

New Media Based Learning Practices; Use of Social Networks, Wikis and Blogs at University Education in Turkey

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Abstract

The rapid developments in information and communication technologies, affecting every aspect of life at the end of the 20th century have led to a digital revolution which created a new virtual world including virtual offices, virtual stores and even virtual classroom environment. In this context, working, shopping, educational and learning practices have been transforming for decades. All of these developments and the new media tools provide individuals to reach information sources in an easier and unmediated way, enable instantaneous, interactive communication and information-sharing. Today the whole world of web technology, for the need of access to information in terms of providing enriched learning environments are becoming widespread use for educational purposes. Especially blogs and wiki technologies have supportive role in active learning, constructive learning, cooperative learning and group working learning methods in educational processes. Those social networks are also considered for their positive effects on students' critical, analytical, creative and intuitive thinking and learning skills while making a contribution in information society access as well. The aim of this study is to reveal how and at what rate the social network sites, wikis and blogs are used at the level of higher education in Turkey in general education activities. For this purpose, an online survey was conducted at communication faculties of universities across Turkey among academicians. As planned an exploratory study for this research, the survey was designed with open-ended questions. Research findings show that communication faculty scholars tend to use social networks to engage in personal communication and rarely blog for education purposes, mostly because of the absence of new media use skills. The paper offers the use of blogs for higher education planning model in order to disseminate academic knowledge and to provide a mutual interaction among scholars and digital age students as a challenge of new media.

Keywords: New Media, University Education, Blogs, wikis, social networks

Introduction

Information is the whole of what as a result of reading, research, observation and experiment is acquired and learned. The electronic device which increases the rapidity of information processing, does comparison and calculation, processes data, produces information, store the information is computer. With the help of computers, the information technologies which can store the required information at desired quantity, process them and produce new information are presented to the service of humanity. Information system, with its computer technology, infrastructure and human resources, should meet the needs and requirements of the business. Human beings, taking the support of information technologies, are innovative and on the one hand are reshaping the society. (Ertugrul and Keskin, 2010: 2).

As Postman (2006: 126) stated; "computers are being used by everyone or everybody is being used by computers", so among technological devices, computer technologies are the ones that are immediately separated and differentiated from others. In this sense, the widespread use of the computer itself can be easily seen.

In many other technologies, while people face with the consequences of technology, they can be involved personally on the results of computer technology. This is because while computer technology becomes the new basic dynamic of social functioning through interconnected networks, it is shifted effectively to new areas of use by users.

Being the most important extension and developer of computer technology, internet shows the feature of being the largest network that mankind has ever generated on earth. The interconnection of computers being far away from each other for miles through internet, has led the concept of globalization to become widespread and to be felt in households. According to Mattelart (2001: 9) through expanding the space of circulation of individuals gradually like other means of communication, the internet and computer technologies have accelerated the participation of individual communities to larger totalities; changed the material, intellectual and mental boundaries constantly. The interactive nature of internet technology becomes dissimilar to other types of communication through offering the individuals of information society the opportunity to interact during the process of communication.

Castells (2005: 124) suggests that this transformation rising globally with the development of information and communication technologies forms the "Network Society". Castells' definition of Network Society highlighting the information is a structure of a new social organization which is driven by information technologies, formed in information networks and spread to all spheres. This structure has affected the production, consumption and power relations as well as having formed an interaction shaped through culture among people. In addition to these, the structure of the network society constitutes new communication structures through interpersonal social relationships.

Developing computers, the internet and mobile technologies have led to the emergence of new media platforms having the feature of transactionality in a non-spatial and time-independent way. The social dimension of new media comprises the user generated content and the social media sites formed by the content's getting into circulation in the network that connects users to each other.

Mayfield (2009), divided the types of social media into 6 which are social networks, blogs, wikis, podcasts, forums, content communities, and microblogs. Websites which will be shown as examples such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Wikipedia, Apple iTunes, YouTube to social networks, allow individuals to communicate with their friends and share content through personal websites.

According to Mayfield (2009), features of being a human are closely related to social media. With the development of technologies, the decrease of costs and the simplification of the use in this field such as the fall of digital cameras, increase of access to high-speed internet; people have had the chance to spread their videos, thoughts, photographs, statements through creating their own content. Thanks to these features, social media sites have spread over the whole globe within a very short time. Social network media provide new opportunities for personal expression, creating communities of interest, collaboration and sharing.

