

YABANCI DİL ÖĞRETİMİNDE İNTERNET TABANLI PROGRAM KULLANIMINA İLİŞKİN BİR ÇALIŞMA

Dilek ALTAS¹
Erdem ÖNGÜN²

ÖZET

Bugün yüz-yüze yerleşik sınıf içinde öğretim ve öğrenme hızlı ve aşamalı bir şekilde zaman ve mekândan bağımsız olan çevrimçi eğitime doğru değişmektedir. Bu değişime bağlı olarak eğitim teknolojilerinin eğitimde kullanımı günden güne artmaktadır. Bu alanda benzer uygulamalara yönelik çeşitli çalışmalar ülkemizde de uygulanmaktadır. Bu kapsamda yabancı dil öğretiminde eğitim teknolojilerinin etkin bir şekilde kullanımı önemli bir gereksinim haline gelmiştir. Bu çalışmada, cinsiyet, fakülte-bölüm, seviye, çevrimiçi (online) program kullanımı, kullanım sıklığı, dil becerileri ve teknik destek alma gibi kriterler göz önünde bulundurularak çevrimiçi (online) program anket araştırma tekniği ile değerlendirilecektir. Anketler sonucunda elde edilen veriler çeşitli istatistiksel teknikler kullanılarak analiz edilecek ve çevrimiçi (online) mevcut program içerisindeki etkinliği araştırılacak ve tartışılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Eğitim, Dil Öğretimi ve Öğrenimi, Elektronik Öğrenme, Bilgi Teknolojileri, İstatistiksel Analiz

¹Doç.Dr., Marmara Üniversitesi, İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi, Ekonometri Bölümü, İstatistik Bilim Dalı, Bahçelievler, İstanbul, dilekaltas@marmara.edu.tr

²Dr., Kadir Has Üniversitesi, İngilizce Hazırlık Okulu, Bahçelievler, İstanbul, erdem.ongun@khas.edu.tr

AN APPLIED STUDY OF THE USE OF AN ONLINE PROGRAM IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

ABSTRACT

Today built-in face to face classroom teaching and learning have been gradually and rapidly shifting towards online education, which is independent of time and space. Regarding this change, use of educational technologies in education has been increasing day by day. It has been observed that various studies relating to such applications have been conducted in this area in Turkey, too. In this context, using educational technologies efficiently in foreign language teaching has become an urgent need. In this study, taking into consideration the criteria such as sex, faculty-major, level, the online program use, frequency of its use, language skills and getting technical assistance were assessed through a series of questions in survey-like technique. Data acquired as a result of the survey will be analyzed using various statistical techniques and the efficiency of the online program within the current program will be researched and discussed.

Key Words: *Education, Language Teaching and Learning, E-Learning, Information Technology, Statistical Analysis*

Introduction

Rapid technological transformations that have taken place in recent years especially in the fields of communications and information technology (IT) have brought changes to the paradigms of education both in the education of the student and in his or her professional development. The use of new technology can assist with collaborative work, discovery-based learning and in the production of knowledge. Besides, the changes that were brought about by the technology-innovator paradigm — which itself is still resisted by many professionals in different sectors of education — remind us of the warning words of McCarthy, “Professors will not be substituted by technology, they will be substituted by professors who use technology”(Torres & Marriott, 2005:133). Hence, teachers are encouraged to use the new technology for effective teaching as part of a worldwide

educational reform. The Internet as the teaching platform is one of the most recognized and worldwide teaching modes in applying the technology in education. The use of modern technology especially in education in general has created significant potential to expand the physical setting for teaching and learning beyond the traditional classroom, and even the school. Nowadays, there are almost unlimited resources of information on the internet, whether good or bad. It is often the choice of the individual that influences the outcome of an online activity. For fruitful learning on the Internet, the learner needs to develop a critical mindset so as to be able to distinguish between what is good and what is bad, what is valuable and what is dispensable. This issue still seems to be a matter of discussion for the following years in terms of upcoming innovations in educational technologies.

Education and Technology

Traditional versus New Teaching and Learning Processes

Education as a process in its broader sense has always been one of the initial steps in human life. It has been applied in various settings along with accompanying and supplementary methods and materials as a changing but dynamic paradigm. Briefly, changing times and trends have transformed what is known as “traditional education” through new and innovative concepts and approaches in both methodological and physical sense. With the help of new educational technologies, teachers and students are now so close no matter how far they are from each other. In traditional classrooms, where the focus of power and control was clearly in the hands of the teacher, the computer, as an innovative educational tool, had become a catalyst for breaking the power, authority, and control structures that had long predominated in the teaching and learning dyad, and was beginning to positively impact the way that learning was defined and practiced in technologically rich classroom environments (Sorenson,2006:80).The conventional form of learning is inherently individualistic: the learning arrangement is largely between teacher and student. It is usually difficult to establish contact, interaction and discussion between students as a group, and indeed between the teacher and each individual student. Learning rarely takes place in a social context where students and teachers discuss, share and explore in depth issues relating to learning (McConnell, 2006:14). At that

point, role of technology appears to be a functional tool.

