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## Distance higher education policies in turkey: Teacher training by letter

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### Abstract

The aim of this research is to reveal the view towards teacher training by letter, one of the teacher training policies in Turkey. For this purpose, case study, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. In order to reach the research findings, a detailed literature search was carried out, and in the data collection and analysis processes, attention was paid to ensure that the data were meaningful and consistent within themselves. In addition, content analysis of the data obtained in the research was carried out. According to the research results; We see that around forty thousand teachers are trained through distance education institutions established under the Ministry of National Education. From the point of view of teacher training, it is possible to say that the system is blocked due to the problems experienced in the functioning of the system, such as the inability to create the desired quality at the level of the students in proportion to the quality of education, the insufficient conditions for education, the lecture notes and exams are not delivered to the students or they are delivered late. Although the practice of teacher training by letter has the feature of being a distance education model applied in the history of Turkish education, the practice could not be continued for a very long time.

**Keywords:** Teacher, distance education, politics

### 1. Introduction

While technological developments and the effect of knowledge on societies have caused rapid developments in almost every field in the world, people have searched in different fields in order to keep up with this rapid development. This search of mankind has led to many developments in the scientific field. Mankind has always cared about educational activities in this historical process in which it has developed and tried different models for the dissemination of education in the social field <sup>[1]</sup>.

Education has been interpreted in different ways by people individually and socially, individually and publicly, and due to its nature, it has taken part in different activities, especially in developing countries, based on different duties and responsibilities. This activity process is a process that continues throughout a person's life and exists in every aspect of a person's life. In this process, curricula and activities have changed in line with the objectives. Although learning by living is important in lifelong education activities, it is known that education is the most accurate guide in the processes of understanding and making sense of life. While people can make inferences about how and in what way they will behave in the face of any event or situation, they can also regulate their emotion, thought and character development processes <sup>[2]</sup>.

Today, education has gradually changed its face with the effect of new communication technologies. However, this development has occurred as a result of a pile of accumulations in the historical process. Distance education and its formations are developments that affect human beings as a result of years of work. Distance education, which started with letter teaching practices in the 1700s, has evolved over time in the light of developments in science, technology and education and changed its form. In this sense, we see that distance education has transformed from newspaper and letter education to radio, television and video education, from computer aided education to web-based education in the historical process. However, the most crucial developments in distance education have been experienced with the development of internet technologies <sup>[3]</sup>.

Distance education is a system in which teachers and students in different physical spaces interact with the help of various communication technologies and carry out teaching-learning activities in order to provide education services to wider masses and to provide equal opportunities in education <sup>[4]</sup>.

Distance education, on the other hand, is a planned form of education in which students and teachers are brought face to face in different ways in a virtual classroom environment by making use of the possibilities of technology, without requiring students to be physically where they are. Distance Education is a teaching method in which communication and interaction between those who plan and implement educational studies and learners are provided from a certain center through specially prepared teaching units and various environments in cases where classroom activities are not possible due to limitations in traditional learning-teaching methods. With distance education, service is provided to all willing students at all levels and ages. In practice, literacy, primary, secondary, vocational school, adult education, associate degree, undergraduate and graduate education are provided <sup>[5]</sup>.

Educating teachers and increasing the quality of their education is one of the issues that education systems take into consideration. The use of new technologies in education is encouraged in many countries of the world. Competencies related to the teaching profession are undergoing a great transformation with the developing technology. It is necessary to benefit from the opportunities offered by rapidly changing technologies in the development of professional standards of teachers. In this process, there is a need for fast and flexible programs that will contribute to the professional development of teachers. Distance education and open university applications will make an important contribution to the professional development of teachers such as building, open and distance learning, among the opportunities offered by developing technologies <sup>[6]</sup>. From this point of view, in this study, the letter teacher training system, which is one of the various ways and methods offered by distance education, will be discussed in detail.

## 2. Materials and methods (Times New Roman, 12, Bold)

This research was carried out on the basis of case study which is one of the qualitative research methods. The case study makes a holistic description and analysis of events that are limited to a specific time and place by means of the inductive method, from a historical perspective <sup>[7]</sup>. Case study is a methodological approach where a system is examined in depth using multiple data collection to collect systematic information about how that system works and performs <sup>[8]</sup>.

