

## OPEN EDUCATION IN INTERNET DICTIONARIES AS A COMBINATION OF TECHNOLOGY, SOCIETY AND CULTURE <sup>i</sup>

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**Abstract:** Anadolu University Open Education System has existed to date as a steadily developing/growing system in views of both the number of programmes and instructional content and materials since it was founded in 1982. Various attitudes (positive or negative) towards the system have been adopted by the students and graduates in the meantime. Reviews of these attitudes and studies on their reasons are fairly rare.

With the proliferation of social media, hypertexts, developed with the voluntary participation of users, have acquired the characteristics of a database of perceptions, comments and attitudes representing different sections of society as well as their numerous functions.

*Ekşi Sözlük*<sup>ii</sup>, founded in 1999 as a format peculiar to Turkey and a collaborative structure providing an environment of free expression and broad participation, has ranked among the most used social media tools thanks to broad participation and access. It is observed that Open Education System has been subject of discussion under various and numerous topics and posts from its foundation to date. Thus, 16 years' experience is the point in question in this issue. This study is a content analysis conducted considering the feedbacks on the system, having departed from the idea that this experience may make it possible to draw inferences about the attitude towards the system of the community it represents. The study deals with the posts and topics about Open Education between 1999 and 2015.

### INTRODUCTION

Turkey was introduced to Open Education System in 1982, when Anadolu University began to offer education. Although there had been practices of distance learning (such as Yaykur, correspondence course) in the country before, it was not until Open Education System that it became widespread, popular and people became familiar with it; one may as well say that Open Education System became synonymous with distance learning. Various appraisal patterns have been identified through students and graduates alike in the meantime. One may think that these patterns of perception, some positive and some negative, have developed and even have undergone changes in time; however, the number of the surveys and studies on the reasons of the results is fairly low.

With the proliferation of social media, hypertexts developed with the voluntary participation of users, have acquired the characteristics of a database of perceptions, comments and attitudes expressing different sections of society as well as their numerous functions.

*Ekşi Sözlük* was set up as a social media environment in a format peculiar to Turkey in 1999. Soon it ranked among the most used social media environments with such participation and access that even its founder hadn't expected; its likes emerged and steadily proliferated. The open access website, matching up with public sphere functions with its collaborative structure enabling a participatory environment of free expression, has the characteristics of a leading design nowadays. One can write on whatever topic they wish in the website, defining itself "a sacred source of information". In this respect, items and entries on practically all topics in question are available

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<sup>i</sup> This study was summarised from the book "Yalın İsim Üzerinden Kapsamlı Açılım: Ekşi Sözlük'den Açıköğretim Okumaları" (Comprehensive Definition Through A Simple Title: Open Education Readings From *Ekşi Sözlük*) by the author.

<sup>ii</sup> "*Ekşi Sözlük*" literally means "sour dictionary" in Turkish.

online. Although the general style of the dictionary seems like a humorous approach towards topics in question and such style has influence on a few of the posts within the scope of this study, it has been rarely observed in the posts. In other words, the posts in question are not generally humorous statements; and they are statements, sometimes brief and sometimes comprehensive, expressing experiences, judgements as to life, problems, likes, and appraisals. It is possible to notice the dissenting manner, present in the main structure of the dictionary, in some of these statements, as well.

Both Open Education System and *Ekşi Sözlük* have been subjects of discussion in a great number of posts and topics. It has been observed that there are many graduates and students of the system among the authors of *Ekşi Sözlük* and that a large group of authors who are not directly related to the system have edited posts about Open Education System. What has been observed through the posts examined is that the educational level of dictionary authors is generally tertiary education, and that they are composed of well-educated professional groups.

### AIM

It is obvious that Open Education System has been subject of posts and threads in numerous and various topics from 1999, when it was opened in *Ekşi Sözlük*, to date. Thus, a 16 years' feedback on this topic is in question.

This study has been conducted, accepting this as the feedback on Open Education System, having departed from the idea that this experience may make it possible to draw inferences about the attitude of the community it represents towards the system with the analyses to be carried out.

### METHODOLOGY

This study is a web-based content analysis (*Ekşi Sözlük*). The main approach adopted for this analysis is the content-based approach. "Content-based approach is one of the approaches towards the analysis of the content used among internet users" (Çomu ve Halaiqa, 2014 s.27). In this approach, not users or authors, but the content itself is important.

