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WEB-BASED LISTENING EXAM ACCEPTANCE: COMPARING FRESHMAN AND SOPHOMORE STUDENTS AT A VOCATIONAL COLLEGE

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Abstract: Assessing learner performance in a foreign language teaching setting has always been a challenge for instructors due to pragmatic reasons and Web-based Exams (WBEs) have been lending a helpful hand with assessment procedures by virtue of their advantages of security, cost, accuracy, and time saving. Being increasingly popular in recent years, WBEs are attributed to be effective methods of testing and evaluation, because they not only reduce time and effort required for exam generation and scheduling, but also enable more efficient recording, grading, and further analysis on the results. For this reason, a growing number of secondary and higher education institutions are adopting WBEs to evaluate their students' achievement. However, there is another significant issue as much as employing WBEs in educational settings: learners' acceptance of WBEs. Building on this point, this study aims to investigate the factors influencing language learners' acceptance of WBEs in terms of the following variables: Goal Expectancy, Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions, Computer Self Efficacy, Content, Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Playfulness, and Behavioral Intention. The study was conducted in 2014–2015 academic year with the freshman and sophomore students of 'English as a Foreign Language' course at a vocational college. The data were collected via an online questionnaire from 602 participants having used the web-based listening comprehension exam system and analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics (independent-samples t-test). The overall results of the study indicated that the participants were not inclined to use WBEs although sophomore students favored WBEs slightly more than the freshman students did. The inferential analysis put forward a significant difference between freshman and sophomore students in terms of all factors except goal expectancy. In this sense, it is assumed that having more experience with WBEs could create a positive orientation in the students' acceptance of WBEs.

***Keywords*:** Web-based exams, vocational colleges, technology acceptance

Introduction

Web-based Exams (WBEs) have been lending a helpful hand with current assessment procedures in various academic settings by virtue of their numerous advantages. Zakrzewski and Bull (1998) summarizes the three basic benefits of WBEs: students can take the exam (1) whenever they want; (2) as many times as they want; and (3) to receive immediate feedback. Being suggested as effective tools to help students retain important concepts for exams (DeSouza & Fleming 2003; Grimstad & Grabe 2004; Johnson & Kiviniemi 2009), WBEs are considered to be convenient and beneficial in many ways. WBEs providing self-assessment and instant feedback opportunities to improve one's own learning is an example. In line with the benefits available to learners, WBEs are claimed to reinforce students' understandings of the main concepts (McCausland, 2003) and to narrow the gap between actual and desired performance through timely feedback (Nicol, 2007). WBEs also support individual learning and engage learners with crucial learning experiences (Gikandi, Morrow, & Davis, 2011).

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On the side of test-developers and instructors, WBEs are believed to support many phases of assessment and evaluation procedures in e-learning environments, especially through tasks like test preparation, automated grading, and reporting (Llamas-Nistal, Fernandez-Iglesias, Gonzalez-Tato & Mikic-Fonte, 2013). WBEs enrich e-learning platforms by providing testing applications as an important side tool, either in online courses or in blended learning environments. In comparison to classroom assessment, WBEs offer more efficient ways to improve existing assessment methods, because time saving performances, immediate feedback, enhanced resource use, record keeping, and convenience (Bull & McKenna, 2004; Morris 2008) are some of the things that WBEs bring with them. The issues of flexibility, frequency, time and place are the other elements to be counted as the greatest benefits of WBEs to teachers or instructors (Zakrzewski & Bull, 1998; Zakrzewski & Steven, 2000).