In order to reach the research findings, detailed literature research was conducted. In this context, the Presidency State Archive, the Library of the Board of Education and Discipline, the periodicals and university libraries in the Presidency of the National Library were scanned. The data obtained with the categories and codes formed through the findings were classified within themselves. In the data collection and analysis processes, attention was paid to whether the data were meaningful in itself. In this direction, the consistency between the purpose of the study, data collection tool and data analysis were constantly taken into consideration. In addition, content analysis was made according to the data obtained in the study.

## 3. Results & Discussion

It was seen that the first applications of distance education

started with the giving of written expression lessons by letter by some newspapers in the USA and Sweden in 1728 and 1833, but in the advertisements in these newspapers, mutual communication and how the lessons would be graded were not mentioned. For this reason, it is accepted that the first distance education application in the world was started in England by Isaac Pitman in 1840. Pitman taught students to write in shorthand in distance education applications and evaluated student achievements with grades. The first institutional applications started in Germany in 1856 by Charles Toussaint and Gustav Langenscheidt, and in the USA in 1874 at the University of Illinois Wesleyan, which gave both undergraduate and graduate degrees. After this date, it has been possible to see distance education applications in different countries of the world, especially through letter teaching <sup>[3]</sup>.

These developments in the world began to spread rapidly. Distance education applications for soldiers and individuals with limited access to school started in Japan in 1948. In this context, educational activities have been tried to be delivered to all segments of the society. It was possible to see the distance education studies implemented in Japan in different countries in the same period. After Japan, applications related to distance education have been seen in Italy, Canada, India, Poland, Israel and Spain. In 1949, the Faculty of Non-University Teaching was established in Australia for the course registration and consultancy processes of university students <sup>[2]</sup>.

In 1950, the Letter Education Center, which was established in China, affected the countries in the same geography over time. In the same years, it is possible to see organizations similar to the center established in China in Japan, Malaysia and India. Between 1966-68, while experimental distance education applications started in Poland, education opportunities were provided to students, especially through television. In the 1970s, the National University of Distance Education was established in Spain and it was tried to spread education throughout the country. Likewise, when the National College in England and the Hagen Open Education Universities were established in Germany in 1974, they started to provide services in terms of distance education applications in these countries. The studies carried out in this period formed the basis of today's distance education systems in many parts of the world, especially in Europe <sup>[9]</sup>. Especially with the spread of web-based education, this rapid development has been followed and implemented by many countries.

### 3.1 Distance Education Applications in Turkey

While distance education first came to the agenda in a meeting planned in 1927 with the aim of teaching illiterate Turkish citizens to read and write, this plan could not be implemented. Distance education initiatives in Turkey remained an idea until 1956 <sup>[10]</sup>.

After 1956, studies in terms of distance education gained momentum in Turkey. In 1960, a committee called "Letter Teaching Center" was established within the Directorate of Statistics and Publications <sup>[11]</sup>. Since 1962, this board has provided education, especially to children and adults who could not continue their education life, through letter teaching. As a result of the developments in technology, educational programs were prepared by TRT in Turkey in 1968 and started to be broadcast for the benefit of the society. Educational programs for all education levels were prepared by the Film Radio and Television Education Center

(FRTEM), which was established in 1973. In addition, the Non-formal Higher Education Institution (YAYKUR), which was established in 1975, has planned to publish educational programs in many different fields in the sense of distance education [12].

Higher education has been affected by these developments. In 1978, it was proposed to establish an "Open University" within the MEB for distance education in higher education. This proposal was only embodied in 1981 and Open Education Faculty was established within Anadolu University with the law numbered 2547 [5]. While open education faculties were established in other universities in the 1990s, open primary schools were opened within the Ministry of National Education. As a result of these technological developments in Turkey over time, it is possible to see applications related to distance education in public institutions, private enterprises and universities. Thanks to the technological infrastructure created as a result of these technological developments in the Ministry of National Education, he established the Education Information Network (EBA) within the scope of the Component of Providing and Managing Educational E-content and established a distance education center called UZEM [3].

### 3.2 Higher Education by Letter

The search for the right method in teacher training, which is one of the most important elements of education, has been one of the most important issues both in the world and in Turkey throughout the history of education. In line with the country's policies, the effective implementation of educational practices is linked to the training of trainers and trainers with appropriate methods and methods [13,14].

Throughout history, the most important task has fallen to the teachers, together with the family, in acquiring the necessary competencies for people to find a place in the social and social order. The fact that different forms have been seen throughout history in the process of training teachers, who have such an important mission, is due to the fact that education is a dynamic process. It is known that a formal education approach emerged in the education of teachers in the 17th century, after these forms such as training by the clergy and master-apprentice training. Since the 19th century, societies' perspectives on education have increased and studies have begun to train qualified teachers and to solve the existing problems in this field [15].

