THE STRATEGIC PLANNING (SWOT) ANALYSIS OUTCOMES AND SUGGESTIONS ACCORDING TO THE STUDENTS AND THE LECTURERS WITHIN THE DISTANCE EDUCATION SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, strategic planning has become one of the subjects that many institutions work on to ensure the intuitions' appropriate management based on realistic results. Therefore, this planning has to be taken into account and should provide planning direction on the bases of its results. Basically, the manager of strategic planning, leadership and strategic thinking and to act to help planners designed the tools, processes and concepts is a group. At the same time, the organization of the development and effective strategies will help to place.

The purpose of this research is to provide SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis and to present new suggestions based on the opinions of students in the distance education system. In this work, we have applied Survey Method. The study group has consisted of 70 students and 11 instructors of Mersin Vocational School of Higher Education (MVSHE). All the data was surveyed during the spring semester of 2009. In the development of the questionnaire, a relevant literature has been investigated. Also, expert opinion has also been provided for the survey materials and survey articles. The questionnaire is finalized according to the expert's opinion. The questionnaire was applied in the internet environment to both the students and the instructors. The outcomes of the survey have been evaluated quantatively along the direction of the survey's fundamental question: "What are your views on strategic planning (SWOT) of distance education?" The suggestions have been made about the distance learning education based on the findings of the survey.

Keywords: Distance Education, Strategic Planning, SWOT Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Rearrangement of educational environments, increase of teachers' qualifications, appearing of the approaches such as "life-long learning", "effective learning", "learning to learn" and "distance education" as a result of developments in science and technology make it necessary to question and develop the education system continuously. One of the factors ensuring this process is the strategic planning.

The concept of strategic planning was introduced during the World War II. It was first used in the context of military, and then it was applied in the business world. It was applied in higher education after 1970s and in other school levels after 1980s (Reiger, 1993). Strategic planning basically contains a group of instruments, operations and concepts arranged to help managers, leaders and planners to think and act strategically. It contributes, at the same time, to the development of organization and the establishment of effective strategy (Bryson, 1995). Therefore, strategic planning is crucially important for the organization for its development. Use of strategic planning in education differs significantly from application of it in other fields. Schools cannot be managed like private businesses (Callahan, 1996). Implementers must take part in the planning process while making strategic planning in the education. This is because of the fact that there must be cooperation, harmony, agreement and communication in the context of strategic planning. It is necessary to answer basic four questions while applying the strategic planning (DPT, 2003).

> Where are we?
> Where do we want to go?
> How can we reach the point we want to go?
> How do we follow and evaluate our success?

Another question can also be added to these basic questions: How can we develop our success? SWOT analysis answers the question of "where are we?"

The purpose of this research is to present the opinions and the suggested solutions of the students and the instructors in the distance education system within the concept of SWOT analysis. This research reveals strong sides, weak sides, opportunities and threats in Mersin University which takes distance education system as a model in some programs and departments. In addition, it includes suggested solutions.

In this regard, it is thought that this research will produce a significant contribution to the institutions that take the distance education system as model.

THE PROBLEM

The problem is what are the students and the academicians' opinions on the SWOT analysis at distance education system in Mersin University? To find the answers to this problem, the following sub items were questioned as well: Sub problems are here:

> What are the students' opinions on the SWOT analysis at distance education system in Mersin University?
> What are the academicians' opinions on the SWOT analysis at distance education system in Mersin University?

THE METHOD

The descriptive method is used in this study to determine the opinions of students and instructors in the distance education system. Descriptive research also takes into account the Description research, current events and conditions, relations with the earlier incident to explain the interaction between states (Kaptan, 1998).

Data for students and academic staff through structured open-ended survey questions have been obtained via a questionnaire in the Internet environment.

The Research Group
Working group of the study is the distance education students and the instructors of 2009 Spring semester of Mersin University. The questionnaire was applied to 70 students and 11 teaching faculty that were randomly selected.

Data Collection and Analysis
Open-ended survey questions were used in the data collection process. Three researchers were prepared the open-ended questions based on the related literature. Literature review and expert opinion were taken for study validity and reliability.