Along with those benefits, WBEs are becoming more and more widespread in educational institutions and a growing number of faculties realize that they can create, implement, and manage assessment processes as parts of learning management systems as in Claroline, MOODLE, and WebCT-Blackboard (Llamas-Nistal et al. 2013). It is repeatedly claimed in the literature that the use of online tests within blended courses will be around for a long time (DeSouza & Fleming, 2003; Grimstad & Grabe, 2004; Johnson & Kiviniemi, 2009). However, there is another significant issue as much as adopting WBEs in educational settings: learners' acceptance of WBEs. The literature on technology acceptance puts forward several models to explain students' perceptions about acceptance of a particular technology or their behavioral intentions to use that technology. A comprehensive model, the CBAAM (Computer Based Assessment Acceptance Model) which was derived from other previous technology acceptance models, was proposed by Terzis and Economides (2011). Building on their points, this study aims to investigate the factors influencing language learners' acceptance of WBEs in terms of the following variables: Goal Expectancy, Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions, Computer Self Efficacy, Content, Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Playfulness, and Behavioral Intention.

Methods

The study was conducted in 2014–2015 academic year with the freshman and sophomore students of 'English as a Foreign Language' course at a vocational college in Turkey. The data were collected via an online questionnaire from 602 participants ($n_{freshman}$=349; $n_{sophomore}$=253) having used the web-based listening comprehension exam. The participants were from different departments of the vocational college and all the students participating in WBEs took two distinct listening tests. In the first one, they were provided with a 20-item multiple-choice test. The second test, however, included a variety of tasks such as drag and drop, fill-in-the gaps, matching, and multiple-choice (see Figure 1).

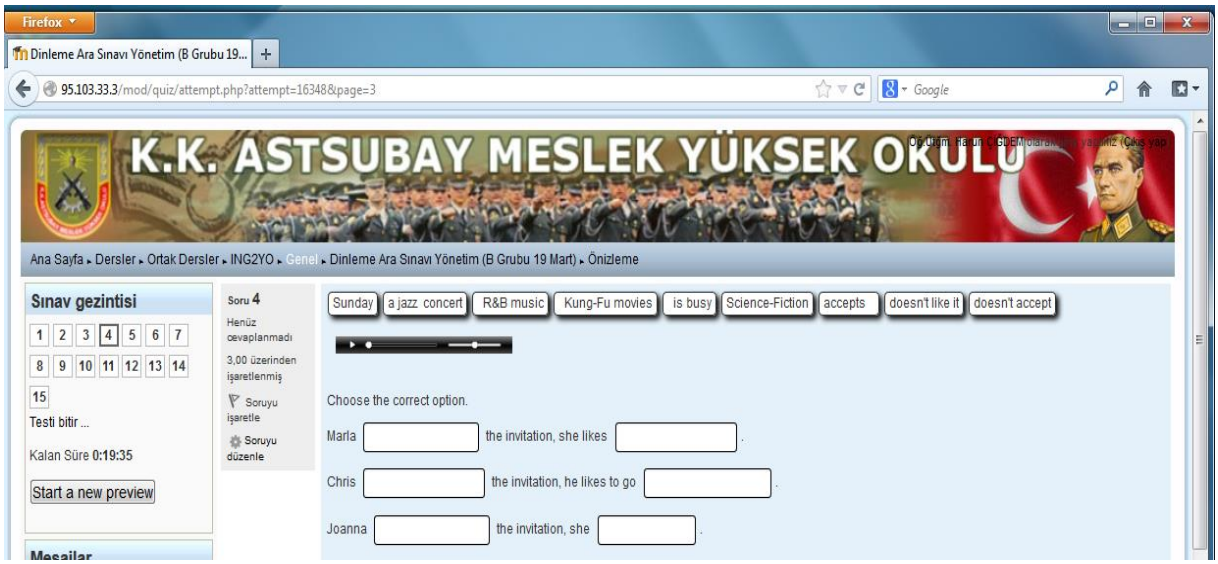

Figure 1. A screenshot of computer based listening exam

In this research, nine factors were determined on the scale developed by Terzis and Economides (2011): Perceived Usefulness (PU); Perceived Ease of Use (PEU); Computer Self-Efficacy (CSE); Social Influence (SI); Facilitating Conditions (FC); Perceived Playfulness (PP); Content (C); Goal Expectancy (GE); and Behavioral Intention (BI). The Cronbach Alpha coefficients of the subscales were found to range between .72 and .93. In the grading process of obtained mean scores, in accordance with the five rating scale used in the data collection

tools, the following bases were adopted: 1.00 to 1.80 as *Strongly Disagree*; 1.81 to 2.60 as *Disagree*; 2.61 to 3.40 as *Undecided*; 3.41 to 4.20 as *Agree*; and 4.21 to 5.00 as *Strongly Agree*. The data were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics. Independent sample t-tests were employed to test whether there were any significant differences in the vocational college students' acceptance of web-based listening comprehension tests based on the grade level. The significance level was set at .05 in all the analyses.