When we look at the history of Turkish education, both in the past and today, the problem of teacher training and teacher qualifications and qualifications continue to exist as a current issue where discussions continue. The studies conducted classify the main points that teacher training, qualifications and competencies focus on [16].

- Selection of teacher candidates,
- Training of candidates,
- Placement of candidates.

In order to evaluate and make sense of teacher training problems in Turkey, it is necessary to know the qualitative characteristics of the teaching profession. When we take a critical look at the problems of the teaching profession in Turkey, we can see that many people who did not graduate from a teacher training institution and did not receive formation work as teachers in schools until very recently. One of the most important reasons for this practice was that the necessary importance was not given to the professional knowledge adequacy required by the teaching profession and

that professional quantity was preferred over quality. Thus, teacher candidates, one of the most important elements of education, could not be selected from qualified students, could not undergo a qualified education, and in this case, the professional reputation of the teaching profession in the social order was damaged. In addition, teacher training and employment were constantly mentioned by the politicians of the period, but the system continued to be damaged by temporary solutions such as the appointment of teachers from outside the profession or from outside the field [17].

One of the teacher training policies in the Republican period was the practice of teacher training by letter. Higher education by letter has become a teaching model used in Turkey as well as all over the world. It was applied for the first time in Turkey by a private organization, FONO. In the practice that started in 1953, foreign language education was provided by letter [18]. The first applications in the public sphere started in 1956, with the Banking and Commercial Law Research Institute established by Türkiye İş Bankası at Ankara University Faculty of Law between 1958-1959 [19]. The widespread use of letter teaching throughout Türkiye coincides with the 1960s. First, a Letter Teaching Center was established under the Undersecretariat of Vocational and Technical Education, and its regulation was published in 1962 [20]. The Center was organized in 1966 as the General Directorate of Letter Teaching and Technical Publications. In 1974, changes were made in the structure of teaching by letter and its scope was expanded and the Center for Teaching by Letters, which has the capacity to provide education at all levels of education, was established [21].

In 1974, the idea of teacher training within the scope of letter teaching was put forward. This idea was justified by the administrators of the period for closing the current teacher shortage, for unemployed young people to have a job and to be removed from the streets, and for the CHP's election manifesto promised to enroll high school graduates in universities without an exam [22].

In the light of these reasons, while attempts were made to train teachers in higher education by letter, the scope was applied at other levels over time. Educational institutes, girls' technical, boys' technical and trade-tourism higher teacher schools were selected as the schools to be given higher education by letter [19].

Teaching by letter was started in the 1974-75 period, but the necessary legal arrangements were made in 1975. In 1975, "Regulation on Establishment and Working of Centers for Education by Letter" and "Temporary General Regulation of Higher Schools Subordinated to the Ministry of National Education Providing Education by Letter" were published [23]. However, the practice of teacher training by letter could not be continued for a long time. The center was included in the Non-formal Higher Education Institution (YAYKUR), which was established in 1975. Looking at the organizational structure of YAYKUR, it is possible to see that it consists of two parts: Open Higher Education and Formal Higher Education. It is possible to say that open higher education consists of external graduation, letter teaching, open higher education and non-formal education courses. When formal education is considered, it is seen that there are foreign language schools and higher vocational schools [24].

### 3.3 Letter Teaching Center

In order to carry out the works and transactions included in the regulation of the Center for Teaching by Letters, the "Learning Center Executive Board" was formed within the



organization of the establishment. This committee was composed of Undersecretaries, General Managers, School Managers and Representatives of the Board of Education [19]. Apart from the executive board, the organizational structure of the center includes the Director, Deputy Director, Deputy Directors, Heads of Departments, Branch Managers, civil servants and other officials. The Center Manager is defined as the official with the widest authority in the organizational structure. The Director of the Center was responsible for the planning and implementation of the works and transactions to be carried out by the center, and the execution of the presidency of the boards and commissions to be formed within the center. Other officials have been made responsible for fulfilling the duties defined by the principal for the healthy conduct of the activities of the center [23].

Organization of the Letter Teaching Center; It is divided into four sections: "Preparation and Development of Teaching Tools, Education and Training, Planning and Research, Technical and Administrative Services". A Head of Department has been appointed to carry out the work of each department. In order to ensure intra-departmental and inter-departmental coordination within the center, the "Letter Training Center Coordination Board" was formed, in which the Director, Deputy Director, Heads of Departments and, when necessary, other officials will participate [25].

