OPEN AND DISTANCE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING: A CONTENT ANALYSIS STUDY

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Abstract

This paper presents results of a content analysis of articles in the field of Distance English Language Teaching. In order to be able to reach the results, we examined the articles published between 2002 and 2012 in 4 different Journals which have high impact factor. This research uses a content analysis method, which is one of the qualitative research methods, with an aim of finding the topics of the articles, their samplings, their methodological dimensions and analyzing their results and showing their trends. During the research process key words such as English Language Teaching, Distance English Language Teaching, and Distance Foreign Language Teaching were used. After the research process, 30 articles were reached. Then the obtained articles were examined in detail and a coding procedure was also applied. As a next step, it was decided to use 15 of them for the analysis. The selected articles were analyzed using three variables which are research titles, sampling and research diversity. Results indicated that the most common titles used in the articles published between 2002 and 2012 were teaching methods and implemented technologies. This is followed by affective dimension and perception. As sampling diversity mostly teachers and university level students were participated in the studies. The last variable results showed that the articles examined have much more qualitative studies than quantitative ones. Especially they have experimental studies. It is thought that this paper will be beneficial in terms of shedding light on prospective studies. A content analysis with different variables and journals will make it easier to draw a framework about studies carried out in this field.

Keywords: Content Analysis, Language teaching, distance learning.

INTRODUCTION

Up to the date various different approaches in education systems have been drawn on. One of these approaches is open and distance education. Basically, open and distance education is referred (Keegan, 1996) as a system in which the teacher and the learner are located in different locations and it includes all teaching methodologies that are used in different learning levels, school and classroom management, planning, guidance and the organization of these matters (Holmberg, 1989). Accordingly, Simonson, Smaldino, Albright and Zvacek (2012) defined open and distance education as a learning process in which learners are at a distance of their peers and learning resources in terms of time and/or place , and in which the interaction among learners and learning resources is carried out thanks to distance communication systems. Similarly, according to Moore and Kearsley (2005), distance learning, is a process which is conducted with different Communication Technologies and which is planned and programmed intentionally in normal circumstances with events in different places of learning and teaching. Open and distance education takes away the time and place obstacle. The limitation of being in the same place at the same time in conventional education has expanded with the help of open and distance education. Open and distance education enables more alternatives such as synchronous, asynchronous and self-paced to answer different needs (Simonson vd, 2012). This situation has occurred in many different areas and so many education platforms have diversified with open and distance education approaches. One of these education platforms is foreign language education.

Distance Foreign language teaching is one of the most controversial topics. Therefore, foreign language teaching with open and distance learning approach has been the interest of many researchers. Foreign language teaching in different periods of open and distance learning (distance education with letter, distance learning with electronic communication tools, faculty of open education), which has been a controversial approach for over 100 years, has been one of the most handled topics (Aydın, 2011; Holmberg, 1989; İşman, 2008; Keegan, 1996; Moore and Kearsley, 2005; Simonson et al, 2012). Trajanovic, Domazet ve Misic-İlic (2007) reached a conclusion that shows positive affects of open and distance foreign language teaching on learners. Same study concluded that an open and distance foreign language teaching which is effective, efficient and attractive can contribute to the learners' language development and in the schools that have inadequate foreign language teachers or limited resources should apply this method with the aim of giving equal chance to their learners. In addition, it may also be helpful in teaching uncommon languages (Adıyaman, 2002). Johnstone (2007) has emphasized that interaction in language learning is important and has stated that with distance learning approach the association and cooperation can be achieved.

Knowing the researches in open and distance foreign language teaching will help the researchers and new studies with updating the current information. The systematical research and evaluation of previous studies save time and prevent the lost of resources. This research method has been called as content analysis in scientific papers.

Content analysis is a technique used to characterize and compare documents, interviews or cast recording of interviews. The purpose of content analysis is to define the contents of the participants' views. In this way, content analysis makes the researcher familiar with the data collected and makes it easier to use the data for further analysis (Altunışık, Coşkun, Bayraktaroğlu ve Yıldırım, 2010, p.322). Content analysis, used for composing descriptive information about a topic, ensures regular information for educators or content experts who want to deal with the topic analyzed (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz ve Demirel, 2012, p.241). Accordingly, content studies that are field based are seen as necessary. Especially the analyses that are up-to-date will be an effective instrument in providing resource and showing the direction to the prospective researchers.