Beryl and Michael (2010: 33-48) argue that there are differences between social networking sites and social media sites. While Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn and other similar social networking sites draw people of common interest together; YouTube, Flickr, Twitter and other social media sites are used to share user-generated content. Facebook is an online social network software allowing its users to connect with other users via private or public writings at different permission levels, join groups and share resources within the networks created by users. Similar to other online social networking sites (Friendster, MySpace, etc.), the users introduce themselves in an online profile, they make friends, and they can inform or comment on other people's profiles or social contents (Peluchette et al. 2010).

The rapid development of internet technologies has commenced tendency to computer-aided education processes. The utilization of computer and internet at student-centered environments supports the process of learning and offers new opportunities to the student and instructor in providing the social interaction. In Towson University, Haverback (2009: 34) has used her Facebook group named "The Women of 324 Reading Methods" so as to meet teacher candidates in reading lesson. This group has served as a platform in which papers are discussed, questions are asked, opinions are criticized, information is sent and opinions are supported. In addition, the researcher has suggested forming book clubs to support their students' reading, organizing book discussions and using social networks to share the readings. Blogs are one of the software technologies that allow individuals to create virtual learning communities.

Blogs, when used for educational purposes, with its features of interactivity and socialization-supporting, offer a flexible environment where users can work independent of time and space (Cuhadar, 2008).

The subject of this study based on the aforementioned developments, is to reveal to what extent the new media environments in general, particularly social network, blogs and wikis, are included in the education and training processes among the academic staff at faculties of communication in Turkey. The academic staff has been reached through online surveys prepared for this purpose; their opinions have been taken and their usage experience of blogs, wikis and social network have been interpreted in the context of their approach to new communication technologies.

Social Networks, Blogs and Wikis for Educational Use

In recent years, it has been seen that the use of social networks for educational purposes is the subject of academic research. Murat and Mubin (2012) have stated with an educational perspective in their research that the participation to online social networks whose users consist mostly of university students offers learning experience for students due to the fact that the university itself is an environment in which people interact with each other in an academic context.

Social networks provide many benefits also for academics. It is seen that social networks have gained an important place in education planning with flexible and user-friendly features and that they are being used more widely and effectively all over the world. By easily following the steps shown, students and researchers that can create a community communicate and share with each other build more efficient processes aimed at education through using the opportunities offered by new media.

The efficient use of this ever-increasing popularity of social networking sites with different objectives in the educational process is of great importance. It can be stated that the access to content with internet in a traditional way and the way it is used will provide individuals', especially adolescents' and young adults' moving the social network to more cooperative environments so as to share information and the implementation of social network in educational environments that will allow for a more effective communication between instructors and students and besides, will increase the opportunities of instructors' to know their students better . (Mazman, 2009: 230).

Today, social networks used especially widely by the younger generation, are also useful tools for the process of communication between students and lecturers. So as to diversify learning tools, develop learning activities, take advantage of the opportunities offered by social networking, the requirement to keep pace with using social networks for the teaching staff and students has arisen. Tiryakioglu and Erzurum (2011: 1031) have stated that the lecturers will communicate with their students, be informed about their problems and get the opportunity to submit materials related to the course via social networks and this situation may improve communication.

Mazman's research (2009: 231) reveals that these tools regarded as new internet technology trend in recent years have the potential to further development of teaching and learning environments in higher education. Kayra and Cakir (2010: 48) suggest that social networks support active learning, allow for school-student interaction and student-student interaction and also they state that the student's satisfaction increases with the use of social networks in the classes; their writing skills improve; social networks provide an informal learning environment for everyone. According to the constructivist approach, learning is shaped by the students, and even course materials are developed by the students. In this context, suggesting Facebook as an effective learning environment is possible.

Tiryakioglu and Erzurum (2011: 1035) indicate that a social network has been established in order for lecturers to share their opinions and ideas related to courses with other lecturers. This network will play a role in strengthening the student-teacher communication as well as allowing members to be aware of each other's studies. Thus, in a sense, a social network for educational purposes will be established.

