

DİJİTALLEŞEN YÜKSEKÖĞRENİMDE OTORİTE ALGISI

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ÖZ

Uzaktan eğitim ve eğitimde dijitalleşme Korona salgın döneminde, her zamankinden daha önemli hale gelmiş ve eğitimin yer ya da zaman gibi koşullara bağlı olmaması ve bu koşullarla kısıtlanmaması gerektiğini hatırlatmıştır. Uzaktan eğitimin yer veya zaman gibi koşullara bağlı olmadığı bilinmektedir fakat uzaktan eğitimin performansı ve çıktıları eğitici ve öğrenci toplulukların eğitimi nasıl uyguladıklarına bağlıdır. Burada otorite sorusu gündeme gelmektedir: pozisyonu gereği örgün eğitimde otorite olan eğiticiler uzaktan eğitimde de hala aynı konumlarını sürdürmekte midirler? Bu çalışma yükseköğretim ve özellikle uzaktan eğitim çerçevesinde eğitim ve iletişim yöntemlerindeki tercih değişikliklerini irdelemekte ve yükseköğretim kuşakları arasında otorite kavramında değişiklik olup olmadığını sorgulamaktadır. Dijital dünyanın etkisi ve koşulları doğrultusunda öğrencilerin eğitim süreçlerinde daha bağımsız ve otonom nitelik sergiledikleri gözlemleri üzerinden, danışma ve onaylanma ihtiyaçları olmayacağı, bu nedenle geleneksel otorite figürlerini gereksiz ya da gözardı edilebilir bulacakları hipotezi kurgulanmış; anket yöntemi ile iletişim fakülteleri öğrencilerinin eğitime bakış ve tercihleri belirlenmiştir. Bulgularımız, dijitalleşme düzeyinden veya kapasitesinden bağımsız olarak eğiticilerin otorite rolünün sürdüğünü göstermiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijitalleşme, Uzaktan Eğitim, Jenerasyon, Otorite.

PERCEPTION OF AUTHORITY IN DIGITALIZING HIGHER EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

In Corona pandemia times recently, digitalization and distance education became more important than it was at all other times, reminding us that education should not be restricted with and should not depend on conditions such as time and location. Although the distance education system is primarily known as independent from time and place, its performance and outcomes are dependent on how it is practiced by the teaching and the learning populations. Here comes the question of authority: due to its position, is the teaching staff still considered as the authority in distance education, as it was in the formal education? Within the frame of higher education, and distance education in particular, this study questions the preference differences in education and communication methods and investigates if the perception of “authority” has been changing, between higher education generations. The hypothesis was that the students of the younger generations seem to have developed as more independent and autonomous individuals in their education periods mainly under the circumstances and effects of the digital world, and that they are not in need of being consulted and approved anymore, therefore to find the traditional

authority figures as useless or at least negligible. A questionnaire was designed around the hypothesis and forwarded to the students of the Faculties of Communication in order to determine their approaches and preferences concerning their education. Our findings led us to conclude that the role of the scholars has not been minimized due to their digital literacy capacity and the authority role of the tutors is still continuing in the digitalization era.

Keywords: *Digitalization, Distance Education, Generation, Authority.*

INTRODUCTION

The process of education needs different partners, namely the teaching and the learning populations. Naturally, the teaching staff belongs to the older generation and the learning side consists of the younger. Till recently, the prestigious job of teaching made the academic staff the primary authority in higher education. During the last 3-4 decades, the methods of education have changed very fast due to the technical developments worldwide, particularly in the digital area. The digital tools are used by millions for many everyday-life issues and therefore also for educative purposes. It is a globally known and accepted fact that consecutive generations have conflicts due to their developmental features and conditions. Adaptation to the digital world and tools have become a prominent marker of generation conflicts in our era, giving way to the use of terms such as digital-literate (younger generation) or digital-illiterate (generally the older generation). The academic staff in higher education is considered to belong to the X-generation born between 1965 and 1981, during the reconstruction of Europe after the war. After war children know that they should work for living and they recognize authority. The main characteristics of the X-generation are being categorically hard workers than the digital generations Y and Z, and being less rebellious compared to them. The higher education students belong categorically to the so called Y or Z generation. The Y generation specifically has the features of being digital literate and is considered to be not only independent but also intolerant of authoritarian personality while the Z generation is known as totally against authority and as ‘ultimate rejecters’ of authority figures. They are ‘digital natives’, lazy, narcissistic, spoiled and recorded as “me-me-me generation”. Both Y- and the Z-generations are digital-literate and involved in technology in their everyday lives. They make their decisions on their own (Bal, 2017; Levickaite 2010; Prensky, 2010; McCrindle, 2010; URL-1).

AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

The main hypothesis of the study was that the diversification of information resources along with the digitization process enhanced and quickened the access to information and therefore changed the dominant role of the traditional means of ‘teacher’ in the learning process, and ‘parents’ in the family, who had used to need to be approved by the older until being a mature adult. The assumption was that the context of teaching and teacher has changed, and the importance of both of them has dramatically declined. Then, it was investigated whether our new generation students grew as more autonomous individuals than their older generations.

The study was based on the assumption that distance education students were more competent in terms of digital literacy than formal education students, with reference to other studies. Generations X, Y and Z were defined by time and conditions and different environmental effects, and the questions were classified, considering that the learners and trainers were mainly from different generations. It was observed that the trainers were predominantly from X, the learners predominantly from Y and Z generations. Based on this observation, the hypotheses have been prepared to include generational differences, and the positive or negative effects of these differences have been investigated.

The question in this study was whether these so called Y and Z generations in Turkey have really broken up with the conventional ties both in the meaning of their use of technology, their preferences of technological devices and also in their interpersonal dynamics; or whether they were still waiting for being approved by the older generations, meaning their parents or teachers who were there to criticize them and shape their way of experiencing things.

Within the scope of the quantitative research method, a questionnaire (addendum 1) was applied and the

reliability of the questions, structured with the descriptive statistics technique, was evaluated. An alternative correlation analysis method was used for evaluating the answers when the 5-step Likert Scale could not be used. Reliability analysis measured the consistency of the ordinal responses to the questions prepared according to a predetermined scale type.

FINDINGS

The 27 universities where the survey study was applied are shown in Table 1, and the department distribution of the participating students from all Faculties of Communication is shown in Table 2. Gender ratios and education types were designed in the survey to be close to each other, 52% as females and 48% males, 49% as distance education and 51% formal education. It should be assessed that the students represented one of the generations taken as a reference in our study.

Table 1. Participating universities in alphabetical order.

Surveyed Universities		
Afyon Kocatepe University	Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University	Kocaeli University
Akdeniz University	Çukurova University	Maltepe University
Amasya University	Dicle University	Mersin University
Ankara University	Erzincan University	Namık Kemal University
Atatürk University	İnönü University	Plato Vocational Higher School
Atılım University	İstanbul Aydın University	Sakarya University
Beykent University	İstanbul University	Süleyman Demirel University
Bingöl University	Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University	Trakya University
Celâl Bayar University	Kırıkkale University	Zirve University (later named as Gaziantep University July 15 Campus)

Table 2. The distribution of total participants according to their departments.

Department	%
Public Relations and Advertising	40.2
Radio, Television and Cinema	16.4
Journalism	12.6
Public Relations	8.4
Press and Publishing	6.2
Digital Media	4.3
Advertising	4.2
Communication Design and Management	4.2
New Media	3.1
Visual Communication Design	0.4
Total	100

Students were asked if they communicated with their instructors outside the class hours during their study periods. A very high percentage (81.5%) of the formal education group and a nearly high percentage (71%) of the distance education group answered positively. Communicating directly with the instructor even aside from the course hours is usual among formal education students but distance education students also showed a similar attitude with a considerable rate (Table 3). When it was not

restricted with obligations or rules set by the school or the instructor, the most preferred way of communicating with the instructor outside the course time was still a face-to-face interview in the formal education group. E-mail was of the top preference for the distance education group but was followed in the second place by face-to-face interviews again. When the total of the students were evaluated, face to face interviewing was preferred as the first option with a rate of 27.1% as shown in Table 4. The expectations of the students from their instructors for more supportive contents are given in Table 5, showing that only 4.7% had a strict and 11.1% a general expectation from the instructor for more materials, and the rest was content with what was offered by the instructor. The distance learning students received the highest amount of support from video and audio content using YouTube in the first place and then Wikipedia. The same ranking was valid also among the formal education students (Table 6).

Table 3: Distribution of student responses regarding whether there is communication between the student and the instructor outside the course hours.

