limited as of the 2018-2019 academic year. The abroad programs carried out by the Open Education Faculty outside the Balkan geography are out of the scope of the research. There are other open education faculties of Istanbul University and Atatürk University in Turkey. However, since there were no abroad Balkan programs of these universities, they were not included in the research.

Conclusion and Recommendations: The number of open education programs in the Balkans investigated in the research seems to be less than the number of the programs in Turkey. The programs, known as Balkan programs are selected among programs in Turkey. The number of programs can be increased by making analysis for needs in order to open different programs in the Balkan geography. It is recommended not only to increase program diversity in existing countries, but also to open programs in different countries. In addition, more open education

programs can be opened in the different countries in Balkan geography, of which citizens can speak in Turkish. Besides, the number of English programs based on foreign languages can be increased.

The majority of the courses are in Turkish because most of the individuals living in this geography speak Turkish at a level that make them successfully complete their education. However, the legal regulations in some courses may differ in Balkan countries. Therefore, these restrictions should be taken into account in program preferences.

In this study, it is seen that the Open Education Faculty system provides very important student services for students in the Balkans. Also, learning environments and support services can be increased by the support of local units. Cooperation protocols can be signed with state institutions and non-governmental organizations to maintain education in different fields. Considering that the Balkan geography consists of developing countries, applied departments can be established to contribute to the labor force.

The promotional activities of the Balkan programs should be increased. Besides, the characteristics of programs should be introduced in the events such as education fairs and special meetings. In this sense, if the institution concentrates on different cooperations and promotions, this will also increase the demand of students. Especially secondary education students constitute the main target group. Getting information is very important to transfer the students to open education programs after they have graduated from secondary school.

At a time of rapid development of technology, it was observed that different applications of social media were being used in Balkan programs. Also, technology-based applications should be designed for the assessment-evaluation system. In the current climate, midterm and final exams are carried out face to face and with proctoring. However, Some of these exams can be designed online. Moreover, it is suggested that the online exam should be applied by technical and legal efforts since the institution, organization of exams in different geographies is time consuming and costly. By the online exam, the institution will be able to implement exams more easily, which can also be appreciated by the students. All in all, Increasing technology-based applications will attract attention of the target group planning to register.

Keywords: Open Education, Balkan Programs, Open and Distance Learning.

BALKANLARDA EĞİTİM FIRSATI: AÇIKÖĞRETİM BALKAN PROGRAMLARININ İNCELENMESİ

ÖZ

Bireylere zaman ve mekân bağımsız eğitim fırsatı sunulması anlamında Açıköğretim önemli bir yapıdır. 21. yy teknolojinin sunduğu olanaklarla bilgiye ulaşımın çok hızlı geliştiği bir çağ olmuştur. Açık ve uzaktan öğrenme alanı çağın gerisinde kalmayarak kendini geliştirmiştir. Açıköğretim yurtiçinde uzun yıllar boyunca uygulanmış ve büyük

kitlelerin eğitim ihtiyacına cevap vermiştir. Elde edilen tecrübe ve deneyimlerle dayalı olarak önce Batı Avrupa sonrasında ise Balkan coğrafyasında da Açıköğretim programları açılmıştır.

Bu çalışmada Açıköğretim yurtdışı programları arasında yer alan Bulgaristan, Kosova, Makedonya, Arnavutluk ve Bosna Hersek programları farklı boyutlarda detaylı olarak incelenmiştir. Programların özellikleri, öğrenci kabulü, kayıt koşulları, kayıt tarihleri, eğitim-öğretim yapısı, derslere devam koşulları, yabancı uyruklu öğrencilerin kayıt olanakları, ölçme-değerlendirme, öğrenme ortamları ve öğrenci destek hizmetleri tüm boyutlarıyla ele alınmıştır. Elde edilen bulgulara dayalı olarak program çeşitliliğinin artırılması ve farklı Balkan ülkelerinde de program açılması önerilmektedir. Açıköğretim programlarının tanıtılması ve hedef kitleye ulaşılması için farklı etkinliklerin yapılması düşünülmelidir. Yurtdışı programları ile ilgili olarak teknolojik altyapıya dayalı uygulamaların artırılması hem kurum hem öğrenci açısından önemli artılar sağlayacaktır. Öğrenme ortamları olarak önemli derecede teknolojik altyapının kullanıldığı tespit edilmiştir. Bununla birlikte ölçme-değerlendirme faaliyetlerinde online sınav uygulamasına geçilmesi önerilmektedir.

Balkan coğrafyasındaki insanlar için Açıköğretim önemli bir eğitim fırsatıdır. Zaman ve mekan bağımsız öğrenmeye olanak tanımaktadır. Programların tanıtımı, teknolojiye dayalı uygulamaların çeşitlendirilmesi, farklı ülkelerde programların açılmasının önemli olduğu görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Açıköğretim, Balkan Programları, Açık ve Uzaktan Öğrenme.