Yet, with the aid of technology, wide-range one-on-one education may be closer at hand than ever before. An encounter between student and teacher via the internet is very different from the exchanges in formal classrooms that have until now characterized education. Such a shift does not signify an end to education as it has existed but the coming of a paradigm in which a course offered to a classroom full of students may be less compelling than it has been. The question is not whether formal learning will continue— of course it will— but what forms it will take (Maeroff, 2004:1). That discussion brings us to a point where we feel obliged to revise our stand between real and unreal (cyber) forms of learning process in the light of innovative tools.

On the other hand, it is also argued that there can be no sole form of learning that is applicable to methodologies and settings. In addition, some have tried to suggest that this new learning process is somehow ‘better’ than the ‘old’ processes; that school children will no longer go to schools; that students will no longer go to universities, hence the term ‘from bricks to clicks’ has entered the contemporary phrasebook. The suggestion was that learning institutions will lose their sense of place and that students will sit at multimedia terminals and construct process and interactions with many different peoples and places. But in so many ways this seems to miss the point. Online learning will fail if it is not managed correctly: if there is no induction to online learning and resources, no provision of the proper equipment and computer access and a lack of strategic thinking (Bach, 2006:183). Pertaining to this assertion, there needs to be a solid and constant collaboration and coordination between educators and technology strategists.

Computer Assisted Language Learning

The use of computers to assist language learning dates back to the middle of the twentieth century, and CALL has evolved alongside technological advances since then. There have been various attempts to summarise this evolution but perhaps the best known is Warschauer’s ‘Three Phases of CALL’ where he describes the increasing number of ways that computers have been used for language learning and teaching. The first phase, ‘Behaviouristic CALL’, prevalent between the 1950s and 1970s, favoured the use of drill and practice type courseware and rested on the role of the computer as ‘tutor’, delivering instructional material to the learner.

During the second phase of ‘Communicative CALL’, between the 1970s and 1990s, the role of the computer in language learning involved not only acting as ‘tutor’ but also as ‘stimulus’ for more communicative language activities, such as for student discussion and writing activities. A third model during this second phase was the computer as ‘tool’, where the computer does not necessarily provide any language-specific content but is used as a means of performing some language-based tasks; for example, using software such as word processors, spelling and grammar checkers, desktop publishing programs and concordancers. The third phase of ‘Integrative CALL’ from the 1990s again paralleled both technological and pedagogical developments. Pedagogical paradigms were beginning to shift in the 1990s towards more integrative and constructivist approaches to teaching, which were complemented by two significant technological developments—the growth of the Internet and the use of multimedia, and, through the integration of both, of hypermedia. Hypermedia facilitates the integration of various communication skills, such as listening, reading and writing, and the use of task and project-based work through, for instance, simulations, web quests and collaborative writing activities. In this third phase of CALL, the role of the computer can be seen as expanding yet further to incorporate its use as ‘manager’ and ‘messenger’ (Rogerson-Revell, 2007:4-60). In that sense, teachers accordingly need to equip themselves with innovations if they want to act as either “manager” or “messenger” in the technological learning process.

There were computers before they themselves went online. So it began with computing things and processes. Learning can be given example to this as a process. Over the years, there have been a number of books and articles covering various aspects of computer assisted language learning (CALL) methodology, materials, and techniques. However, there have been only scattered attempts in the literature to characterize the knowledge and skills a language teacher or other educational adjunct, such as a technical support person for a language program, should have (Hubbard, 2006:3). As computers went online, they introduced a more connected and dynamic environment from which learning as a process has benefited in various ways and forms such as the web world.

Students in online learning situations need to come to awareness that learning through the use of technology significantly affects the learning process itself. Furthermore, they need to realize that the online learning process occurs, for the most part, through the formation of a learning

community and is reactive in nature. Students may enter an online course expecting to be educated by a content expert, just as in a traditional classroom. When they discover that the most profound learning in an online course comes through interacting with other students, they may become confused and sometimes feel “cheated” by the process (Palloff, 2001:5-108).