In the research, the SWOT analysis results and the suggestions about the solutions to some problems of the students in the distance education system was determined by qualitative analysis. In the Qualitative data analysis work, the "Qualitative Content Analysis" concept was used. The data were analyzed within three stages:

> ➤ definition of categories,
> ➤ (ii) presenting examples, and
> ➤ (iii) predetermination of the coding rules (Mayring, 1996)

Qualitative analysis was accomplished by 5 basic questions. The sub-themes and the codes were created by analyzing the different data. Sub-themes were identified and the codes for the frequency of the study items are presented.

Furthermore, the data was supported by taking the views of students and faculty members by direct quotations. Since the number of faculty members is small, direct quotations from them are shared.

RESULTS

First Sub-Problem Related Results
Below is information about the SWOT analysis.

Table: 1
The opinions of the Students within the
distance education system related to strong sides

Theme, Sub-theme and Codes	Frequency (f)
A.1.The possibility of having an education while working	
A.1.1. Noncompulsory attending courses	28
A.1.2. Supporting work-life	18
A.1.3. The time advantage	16
A.2. The possibility of distance education	
A.2.1. No time limiting	8
A.2.2. Introduced to all people at any age	14
A.2.3. The educational system of future	9
A.3. The course materials	
A.3.1. Videos	7
A.3.2. Course leaflets	3
A.3.3. Homeworks	2
A.4. Examination System	
A.4.1. Marks/Scores System	16
A.4.2. Homeworks	12
A.4.3. Serving some of the examinations on the net	4
A.4.5. Quality of examinations	2
A.5. Communication	
A.5.1. Communication with academicians	17
A.5.2. Communication with administrative personnel	8
A.5.3. Communication via written form	4
A.5.4. Provided communication facilities everywhere	8

Theme, Sub-theme and Codes	Frequency (f)
A.5.5. Easily reachable education	**5**
A.6. Quality of education	
A.6.1. Standardized education	**14**
A.6.2. Highly- developed in science and technology	**25**
A.7. Providing the chance of being employed	**13**
A.8. Computer	
A.8.1. The development of computer using skills	**11**
A.8.2. Being fond of computer	**7**
A.8.3. The importance of computer in everywhere	**9**
A.9. Individual development	
A.9.1. Enhancing the imagination power	**14**
A.9.2. The development of technical skills	**8**
A.9.3. General culture	**3**
A.9.4. Acquiring more knowledge	**13**
A.10. There is no strength side.	**21**

"It is a very ideal education style for us since we find environment to study whenever we want."

"Strong side of our department is that everything is operated with computer system and the system is developing constantly."

"Course materials are quite good. Especially some course videos are very beneficial. Distance education decreases the expenditures."

"It presents an education which allows to advance in the business life and to have better knowledge. This is because attendance is not compulsory."

Table: 2
The opinions of the students within the
distance education system related to weak sides

Theme, Sub-theme and Codes	Frequency (f)
B.1. Expensive education	
B.2. The insufficiency of educational materials	**12**
B.2.1. Insufficient course leaflets	
B.2.2. Insufficient Videos	**19**
B.2.3. Insufficient E- classes	**11**
B.2.4. Insufficient samples and tests	**7**
B.3. The insufficiency of communication	**8**
B.3.1. The difficulty of having communication with academicians face to face	**9**
B.3.2. The delay in receiving information concercing the instruction.	**9**
B.3.3. The difficulty of reaching a responsible person	**8**
B.3.4. The lack of social medium	**3**
B.4. Continuously changing system	**2**
B.5. Highly- rate of theoretical courses	**4**
B.6. Technological problems	
B.6.1. System-based problems	**10**
B.7. The difficulty of courses and examinations	
B.7.1. Difficult course contents	**9**
B.7.2. High passing marks/scores	**7**

"*It is very difficult to work and study at the same time. Therefore, it is very difficult to pass a course.*"

"We cannot reach the teachers directly and course videos are not as explanatory as we want"

"I cannot devote close attention to the courses; absolute teaching is not ensured with course notes; I always need someone to explain the subject to me."