Introduction

The open and distance learning is constantly evolving through changes in both technology and educational paradigms. Individuals can access information anytime and anywhere thanks to opportunities provided by technology. This rapid paradigm shift may also affect the field of education. Individuals can now study in different countries without leaving their own places. The global dimension of access to information has brought globalism in the field of education. In this sense, the open and distance learning model applied by Open Education Faculty of Anadolu University becomes prominent.

Open Education Faculty, which has a successful educational background in Turkey, is considered as an educational opportunity for those who live in the Balkans. Its structure and operation, facilities and educational activities have reached international standards. In this study, first of all, the theoretical basis of the open and distance learning is explained and then the (organizational) structure of Open Education Faculty is discussed. Later on, the Balkan programs of Open Education Faculty are examined in all respects. Matriculation, education-learning structure, assessment-evaluation, learning environments and support services at the Balkan Programs of Open Education Faculty are also discussed in detail. Consequently, in the light of findings, some crucial suggestions are presented.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the open and distance learning activities conducted for the educational needs of people in the Balkan region. For this purpose, the Balkan Programs of Open Education Faculty are discussed. The characteristics of the programs, registration types and

conditions, registration dates, educational activities, attendance conditions, registration opportunities of foreign students, passing a course, assessment-evaluation, learning environments and student support services are also examined.

Limitations

In this research, only the Balkan Programs of Open Education Faculty of Anadolu University were discussed. In this respect, our sample size is limited to the Balkan Programs in Bulgaria, Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which are among the overseas programs of Open Education Faculty. The data obtained are limited to the 2018-2019 academic year. Also, the programs of the Open Education Faculty outside the Balkan geography are beyond the scope of the research. Since İstanbul University and Atatürk University, which have also open education programs in Turkey, do not have programs in the Balkans, they are not included in the study.

Open and Distance Learning

It is stated that the history of distance education in the world starts with the period called “correspondance teaching”. As known in the literature, the first practice is thought to be stenography course given by Caleb Phillips in the newspaper called Boston Gazette published in Boston in 1728 (Holmberg, 2008, p. 13). In the first age of open and distance learning, which can be named as the period of Correspondance learning/ teaching, this kind of teaching was practiced in the in England, Germany, Sweden and United States of America 18th and 19th centuries.

In order to explain the theoretical dimension of this study, the concepts of distance education, open and distance learning, and then open education are discussed. Distance education is an educational activity where learners, instructors and learning materials in different environments are brought together by means of communication Technologies (Keegan, 1996, pp. 33–46). According to Moore and Kearsley, distance education is a planned learning and teaching, where teaching is often carried out in a different place than learning, a special corporate organization as well as communication through technologies are required (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, pp. 2–9). Distance education is seen as an educational activity carried out by an institutional structure in which the learner is at the center and where the communication of the individuals in different settings is provided through appropriate communication technologies.

Distance learning, according to another definition, refers to offering programs in face-to-face training programs through internet-based distance education and the practices that sometimes require students to come to campuses for different reasons, such as exams or practice courses (Aydın, 2011, p. 24). It is seen that especially the changes in the field of technology are effective while making definitions about distance education. Some classifications have emerged in parallel to these developments.

The development process of distance education can be classified into five generations. The first generation is the delivery of printed materials to the learner by letter; the second generation, the use of visual and auditory multimedia applications; the third generation, the use of communication technologies such as television and radio; the fourth generation, the use of flexible learning resources by the emergence of internet; the fifth generation, the intelligent flexible learning model that provides increase in the interaction in the internet (Taylor, 2001, pp. 1–14). Moore and Kearsley also made a similar classification distance education was examined in five generations as (1) correspondence, (2) broadcast radio/television, (3) open universities, (4) teleconferencing and (5) Internet/web (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, pp. 24–26). As a continuation of the five generations highlighted in the literature, Caladine stated that a further generation should be added to explain the developments in information and communication technologies especially after 2000s. He defined the sixth generation that includes

social networks and communication environments as Web 2.0 and e-learning 2.0 (Caladine, 2008, p. 20).

While making the definitions of distance education, there are many variables including communication, interaction, technology, learning environment, time, space, learning, teaching and education. Along with the change in information and communication technologies, it is possible to see the term of open and distance learning in the definitions of distance education. According to Aydın, open and distance learning is a learning process in which learners are far away from each other and learning resources in the context of time and/or space, and their interactions with each other and learning resources are based on remote communication systems (Aydın, 2011, p. 26).