Technology in language teaching is not new.. Indeed, technology has been around in language teaching for decades. Technology becoming more mobile offers new ways for practising language and assessing activities by bringing the outside world into the classroom where learners will in turn become teachers themselves (Dudaney & Hockly, 2007:7-8). As far as language learning is concerned, thousands of web pages claim to teach English as a Second Language (ESL) through explicit language instruction by providing a forum for contact among individuals who can participate in various discussion forums, chat rooms, and e-mail. In keeping with the common wisdom suggesting that if you want to learn English, you should go live in a place where English is spoken. Many sites for communication among English learners through computer-mediated communication on the Internet offer opportunities for conversation with other English speakers (Chapelle, 2003:51). As a result, there is an increasing role and demand for online delivery in second language instruction and the number of online language courses has been increasing rapidly over the past few years. As a result, good learning programs lead the learner to demonstrate the skills and understanding they previously lacked. It is often thought that attending classes that seemed a waste of time. Thus before setting out on the challenging and expensive business of developing an e-learning program one must be sure that it will meet a genuine need and that it is the way to meet that need. At the other end – when the learners complete the program – it is required to assess how well they have learned (Lewis, 2003:49). Such awareness sets an essential view on both the course creator and coordinator.

E-Learning at a Distance: Distant Education and the Courseware

Distance education, or distance learning, is a field of education that focuses on the pedagogy and technology and instructional systems design that aim to deliver education to students who are not physically "on site" (Hebert, 2007). Distance technologies have opened up new potential in higher education, and the literature is full of enthusiastic predictions. For

example, networks offer scope for new ways to access and combine information using the limitless resources of the Web. Instead of receiving information or knowledge from the teacher, students can be encouraged to seek out information for themselves and to develop their understanding by rejecting on course concepts with their peers (Janet, 2006). Distance education applications in educational institutions have attracted a lot of interest and attention recently.

Most distance learning classes today are delivered either through interactive video or over the internet but not all online distance learning classes are created equal. A good way for instructors to enter the online arena is by using technology to enhance an on-campus class. As they gain experience in teaching online, moving from an enhanced approach to one in which a class is wholly delivered online becomes easier. Classes that use technology and the Internet as an enhancement to what is happening in the face-to-face classroom generally employ materials on CD-ROM, an electronic textbook including associated learning activities, "lecture" material or an asynchronous discussion board located on a course site online, or chat or synchronous discussions online; they may even simply use e-mail (Palloff, 2001:5-108). The format and content development has always been in rapid progress.

In addition to traditional hard copy materials that have been in use for a long time, most educational materials come with "courseware" (an educational material usually packaged, uploaded or installed for use with a computer) or they might make the whole set of the educational material with visual and auditory aids. Many courseware packages now include grade books as well, so that both instructors and students can monitor progress as the course occurs. Frequently, quiz results can be linked to the grade book so that they are automatically recorded. Many of the technological developments may be helpful in accommodating various student learning styles. An auditory learner, for example, may feel more comfortable listening to a brief audio clip explaining a concept than reading about it. A visual learner tends to do well in an environment that presents mainly text or uses video clips. A learner who is more kinesthetic may appreciate assignments requiring visits to other websites on the Internet and the incorporation of online research. All of these techniques also help to keep things interesting for students who feel the need for more activity in a learning situation (Palloff, 2001:5-108). It should be noted that a comprehensive courseware package will fill the interactivity gap in a course

whenever an instructor fails to create it.

Teacher–Student Interaction and Current Directions in E-Learning Tools and Technologies

Researchers in the area of online learning have argued that whether the use of computers could maintain a reasonable level of interaction between teacher and students and among the students themselves often depends on how the teacher handles the learning process. Apparently, there could be a shift of information flow in the teaching and learning process of online courses and a change from the conventional teacher-centred approach to a learner-centred approach. According to this view, the changing role of the teacher from being a knowledge purveyor to a facilitator would have a significant impact on the capacity of an online course to maintain the teacher–student interaction. However, there is also the counter-argument that the success of the course depends on learner participation. Thus, it may be unclear as to how much influence online instruction will have on teacher–student interaction.

A teacher of an online program simultaneously plays four roles, namely pedagogical, social, managerial and technological. Of these multiple roles of the teacher, the one most relevant to the issue of teacher–student interaction in online learning is the social role. If the teacher can create a friendly learning environment, get the students involved in communication tasks, provide prompt feedback to the students, exhibit a positive attitude and personalize each individual’s learning progress, there is a better chance of maintaining a good level of interaction. Whether teaching and learning processes are teacher centred or student-centred is mostly dependent on the teacher’s beliefs and perceptions of their roles in teaching and learning and has little to do with the technology involved. Hence, how the teacher takes on the social role in class is crucial. Nevertheless, the role of the student may be equally important for effective teacher–student interactions during online learning.