	Distance Education Students		Formal Education Students		Total	
	Number	% within group	Number	% within group	Number	% within total
Yes	265	71	317	81.5	582	76.4
No	108	29	72	18.5	180	23.6
Total	373	100	389	100	762	100

Table 4: Preferred tools for communicating with the instructor outside the course hours (students could choose more than one option).

	Distance Education Students		Formal Education Students		Total	
	Number of responses	% within group	Number of responses	% within group	Number of responses	% within total responses
Face to face interview	230	25.4	299	28.5	529	27.1
Phone	137	15.2	146	13.9	283	14.5
Email	236	26.1	278	26.5	514	26.3
Social networks	181	20	204	19.4	385	19.7
WhatsApp	96	10.6	99	9.4	195	10
Voice chat tools	16	1.8	21	2	37	1.9
All	8	0.9	3	0.3	11	0.5
Total	904	100	1050	100	1954	100

Table 5. The frequency of needs of students for visual or audio content other than the instructors offer to support the courses.

	Distance Education Students		Formal Education students		Total	
	Number	% within group	Number	% within group	Number	% within total
Always	24	6.4	12	3.1	36	4.7
Usually	36	9.7	48	12.3	84	11.1
Sometimes	122	32.7	113	29	235	30.8
Rarely	105	28.2	152	39.1	257	33.7
Never	86	23	64	16.5	150	19.7
Total	373	100	389	100	762	100

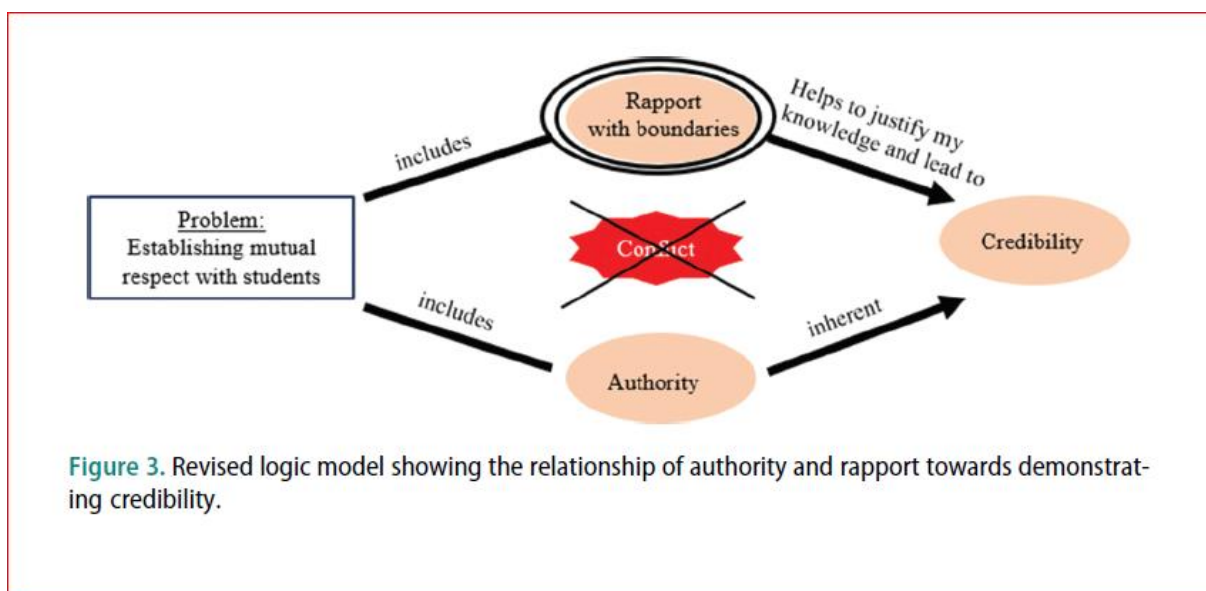
Table 6. Student preferences for reaching contents to support their courses in case of need (students could choose more than one option).