Instructional Tools Preparation and Development Department carried out the preparation and development of the teaching programs to be implemented in the institutions that will provide education by letter, the preparation of the lecture notes and resource books to be sent to the students by mail, as well as the preparation and development of the resource books that teachers and students will benefit from. The Education and Training Department was more concerned with the procedures and principles of the practice, while carrying out the necessary studies for the realization of the targeted objectives, it planned the assignment of advisor teachers, undertook the processes of measurement and evaluation and the regular execution of the summer practice. While the Planning and Research Department was managing the research and development processes of the letter teaching system, it carried out the management and distribution of the educational tools and materials required especially for the letter teaching. In addition, while keeping the archive records of students and officials, he carried out the duties of internal and inter-institutional correspondence and budget preparation and implementation [25].

In the regulation published in 1975 under the name of "Temporary General Regulation of Higher Schools Subordinated to the Ministry of National Education that Provide Education by Letter" within the scope of Teacher Training by Letter, it is stated that higher education by letter; It is planned to be implemented in the departments of Mathematics, Turkish, Social Studies, Science, Foreign Language, Music, Art and Work, Physical Education of educational institutes, and in Higher Technical Teachers for Girls, Higher Technical Teachers for Boys, Trade and Tourism Higher Teachers' School and associate degree schools within these schools [26].

In this context, the selection of the students who will receive education in higher education practice by letter, the registration acceptance procedures and the distribution to the schools were carried out by the Ministry of National Education. Since the schools set their own admission requirements, students applied according to the prerequisites of the schools they want to enter. The list of schools where

higher education by letter application is carried out is given in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Institutions Training Teachers by Letter

No	School Name
1	Adana Education Institute
2	Ankara Gazi Education Institute
3	Ankara Institute of Foreign Languages Education
4	Balikesir Necatibey Education Institute
5	Bursa Education Institute
6	Diyarbakir Education Institute
7	Edirne Education Institute
8	Erzurum Education Institute
9	Eskisehir Education Institute
10	Gaziantep Education Institute
11	Isparta Education Institute
12	Istanbul Ataturk Education Institute
13	Izmir Buca Education Institute
14	Konya Selcuk Education Institute
15	Samsun Education Institute
16	Trabzon Fatih Education Institute
17	Uşak Education Institute
18	Ankara Boys Technical Higher Teachers' School
19	Ankara Girls' Technical Higher Teachers' School
20	Ankara Trade and Tourism Higher Teacher School

Planning in distance higher education by letter is divided into two parts as theoretical education and applied education. In the theoretical education, the program applied in the formal education department of the educational institutes was used. With the letter applied in education institutes, 3-year education was carried out in higher education and 4-year education in schools that train teachers in the fields of technique and trade-tourism. There was no difference in status between higher education and formal education students by letter, and even no phrase was written on the diplomas of higher education students by letter. While students who are successful in the higher education system by letter are given the right to enter formal education, students who continue formal education are given the right to enter higher education by letter [25].

### 3.4 Teaching the Courses in Higher Education by Letter

The lecture notes prepared by the teachers within the scope of the theoretical education and training process were sent to the students by post at the beginning of each academic year. The notes, which were prepared due to some problems in the delivery of the lecture notes to the students, started to be distributed from certain centers in the following period. In addition, resource books were prepared for the benefit of students and offered for sale in certain centers. Similar to formal education within the scope of higher education by letter, advisors were appointed so that students could carry out the processes related to education and training [26].

It was also decided to hold an exam in order to evaluate the success of the students in the letter teaching process. In this context, two exams were held in the middle of the semester and at the end of the semester, and the success grade of the student was determined based on the averages of these exams. In particular, it was preferred to use the test technique in the exams of Education Institutes. A commission was established for the formation of exam questions and the exams were held in institutions that provide education by letter [23].

In the practice of teacher training by letter, applied education is handled in two parts, A and B type. While students who were successful in all their courses in the beginning of the

semester could participate in applied education in the summer term, students who failed a single course in the following semester were allowed to participate in applied education [25]. In this context, applied courses;

- Four each for Turkish, social studies, mathematics and science, and foreign languages (actually 6 weeks by increasing the number of lessons per day); It has been decided that painting, music and physical education will be five weeks each.
- It has been decided to allocate these additional hours to branch courses by adding 18 hours a week, eight hours on Saturdays and two hours on other days, to the applications of Turkish, social studies, mathematics and foreign languages.
- The applications were made taking into account the hours in the programs in the education institutes.
- If the number of students to participate in the application is above the school capacity, the applications were in the form of two semesters and evening education. Summer practice was carried out for 5 weeks in the physical education department.