There are four possible combinations of roles of the teacher and the learner. The teacher controls both the learning process and the content sector in the teacher controls the content but the learner controls the learning process; the teacher controls the process but the learner controls the content; the learner controls both the process and content. Unless the learner has a sense of control in the learning activity effective teacher–student interaction

is unlikely to occur. Very often, the extent to which the students respond to the teacher depends on the teacher's input. After all, language learning activities inevitably involve teacher-student interactions as well as student-student interactions. Especially in classes with students having a range of abilities, computer technology and appropriate teacher-student interactions may complement each other. On the one hand, high proficiency learners have been found to feel more comfortable exploring the various options available with the technology. On the other hand, weaker learners are allowed to proceed gradually and steadily (Ng et al., 2006:1).

As far as learners' control over their own learning is concerned, online language learning functions as a successful autonomous learning practice tool through which metacognitive knowledge and skills are put to good use. Students are also provided with the need to develop such knowledge and skills in distance education as language learners. It is believed that when students feel free to practice their language learning process online, they can begin to make good decisions about their language learning and they can also make use of open source learning practices in virtual environments.

Literature Review

Regarding learners' approach and evaluation of the computer aided language learning process; Liou (2000:1) discusses the assessment of learner strategies in the Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) context, and the pros and cons. It first reviews the empirical studies, including two of the author's recent projects, which have used the computer to record the interactive process where L2 learners demonstrate different on-line language learning behaviours as types of learner strategies. The available literature has covered the areas of grammar learning, writing, reading, and listening and viewing (video) comprehension. Types of strategies include cognitive and metacognitive strategies such as resourcing, monitoring, practising, or self-evaluation.

As far as educational institutions are concerned, Dlaska (2003:1) proposes a content-orientated approach to teaching foreign languages in institution-wide language programmes. It posits that a separation of content and language in an entirely skills-based model of teaching non-specialist language learners is neither university-adequate nor in the interest of successful language learning. Simpson (2005:1) in his study argues the

learning that happens in the synchronous text chat forum of an online group of English Language learners and tutors. The study mainly concerns the learning of certain skills associated with electronic literacy, namely discourse management and technological skills involved in using synchronous text-based computer-mediated communication (SCMC). Focusing on the analysis of the concepts of collaboration and scaffolding in learning, attention is also paid to the analysis of SCMC text, employing the notion of the conversational floor as an appropriate analytical unit for this type of discourse.

Regarding the issue whether online courses may discourage teacher-student interaction, which is considered by teachers and researchers as an important element in language learning, a study was conducted with a total of 60 students from associate degrees who attended an online English course in Hong Kong and responded to a questionnaire asking them about their effort and interest in learning English, their anxiety about computer applications, their self-monitoring capability, their interactions with the teacher and their peers and their competence in English, Ng et al.(2006:1) found that those students who perceived themselves as more competent had more favourable perceptions of their interaction with the teacher than did those who were less competent. The study findings also imply that online language learning does not necessarily diminish interaction. Instead, the level of interaction may depend on the learners' sense of competence in the target language.

Fischer (2007:1) investigates the computer-based tracking in CALL and the uses to which the analysis of tracking data can be put to address questions in CALL in particular and second language acquisition (SLA) in general. Adopting both quantitative and qualitative methods, it has been found that students often use software in unexpected ways, a finding which has consequences for the notion of learner autonomy and underscores the need for learner training

Rogerson-Revell (2007:4-60) draws attention to current developments in e-learning tools and technologies- currently the most widely used of which are Blackboard and WebCT ; other easy-to-use and cheaper alternatives such as *Manila* (online; which is particularly useful for creating multi-user writing environments), *Etudes* (online; which is aimed specifically at distance learning) and the increasingly popular free, open-source CMS, *Moodle* (online). Blackboard's *Building Blocks* facility, for example, enables the integration of extension software such as Wimba's

Voice Tools, which can add a voice element to Blackboard's discussion board-with a view to extending distance language educators' (teachers, materials developers, program leaders) awareness of the technical possibilities at their disposal for developing online distance learning resources. Outlining the evolution of web and computer-assisted language learning authoring and she then describes some current directions in e-learning applications, such as hybridisation, modularity, standardisation and integration. Her study suggests the need to bridge the gap between pedagogic and technical expertise in creating online language learning resources, and argues that greater convergence and dissemination of ideas, resources and objectives between the fields of e-learning and distance language learning could be of equal benefit in promoting effective online learning resources.

On the other hand, based on quantitative and qualitative data from their studies, Murday (2008:6) et al. emphasize a trend of increasing satisfaction with the online courses compared with offline (traditional) courses. Additionally, their data shed light on a valuable insight for a course format that is increasingly utilized in university-level language learning.

