



E-Instructor Certificate Programme: Reflections of Participants¹

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Abstract

The evolving global economy, technology and professional development have created additional requirements for employees to gain new information and skills. This applies to all sectors, and the education sector is no exception. Therefore, there is a need to make best use of the available educational technologies for all teachers and educational trainers who work in the public or private sector, and to enhance the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process by utilising these technologies. The aim of this study is to introduce an e-instructor certificate programme and then evaluate the programme by examining the reflections of the participants. This qualitative case study is carried out with eight participants who enrolled in the e-instructor certificate programme at a private university in Ankara, Turkey. According to the results, it can be said that the e-instructor certificate programme met participants' expectations. The programme provided many benefits, such as the learning of new technologies, methods and programs, e-assessment and about distance education in general. Participants of the programme supported the choice of programme topics, which were deemed to be both important and popular.

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1. Introduction

The evolving global economy, technology and professional development have created additional requirements for employees to gain new information and skills. This applies to all sectors, and the education sector is no exception. Therefore, there is a need to make best use of the available educational technologies for all teachers and educational trainers who work in the public or private sector, and to enhance the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process by utilising these technologies. Moreover, it is essential for teachers in the e-education sphere to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills about teaching at a distance. However, those teachers often cannot find enough time for self-development in this area, due in part to their working conditions, work hours, and family responsibilities. At present, the preferred solution may be professional development programmes offered on the internet.

The aim of this study is to introduce an e-instructor certificate programme and then to evaluate the programme by examining the reflections of the participants. This certificate programme intends to develop teaching competencies of the participants focusing on using technology and material development via online technologies. As Misra (2010) noted, by offering innovative approaches, teachers will gain skills and capabilities to use technologies efficiently in order to meet the needs of the students.

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The e-instructor certificate programme consists of 10 subjects, completed over a period of 13 weeks. The subjects included are e-learning concepts and applications, message design and visual design principles and elements,

infrastructure in e-learning (LMS and video conferencing systems), e-course design and development, e-learning in communication and social networks, e-assessment, web-design, ethics and copyright, usage of interactive boards and tablets, graphic design and animation.

Learning materials are provided via the synchronous and asynchronous distance education programme, covering a total of 76 hours. For synchronous learning, live web-video conferencing is conducted using a virtual class management tool. The Open Meetings platform enables students and instructors to meet online through technologies such as video camera, headphone and microphone. For asynchronous learning, a Learning and Content Management System (Moodle) is used for the sharing of lecture notes, course materials such as presentations and video recordings, and for managing the teaching process, receiving assignments from students and for the provision of feedback to students.

Participants of the programme must then take an online exam after completion of all the subjects covered in the certificate programme. In order to receive a certificate, they are required to achieve a minimum pass mark of 65% in the exam.

2. Method

This qualitative case study is carried out with eight participants who enrolled on the e-instructor certificate programme at private university in Ankara, Turkey. Five participants were females and the other three were males. The mean age of the participants was 37, with ages ranging from 24 to 50 years old. When their professions were considered, five were teachers, one was an economist, and there was one manager and one technician. After completion of the course, nine open-ended questions were posed to the participants.

1. What are your reasons for preferring this e-instructor certificate programme?
2. Did the e-instructor certificate programme meet your expectations?
3. What benefits did the e-instructor certificate programme provide to you?
4. What do you think about the subjects involved in the e-instructor certificate programme?
5. What do you think about the evaluation process of the e-instructor certificate programme (assignments, exams, etc.)?
6. What do you think about the teaching methods, techniques and activities?
7. What do you think about Moodle and Open Meetings?
8. What do you think about shared learning materials (videos, presentations, articles, etc.)?
9. The e-instructor certificate programme was completed in three months - do you think this amount of time was sufficient?

Content analysis was performed using the data gathered from the open-ended questions. Each answer was read more than once, and then answers were coded and a frequency table created (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006).

3. Findings

When the reasons for preferring the e-instructor certificate programme were considered (Table 1), three main thoughts emerged. Six participants stated that they preferred the e-instructor certificate programme for personal and professional development, whilst two explained that they wanted to learn distance education practically, and one participant wanted to learn new technologies from CEIT instructors.

Table 1. The reasons for preferring the e-instructor certificate programme

The reasons for preferring the e-instructor certificate programme	#
For personal and professional development	6
For learning distance education practically	2
For learning new technologies from CEIT instructors	1

According to the opinions about meeting expectations of the participants, five participants stated that their expectations were met, while three mentioned that their expectations were only partially met.

Opinions about the benefits of the e-instructor certificate programme consisted of three main thoughts (Table 2). Six participants stated that they learned new technologies; methods and programs related to education, three participants stated that they had a chance to learn e-assessment types and lastly, two participants clarified that they understood how distance education should be implemented.

Table 2. Benefits of the e-instructor certificate programme

Benefits of the e-instructor certificate programme	#
Learn new technologies, methods and programs related to education	6
Learned about types of e-assessment	3
Learned about how distance education should be implemented	2

When the opinions about the programme topics involved in the e-instructor certificate programme were examined (Table 3), four participants explained that all of the topics are important, popular and that they are sufficient; one stated that the e-instructor certificate programme has intensive topics; and one student stated that the teaching hours of some topics could be reduced, whilst more comprehensive topics may be extended.