Students who were successful in the June exams were accepted to the summer applications. Students in higher education by letter studied for a total of 15 weeks, 5 weeks a year, excluding painting, music and physical education departments, while students in formal education received a total of 72 weeks from 24 weeks a year. When these data are evaluated, it is seen that there are very important differences between the application course hours of the students who continue formal education and higher education students by letter [17].

After the establishment of the Common Higher Education Institution (YAYKUR) in 1975, there have been some changes in the practice of higher education by letter. In this context, higher education business and operations were transferred to YAYKUR by letter [24]. In the 1974-1975 academic year, after the start of the application of letter teaching, two students were admitted to the Education Institutes and one academic year to the vocational and technical teacher schools. This has led to a decrease in the number of students over the years [18]. The number of students enrolled in the teacher training program by letter by year is indicated in Table 3 [25].

**Table 2:** Number of Students Enrolling in the Teacher Training Program by Letter by Year

Year	Male	Female	Total
1974-1975	34535	10522	45057
1975-1976	29255	10935	40190
1976-1977	21061	6155	27216
1977-1978	10522	3290	13812
1978-1979	5771	1200	6971
Total	101144	32102	133246

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that 133246 students received education in higher education programs by letter between 1974-1979. In the same period, 281976 students studied at the Education Institutes. It can be said that another reason for the decrease in the number of students after the first years of letter teaching is due to the requirement to be successful in all courses in order to move to the next grade in the first years of the practice. In total, 6384 people graduated from the higher education system by letter. It was not possible to reach the information on how many people among the

graduates practiced the teaching profession [25].

#### 4. Conclusions

The application of higher education by letter, which started to admit students during the period of Bülent Ecevit, gained a different dimension with the suspension of student admission after the establishment of YAYKUR during the period of Süleyman Demirel. The problems experienced in higher education by letter and the problems that arose in its functioning became the material of the political conflicts of the period. From the point of view of teacher training, it is possible to say that the system is blocked due to the problems experienced in the functioning of the system, such as the inability to create the desired quality at the level of the students in proportion to the quality of education, the insufficient conditions for education, the lecture notes and exams are not delivered to the students or they are delivered late [20, 22].

In this period, the practice of teacher training by letter was not only a matter of debate in the political environment, but also brought some discussions academically. It has been frequently stated that the inadequacy of the number of instructors in higher education at that time and the excess of the course load of the instructors, as well as the problems experienced by the students in accessing the lecture notes and exams, directly affect the academic success of the students. In response to these criticisms, the summer practice was implemented in order to eliminate the disadvantages caused by the mentioned problems [25]. However, these changes did not solve the problems on the system, the implementation of higher education programs by letter in Education Institutes was terminated in the 1978-1979 academic year, and the remaining students were transferred to Ankara Gazi Education Institute (Gazi Higher Teachers' School) and the practice of teaching by letter was thus terminated [5].

More than 40000 people have been given teaching diplomas by letter via higher education method. The teaching profession was used as a tool to employ high school graduate students who were idle as a result of political thoughts and policies. These students were employed in the public sector as university graduate teachers without any teaching formation [27].

The Ministry of National Education was also unable to provide the necessary in-service training to teachers who did not receive pedagogical formation. In the meetings held on the system, it was criticized that the students could not achieve any of the aims of the education system, and that the teachers did not receive the training to achieve their educational goals in the schools where they would work [27].

Despite all these criticisms, the practice of training teachers by letter is a distance education model applied in the history of Turkish education. The practice could not be continued for a very long time, and one year after it started in 1974, the admission of students to technical higher teacher schools for boys and girls and to education institutes after the second year was stopped. With the establishment of YAYKUR in 1975, letter teaching was included in this institution.

In higher education by letter, painting, music and physical education departments received face-to-face lessons for a total of 15 weeks, 5 weeks a year, and other departments received face-to-face lessons for a total of 12 weeks, 4 weeks a year. On the other hand, formal education students in education institutes received education for 24 weeks a year. In addition, the internship application, which we can count as one of the most important elements of teacher schools, was not included

in the application of teacher training by letter. All these reasons are considered as a practice far from the goals of training qualified teachers in terms of training teachers by letter in general and Physical Education Teachers in particular.

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