Suraya and his colleagues (2011) suggest that through the use of social media technology, students will have a public space where they will easily be able to follow the works/studies of others, can download these studies/works or publish their ideas. It is possible for students to share information and improve learning process through using online technologies even outside of in-class environments where they find the opportunity to share their files in video sharing sites such as Flickr, Youtube and Slideshare. Social networks, in the context of the partners of the process of higher education, have the potential to contribute to enrich their teaching and learning experience.

According to the researchers, social networks improve communication skills, broaden participation and social cohesion, strengthen peer support and enable the realization of collaborative learning. In addition, social networking sites can easily and inexpensively be used without the support of universities, easily be integrated into the educational process for students and such kind of uses are rapidly gaining popularity. Thus, when the students graduate from university, they can have the advantage of reaching and examining their educational processes and access their own educational history through web.

Social media tools enable users to have many opportunities such as sharing information, establishing and developing relationships (McLoughlin and Lee, 2007). All these opportunities give educators countenance to promote teaching-learning processes with an active, creative and cooperative learning; increase the student-student, student-content and teacher-student interactions; urge students to use and develop their abilities to research, inquire and solve problems (Ozmen et al., 2011: 42). In other words, social media technologies have become subsidiaries for educators trying to attract students' attention to the lesson and motivate them which can be applied to traditional learning environments (Guy, 2012: 2).

Greenhow and to Robel (quoted by Buzzetto and More, 2012: 11) have found that using social media tools in education has four main benefits. According to that, social media:

- Provide students with social, emotional and cognitive support.
- Encourages students to express themselves.
- Due to the nature of its collaborative structure, it undertakes social learning function.
- Develops students' communication and technology skills and their different perspectives.

Blogs as Educational Practices

When we look at the history of blogs which are also defined as online diaries, Hookway refers to 1999 as "the boom year" (2008: 106). Accordingly, Kaye (2007:128) states that the number of blogs of internet-based diaries was 50 in 1999 while in 2004 approximately 8 million internet users had blogs and that this quantitative increase enhanced the potential of these blogs' being the source of both political and social change.

Updating a blog, adding a new article or a link is called blogging whereas the person who does these activities is called "blog writer" (blogger). People accessing to blogs are separated into two as writers and readers; according to readers, blogs are no different than webpages, but according to writers it is a system of authoring which provides creating and organizing a webpage without needing HTML information, file transfer processes and a special software. To the concept of blog, some Turkish equivalent suggestions have been made. Among these we can name "ağgüncesi/network diary", "günlük/diary", "günce/journal" (Altun, 2005).

Blogs are updated at short and regular intervals according to the habits of the user. The publishing of the blog is synchronized with the writing process on the web. The newly added articles, photos will be placed on the top of the page, so that readers can easily see and read new posts. Articles added on the blog can be archived and stored in chronological order and through the link of archive, articles can be accessed. Some blogs have simple search features (Altun, 2005). In many blogs, there are RSS feed feature enabling readers to easily follow the new blog entries. The reader can follow multiple blog updates via RSS without visiting them one by one (Huanan et al. 2005).

While blogs and personal web pages have common characteristics that cannot be distinguished from each other, they are structures having some key differences. When we consider the technical aspects of blogs, they can be created more easily than personal web sites because knowledge of HTML is need while creating and undertaking a web site; but for a blog, such a level of technical knowledge is not required. According to Matheson (2004: 448) the most fundamental feature that distinguishes the web page from a blog is its being static stylistically. In the study of Herring et al (2004: 7) the comparison of a web page with a blog has been included. Accordingly, in blogs there are no guestbooks, search function and they do not include advertisements; blogs are poor in the sense of images. On the other hand, blogs have 'archives' and 'small icon' (badges) features while web sites do not have any of them. According to Gunter (2009: 120) the most distinctive feature that separates blogs from personal web pages is that blogs allow for more individual creativity and that the ownership belongs to the blogger during production.

It is known that when used for educational purposes, blogs have a great many benefits for teaching-learning environments.

Students express that blogs have a significant impact in the process of teaching and learning (Williams and Jacobs, 2004). Blogs can be used for instructional purposes as they increase the learners' level of learning and motivation (Cuhadar, 2008). Wang and Fang (2005) have found in their study that blogs increase students' confidence for learning and that two-thirds of the students think that blogs contribute to their academic improvement.