### Population-Sample and Limitations

The sampling of the study is composed of the data from the items found as a result of the search performed in the context of Open Education System's different pronunciations format as *aöf*, *aof*, *açıköğretim ve açık öğretim* in *Ekşi Sözlük*, posts edited under these items, and that from additional contexts related to the system but not concerned with these contexts but can be found under *distance education, second university and Anadolu University*". There are 67 topics and 1266 posts edited between 1999 and Feb 15, 2015 within the scope of the study.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Recording units have been established with the data acquired through context search, and the smallest recording unit has been defined as a "post". The categories of topic and negative-positive attitude have been determined as analysis categories for the data gathered within the scope of the study.

As a result of the analyses carried out accordingly; six topics have been determined based on *Ekşi Sözlük* posts, and the posts present under the items in these topics have been examined in views of the attitudes.

## FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

As a result of the searches through the relevant contexts, the topics have been classified under six main groups:

1. Open Education: Comprehensive Definition Through Simple Title
2. Being a graduate of Open Education
3. Second University with Open Education
4. Being a student of Open Education
5. Distance Learning- Open Education Relation
6. Anadolu University- Open Education Relation

Presentation of these items in views of attitudes has been featured in Table 1.

### 1. Open Education: Comprehensive Definition Through Simple Title

The first one of the items within the scope of the analysis is the overview on the system handled under the topic “Open Education: Comprehensive Definition Through Simple Title Results”. It has been observed in the definition approaches, in which the system is generally overviewed, that the posts regarded as ‘negative’ account for 51 %, while the percentage of the positive posts is 24 % according to the results of Table 1. The percentage of no comment or only news posts found under this item is 25 %. Poor educational methodology and low levels of students’ qualifications in comparison to formal education have been shown among the reasons for the negative attitude. It has been observed that the posts under this topic have stemmed from the negative perceptions of the Open Education System, and have voiced these negative attitudes.

It is obvious that the advantages of the distance learning lie beneath the positive approaches to the system as a result of the comparison with the formal education. Enlightening explanations about the topic have been included in these posts, which properly deal with the existential justification of distance learning.

Topic Classification	Positive		Negative		No comment/ news		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Open Education: Comprehensive Definition Through Simple Title	152	24.0	322	51.0	158	25.0	632	100
2. Being a graduate of Open Education	168	62.5	73	27.1	28	10.4	269	100
3. Second university with Open Education	67	37.6	59	33.2	52	29.2	178	100
4. Being a student of Open Education	20	29.4	45	66.2	3	4.4	68	100
5. Distance Learning- Open Education Relation	21	30.9	28	41.2	19	27.9	68	100
6. Anadolu University- Open Education Relation	12	23.5	20	39.2	19	37.3	51	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>34.8</b>	<b>547</b>	<b>43.2</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>22.0</b>	<b>1266</b>	<b>100</b>

The definition approaches have been found to be based on the different components of the system, in addition to holistic view on the system, under the item in which how Open Education is defined under a simple title has been analysed and the highest number of posts have been edited. These have been found as follows according to the percentages of frequency of editing, respectively: overall view on the system, assessment and evaluation- pass and fail grading, support services, student affairs, exam organisation, learning environments, second university and graduation. These sub titles and approach rates are shown in the Table 2.

Although the percentages of negative and positive attitudes toward assessment and evaluation- pass and fail grading are close to each other, the percentage of negative attitudes is higher. With the changeover to the credit system in Open Education System, because bell curving may result in lower grades, this result has been regarded as ‘positive’ by a group, whereas the same result has been considered ‘negative’ by those who find it too easy. Various problems are said to have been encountered by students particularly in the period of changeover to credit system.

Support services and student affairs have been determined as two areas in which negative attitudes have been observed with a higher frequency. The issue of long queues in front of the offices especially during the registration and re-registration periods has been frequently mentioned as the main reason for negative attitude in this area. Furthermore, the failures occurring in the online system during exam periods have been mentioned among the negative appraisals.

Exam organisation has been determined as the topic having the highest percentage of negative attitudes among the topics handled in this context. As far as year 2015 is concerned, Open Education System administers at least four exams in an education year for undergraduate programmes, all of which one and a half million active students take in 107 different exam centres across the country. As exam organisation is a process which should be planned in a detailed way and carefully administered, it is made in accordance with some rules and regulations. The arrangement of exam venues for students is made on the basis of address information system. Nevertheless, the issue provoking the most intense criticism in the exam organisation context is to enter exams fairly far away from students’ residential addresses. The rate of negative attitudes is high in this topic for this reason.