Literature made in the field of open and distance education are examined and content analysis studies that analyze sampling categories, title analyses and research methods of the studies (Lee, Driscoll ve Nelson, 2004; Zawacki-Richter, Bäcker ve Vogt, 2009; Ritzhaupt, Stewart, Smith and Barron, 2010) have been achieved. Moreover, articles that show the results of language teaching studies have also been achieved (Johnstone, 2006; Johnstone, 2008; Uzunboylu and Özçınar, 2009). Likewise, there are studies analyzing foreign language teaching with open and distance teaching approach in the literature. Madyarov (2008) states that in his study he has investigated the studies that focus on open and distance foreign language teaching and he expresses that these studies concentrate on themes such as technological diversity, the importance of open and distance education in language learning, open and distance education in different cultures, online courses, content-based, task-based and distance language courses for specific purposes. White (2006) explains in his study, named Distance Foreign Language Learning, that there has been a significant rise in the number of studies carried out in this field for the last 30 years. He also emphasizes that this rise will go on in the same direction and predicts that with the usage of new technologies there will be studies with higher efficiency level in the field. In order to be able to provide the continuity of the content analysis studies, an up-to-date content analysis study which investigates the topics and research methods of the open and distance foreign language teaching studies is needed. This situation brings up the importance of this current study.

Purpose of the study
The aim of this current study is to show the trends, samplings, research methods, contents focused and results of the studies carried out between the years 2000 and 2012 in the field of open and distance foreign language teaching.

To that end, the content analysis of journals with high impact factor in the field of open and distance education has been carried out. The journals analyzed are Educational Technology Research and Development (ETR&D), British Journal of Educational Technology (BJET), Distance education (DE) and The International Review of

Research in Open and Distributed Learning (IRRODL). During the content analysis process, open and distance foreign language teaching was the topic used for the analysis and the answer for the following research questions was addressed:

(1) what is the distribution of the titles?

(2) what is the distribution of the sampling?

(3) what is the distribution of the research methods?

In the articles published between 2000 and 2012.

METHOD

Research Method

Content analysis needs a deep analysis of data collected and it also makes it possible to explore the themes and dimensions that are not clear (Creswell, 2008). Hence, this study employed a qualitative content analysis as research method to reach its aim.

Journal and Article Selection Process

In this study, 4 journals with high impact factor published in the field of open and distance education have been utilized. These journals are Educational Technology Research and Development (ETR&D), British Journal of Educational Technology (BJET), Distance education (DE) and The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning (IRRODL). Keywords like open and distance foreign language teaching, foreign language teaching, foreign language were used for literature review and 30 articles were reached. In the following phase of the study, the researchers evaluated the articles in terms of open and distance foreign language teaching theme and 15 articles were decided to be used in the content analysis. Table 1 shows the distribution of the articles according to journals and publication years. See appendix 1 for further information about the articles.

Table 1: The distribution of the articles

Journals	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	f	%
ETR&D	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	6,67
BJET	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	3	20
DE	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	1	-	1	2	7	46,67
IRRODL	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	2	-	4	26,67
Total	**1**	**-**	**-**	**1**	**-**	**1**	**2**	**2**	**-**	**2**	**-**	**4**	**2**	**15**	**~100**

Coding Procedure and Data Analysis

Documents were analyzed to collect data in this study. Studies starting with open coding to label the data can also be called as document analysis.In the next step, these codes are gathered under different categories and these categories form the themes (Creswell, 2011).

During the research process, each researcher coded the titles, research methods and the samplings of the articles under different categories. Then, these categories were compared to each other and contradictions were eliminated. At the end of this stage, technology, teaching methodology, affective dimension, perception, teacher competency and motivation were formed as categories of titles used in the articles. The sampling categories of the articles are documents, primary school learners, teachers, undergraduate students, course participants and course trainers. Finally, research methods categories formed in this study are non-experimental and semi-experimental studies of quantitative method and case study, document analysis of qualitative method.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This section presents the distribution of the articles according to the categories formed in the coding procedure.

Findings of the Research Titles

Table 2: The distribution of research titles

Title Categories	ETR&D	BJET			DE						IRRODL		
	2000	2007	2009	2011	2005	2006	2007	2009	2011	2012	2003	2006	2011
Technology	X	X	X	XX							X		
Teaching methodology	X	X		XX	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Affective Dimension				X	X		X						
Perception						X			X				X
Teacher Competency									X			X	
Motivation						X							

Under teaching methodology category it can be seen that the articles heavily focused on synchronous, asynchronous teaching, web-based/assisted teaching, computer based/assisted teaching and e-learning, respectively. Technology is another category that the articles concentrate on. Under this category learning management system, teaching software and social networks have occurred as codes. Other titles that were used in the articles are learner attitude, learner perception and teacher competency. One interesting finding of the study is only 1 article deals with learner motivation.