Open Education

Moore and Kearsley stated that the third semester in the historical process of distance education is open universities. There are two main developments in this period. The first of these developments is the studies in the field of distance learning at the University of Wisconsin. In the University of Wisconsin, distance learning practices including study guides, written materials, radio and television broadcasting, and experimental kits were conducted (Yüzer, 2013, pp. 42–43). The other development in the period of open universities was the Open University, which was founded in 1967 by the British government. In terms of open university, these two universities have pioneered the field. Later on, open university model was applied in many countries around the World (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, pp. 34–36).

In the open university model, the concept of Mega-University emerged because of an understanding of mass education. Among distance education institutions, the universities whose active student number is more than one hundred thousand is defined as Mega-University (Daniel, 1998). In 1981, while still working on distance education in the world, the law was enacted for restructuring higher education in Turkey. The following year, Anadolu University was authorized to spread the distance education nationwide. After forming legal ground, Open Education Faculty of Anadolu University offered distance education in Turkey.

Open education is a form of offering an education service. Although there is no difference between face-to-face teaching institutions in terms of essence and ultimate purposes, the model is a completely different and new educational institution (Gökdağ, 1990, pp. 493–503). Open education refers to the abolition of all possible political and practical obstacles to access to learning resources in the broadest sense. It is an instructional approach which is based on the self-learning, supported by open sources and instructors, when it is needed, and without time and space limitation (Uzaktan Öğretim Sözlüğü, 2018). According to another definition, Open Education is used for practices that provide relatively low-cost mass education with internet support for large masses (Aydın, 2011, p. 24).

Balkan Overseas Programs of Open Education Faculty

Anadolu University is a higher education institution which conducts open education activities in Turkey as well as abroad. The Western European Higher Education Programs, which are considered as the beginning of the international programs, started in 1986 with the office in Cologne, Germany (Anadolu Üniversitesi Açıköğretim Fakültesi, 2019c). The international training activities that started in Western Europe continued in 2012 in the Balkans. As of 2012-2013 academic year, Kosovo and Macedonia programs were opened. Then in 2013-2014 academic year, Bulgarian programs were opened. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania programs have been started since the 2015-2016 academic year. The University states that it adopts the principle of "equal opportunity in education" in international educational activities (Anadolu Üniversitesi Açıköğretim Fakültesi,

2019d). Distance learning is an important opportunity for individuals in the Balkan region. The steps and rules which should be followed to take advantage of this option are explained in the next section.

How to Become a Student?

When the learners in the Balkans want to get a higher education degree, there are different options for them. However, when it comes to abroad, many questions come out. Which programs in undergraduate and graduate level can I apply to? Do I have to be a citizen of the Republic of Turkey? Can I apply if I am a foreign citizen? Do I need a residence permit? It is possible to reproduce these questions. Those living in Bulgaria, Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Balkans have the opportunity to study in these countries. Table 1 shows the associate degree and undergraduate programs which admit students for Balkan programs as of 2018-2019.

Table 1: 2018-2019 Academic Year Open Education Balkan Programs

Associate Degree Programs (2 years)	Undergraduate Programs (4 years)
Banking and Insurance	Business Administration (except for Bosnia and Herzegovina)
Call Center Services	Business Administration (English) (except for Bosnia and Herzegovina)
Home Management	International Trade and Logistics Management
Photography and Camera Operation	Economics
Theology	Public Finance
Theology (Arabic) (except Bulgaria)	Labor Economics and Industrial Relations
Human Resources Management	International Relations
Cultural Heritage and Tourism	International Relations (English)
Brand Communication	Public Administration
Media and Communication	Philosophy
Radio and Television Program Production	Public Relations and Advertising
Sports Management	Sociology
Foreign Trade	History (except Bulgaria)
Web Design and Development	Turkish Language and Literature
	Management Information Systems

Balkan Programs of Open Education Faculty basically accept distance learners in two ways. These are Proficiency Exam for entering the university and the opportunity of having double university degree (second university without entrance exam). The learners can choose among the programs in Table 1 depending on their preferences. There are also English and Arabic programs for candidates who want to study in foreign languages. However, some of the programs are not open in some countries. The decision on which programs should be offered is given between the country representatives and the university. The first and most important condition to be a learner in the Balkan programs is to be the citizens of Balkan countries or of the Republic of Turkey. If the applicants have Turkish nationality, they can directly apply for the proficiency exam for entering the university. Foreign citizens, the nationals of other countries, should have a residence permit for at least 6 months or for an indefinite period of time.

The Proficiency Exam

The proficiency exam for student admission to Bulgaria, Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina Programs is held annually. Candidates who are entitled to register according to the proficiency exam scores can enroll in higher education depending on their preferences in majors. As a result of the proficiency exam, students who submit all necessary documents to an associate or bachelor's degree program are subject to the education-learning regulations accepted by the university senate. In this sense, all students comply with the Turkish higher education legislation.