Table: 3
The opinions of the students within the
distance education system related to opportunities

Theme, Sub-theme and Codes	Frequency (f)
C.1. The possibility of having an education while working	
C.1.1. Noncompulsory attending courses	**17**
C.1.2. Opportunity of not going to the school	**6**
C.2. No time and place limitations	**18**
C.3. The chance of finding a job and promoting	
C.3.1. Supporting career	**24**
C.3.2. To find a better job	**15**
C.4. The chance of being a university graduate	
C.4.1. Having a diploma	**10**
C.5. The opportunity of self- development	
C.5.1. More leisure time	**14**
C.5.2. Acquiring more knowledge on the profession	**12**
C.5.3. The prestige of being a university graduate	**8**
C.5.4. Benefiting from technology and innovations	**12**

"I have the opportunity to graduate by receiving distance education without making any change in my life."

"I work as a technician in the public sector. I am attending the distance education to be able to promote to engineering level."

"It provides time when applied properly. You both receive your education and maintain your life."

Table: 4
The opinions of the students within the
distance education system related to threats

Theme, Sub-theme and Codes	Frequency (f)
D.1. Working	
D.1.1. Insufficiency of time to study the courses	**33**
D.1.2. Work life	**28**
D.1.3. The problem of getting permission	**23**
D.1.4. Work medium	**18**
D.2. Family and environment	
D.2.1. Taking care of the children	**16**
D.2.2. The responsibilities at home	**20**
D.2.3. Inner -family problems	**14**
D.2. 4. Environmental problems	**19**
D.3. Course materials	
D.3.1. The insufficiency of course videos	**12**
D.3.2. Highly- rate of theoretical courses	**8**
D.3.3. The difficulty of comprehending the course leaflets	**14**
D. 4. Examination system	
D.4.1. Insufficient information on examination system on the net	**14**
D.4.2. The difficulty of homeworks	**5**

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D.4.3. The difficulty of examinations	15
D.4.4. Attending to school for some examinations	12
D.5. Communication problems	
D.5.1. Lack of communication in system	12
D.5.2. The difficulty of having communication with academicians	13
face to face	6
D.5.3. The delay in receiving the answers for the questions	8
D.5.4. Computer-based problems	11
D.5.5. The difficulty of transportation for examinations	9
D.5.6. The lack of interest of the personnel	
D.6. The problems of distance education system	18
D.6.1. Internet	10
D.6.2. Systematical problems	
D.7. Expensive education	16
D.7.1. High expenditures	14
D.7.2. Uneconomic	16
D.8. There are no threats.	

"School fees are too much. It is really very high when the tuition and the school fees are considered together."

"My work life and personal life (especially my relations to my children) increase my time problem, and therefore I cannot study sufficiently."

Table: 5
The opinions of the students within the
distance education system on suggested solutions

Theme, Sub-theme and Codes	Frequency (f)
E.1. The courses should be interactive.	
E.1.1. The dialoguing hours for the students and academicians ought to be in the non-working hours.	18
E.2. A technical support unit should be formed.	
E.2.1. The system should be fixed at once whenever a problem occurs.	8
E.2.2. The system should be more secure.	6
E.2.3. The on-line courses should be loaded to the system on time.	5
E.3. The quality of educational materials should be increased.	
E.3.1. The courses ought to be more visual.	4
E.3.2. The sample solutions should be increased.	15
E.3.3. The courses should be more daily.	4
E.3.4. The videos and course contents should be coherent with each other.	3
E.4. The face to face and phone communications ought to be optimized.	
E.4.1. An info related with the problems should be received at once.	7
E.4.3. Enlightenment should be more daily and fast.	12
E.5. The distance education should be more economical.	6
E.6. The international researches should be examined.	3
E.7. The in-service training for the academicians should be continuously provided.	
E.7.1. The academicians should be aware of the fact that the students of the distance education are adults.	5
E.8. Practical education should play an important role.	3

"Online support sections could be constituted in the matter of supporting the students. There could be a boot application which could answer the questions of the students.", "Courses can be more visual and therefore be more effective."

"Teachers make their chats during the day hours, but we cannot take part in these chats since we work during the day hours. Chat hours should be made after the working hours."