Table 3. The opinions about the programme topics

The opinions about the programme topics	#
All of the topics are important, popular and that they are sufficient	4
Intensive topics	1
The teaching hours of some topics could be reduced, whilst more comprehensive topics may be extended	1

According to the opinions about the evaluation process of e-instructor certificate programme (Table 4), many different thoughts emerged. Four participants stated that the period of e-exams was insufficient, four participants said that the research, projects and applications were quite useful, one participant stated that rapid feedback on assignments was more productive, one stated that the evaluation criteria was adequate, one explained that multiple choice type exams were inappropriate, and one stated that they had intense homework and lastly one stated that exams were difficult.

Table 4. Opinions about the evaluation process

Opinions about the evaluation process	#
Period of e-exams was insufficient	4
Research, projects and applications are quite useful	4
Rapid feedback on assignments was more productive	1
Evaluation criteria was adequate	1
Multiple choice tests were inappropriate	1
Intense homework	1

The participants had a wide variety of opinions about the teaching methods, techniques and activities (Table 5). Four explained that lectures could sometimes seem monotonous in distance education; three participants stated that practice and discussion were extremely useful, and one participant stated that the teaching methods and techniques were sufficient for understanding the programme topics. In contrast to these opinions, two participants said that they had difficulty with two actions such as following live sessions and doing practicals, and one stated that precautions should be taken in case of technical problems before performing screen-sharing.

Table 5. Opinions of teaching methods, techniques and activities

Opinions of teaching methods, techniques and activities	#
Lectures can sometimes seem monotonous in distance education	4
Practice and discussion were extremely useful	3
Teaching methods and techniques were sufficient	1
Had difficulty with two of the actions	2
Precautions should be taken in case of technical problems	1

When the opinions about Moodle and Open Meetings that facilitates distance education were considered, both positive and negative thoughts emerged (Table 6). Four participants stated that they found Moodle and Open Meetings useful, whereas four participants stated that they had difficulties when screen-sharing has performed, one explained that Moodle's interface design is not effective, and one other said that both Moodle and Open Meetings are technically problematic.

Table 6. Opinions about Moodle and Open Meetings

Opinions about Moodle and Open Meetings	#
Moodle and Open Meetings are useful	4
Had difficulties when screen-sharing has performed	4
Moodle's interface design is not effective	1
Moodle and Open Meetings are technically problematic	1

All the participants favoured the shared materials (videos, presentations, articles, etc.) in both systems and they stated that they were quite adequate and comprehensive. Finally, for the last question about the time required to complete the e-instructor certificate programme, all the participants stated that the time span of the programme was deemed to be appropriate.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to introduce an e-instructor certificate programme and then to evaluate the programme by examining the reflections of the participants. The intention of this certificate programme is to develop teaching competencies of the participants, focusing on using technology and material development via online technologies.

When the reasons for preferring the e-instructor certificate programme were considered, this programme was preferred for personal and professional development, learning distance education and new technologies. The reasons

for preferring the e-instructor certificate programme are not surprising, and this result is similar to the purpose of the programme's formation.

It can be said that the e-instructor certificate programme has met the participants' expectations. The programme has provided many benefits, such as the learning of new technologies, methods and programs; e-assessment types, and the implementation of distance education. Moreover some participants stated that they have since begun to implement what they learned on the programme into their schools. In this sense, Blomeyer (2006) stated that professional development for preparing qualified online teachers seems to have a positive effect on online student performance (as cited in Davis et al., 2007). Therefore, the success of the participants in the process might have a downstream effect on their students' achievement.

Participants of the programme favoured the programme topics, and found the topics to be important and popular. In fact, the topics covered in the certificate programme were carefully selected by experts in the field of educational technology in order to best equip the teachers and trainers with the most current topics to enhance their teaching competencies.

When opinions about the evaluation process were considered, they did not seem very pleased with the multiple choice e-exams. They were more satisfied with research homework, since they could be completed over a longer time period. The duration of the exams was set according to the number of questions; moreover the reason for the short duration of the exams was to reduce the possibility of cheating.

Longer lectures in distance education can be perceived as boring and distracting. Instead of this technique, students can become more active with different teaching methods, such as question and answer and discussion. Moreover, the learning process can be enhanced further still with the addition of collaborative/cooperative activities.

Some participants found the learning and content management and virtual classroom management tool useful, whilst the others were not in favour. Internet traffic, the features of personal computers, internet speed, and having technical problems may have contributed to the participants having thought negatively. Problems within the systems should be eliminated wherever possible, by considering the necessary suggestions and taking precautionary measures.

Goold, Coldwell and Craig (2010) stated that all teachers (experienced or novice) need support to constantly adapt and develop their knowledge and skills in parallel with developments of the technologies. For this reason, the e-instructor certificate programme offers a good opportunity for those who want to improve their competencies in education, to integrate technology in education, to develop technology-supported materials and to learn how to teach at a distance.

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