On the use of web technologies for language learning, Hamatr (2008:1) argues the question of what kind of web technologies have been used for language learning in a systematic manner. For realising this, a framework for a course management system (CMS) oriented for language instruction to identify the technologies for the purpose of language learning and teaching in systematic manner institutes of higher learning was developed. The findings indicated that web technologies used for language learning fall into four broad categories: synchronous and asynchronous communications, language production technologies, language testing and web. In conclusion, based on the available data, a CMS designed for language learning should include technologies for communications, production, testing and access to online resources.

Donavant (2009:1) argues that adult education is taking place as a result of advances in technology. This comprehensive, quasi-experimental study examining the efficacy of online education (OE) for professional development, conducted among American police officers, compares OE to traditional delivery methods, using quantitative methods and open ended questioning to determine whether the potential performance of adult learners in OE is related to various demographic factors, and evaluates the adult learners' perceptions of OE. Data analyses indicate no significant difference

between the effectiveness of the delivery methods but they do reveal a statistically significant relationship between potential online learning success and a formal educational level. The historical data indicated that police officers who participated in professional development courses delivered via OE and TI demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in learning, based on pre- and post-test scores.

In the context of learner autonomy in language learning, Holmberg (2005:1-2) claims that while there are a number of theoretical descriptions of autonomous language learning, a single, universal theory has yet to emerge. The implications for a theory of autonomy are arguably even more complex in the case of distance language learning, where highly structured course materials and fixed assessment points would appear to run counter to notions of choice and responsibility.

İşman et al. (2004:20) about the study that is “students’ perceptions towards computers” concluded that students give importance to the computers as a part of their life. In addition to this, the research results represent high percentages concentrated on that there are positive attitudes towards computers because of being a tool to organize life efficiently. As a result of their research and questionnaire, students have positive tendency the useful and easy reflections of computers. This means that there is a consciousness about effects and importance of computers but there are a few tendencies to apply the consciousness or willingness of new technological style because of not having particular education, encouragement and facilitative environment.

Aydin (2007:19) points out that depending on the goals of language teaching, students are expected to be proficient in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, discourse and language skills in target language. However, he also adds that it is not possible to say that language learning environment always provides learners real and natural settings. For example, EFL learners in Turkey, except the ones at schools that apply intensive language classes, try to learn English in teacher-centred, examination-oriented and textbook-based environments in crowded classrooms. Consequently, decontextualized language knowledge that they acquire not only prevents learning and using language but also causes negative attitudes towards language learning. As a final point, Aydin concludes by saying that it is clear that one of the ways to overcome the difficulties in EFL learning is to teach them language in real and natural environments.

In a study conducted by Dabaj (2009:124), the online education was

found to be mechanical and most preferred taking traditional face-to-face education for the majority of the students. According to this, students also had concerns regarding the reliability of the materials used on the net and the adequacy or competence of the teachers who deliver the instruction, and they also faced shortness of time and experienced difficulty in nonverbal communication.

Finally, about the issue of learner success in online environments, Savery and Vonderwell (2004:40) found that learner success can be improved when students are able to use the tools afforded by the environment. In combination with critical thinking, Savery and Vonderwell (2004) again claim that these tools can assist the learner in filtering through the tremendous amount of information learners they will encounter when searching online resources to obtain useful knowledge.

The Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the efficiency of the use of an online program in teaching and learning English as a second language in terms of factors such as sex, faculty-major, level, the internet-based program use and frequency of use and language skills involved in the learning process in English Preparatory School. The online program was meant to run with the current language school program that is designed to provide students with English skills needed in general and academic context. The overall set of online course syllabus is organized around themes and the activities which are designed to cover different aspects of language structure and language use, including Grammar, Reading, Vocabulary, Listening and Writing, Speaking-Pronunciation including a multi-level, video-based, integrated skills program that includes more than 100 hours of instruction per level with three modules and related sub-units in parallel with the school program. In each module, there are different types of visual and auditory activities for basic language skills with detailed explanations and instructions on the tasks to be completed. The course also offers a wide range of unit-end tests and quizzes which were hosted on an online learning server platform. Both skills teachers and students with a username and password could access the course throughout the academic year and they could exploit online materials and work on the tasks. Students could obtain feedback on their work and attempt the same task as many times as they like. Their work could be monitored by their skills teachers at the other end. Using the file manager

and submission tool, the class teacher(s) and students were free to post and receive information regarding discussion topics or questions related to the course. Various communication tools were also available on the online teaching platform through which teachers could respond to the opinions and comments of their learners or share information with the class. For example, the “Add Note” tool enables teachers to send a note to their students. Incoming alerts provides a channel for two-way communication between teachers and students. The most obvious advantage of the online learning approach could be accounted for its flexibility by which students could choose to work at a time they prefer and at a pace they are comfortable with.