<b>Table 2</b>						
Approaches on the basis of topics in the definition posts						
<b>TOPICS</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Observation</b>	<b>news.</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>%</b>
1. System (overall)	58	97	38		193	<b>30.5</b>
2. assessment evaluation- pass and fail gradin	39	48	57		144	<b>22.8</b>
3. Support services and student affairs	24	70	31		125	<b>19.8</b>
4. Exam organisation	6	46	10		62	<b>9.8</b>
5. Learning environm	14	12	-		26	<b>4.1</b>
6. Second university	13	3	7		23	<b>3.6</b>
7. To graduate	9	6	5		20	<b>3.2</b>
8. Others	12	17	10		39	<b>6.2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>158</b>		<b>632</b>	<b>100</b>

The learning environments offered to students in the Open Education System are printed materials, e-learning services, academic consultancy services, and TV programmes. Considering the appraisal of learning environments in the context of this topic, it has been observed that positive attitudes towards the topic have prevailed in the context of books and particularly e-learning environment. The failures in access to e-learning environments have decisive role in the negative attitudes.

It has been observed that the topic of second university has the highest number of positive attitudes among the topics mentioned in the Open Education definitions. The opportunity of second university has been mentioned as a chance by those who haven't been able to attend a department they desire before, and the issue has been approached by highlighting the advantages of receiving distance education. Positive contributions of the opportunity of second university to students in their self-improvement and their social standing have been emphasised in the relevant posts. It has been observed that few negative approaches to the topic are the thoughts of those who adopt negative view on distance learning and don't believe the benefits of having a second university degree.

The topic of graduate and graduation results as the outputs of Open Education System has been one of the subjects in which the positive views prevail. What the positive attitudes in this topic have in common is the grant of the equal rights to the university graduates by law; furthermore, the opportunity of short-term military service the system offered for men is particularly emphasised.

## **2. Being An Open Education Graduate**

The second most commonly mentioned topic after the definitions under the title of Open Education has been the subject of graduate-graduation. The way of approach to the issue of graduates and graduation as the outputs of Open Education System has been found more meaningful in views of the appraisal of the overall system because they have been focused on the results. The value attached or positive attitude towards the outputs and the contrary negative views have been seen as results associated with the system, as well.

The percentage of positive attitudes under this title (Table 1) has been found 62,5 %; that of negative attitudes, 27,1 %; the percentage of the pure news entries, 10,4 %. It seems that the level of positive attitude towards being an Open Education graduate has become higher with the observation and experiencing of the graduation offers, and this positive attitude has been expressed. In this context, the Open Education System has been appraised and found positive in views of having the same rights as the graduates of the other higher education institutions and the quality of the outputs of some higher education foundations. References to the negative prejudgements about the Open Education System have been criticised, and the prejudgements deemed to be wrong have been clarified.

The basic reasons for a negative attitude towards being an Open Education graduate are based on the discussion on the quality of formal education - distance learning, and already existing negative prejudgements.

The general conclusion of the detailed analyses of topics and posts in this context is that the view finding 'Being an Open Education graduate' valuable outweighs.

### 3. Second University with Open Education

The third of the analysis titles, whether it is within the scope of being a student, is the issue of “second university”, differing as a result of its mission and expressed under different titles. It ranks the third in views of percentage of post edition about the topics, too.

The opportunity of attending the second university with open admission, offered to students or graduates of higher education programmes, differs as a selection on a voluntary and optional basis. With its such properties, the system at least remains independent of the prejudgement of “integrating with the system without being able to enter a higher education programme”. Therefore, the attitude towards a second university opportunity included in the Open Education System is expected to shift. The context of second university has been analysed on the basis of this assumption, and the results have confirmed it.

As a result of analysing the attitudes towards second university with Open Education, it has been found out that the percentage of positive attitudes in Table 1 (37,6 %) is high in comparison to that of negative attitudes (33,2 %) and that there have been meaningful levels of pure news-information content posts (29,2 %).

As for the reasons for the positive attitude, it has been shown as follows: The opportunity of completing the programmes offered to those who have had no chance of attending before, the contributions of second diploma to personal self-improvement and social standing, and taking advantage of being a student again.

The reasons for negative attitude are that being a graduate of Open Education System is a disadvantage, that it has no contribution to personal self-improvement and social standing contrary to the reasons put forward among the positive ones, and that it places a huge burden on a person attending another programme (MA, PhD etc) at the same time.

### 4. Being An Open Education Student

Approaches to the topic “student and studentship”, the most important component of the system, have been considered in the context of “being an open education student”. In this context, while the percentage of positive attitudes is 29,4 % according to the results of Table 1, the percentage of the negative attitudes is 66,2 %.

The general conclusion of this context is that, in line with the student profiles of Open Education System, those who act aware of being a student in a higher education institution have been appreciated and their promotion has been supported. Again, with reference to the student profile, some negative attitudes have been expressed considering the student groups who underestimate their studentship in the system and exploit this state (as a reason for staying in Eskişehir or only for taking advantage of student discounts etc). Furthermore, it has been observed that negative prejudgements against the Open Education System have a decisive role in this view.