Second Sub-Problem Related Results
Below are the examples of opinions from SWOT analysis applied to teaching staff:
Examples of opinions of teaching staff related to strengths

"There is 7 years of distance education experience in Mersin University. The system in Mersin University provides students the opportunity of constant communication (hotline). The courses are taught with variety of visual aspects . The technical infrastructure is strongf"
"We are in good state in terms of software and hardware."
"A good team. Strong equipment."
"Having well confidence in the courses you teach."
"It is one of its strong sides that it offers opportunity for people from different regions of Türkiye and for people of different ages. They can have the education via computer technologies whenever they want without any time limit."

Examples of opinions of teaching staff related to weaknesses

"Absence of any counselor for preparation of course materials according to the distance education pedagogy – Fewness of synchronous education methods"
"There is content deficiency and communication problem with the student."
"Animation examples within the courses are not sufficient."
"We cannot have students' feedback about the lessons we teach."
"There are too many things which will be made as novelty in distance education for instructors to do (Personal). "

Examples of opinions of teaching staff related to opportunities

"Constant increase in student's demand in this matter; rapid development of distance education technologies-Instructors' become aware of this issue day by day and They take this issue more important"
"Life-long learning"
"To take part in national or international meetings, seminaries, conferences and workshops on this matter. To follow and apply new technologies. To cooperate and share knowledge with other universities that employ distance education in the national scale."
"To establish laboratories in lareg cities and to provide students requesting applied teaching with studying opportunities."
"Online education is an opportunity for us. We have the possibility to become a unit which provides the best service, which is preferred in the country and abroad with good quality of education. , and which is unique and pioneering in its field. "

Examples of opinions of teaching staff related to threats

"Course advisors' inability do what they have to do in the distance education management system, and therefore discouragement of distance education students"

"I see the distance education as a competitive area. Students put importance to the quality in distance education. I see the universities providing better education than us a threat."
"It is a threat for us that our students' enrollment may decrease because of the better service provided by other institutions."
"Financing, bureaucracy and related regulations."

CONCLUSION

The results of this study can be summarized as follows:
The students having education in Mersin University in the distance education format...

- ➢ ...mention that the strongest side of it is allowing to have education while working, and providing communication convenience.
- ➢ ...mention that the weakest side is to have deficiency of education materials and experiencing technical problems.
- ➢ ...mention that it offers opportunity to study and work at the same time, and to be promoted in their jobs in addition to finding a better job.
- ➢ ...mention that studying environment and business life are generally not convenient and the factors such as home duties, children and spouse can be obstacles to their education.
- ➢ ...mention that quality of education materials must be improved; courses must be made more interactive; and opportunity to participate in chat rooms during the evening hours must also be provided.

Lecturers giving the distance education in Mersin University ...

- ➢ ...mention that the strongest side of it is that they have the distance education experiences; they could address to everyone; and they have a good technical equipment and staff.
- ➢ ...mention that the weakest side of it is that course materials are not pedagogical enough; and they have insufficient communication with the students.
- ➢ ...mention that they see life-long learning, internet opportunities and national-international sharing and cooperation as opportunities.
- ➢ ...mention that they see the difficulty of application opportunities, competitive environment and financial problems as the threats.

It is realized at the end of this research that distance education system has certain problems in the current situation.

However, analyzing its strong sides and opportunities, it can be concluded that it is indispensable for achievement of the principles such as life long learning and equal opportunities in the education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ➢ Courses must be more interactive in the distance education system of Mersin University. To achieve this goal, necessary education and infrastructure must be established.
- ➢ Qualities of distance education materials must be improved. To do so, related people must cooperate with the teaching design experts.
- ➢ SWOT analyses must be made at certain intervals, and their results must be used in the improvement of distance education system.
- ➢ SWOT analyses must be made in every university such that national and international standards in the distance education must be established.
- ➢ SWOT analyses can be made also in the public and private sectors, and in that way the distance education studies with regard to the social needs could be guided.

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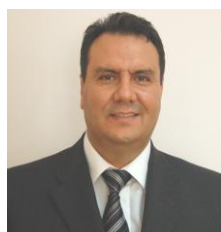
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