Results and Findings

Mean values and standard deviations of the CBAAM subscales are presented in Table 1. When the mean scores obtained for each sub-scale were descriptively examined, it was seen that Computer Self-Efficacy received the highest mean value (*M*=3.39) among the participants regardless of their grade level while the lowest mean value was of Content (*M*=1.58).

Table 1. Descriptive results of cbaam subscales

Subscales	*N*	Items	*M*	*SD*	*Cronbach Alpha*
Perceived Usefulness	602	3	1.78	.96	.921
Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)	602	3	2.34	1.23	.882
Computer Self-Efficacy	602	4	3.39	1.06	.868
Social Influence	602	4	2.26	1.20	.714
Facilitating Conditions	602	2	2.55	1.27	.803
Content	602	3	1.58	.91	.717
Goal Expectancy	602	3	2.61	1.17	.791
Perceived Playfulness	602	4	1.72	.91	.902
Behavioral Intention	602	4	1.95	1.13	.933

As seen in Table 2, the students' level of acceptance indicated significant differences with respect to their grade levels in all sub-scales, except for Goal Expectancy. In all the aspects other than Goal Expectancy, the sophomore students participating in the current study seemed to accept web-based listening comprehension tests more than the freshman students did.

Table 2. Test results of vocational college students regarding level

Subscales	Group	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Perceived Usefulness	Freshman	349	1.66	.92	-3.500	.000
	Sophomore	253	1.94	1.00		
Perceived Ease of Use	Freshman	349	2.10	1.14	-5.608	.000
	Sophomore	253	2.66	1.28		
Computer Self-Efficacy	Freshman	349	3.16	1.15	-6.517	.000
	Sophomore	253	3.71	.81		
Social Influence	Freshman	349	2.06	1.13	-4.935	.000
	Sophomore	253	2.54	1.24		
Facilitating Conditions	Freshman	349	2.40	1.27	-3.450	.000
	Sophomore	253	2.76	1.25		
Content	Freshman	349	1.48	.83	-3.083	.000
	Sophomore	253	1.71	1.00		
Goal Expectancy	Freshman	349	2.54	1.17	-1.856	.064
	Sophomore	253	2.72	1.16		
Perceived Playfulness	Freshman	349	1.60	.85	-3.840	.000
	Sophomore	253	2.16	.98		
Behavioral Intention	Freshman	349	1.80	1.02	-3.899	.000
	Sophomore	253	2.16	1.24		

Conclusion

Besides examining the variables influencing students' intentions to use WBEs, the major contribution of the current study was related to the research setting, which was a foreign language teaching context at a two-year post-secondary institution. When the factors within the CBAAM were analyzed descriptively, it was seen that a great majority of the mean scores were below the value of 3, except for the dimension of computer self-efficacy, and ranged approximately between 1.5 and 2.5 (see Table 1). All those values descriptively indicated that the participants had generally negative attitudes towards WBEs, which is apparently an inconsistent finding with that

of some previous studies (Cigdem & Oncu, 2015; Cigdem & Tan, 2014; Dermo, 2009; Sorensen, 2013). The inferential analysis put forward a significant difference between freshman and sophomore students in terms of all factors except goal expectancy. In this sense, it is assumed that having more experience with WBEs could create a positive orientation in students' acceptance of WBEs.

Recommendations

The difficulties experienced by the participating students are thought be due to WBEs' being a new implementation within the institution. After getting more training and experience on how to use WBEs, students are expected to increase their competence. Additionally, better infrastructures are always needed to cope with technical problems.

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