Baggette and Wasson (2006) have found that blogs support the self-regulated learning of students in various ways. It has been stated that (1) by making a general reflection on the subject (Reflection); (2) by building a personal information database; (3) students can control their own learning as an information pool in which they can test their knowledge, solve their problems and view their information. In a study where Dua and Wagner (2007) have examined the effects of efficient using of blogs on students' learning performances, knowledge gaining and knowledge sharing; they have found out that the performance students show at blogs is a significant indicator of learning outputs. Ellison and Wu (2008) state that in terms of understanding the concepts related to the course, reading other students' blogs is the most beneficial way. Du and Wagner (2007) have stated the contributions of blogs to the learning processes as follows:

1. Using a blog so as to write "learning logs" requires students to make sense of their thoughts and organize them effectively.
2. Using the blog for the purpose of learning allows students to develop their learning over time.
3. Teachers' individualized feedbacks / responses are recognized more easily and they are rapidly transmitted to the appropriate student.
4. Self-reflection exercises with blogs help students to identify the areas they need to improve themselves and what they have learned.
5. Due to the individual responsibility-strengthening nature of blogs, students can publish their own online learning logs.
6. Blog posts and comments can be archived for later review.
7. Students gain online interaction with other individuals through sharing their thoughts, ideas and judgments.
8. Publishing the learning logs from the web gives students the opportunity to make comparison and to compete; and allows them to be more aware of poor implementations that they can easily adapt to better ones.
9. The interactive features of blogs enable the blog users to publish their reviews easily without having any great technical skill.
10. Blogs have also positive contributions to the communication between students and lecturers.

According to Hernandez and Ramos (2004) forums and blogs are seen as important tools in terms of teachers' recognition of their students. Besides, considering the student-student communication, it provides an online environment for students where they can gather, communicate and interact socially while feeling comfortable (Cuhadar2008;). Nevertheless, it gives the opportunity to reach out to people with similar interests, make new friends and build community (Efimova, 2004).

It is also possible to consider the blogs in which individuals express and share their thoughts as virtual classrooms globally. Instructors can use blogs in order to provide learning opportunities for students (Yang, 2009). In addition, classroom blogs may allow students to get in contact easily with other teachers giving the same lesson (Richardson, 2006).

Blogs as an active learning environment, give teachers the chance to extend learning process beyond the walls of the classroom and to include students to the process actively (Downes 2004). Richardson (2006) lists the benefits of blogs to students as an act of writing as follows: (a) expressing their thoughts by writing, (b) maintaining the action of writing on any subject within a certain time -perhaps a lifetime, (c) leading to write and read more through including the readers to this speaking process, (d) synthesizing different learning experiences and understanding the relationship between these collective experience.

Blogs provide high-quality writing skills to those in the learning process with their potentials (Hernandez and Ramos, 2004). In this way, students are given equal opportunities; particularly, an environment where introverted and shy students express themselves in a comfortable way is provided (Wang and Woo, 2007).

Blogs can also be used for issues such as course announcements, sharing of teaching resources. According to a lecturer, blogs can be described as a web page being a tool of sharing where course announcements, lecture notes and links related to the course are published and where the performances of the students are controlled while according to students blogs are platforms where they deliver their assignments. Downes (2004) has stated another benefit of blogs as helping to overcome homework problems within the triangle of teacher, student and parents. Accordingly, the teacher may resolve the confusion by giving explanations and examples and writing tips. In addition, blogs can be considered as a tool of providing information to school units and parents about educational activities for lecturers since blogs are repositories of information and career development materials (Clyde, 2005).

Research Objectives and Methodology

Today, there is a requirement for the academic staff to increase their skills of using new communication technologies quickly giving university education to young people who are born and raised into a digital world. In other words, today, it is possible to say that incorporating new media practices at all levels of education practices confront us as a necessity. The purpose of this study, on the basis of this proposition, is to reveal the approach of lecturers of Communication Faculties to the new communication technologies, their use of social networks, blogs and wikis in general in terms of social media environments and tools and their integration practices of these into educational processes and learn the views on this subject. The reason why this study is limited to the instructors of the Faculties of Communication is that it constitutes a part of the research planned to be carried out throughout Turkey at a later stage. On the other hand, it is seen that more and more faculties of communication include "New Media" thematic courses in their higher education courseplannings. In this exploratory research study, the following major research questions have been searched for answers:

- What are the purposes of academic staff in using social media environment and tools in general, how do they use social media tools, what are their opinions on this subject?
- What are the practices of instructors on the educational use of social networking, blogs and wikis and what are their opinions on the subject?