	Distance Education Students		Formal Education Students		Total	
	Number of preferences	% within group	Number of preferences	% within group	Number of preferences	% within total
YouTube	323	50.8	332	53.9	655	52.3
Wikipedia	181	28.5	189	30.7	370	29.6
Podcasts	17	2.7	11	1.8	28	2.1
iTunesU	12	1.9	13	2.1	25	2
Moocs	16	2.5	19	3	35	2.8
Academic articles	16	2.5	8	1.3	24	1.9
Google	12	1.9	12	2	24	1.9
Vimeo	20	3.2	10	1.6	30	2.4
Adobe	14	2.2	6	1	20	1.6
Ponopto	8	1.2	3	0.5	11	0.9
investopedia	4	0.6	3	0.5	7	0.6
Facebook / Twitter	4	0.6	3	0.5	7	0.6
EBSCO	7	1.1	3	0.5	10	0.8
Wiley	2	0.3	4	0.6	6	0.5
Total	636	100	616	100	1252	100

THE EDUCATOR IN THE CONTEXT OF AUTHORITY

Authority is a kind of a relationship reminding us of a cognitive bridge between the student and the educator. On the process of learning students should follow steps on this cognitive bridge. The steps taken by the students and the process organized by the educator should be considered as a cognitive process of learning enabled by the figure of authority which is the educator as the mediator of the learning process.

According to Andrea Phillips and Meredith Park Rogers (2020), power plays a role in any mentor-mentee relationship in education. The purpose of their self-study was to examine an internal conflict, the lead author was feeling about her credibility to teach pre-service elementary teachers when she was similar in age to them and had no K-12 teaching experience. This complexity was especially apparent to Andrea Phillips as she strongly valued mutually-rewarding positive relationships with students, and felt those relationships challenged as she needed to show authority. They also gave findings from an earlier study of Rodriguez, Plax, and Kearney in 1996, to emphasize the mediating role of educator in the cognitive process of learning and point to the relationship between immediacy and learning— teachers who show immediacy in their relationships with students lead to students valuing the learning task at hand. This value for the learning itself brings about increases in their cognitive learning.



Source: Phillips A & Rogers P (2020)

The survey on another study in the United States, asked social science teachers in low and high minority schools to respond to the five-part question “How much actual control do you have in the classroom at this school over the following areas of your planning and teaching: selecting textbook and other materials; selecting content topics and skills to be taught; choosing which parts of the curriculum to emphasize in your instruction; selecting teaching techniques; evaluating and grading students?” .. This study defines the importance of teachers’ instructional authority by these items that measure control over the selection of textbooks, content, curriculum, teaching techniques and evaluation of students. (Hong and Hamot; 2015: 225–241)

Veck studied the mediator role of educators and their relationship with their students paraphrasing Hannah Arendt’s argumentations on the authority, participation and roles of them in the process of education in 2013. Arendt (1993) took students as young adults in an established world, who require the protection and guidance of an older generation for their future survival (Veck, 2013: 36–41).

CONCLUSION

Within the scope of this study, nationwide sampling and evaluation of formal and distance education students in faculties of communication in Turkey were surveyed. Our assumption was that the students of Y and Z generations have high thek accordingly to observe if the current ease of access to information has changed the traditional dominant role and authority of the instructors. It has been assumed that their counseling position would have declined already but in accordance with the results of this study, this point seemed as a matter of discussion.

Face to face relationship with the instructor was still the most preferred communication method in the formal education and the second preference within the distance education group. However, within the distance education group during the survey, it was implied by some respondents that e-mailing was the preferred method dictated by their instructor who set the rules of communication between them, and this may surely have affected the e-mail preference to be in the first place for them although face to face interviews followed in the second place. Therefore, we can easily conclude that face to face relationship was found as important as it was in the earlier times for the whole student body, and that the students did not give up the authority of the instructor altogether, still giving importance to the face to face consultancy.

It is revealed that the students have a commitment to get approval from authority figures and that this has turned into an uninterrupted need. It is obvious that the family approval is a need for children and adolescents, but it has been reflected to the higher education process as a need of approval from the instructors not only for educative purposes but as a kind of permanent digital or even face to face connection need. This seems as a parallel reflection of the ‘helicopter parenting’ (Gardner & Davis, 2014) concept. In this context where counseling is uninterrupted, the issue around the concept of helicopter parenthood can be reflected to the educational parenting as the recent process of students being bounded to their tutors, and should be discussed. The digital devices enabling the uninterrupted communication facilitate communication skills but the dependency on a permanent approval may be hindering them, on the other hand, from being an autonomous and independent adult.