Candidates who want to take the proficiency exam should first fill in the "Candidate Form for Student Proficiency Exam" at the Registration Centers of Open Education Faculty located in

Plovdiv of Bulgaria, in Prizren of Kosovo, in Skopje of Macedonia, in Tirana of Albania, in Sarajevo of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Anadolu Üniversitesi, 2018b, p. 3).

Candidates can also apply via the registration automation system on the university website. The information about in which country and which program the candidate wants to register should be entered into the system. Candidates who apply via automation are expected to print out the application form and submit it to the registration center since the pre-application system is very important in terms of exam organization. The number of students to participate in the exam and the booklets to be prepared accordingly affect the situations such as the determination of the people who will be assigned for the exam. During the pre-application, students do not have to submit or give any other documents.

The date of the proficiency exam is determined by the joint decision of the university and the university officials in the relevant Balkan country and is announced on the website beforehand. The proficiency exam is conducted with face-to-face and supervised in the countries where the student candidates reside.

Table 2: Balkan Programs Proficiency Exam Centers

Proficiency Exam Centers	
Bulgaria	Plovdiv, Kardzhali
Kosovo	Prizren, Pristina
Macedonia	Gostivar, Skopje
Albania	Tirana
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Sarajevo

Student candidates should choose the exam center in Table 2 at the pre-application step. However, in special cases, it may be decided according to the status of the students who will take the exam in these centers. For example, if a student who chooses Skopje for the selection exam wants to take the exam in Prishtina due to his/her special situation, his/her request is fulfilled by giving opportunity to the student depending on the number of spare exam booklets.

The proficiency exam is not for elimination. On the contrary, it is aimed to decide whether the student candidates are qualified to follow the open education programs. The proficiency exam consists of two parts which are Numerical Ability Test and Verbal Ability Test. Each section contains 40 questions. The general ability section is also called a quantitative section. In the general ability section, students answer the information about quantitative information. There are questions based on the basic concepts in mathematics and science and quantitative thinking skills. The subject matter knowledge is also called the verbal section. This section focuses on questions of understanding and interpretation on the basis of Turkish and social sciences. The proficiency exam is prepared in 3 different languages: Turkish, English and Arabic.

During the 2017-2018 academic year, new programs of which all courses are in English and Arabic were opened. The proficiency exam for the students who will take these programs is done in English and Arabic. The proficiency exam in English and Arabic consists of two sections with 80 questions. The questions in the numerical ability section are mainly quantitative and mathematical and the verbal section includes the questions about mainly the grammar of English or Arabic. Candidates with a score of 180 or above in this exam gain the right to enroll in programs in English or Arabic. The languages of the programs in Table 1 are Turkish, English and Arabic. Students have to take exam in the language parallel with their program language. A student who chooses the International Relations-English program has to succeed in the English Proficiency Exam.

The date and place of the proficiency exam are announced on the university website. Students are expected to bring their exam entry documents in order to take the exam. Exams are usually held

on a single session on Sunday, and they all start and end at the same time in the exam centers listed in Table 2. Finally, for each academic year, the proficiency exam is held only once.

The higher education areas that the student candidates want to study consist of two groups; associate degree and bachelor's degree. Associate degree programs consist of 2 years; that is, 4 semesters. Undergraduate programs consist of 4 years; that is, 8 semesters. Candidates who get 150 and above from the proficiency exam are eligible for Associate Degree Programs and student candidates who get 180 or above are eligible to register for Undergraduate or Associate Degree Departments and Programs. There is no restriction on student quotas in Balkan programs. Therefore, there is no ranking among the students depending on the proficiency exam. Candidates who pass the relevant minimum passing scores can register for the programs they choose.

Second University

For the transition to higher education, you can enroll in the open education system through the second university without retaking the exam. If candidates are active students in a higher education institution in Turkey or graduates of a higher education institution they can apply for the second university as an alternative. If the graduation of the student is from overseas universities the degree should be certified by the Council of Higher Education. The point here is that the preferred department should not be the same as the previous department. For example, a student cannot choose the Department of Finance as a second university if s/he graduates from the Finance program or is still active student. However, s/he can choose all other programs.

For the preference in the second university, those who continue in or graduate from associate degree programs can prefer only associate degree programs. Those who graduate from or continue in the undergraduate program can choose to pursue all programs of associate degree or bachelor's degree.