Findings Of The Samplings

Table 3: The distribution of the samplings

Sampling Categories	ETR&D	BJET			DE						IRRODL		
	2000	2007	2009	2011	2005	2006	2007	2009	2011	2012	2003	2006	2011
Documents								X			X		X
Primary Learners	X												
Teachers					X				X			X	
Undergraduate Students		X	X	X	X	X			X	X			
Course Participants					X			X		X			
Course Trainers								X					

Most of the articles use undergraduate students and teachers as samplings of their studies. On the other hand, only 1 study used primary school learners as its sampling.It has also been achieved that some studies focusing on open courses use course participants and course teachers as samplings.

Findings Of The Research Methods

Table 4: The distribution of research methods

Research Methods		ETR&D	BJET			DE						IRRODL		
		2000	2007	2009	2011	2005	2006	2007	2009	2011	2012	2003	2006	2011
Quantitative	Non-experimental					X		X					X	
	Semi-experimental	X	X	X	XX		X			X	X			
Qualitative	Document Analysis								X			X		X
	Case Study										X			

It can be seen in table 4 that the most frequently used research model in the articles published between 2000 and 2012 is experimental study. 3 of the studies are descriptive studies while only 1 of them is a case study. Table 4 also shows that BJET is the article that publishes experimental studies mostly. However, it is possible to say that in DE the distribution rate of qualitative and quantitative studies is closer to each other.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study analyzed 15 articles published in ETR&D, BJET, DE and IRRODL between the years 2000 and 2012 in the field of open and distance foreign language teaching. In addition, research titles, samplings and research models of the studies were used as samplings in the analysis process.

Most frequently used research titles are teaching methodology and technology. These categories are followed by affective dimension and perception categories. These results are in the same line with the studies of Madyarov (2008) and White (2006).

Another sampling used in this study is diversity of the samplings in the studies carried out in open and distance foreign language teaching field between 2000 and 2012.In this context, undergraduate students and teachers are the most frequent samplings participated in the studies.This point concludes that these researches are mostly executed in conventional face to face contexts.Yet, open and distance education is not a learning approach that only supports face to face education.With it's support for life long learning and as more and more learners prefer open and distance foreign language learning as their learning alternative (Johnstone, 2007; Trajanovic, Domazet ve Misic-İlic, 2007) , it will be more beneficial for further studies to rise sampling diversity and age range of the participants.

It is clear that quantitative studies are the most frequent studies in the articles selected. Especially, experimental studies are more common than others. The studies are generally supported with quantitative data analysis techniques. For further researches, to be able to do deeper analysis of the studies, using qualitative data analysis techniques and designing a mixed-method research model is suggested.

It is thought that this study will be useful for understanding the current situation of the open and distance foreign language teaching studies and shedding light on further studies. In case of doing similar researches with different samplings and different journals publishing open and distance foreign language teaching articles, it will be easier to draw a layout of the field.

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White, C. (2006). The distance learning of foreign languages. Language Teaching, 39 (4): 247-264.

Zawacki-Richter, O., Bäcker, E. M., & Vogt, S. (2009). Review of distance education research (2000 to 2008): Analysis of research areas, methods, publication, and authorship patterns. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, *10*(6).

Appendix 1: List of Journals and Articles used in the study
Educational Technology Research and Development (ETR&D)
Koolstra, C. M., Beentjes, J. W. J. (2000). Children's Vocabulary in a Foreign Language through Watching Subtitled Television Programs at Home. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 47 (1)*, 51-60. doi: 10.1007/BF02299476

British Journal of Educational Technology (BJET)
Cavus, N., İbrahim, D. (2009). m-Learning: An Experiment in Using SMS to Support Learning New English Words. *Biritish Journal of Educational Technology, 40 (1)*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8535.2007.00801.x

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Ros i Sole, C., Truman, M. (2005). *Feedback* in *distance learning programmes* in *languages*: *attitudes* to *linguistic faults* and *implications* for the *learning process*. *Distance Education, 26*(3).

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Zamorshchikova, L., Egorova. & Popova, M. (2011). Internet Technology-Based Projects in Learning and Teaching English as a Foreign Language at Yakutsk State University. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning, 12 (4)*. http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/845