While making his conceptualization, Prensky (2001) underlined the differences between the “digital natives” born into the digitization era and “digital immigrants” who have encountered with the digital world later in their adult ages (Bal, 2017). Our assumption that the Y and Z generations are more digitally literate implied that the individuals who grew up in the digitalization process have grown up as more autonomous and independent individuals. According to the findings of this study, however, the students seemed to become more and more dependent on an endless approval under the name of counseling. During digital multi-screen era, by default, they sustain to make their own decisions when there is any motivation coming from outside. Counselors, educators and tutors are in a position to motivate and push them to move forward since this is the expectation of the students. The older generations are in the position to decide, more than teach and advise. According to the general perception, this position seems to be authoritative as well. As a result of multiscreen widespread use of digital tools, enabling the permanent and ‘everywhere/everytime’ communication, recent generations tended to develop a kind of dependency and a never-ending sense of need to obtain approval. It seems that the younger generations are in a kind of an immediate neediness for ‘continuous acknowledgment’ similar to that of Castells’ (1996, 2005) conceptualization about the need for ‘continuous networking’. This kind of networking with the older generations can be defined as helicoptering, helicopter parenting for being a counselor instead of being a regular mother or father; and within the perception of this thesis, it can also be defined as being helicopter tutors instead of being regular teachers, professors, or counselors.

The role of the educators has not been minimized according to the generation differences and rates of digitization, or is not dependent on digital literacy capabilities of the different generations. Therefore, we can observe the importance and the “authority role” of the tutors as still continuing in the digitization era and digital natives are not more autonomous and independent than their digital immigrant parents and teachers.

As Veck refers Arendt’s view that any educator who stands before the young in full appreciation of the fact of natality, of the newness of the young in an established world, holds firm to a ground that is

between these young people, who require the protection and guidance of an older generation, and the world, which owes its future survival to them (2013). According to her, educators are able to appear to the young as “representatives of a world” for which they are responsible. She says that authority is the responsibility of the educators; authority to educate the young, an authority she carefully distinguishes from the qualification of a teacher, which ‘consists in knowing the world and being able to instruct others about it’ (Arendt, 1993, p. 189). In other words, Arendt’s concept of the educator is more inclusive than her concept of the teacher: the educator addresses the young, not merely as a specialist in a particular subject, but as a representative of the world itself. However, when the adults, the young look to for guidance, simply turn their backs on their responsibility for the world, the authority of the educator disappears and the potential of young people to renew the world crumbles. Arendt (1993), in an essay first published in 1958, claims that this conflict is a ‘crisis’ in education (Veck, 2013: 41-48).

We can conclude, that the role of the educators cannot be minimized even in the digitization era and even if there are more fatal differences between the generations, with the help of the literacy rates of digitization, it is not dependent on only digital literacy or differences between generations. The role of the educators should come from their ‘authority role’ leading their students to be more ‘autonomous’ and ‘independent’ than themselves, their digital immigrant parents and even their teachers.

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ELECTRONIC SOURCES

URL-1 <http://www.acikbilim.com/2013/09/dosyalar/nesiller-ayriliyor-x-y-ve-z-nesilleri.html>. Date of Access: 20.01.2021

(Addendum 1) *Survey questions

- 1) Your department / program?
- 2) Your class?
- 3) Your gender?
- 4) Your age?
- 5) Do you have a job?
- 6) How would you prefer the course contents to be presented?
- 7) State your opinion on the presentation of applied courses.
- 8) State your opinion on the presentation of the theoretical courses.
- 9) What are your expectations from digital instruments for your learning?
- 10) What is your opinion on the role of the instructor for your learning acquisitions?
- 11) Do you find sufficient the materials provided by the instructor to support the course contents?
- 12) Other than contents provided by the instructor, do you follow voice or video chat on the internet to support your lessons?
- 13) Other than contents provided by the instructor, which voice or video do you follow on the internet to support your lessons?
- 14) Do you communicate with the instructor except the class hours?
- 15) By which tools do you communicate with the instructor outside the course hours?
- 16) Which tools do you use to communicate with your classmates?
- 17) Which is most suitable for your access to information: first consult the instructor, or printed sources, or classmates; or apply to the internet?
- 18) What supportive tools do you need the most in practical lessons?
- 19) Which supporting tools do you need the most in theoretical lessons?
- 20) Which of the following suits you the best when making a decision about your education: decide yourself, or decide by consulting your parents or classmates or instructor?
- 21) What kind of resources did you use while preparing for the central university entrance exam?
- 22) Who investigated information about the university and department you applied for?
- 23) Which sources did you refer to, to decide about the department and university you applied for?

- 24) With digitization of higher education and ease of access to information, do you think the traditional role of the instructors have changed? Explain.
- 25) What are your expectations from digital tools for your learning process?

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