The Enrollment Requirements

In order to enroll in Balkan programs, having the citizenship of Bulgaria, Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia Herzegovina is required. Citizens of other countries who live in these countries, whose citizenships are in different countries, should have a residence permit for at least six months. The residence permit is mainly requested for students to take the exams held by the university for at least one semester. Otherwise, students may not be able to participate in exams and there may be different problems such as discontinuation in their education. In order to prevent this, this rule is applied. Those who do not have the nationality of any country or who do not have a residence permit cannot enroll in the programs even if they have passed the proficiency exam.

Those who have received sufficient points in the proficiency exam should pay the tuition expenses determined by the university for the relevant year. The tuition fee is determined based on the use of resources required for carrying out all kinds of educational activities in the relevant period. Students who have graduated from high school or equivalent schools must have a certificate of equivalence. The equivalence for the graduation documents are operated by the Education Counselor of the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey.

Candidates with relevant documents can enroll in the registration centers of the university. The enrollment dates are announced to the students on the web page of the institution.

Education

In programs abroad for Balkan countries, education is carried out on European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The credit system consists of two periods: fall and spring, and the courses are determined in semesters. One midterm and one final exam are scheduled at the end of each semester. Each semester, students can select up to 45 ECTS from the course list. Also, students

determine the number of courses to be taken. In order to continue the selected courses and to benefit from the student service, re-registration is required in the first week of the related semester. Students must be successful by taking at least 120 ECTS credits in associate degree program and at least 240 ECTS credits in undergraduate program.

The programs carried out on the basis of the credit system consist of 4 semesters if they are associate degree and 8 semesters if they are undergraduate programs. In this respect, the fall semester in the associate degree programs consists of 1st and 3rd semesters, and the spring semester, of the second and fourth semesters. In the undergraduate programs, the fall semester consists of the 1st, 3rd, 5th and 7th semesters, and the spring semester, of the 2nd, 4th, 6th and 8th semesters.

The credit system is applied based on the semester system. For this reason, students are expected to achieve the courses they have taken. As the concept of class does not exist, the students are not mentioned as freshman, sophomore, junior or senior. However, the fall semester courses can be taken in the fall semester and spring semester courses can be taken in the spring semester.

Study Period

All programs conducted on the credit system are based on semesters. However, there is a maximum period of study to benefit from student rights. Within this period, they can benefit from the students' rights. In cases where the study period is exceeded, the student's registration is not deleted, s/he can continue his/her education but cannot benefit from the student services except for the exams.

Associate degree programs consist of two years (four semesters). However, the student has right to study for four years (eight semesters) for associate degree, starting from the semester of enrollment. Undergraduate programs consist of 4 years (8 semesters). The student has right to study for seven years (fourteen semesters) for undergraduate programs.

To re-register and continue education during the related academic year depend on the preference of students. If they do not renew the register, they become passive students. Students are not allowed to take the exams during the period when re-registration is not done. However, the semesters during which the student does not re-register are included in the maximum period of education.

The Obligations for Course Attendance

There is no requirement to attend physically most of the courses in Balkan programs abroad. However, there is obligation for some courses to attend their activities, make practices and internships. Students who do not fulfill the attendance requirement or who are not successful in the practices for a course cannot take the final exam of that course. Tourism and Hotel Management is the only program that requires internship in overseas Balkan programs of Open Education Faculty as of 2018-2019 academic year. In this program, the internship period is 45 days and it is compulsory to do internship before graduation. Students cannot graduate even if they have achieved other courses without doing this internship. In this program, students can do their compulsory internship in one sitting in any semester after the final exam of the second semester. Students can do their internship in hotels, holiday villages, travel agencies, universities, guest houses or practice hotels with Tourism Certificate. Students find internship venues by themselves. They report this to the internship commission of the university. Internships are done at the facilities that the Commission considers appropriate. Students who work continuously in tourism institutions, which are considered appropriate for internship, can document this and do their internship in the same institution.

Passing a Course

As a result of the exams, 30% of the midterm exam and 70% of the final exam grades are taken and "Final Grade" is calculated. In the test exams of multiple choice questions, for each test prepared of five-choice questions, one quarter of the wrong answers is extracted from the number of correct answers. The exam grade is calculated by multiplying the result obtained and the score value of a question (Anadolu Üniversitesi, 2019b). In the open education system, except for some programs, laboratory courses and practice courses, the threshold value of the final grade is 30. If the students cannot get 30 points out of 100 for a course, FF is given as a letter grade. If the grade is 30 or higher, the scores of the students are converted to normalized z values and students are assigned letter grades. In order for students to be successful on a course basis, they should take notes above FF and keep their GPA at 2.00 and above.

Assessment and Evaluation

It is explained under the title of education that the programs are carried out based on ECTS. As the system is on semesters, two exams, midterm and final exam, are held in each semester. Students attend these exams for each course they have chosen in the relevant semester. The dates when the students will take the exam are announced in the academic calendar section of the web page of the institution.