The research questions in general, also mediate the collection of data to the scientific project prepared for extending the use of blog in lesson plannings of university education through aiming to reveal the opinions and usage practices regarding the educational use of social networks, blogs and wikis. In the survey in which qualitative and quantitative data have been obtained, the questions towards obtaining qualitative data have been structured as open-ended questions and an online survey has been conducted as a data collecting tool.

Research Model

This research is a descriptive study and general survey method has been used in the research. The existing situation has been identified and compared to various parameters. The opinions of lecturers on the purpose of using social network and the educational use of socialnetworks have been determined.

The Research Population and Sample

The web page set up by Faculties of Communication in Turkey to determine the 46 Faculties of Communication constituting the research population of this study has been accessed. The research sample consists of 195 academics selected by random sample method working in the faculties of communication. Online survey for the research has got into circulation through "surveys.com" on 05/27/2014. The data of the study findings have been collected by online survey method remaining open for participation for one month.

Research Findings**Table 1: Demographic Info**

		f	%
Sex	Male	128	65.8
	Female	67	34.2
Age	Between 25-35	87	44.4
	Between 35-45	65	33.3
	Between 45-55	30	15.8
	55 years and older	13	6.3
Technology Tools Used	Notebook	70	35.9
	Smart Phone	54	27.5
	Desktop Computer	37	19.3
	Tablet	36	18.1
Computer Usage Periods	10 years and more	155	79.3
	Between 6-10 years	34	17.5
	Between 1-6 years	4	3.2
	Total	195	100

Table 2: purposes of Internet Usage

Data	Frequency	%
Educational purposes; I'm using to be informed and make research	41	21
To Access social media tools like facebook, twitter, blogs, wikis and so on	74	38
Spend my leisure time, have fun, play computer games	35	18
To make e-government, banking operations, buy ticket (e-commerce)	33	17
All of them	94	49
Others	12	6

Table 3: Ownership of Personal Web Pages

Data	Frequency	%
Yes	43	22
No	152	78
Total	195	100

Table 4: Social Media Environments and Tools Used

Data	Frequency
Facebook	98
Twitter	74
Myspace	4
Friendfeed	3
LinkedIn	25
Youtube	80
Flickr	3
Wiki	20
Pinterest	16
Blogs	40
Instagram	51
I don't use social media	19
Others	2

Table5: Rates of Using Social Media Environment and Tools in University Teaching and Learning Activities

Data	Frequency
Facebook	84
Twitter	46
Myspace	4
Friendfeed	3
LinkedIn	12
Youtube	96
Flickr	1
Wiki	35
Pinterest	8
Blogs	40
Instagram	12
I thinktheyare not appropriateforsuch a use	21
Others	3

Table 6: Purposes of Using Social Networks

Data	Frequency
Because it offerstocreate a specificarea (profile, personalpage ...) formyself	69
To meetnewpeopleandmakenewfriends	81
To examineeducationgroupsandevents	48
To shareandfollowtheobjects (videos, pictures, notes, ...) I like	34
In ordertoimprovemyforeignlanguageskills	26
In ordertoplaygames (FarmVille, FishVille, poker...)	48
Others	10

Table 7: Findings on Blogging

Data	Frequency	%
I don'tknowwhat a blog is	11	6
No, but I knowwhat it is	73	37
I'm a regularfollower of a blog	65	33
I'm a regularcommentator of a blog	34	17
I havemyownblog	12	6
Total	195	100

Table 8: Findings on theuse of Wiki

Data	Frequency	%
I don'tknowwhat a Wiki is	22	11
No, but I knowwhat it is	91	46
I'veused it severaltimes	52	27
I'm a regularuser of thewiki	30	15
Total	195	100

Table 9: Purposesof Blogging/Use of Wiki

Data	Frequency	%
Foreducationalpurposes	39	20
Forculturalpurposes	26	13
Forresearchpurposes	70	36
Forleisure	37	19
Forsocialnetworking	23	11
Total	195	100

Table 10: Reasons of Using Social Networks/Blogs/Wikis in Education and Training in Lessons