Kadir Has University English Preparatory School used online courses which consisted of four level packs from Elementary to Intermediate levels of English classes online from Fall 2008 to Spring 2009. The same basic framework was used in all of the online language courses. English Preparatory school students all had to attend English classes because attendance is strictly emphasized in Preparatory School as English is going to be the heavily emphasized focal and reference point for their majors in the following year when they are going to study the core subjects in the associate degree program. The current syllabus typically requires students to follow a textbook. In order to enhance their proficiency in English as a second language, in addition to the face to face lessons conducted on campus, the institution initiated an online tool on which students were asked to do online courses that displayed parallelism with their on campus program. The main goal of introducing the online program was to enhance students’ proficiency in English and provide them with virtual homework material rather than bombard them with solid worksheets for academic purposes. Students were free to log onto the network and work on the online English course at home and in class as arranged and assigned by their class teachers. The online course was meant to be a supplementary part of the current syllabus for offline courses and it was also targeted to be used as frequent homework assignments. On regular basis, students were asked to bring their laptop computers and practice online courses in class. Thus they were also given control and freedom of self-study as autonomous learners. On average, a student as suggested would log on to the online course for about 4-6 hours a week plus about 30 hours of face-to-face contact with his or her teacher on campus. Course teachers acted as administrators who created online courses that are actually virtual classes for their students for specified periods so class teachers could agree to set a start and expiry date,

edit, open and hid courses according to the pacing of the current language teaching program or the related skill and they could also track and view the student progress data in a grade book format for each student. Once a course expired, a student could no longer access the related course. That function was meant to enforce students to perform related tasks on their due date.

It is obvious that students feel more autonomous and they become more willing to take more responsibility for the learning process at the same time. They could also decide on the amount of time and effort they put in, as well as the extent of their participation and interaction with the class teacher. In this respect, they were responsible for, and in control of, their own progress on the course.

Data Collection Technique and Sample Properties

The students responded to a questionnaire consisted of 16 items. The items included respectively age, sex, and level, and faculty-major, online program use, frequency of its use and language skills. The questionnaire was created to suit the associate degree students in the present study. First two items were about students' age and sex. Following questions were mainly about their faculty- majors, language levels and language study strategies and tools used in the Preparatory school. Finally, in last 10 items participants responded on a 5-point scale (1, never; 5, very often) as to the efficiency, frequency and possible benefits of the use of the online program regarding language skills. Higher scores reflected more favourable responses to the item.

The sample for this study included 418 students from different majors at four levels (A-B-C-D-E) in the English Preparatory School of a private university in Istanbul, Turkey. All participants were 19,5 years of age on average, 58 % of whom were male and 42 % were female. 68 % of students were social science majors; 32 % were science majors.

Statistical Analysis

After the questionnaire data were collected, they were recoded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 16. In a preliminary analysis, we first examined the frequency of the use of the online program in language skills and related benefits of its use. We then studied students' views about the online program according to the

differences between sex, language level, faculty, online program use and their getting technical assistance. For this purpose, regarding language skills, the difference between two groups was tested using Hotelling T^2 test; the difference for more than two groups was tested using MANOVA. In addition to this, for one variable, the difference for more than two groups was tested using ANOVA.

Correlations

The relationship between the frequency of the use of the online program in language skills such as Grammar, Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking and the extent how beneficial it was for the language skills taught in the program of the English Preparatory School was studied using Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient and a significant relationship was found among them. Grammar as a skill having the highest correlation coefficient (0,634) is consecutively followed by other language skills with related coefficients as Listening (0,596), Reading (0,558), Writing (0,466) and Speaking (0,423). Accordingly, it was found that use of online program had a positive contribution to the improvement of currently studied language skills as it provided a self-autonomous and easy-to-use medium.

ANOVA and MANOVA Results

Regarding the students who responded the questionnaire, their views about the online program were studied according to the differences between sex, language level, faculty-major, online program use, the frequency of use of the online program and getting technical assistance. MANOVA was used to see whether the online program displays a significance difference between groups for language skills such as Grammar, Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking that are taught in the Preparatory School program. MANOVA is a method which was developed to test the hypotheses based on multivariate normal distributions in two or more than two independent or dependent groups. (Hair; Anderson; Tatham; Black; 1998:336-350; Tatlıdil, 1992:110-114). While Hotelling T^2 test is used in comparisons between two dependent or independent multivariate groups, the analysis is done with MANOVA in cases where the number of groups is more than two (Özdamar, 1999:137-142).