Students who cannot take midterm exam within a semester can take the final exam. There is no prerequisite for the final exams. Students take the exams in the exam centers of the countries demonstrated in Table 2. Students are required to print out the exam entry documents on the student automation before each exam. The exam entry document includes the information of country, city, building, hall, date, time and about which courses to take the exam. The exam organization for students is conducted by the center of Anadolu University. It requires much work as it is at international level. For these reasons, students are required to take the exam in the written place on the statement of exam. For the students who do not take the exam, make-up exam is not done. In particular, students who wish to take the exam in different places by changing the exam center are advised to visit the exam center one day before the exam. The rules of the exam which should be followed in each exam are determined by the administrative units of the university and the hall staff carries out the exam according to these rules.

One mid-term and one final exam are conducted face-to-face with proctoring in each semester. It is carried out by exam proctors in exam halls. Most of the exams are based on multiple choice questions. However, exams based on different types of questions are carried out since 2016. In the courses determined by the faculty, different questions such as open-ended, short-answer, true-false and matching may be included. As of 2018-2019 academic year, there are also courses with both multiple choice and open-ended exams.

The Features of the Exam

Students' exams are scheduled as four sessions in the morning and the afternoon on Saturday-Sunday. The exam of each course consists of 20 questions and 30 minutes are given for them. In the exams which are carried out as mid-term and final exams, two types of documents are used, namely question booklet and answer sheet. If there is a test with open-ended questions in the exams, there is a third document with an open-ended answer sheet.

The answer sheet contains columns for each course. The response to each question should be marked in the corresponding column. Depending on the number of students, more than one type of booklet can be used in exams. The questions have only one correct answer for each. Therefore, questions with more than one marking are considered incorrect. In the courses prepared as multiple choice test, answer keys are evaluated with optical readers in computer environment. The principles

determined by the relevant boards of the University shall be taken into consideration in the evaluation of exams. Students should be successful in all exams for each course. Otherwise, they cannot fulfill graduation requirements. The dates and practice principles of the exams are determined by the related unit's board of directors and announced in the academic calendar section on the web page.

In the courses with open-ended questions, the evaluation is carried out differently. Students are given an open-ended answer sheet for related courses. The students write their answers to the questions given in the exam booklet on the open-ended answer sheet. After the exam, all the answer sheets are scanned through optical readers. All open-ended answer sheets are saved in computer as image files. The computer software developed for the evaluation of open-ended questions sends each answer sheet to two referees by hiding the student information. The blind review is applied in this assessment. The referees do not see the evaluations of the other referees. The scores given by both referees are averaged and the score is calculated. However, if there are extreme differences in the evaluation between the referees, the relevant answer sheet is sent to the department coordinator. The score given by the superior referee is taken as the final score.

All questions and correct answer keys are published on the web on the first working day following the weekend when the exams are conducted. Students can object to both the exam questions and exam results within 3 working days. Objections are made via student automation. They may object to the questions they think are wrong. Similarly, they may request re-evaluation of the exam score by objecting to the exam results.

Graduation and Diploma

The final grades of the students are calculated by their scores in the exams. Students who are successful in all courses reach the graduation stage. For graduation, at least 120 ETCS credits for associate degree programs and at least 240 credits for undergraduate programs should be taken and all courses should be completed successfully. However, the Grade Point Average should be 2.00 or above and the student must not have FF, YZ and DZ grade. The student who fulfills these basic conditions and other obligations is given the diploma for undergraduate or associate degree program (Anadolu Üniversitesi, 2019a).

The diplomas of the students who meet the graduation requirements are prepared in approximately 20 working days. However, the students who have compulsory internship or laboratory practice course can get their diplomas after documentation of their internships or completing their laboratory practices. Our graduates or their agents can apply to the Registraton Centers of Open Education Faculty with which they are affiliated with the student ID/identification card and get their diplomas in return for signature. Anyone other than those cannot get diploma. Diplomas are not sent by mail or shipping to the student's address or official institutions they want (Anadolu Üniversitesi, 2018a).

The diplomas of students in Balkan programs are sent to the liaison centers of Open Education Faculty in their countries. Graduated students cannot get any documents related to the graduation such as interim certificate of graduation or education certificate except for diploma. If the graduated student wants Apostille for diploma it is done on behalf of students in Turkey and sent to the Balkans.

Diploma Supplement is a very important document especially for the recognition of diplomas abroad. The Diploma Supplement is an international document containing detailed information on the program, such as the degree of the related program, courses and credits. Diploma Supplement is prepared depending on students' demands. If the student requests this document, it is prepared and sent.