### 5. Distance Learning-Open Education relation

The fifth of the analysis topics is the relation between distance learning and Open Education. In addition to the investigation of main contexts, distance learning title has been examined for the purpose of determining how the content of this education has been commented on in *Ekşi Sözlük*. According to the Table 1, while the percentage of positive attitudes towards distance learning is 30,9 %, those of negative attitudes and no comment news have been found 41,2 % and 27,9 %, respectively.

It has been found that in the distance learning definitions there exist different approaches employed both from the characteristics of the methodology and present distance education practices; consequently, the appraisals have been separately examined in terms of practice and theory, and it has been observed that the negative attitudes are higher in both practical and theoretical terms. In *Ekşi Sözlük*, the practices have been examined both in comparison to the formal education and on the basis of the shortcomings of the mentioned or observed practices. At theoretical level, the educational methodology has been compared with formal education, and has been assessed in views of their strengths and weaknesses. As a result of the analyses under this title, it has been concluded that distance learning is an educational method which hasn't been fully adopted yet. In this regard, what should be examined in another study is how the view on distance learning shapes the attitude towards Open Education and how the practices of Open Education shapes the view on distance learning.

### **6. Anadolu University-Open Education relation**

The last one of the analysis topics is the relation between Anadolu University and Open Education. Open Education System is naturally a system associated with Anadolu University. In general, while negative views (39,2 %) outweigh in the attitude of the posts in this context (Table 1), the percentage of positive attitudes has been found 23,5 %.

In this context, how Open Education System is associated with Anadolu University has been investigated, and the association is as follows:

1. Mentioning Open Education, too, while defining Anadolu University, that means, accurately perceiving the system as a part;
2. Addressing Anadolu University only as Open Education or in a way only focused on Open Education, that means, wrong perception

According to the first context, when Anadolu University is considered as a superset of Open Education System, that means, when it is perceived with a correct positioning, it has been found that the number of positive attitudes increases. When Open Education System is associated with Anadolu University in the second context, this wrong perception is regarded as a negative state especially by the students in the departments of formal education (in the departments other than Open Education System) in that they can't explain themselves about the type of education they receive. Even if the number of posts analysed are not enough to make generalisations, the result of this heading is that "Open Education" is not well recognised and accurately perceived by a sector of the society. Likewise, it has been observed that such headings as "Open Education University" or "Mistaking Anadolu University for Open Education" have been opened about this topic.

### **CONCLUSION**

It would be a better approach to give a general overview of the study results taking different variables into consideration. The first of these is that the study results can only be generalised for the group *Ekşi Sözlük* authors represent. According to the researcher, the author group of the dictionary is composed of active internet users, most of whom are at higher education level and volunteer to participate in the social media environments. The number of users, rather than the authors, is significant in views of dissemination of the ideas written. The statistics indicate that the website may have ranked the third behind Facebook and Twitter in the number of users, and that the users aren't those who have entered the website once but have visited there continuously (ConnectedVivaki Business Intelligence, 2014). Although there is no data about the identities of the users, it is possible to deduce that they are composed of relatively young people who take part in the group of active internet users. All the posts about Open Education are made available by these

users. Thus, this may be thought to play a role in the perception of a huge mass other than the author group.

Assessing the attitude towards the topics of being a graduate of and a student in Open Education, it will be an accurate approach to take into consideration the attitude towards the higher education across Turkey as well as Open Education. Although this comparison is so broad as to be the subject of another study, the topic explicitly expressed in the posts within the scope of the study has been discussed in views of the education qualities of some universities, as it has been handled in terms of graduation of a formal higher education programme in Turkey and limited employment opportunities. Approaches related to the topic have been further discussed under numerous titles such as “Being a student in Turkey” or “being a university student”.

There is no available data about the open identities including the states of studentship of the authors of the dictionary. However, the impression received from all the posts within the scope of the study is that generally the positive attitudes have been displayed by the active student groups and a group of people who have no relation with Open Education have agreed on these positive attitudes. In line with the qualifications of the target group of distance learning, this group, who may be called ‘the outsiders’, are aware of the students particularly both working and studying in the system because of domestic and economic reasons, and they have shaped their attitudes on the basis of this awareness.

The most significant problem of the active Open Education students, whose aims are to graduate from the target higher education programme, is that they remain within the system with the idea that the negative attitudes towards the system, they are involved in, diminish the value of their studentship and graduation, and thus they are unfairly treated. That means, the real students are adversely affected by the negative attitudes repeatedly expressed by means of such tools as social media. Likewise, the positive attitudes and different voices have impacts through this network of dissemination and interaction, too.

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