Regarding the study whether the online program was useful for language skills as Grammar, Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking, no significant difference was found between male and female participants (Sig.: 0,408). On the other hand, a significant difference was found for different language levels (sig.: 0,016). According to Post Hoc tests applied, on a significance level of 5 %, the difference in Grammar for C and E levels only was found significant whereas for Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking skills, no difference between levels was found. In studying whether the online program was useful for the related language skills, Hotelling T² test was used to find out whether there is a significant difference between getting technical assistance and online program's being useful for related language skills. Accordingly, it was concluded that the difference between groups was significant (sig.: 0,009). On the other hand, no significant difference found between the groups of science and social science students (sig.:0,309).

Studying the online program in terms of frequency of its use in Grammar, Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking skills, a significant difference was found among language levels (Sig: 0,004). As a result of Post Hoc test done for double comparison, it was found that there was a difference between E and C and E and D language levels for Grammar; there was no difference between levels for Reading. For Listening, there was a difference between E and D levels where no difference was found between levels for Speaking. In addition to this, in terms of the frequency of use of the online program, a significant difference was found between those getting technical assistance and those not (Sig.:0,001).

ANOVA test was used to find out whether there was a difference between levels in terms of the frequency of use of the online program in Grammar skill. As a result, the difference was found significant at 0,006 and that difference was reported to result from the difference between E and C and E and D according to Post Hoc tests.

It was found that there was no difference between levels in Reading and Writing whereas there was difference in Listening (sig.:0,005). In peer comparisons, a significant difference was found between E and D.

ANOVA was used to test and find out whether there is a difference between language levels regarding the frequency of use of the online program, As a result, no significant difference was found between levels according to 5% level of significance (Sig: 0,062).

Discussion

With the communication tools available on the online platform, the course offers learners a choice of learning styles and how they wish to interact with the teacher. However, whether students are satisfied with the interactions they experience on the course depends on their perception of their own language competence. The results show that those students who felt good about their English language learning capability tended to have more favourable perceptions of their interactions during their participation in the online English course. Concerning language skills, the study shows that higher levels (A and B) smoothly did the required skills and didn't report any differences of any significance. However, lower levels (D and E) were quite aware of the skills that they need to practice and consequently they exploited productive skills such as Grammar and Speaking more on the online program. Students did not differ in the time and effort invested in the learning process, in the extent to which they liked the course, in their anxiety about using the online teaching platform and in their getting technical assistance but still , they had differential perceptions of the degree of interaction with their teacher in the learning process. The fact that language competence is the only factor significantly associated with interaction in the present study seems to suggest a need to consider a threshold level of language proficiency for the use of online English courses. Only those students who have been striving to attain a certain level of second language competence apparently reported to enjoy online language learning. In our study, according to the findings, regarding levels and language skills (Grammar, Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking) C and E levels benefited from especially Grammar more. This supports the fact that the online program with immense number of exercises allowed students to redo the exercises and provided them with comprehensive feedback which in a classroom situation would have been more time consuming for a teacher. In addition to Grammar, for lower levels as D and E, Listening as a skill was found more useful. This can be based on the fact that as a skill Listening requires more interactivity. In that sense, the online program with interactive auditory content provided a rich multimedia environment for this. It should be kept in mind that if online learning is more suitable for learners with higher proficiency, learners who are less proficient or less confident may not enjoy consuming all the skills on an online course or using the online mode. They would rather ask for more academic online practices based on doing

online search or research for their oral and written assignments throughout the academic year as again their level of proficiency will easily enable them to perform those mentioned assignments. Moreover, it is also possible that if students are more competent in the language, their online interactions using the language content more efficiently will be more sophisticated and they will consequently be more satisfied with them.

Another implication is related to course delivery technical support. It is obvious that students who get enough technical support and counselling are more likely to achieve and perform better than those who don't as they will feel more confident in tackling with various problems.

To identify the threshold level for online learning, a further research should be conducted on the actual proficiency of the students. It is important to find out whether the students' perceptions match their proficiency. By doing so, the findings may guide our judgement as to which a specific group may benefit most from online learning. It will also be useful to evaluate the effectiveness of the blended delivery mode and to provide us with information for use in setting out guidelines to determine the ratio between the two modes.

In conclusion, there is no clear definition for the extent to which computers are more trouble than benefit to learners. Nevertheless, despite all the apparent advantages and limitations of online learning, there is also evidence showing an important and effective role of technological aids as long as currently running syllabi can be customized in accordance with the online content.