Another issue is the documentation of the success in the courses taken. Transcript is a document that shows the success of the students during the course of the program. The relevant document is available at any time after graduation.

Another document showing the achievements of the students is the Honor and High Honor certificates. If students take courses of at least 30 ECTS in any semester and succeed in all the courses they take, they will also get a certificate of High Honor if their grade point average is 3.50 or above and a certificate of honor if their grade point average is between 3.00 and 3.49. The Honor Certificate and High Honor Certificates of the students are published in the student automation. Students from this section can access their documents.

Learning Environments

The main learning material in open education is textbooks. There are books for each course in the programs except the practical and some courses. In the exams, students are responsible for the concerned books. The textbooks are prepared by lecturers who are specialized in their field. In the design of the books, an instructional design based on the student's self-learning is adopted. Textbooks are offered digitally (PDF) to students. Books are converted to other formats such as HTML5, ePUB, and Mobi as well as PDF so that students can easily access from different sources. Depending on the parts they are responsible for each course, students will have access to these books throughout the semester. Students can access the books via e-campus system.

The system called e-Campus is a large learning management system (LMS). All students in the open education system follow their courses through this learning management system. Students can access their courses via <https://ekampus.anadolu.edu.tr/> by logging in with student numbers and passwords (Anadolu Üniversitesi, 2018c).

This system has not only the course book but also different materials. On the e-campus system, the supportive learning materials such as the unit summary, exercise, test, solved question, essay exam, unit videos, interactive video, live courses, leaf test are provided on a course basis. Each textbook generally consists of 8 units. Each unit varies between 25-35 pages, depending on course. Students are responsible for the first 4 units in midterm exam and 1-8 at the end of the semester. As each course has a specific book, the different contents are offered in the system. The unit summary section on the e-Campus system contains a few pages of summary for each unit. These are the lecture notes for students to remind of the unit. With the exercise and test questions, students can test themselves before the exam. In addition, in the essay exam section, they can form exams and take them by the different questions in the database. Thanks to these kinds of exams and exercises, they can see their wrong questions and improve themselves. The students can get together with the instructor of the course through the live lectures (e-seminar). For each course, students can ask their questions to the instructors by getting access to the e-Campus system on the specified day and time.

Student Support Services

All processes of students enrolled in Balkan programs are coordinated by the registration centers and the Open Education Faculty. All kinds of topics related to student services are managed by the AÖF Registration Centers in "Plovdiv" in Bulgaria, in "Prizren" in Kosovo, in "Skopje" in Macedonia, in "Tirana" in Albania, in "Sarajevo" in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkey Open Education Faculty Central Office. Some documents needed by the students may need to be prepared by the center. For this reason, students should get in contact with the registration centers in their country and get information. The contact information of the relevant registration centers (Anadolu Üniversitesi, 2018a, p. 14) is given in Table 3.

Table 3: Registration Centers for Balkan Programs

AÖF Registration Centers Contact Information	
Bulgaria	Hristo Dyukmedzhiev Street No: 25 Plovdiv / Plovdiv Phone: (00359) 32262232
Kosovo	Remzi Ademaj Nr. 53 A Prizren Phone: (00377) 44926193
Macedonia	Braka Ginovski Br: 1 Gostivar Phone: (00389) 42272777
Albania	Tirana Yunus Emre Culture Turkish Cultural Center Tirana
Bosnia and Herzegovina	International University Of Sarajevo, Sarajevo Phone: +38733957478

There may be changes in the contact or address information during the time when the students are studying. This information is particularly important in determining the location of exams and re-registrations. Therefore, students can update this information via student automation. At this point, registration centers in Balkan countries also help students. Students can also update this information through the call center.

In the Balkan programs of Open Education Faculty, the procedures for midterm or final exam start about 1 month before the exam date. In Balkan programs, the change for exam center will be valid for the next exams if it is made after beginning the organization of exams. For this reason, students should check the update dates for exam dates and exam center while changing the exam center via the website and student automation.

The call center is an important support environment for the students of the open education system. They can call 0850 200 46 10-19 (10 lines) from Turkey or abroad. All kinds of information about student services are transferred to the students by the call center.

Another part of the student support service is a short message service (SMS). Students get SMS for important dates, important information etc. However, the mobile phone numbers of the students in the automation system should be up-to-date for this service.

Support environments for Balkan students are quite extensive. Therefore, students enrolled in this program can get support for any issue through different sources. As an online support environment <https://aosdestek.anadolu.edu.tr/> stands out in this sense (Anadolu Üniversitesi, 2019c). The questions and answers from topics such as registration processes, internships, exams, student services etc. are offered in different categories. Students can see frequently asked questions and the questions and answers in the database. Students can also post questions via the tab of ask new question. The system directs the question to the relevant department through moderators. Questions are answered within 48 hours at the latest.