Data	Frequency	%
Forcooperation	8	4
Individualfollow-up -evaluation - feedback	19	10
Forresearchpurposes	24	12
Ease of communication	21	11
Costefficiency	43	22
Practicality	25	13
Specificity	9	5
Sharing of resources-diversity	27	14
Ease of updating	19	10
Total	195	100

Table 11: Opinions on Using Social MediaTools for Scientific Field Studies

Data	Frequency	%
Socialsciences (history, geographyandetc.)	17	8
Science (physics, chemistry, mathematics, etc.)	48	25
Language Sciences (Turkish, English andetc.)	41	21
Computer-relatedstudies	79	40
EducationSciences (measurementandevaluation, learninganddevelopment, etc.)	10	5
Total	195	100

Evaluation of the Study and Conclusion

The use of developing new technologies with Web 2.0 in the field of education bears the potential to transform traditional methods through providing alternative learning environments. As described in this study, due to the many features of the new media environments and the amenities they offer, they lead faculty members to support educational processes with an active, creative and cooperative learning; and these environments support the increase of student-student, student-content and student-teacher interaction; students' use and improvement of their research, inquiry and problem solving skills.

When considered in the context of data supplied by the academic staff participated in the research, it is seen that laptop and smartphone usage rate is higher compared to other technology tools and that the use of computers has been more than 10 years. In line with the responses to open-ended questions other findings regarding the lecturers can be summarized as follows:

- Computer-using purposes not only concentrate in one area but also cover many purposes such applications as social media, following blogs, education, research, e-government.
- Usage of personal web page is not in common use.
- The use of blogs is higher within the group of academicians whose range of age is 25-35.
- While using blog is referred rather to following other blogs, the number of lecturers that have their own blogs and write on their blogs is low.
- In social media environments, they predominantly use 'Facebook', 'Twitter' 'Youtube'.
- Facebook and Youtube are the leading social media environments used for educational purposes.
- Their primary aim in using social networking is "to meet new people" and to create "their own spaces where they can express themselves".
- It has been seen that the lecturers involved in the research can use social networks, blogs and wikis in terms of being 'cost effective' in the lessons.
- Lecturers involved in the research have stated that social media tools are used mostly in major area courses like Science, Computer and Linguistics.

The lecturers have given answers on the benefits of blogs to educational process and to parties taking part within the process as follows: Blogs;

- are student-centered
- do not have time and space limits / restrictions
- are easily accessible by everyone
- enable continuous communication opportunity with lecturers
- are cost-effective
- motivate individuals who are already in the educational process to create and write educational content; help them to gain the habit in this direction
- encourage to go beyond using everyday language for a public blog writing and the use of literary language
- allow for an active and innovative environment that enable replacing, renewal and updating of the generated content.

In this study, it has been seen that academic staff improve their skills of using social media with their personal efforts, so their using social media tools for education, training and academic purposes are limited to each instructor's own knowledge and experience. As the research has also shown, so as to benefit more effectively from social media environment and tools for education, training and academic activities, it has been a requirement to support academic staff, to increase their skills and usage in terms of the role and importance of new modern-day media environments.

Blogs supporting interaction and social processes in teaching-learning environments and being web sites enabling the writers to share their reviews, files etc. on a subject quickly and easily; contribute to the increase of learning motivation, increase of social interaction, cooperation, active learning and critical thinking. It is seen that approaches of the academics involved in the research about the effects of the blogs to the teaching-learning process support this result. When used in learning environments blogs can be used for mutually different and multiple purposes. These include basic activities like; effectuating distance education, sharing course presentations and notes; preparing students to lesson; informing about exams; explaining the exam results; sharing materials and studies within the lessons; informing academic progressions like conferences and symposiums; referring to sources about lesson subject; using as a tool for portfolio and group work activities.

One of the results of the study is that, being one of the new media environments blogs are not used efficiently and adequately by the academic staff of the Communication Faculties in Turkey for education and training activities. On the other hand, the ease of being a log content producer and the benefits it will provide especially in the field of education are based on the studies having been conducted in this area have been described within the study. Based on this rationale, our study suggests that instructors should be motivated and supported to create their own personal blogs that can contribute them in their academic development, increase teaching skills, and enable the education process to be more efficient and up to date.