REFERENCES

- Aydın, S. (2007), "Attitudes of Learners towards the Internet", *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology (TOJET)*, 6(3), p.19.
- Bach, S.(2006), *Online Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*. Buckingham, GBR: Open University Press.
- Chapelle, C. A. (2003), *English Language Learning and Technology. Lectures on Applied Linguistics in the Age of information and Communication Technology*. Philadelphia, PA, USA: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Dabaj, F. (2009), "The Role Of Gender And Age On Students' Perceptions Towards Online: Education Case Study: Sakarya University," Vocational High School. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational*

Technology (TOJET), 8(2), p.124.

Blaska, A. (2003), "Language Learning in the University: Creating Content and Community in non-specialist Programmes", *Teaching in Higher Education*, 8(1),p.1.

Donavant, B. W. (2009), "The New Modern Practice of Adult Education, Online Instruction in a Continuing Professional Education Setting", *Adult Education Quarterly*, 59 (3), p.1.

Dudaney, G. & Hockly, N.(2008), *How to Teach English with Technology* Edinburgh Gate, Pearson Education Limited.

Fischer, R.(2007), "How do we Know what Students are Actually Doing? Monitoring Students' Behavior in CALL" *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, Vol. 20, No. 5, December 2007, p. 409 – 442.

Hamatr, A. (2008), "Web Technologies for Language Learning and Implications for the Design of CMS for Language Instruction Proceedings of World Academy of Science", *Engineering and Technology*, V.1, p.1.

Hebert, D. G. (2007). "Five Challenges and Solutions in Online Music Teacher Education," *Research and Issues in Music Education*, Vol.5

<http://www.stthomas.edu/rimeonline/vol5/hebert.htm> (Last Access 29.07.09).

Holmberg, B. (2005), *Distance Education and Languages: Evolution and Change*. Clevedon, GBR: Multilingual Matters Limited.

Hubbard, P. (2006), *Teacher Education in CALL*, Amsterdam, NLD: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

İşman, A., Çağlar, M., Dabaj, F., Altınay, Z., Altınay, F. (2004), "Attitudes of Students toward Computers", *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology (TOJET)*, 3 (1), p.20.

Lewis, R. (2003), *How to Plan and Manage an E-Learning Programme*. Abingdon, Oxon, GBR: Gower Publishing Limited.

Liou, H. C.(2000), "Assessing Learner Strategies Using Computers: New Insights and Limitations", *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, Vol. 13(1), 1.

MacDonald, J.(2006). *Blended Learning and Online Tutoring : A Good Practice Guide*. Abingdon, Oxon, , GBR: Ashgate Publishing, Limited.

McConnell, D. (2006), *E-Learning Groups and Communities*. Berkshire, GBR: McGraw-Hill Education.

Maeroff, G. I. (2004), *Classroom of One : How Online Learning is Changing our Schools and Colleges*. Gordonsville, VA, USA: Palgrave

Macmillan.

Marriott, V. R. de C.& Torres L. P. L.(2005), “The Language Learning Lab: A Methodological Proposal for a Hybrid Course in a Virtual Environment” Chapter VII LAPLI –in Zaphiris, Panayiotis (Editor). “User-Centered Computer Aided Language Learning” *Hershey, PA, USA: IGI Global*, p.133.

Murday, K., Ushida, E., Chenoweth, N. A.(2008), “Learners’ and Teachers’ Perspectives on Language Online” *Computer Assisted Language Learning* Vol. 21,(2), 6, p. 125–142

Ng, C., Yeung. S. A.,Yuk Hung Hon, R. (2006), “Does Online Language Learning Diminish Interaction between Student and Teacher?”, *Educational Media International*, Vol. 43(3) , 1. p. 219–232

Özdamar, K. (1999), *Paket Programlar İle İstatistiksel Veri Analizi*, 2. Baskı, Kaan Kitabevi.

Paloff, R. M. (2001), *Lessons from the Cyberspace Classroom:The Realities of Online Teaching*.Somerset, NJ, USA: Jossey-Bass, Incorporated Publishers.

Rogerson-Revell, P. (2007), “Directions in E-learning Tools and Technologies and their Relevance to Online Distance Language Education”, *Open Learning* 22(1), p.4-60.

Simpson, J. (2005), “Learning Electronic Literacy Skills in an Online Language Learning Community”, *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 18(4), 1.p.327-345

Sorenson, E. K.(Editor) (2006), *Enhancing Learning Through Technology*, Hershey, PA, USA:IGI Global.

Tatlıdil, H. (1992), *Uygulamalı Çok Değişkenli İstatistiksel Analiz*, Ankara.

Vonderwell, S. & Savery, J. (2004), “Online Learning: Student Role And Readiness”, *The Turkish Online Journal Of Educational Technology (TOJET)*,3(3), p.40.