Another support environment used intensively by students is e-mail. The e-mail account of Open Education Faculty's Student Information Center is aofbilgi@anadolu.edu.tr. Students or candidates in the Balkan program can ask any questions by e-mail. Here, detailed answers are given to incoming e-mails. Additional information may be requested from the students by the information center in order to make detailed examination according to the questions of the students. Thus, more clear answers can be given to the questions.

There is no transfer among programs in the open education system. Therefore, if the students want to enroll in a different program, they have to apply again according to their registration type. A student who is enrolled in a program should deregister the old one in order to enroll in a new program. Individuals cannot register multiple programs simultaneously. For the deregistration, the student should apply to the Balkan OEF Registration Centers by themselves. Any relative of the student, including the first degree, cannot deregister.

Student ID cards are prepared and sent to the relevant Balkan registration center in the semester they register. Here, students can receive student IDs in return for signature. Every student enrolled in Balkan programs can benefit from the free e-mail service offered by the university. After completing the registration process, the student can activate the e-mail account identified for them via automation. An e-mail account with the extension @aof.anadolu.edu.tr is defined for students. They can also benefit from other services offered by the institution via this e-mail account.

One of the services that students can benefit through the e-mail account with the extension of @aof.anadolu.edu.tr is Microsoft Office 365. In this context, students of the Balkan program have the right to use Microsoft Office Word, Excel, PowerPoint, OneDrive for Business, Outlook, OneNote, Access and Publisher. Students access these software via the cloud platform. They can access via e-mail accounts on <https://portal.office.com/home>. Students can install up to 5 of these products on their personal computers (Anadolu Üniversitesi, 2019e). Another important part of this service is the cloud storage provided to students. They can use 1 TB of storage space with the application of OneDrive.

The support environments offered to students have been diversified especially through the use of social media. In this context, in order to support students through social networks the questions of students are answered on Instagram (Anadolu Üniversitesi, 2019d), Facebook (Anadolu Üniversitesi Açıköğretim Fakültesi, 2019b) and Youtube (Anadolu Üniversitesi Açıköğretim Fakültesi, 2019a).

Conclusion and Suggestions

As open and distance learning become increasingly widespread, the opportunity to implement in different geographical regions is increasing. In this sense, the process that started with the Western European programs for Open Education Faculty continues in the Balkan geography. Providing individuals globally equal opportunities with educational services is very important.

The number of open education programs in the Balkans investigated in the research seems to be less than the programs in Turkey. The programs, known as Balkan programs are selected among programs in Turkey. The number of programs can be increased by making analysis for needs in order to open different programs in the Balkan geography. It is recommended not only to increase program diversity in existing countries, but also to open programs in different countries. Programs in different countries can be opened in the Balkan geography where citizens can speak Turkish. Besides, the number of English programs based on foreign languages can be increased. However, it should be known that students should have the necessary language level to carry out the relevant education in foreign language.

The majority of the courses are in Turkish. Most of the individuals living in this geography speak Turkish at a level that make them complete their education successfully. However, the legal regulations in some courses may differ in Balkan countries. Therefore, these restrictions should be taken into account in program preferences.

In this study, it is seen that the Open Education Faculty system provides very important student services for students in the Balkans. On the other hand, learning environments and support services can be increased by the support of local units. Cooperation protocols can be signed with state institutions and non-governmental organizations to maintain education in different fields. Considering that the Balkan geography consists of developing countries, applied departments can be established to contribute to the labor force.

The promotional activities of the Balkan programs should be increased. The characteristics of programs should be introduced in the events such as education fairs and special meetings. In this sense, if the institution concentrates on different cooperations and promotions this will also increase

the demand of students. Especially secondary education students constitute the main target group. Getting information is very important for transfer them to open education programs after secondary school graduation. At this point, it is necessary to inform not only the students but also their parents ,so separate interviews can be arranged for the parents.

At a time of rapid development of technology, it was observed that different applications of social media were used in Balkan programs. Also, technology-based applications should be made for the assessment-evaluation system. In the current climate, midterm and final exams are carried out face to face and with proctoring. Some of these exams can be designed online. The online exam should be applied by technical and legal efforts in terms of institution, organization of exams in different geographies is time consuming and costly. By the online exam, the institution will be able to implement exams more easily. This will also be received favorably by the students since increasing technology-based applications will attract the attention of the target group planning to register.

Different application models can be designed with developments in open and distance learning. Unique examples are likely to emerge thanks to the preparation of technological infrastructure and legal procedures. In this sense, it can be said that the Balkan programs of Open Education Faculty are open to development on this basis. Consequently, it is seen that open education is an important education opportunity for the people living in the Balkan geography.

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