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THE EFFECTS OF ONLINE SELF-STUDY WEBSITES ON PREPARATORY CLASS UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Self-study and autonomy are important skills that should be possessed and improved for the learners of all subjects including foreign languages. In line with this fact, almost all modern course-books are accompanied by online practice activities that are included in the pack. Some students do not miss this opportunity while some others ignore it. Most of these self-study websites provide the users with practice in four skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing) as well as language areas such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Moreover, these exercises are mostly interactive in that the classroom teacher can check, correct and send back the items the students have completed. For young learners of English who often use their mobile phones and personal computers to improve their English, self-study websites are motivating and attention gripping facilities. This study aims to investigate to what extent these self-study websites promote learning English as a foreign language for preparatory class students at a state university in Turkey. The grades of the students who use and do not use the website for self-study in their mid-term exams and pop-quizzes are compared and a questionnaire as to their attitudes towards the online self-study programs is conducted. The results of the questionnaire and the comparison are discussed within the study.

Keywords: *Online Learning, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Self-study Skills, Learner Autonomy*

ÇEVRİMİÇİ BİREYSEL ÇALIŞMA WEB SİTELERİNİN ÜNİVERSİTE HAZIRLIK SINIFI ÖĞRENCİLERİ ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİLERİ

ÖZET

Bireysel çalışma ve özerklik, yabancı diller eğitimi de dahil olmak üzere, her bir disiplinde eğitim alan öğrenciler için sahip olunması ve geliştirilmesi gereken önemli becerilerdir. Bu gerçeğe paralel olarak,

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neredeyse tüm modern ders kitaplarının paket içeriğine çevrimiçi uygulama etkinlikleri dahil edilmektedir. Bazı öğrenciler bu fırsatı en iyi biçimde kullanırken, diğer bazı öğrenciler ise bu olanağı göz ardı etmektedir. Bu bireysel çalışma web sitelerinin çoğu, kullanıcılara dört dil yeteneğinde (dinleme, konuşma, okuma ve yazma) ve dilbilgisi, kelime bilgisi ve telaffuz gibi alanlarda pratik yapma olanağı sağlamaktadır. Dahası, bu uygulamalar çoğunlukla sınıf öğretmeninin öğrencileri kontrol etmesi, düzeltmesi ve öğrencilerin tamamladığı öğeleri geri alabilmesi açısından çift yönlü etkileşim sağlamaktadır. İngilizce seviyelerini geliştirmek için cep telefonlarını ve kişisel bilgisayarlarını sıklıkla kullanan genç öğrenciler için, bireysel çalışma web siteleri motive edici ve dikkat çekici özellikler taşımaktadır. Bu çalışma, bu bireysel çalışma web sitelerinin, bir devlet üniversitesindeki hazırlık sınıfı öğrencileri için yabancı dili olarak İngilizce öğrenmelerini ne ölçüde desteklediğini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bireysel çalışma web sitesini kullanan ve kullanmayan öğrencilerin ara sınavlar ve haftalık olarak yapılan sürpriz sınavlarda aldıkları notları karşılaştırılmış ve öğrencilerin çevrimiçi bireysel çalışma programlarına yönelik tutumlarını belirlemek amacıyla bir anket yapılmıştır. Bu çalışma içerisinde, yapılan karşılaştırma ve anketin sonuçları ele alınarak tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Çevrimiçi Öğrenme, Bilgisayar Destekli Dil Eğitimi (BDDE), Bireysel Çalışma Yetenekleri, Öğrenci Özerkliği.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The utilization of computers and internet technology has become an unavoidable fact for foreign language teachers and learners alike (Beatty, 2003; Carrier, 1997; Chapelle, 2008; White, 2003). As Carrier (1997) reports, at the beginning of the 90s people started asking each other 'What's your fax number?' instead of 'Do you have a fax number?' and by the 2000s, it has become unusual for people in developed countries to ask 'Do you have an e-mail address?'. The advent of the personal computer and the Internet in the 1970s, and their subsequent refinement and global diffusion, has resulted in a revolution in education generally and in distance education specifically (Lynch & Dembo, 2004).

Carrier (1997) highlighted that the internet is a rapidly growing part of international communications, and a significant feature of our post-industrial age. Although little about it is designed to assist English language teaching as a key element in the global communications network so far, it is certain to become a part of student and teacher interaction in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). It is possible to assert that this prediction has come true by the end of the first decade of the 21st century and high

technology, notably in the form of computers, has established a powerful presence in foreign and second language pedagogy. "A common justification for the use of computers in language teaching and learning is that it is said to promote learner autonomy, which researchers and practitioners alike now set as a very important goal" (Jones, 2001).

According to Chapelle, "the expanding presence of technology in L2 use, L2 teaching, and L2 teacher education has continually provided impetus for developing pedagogy that takes advantage of technology" (2005: 746). Course-book companies have been offering online self-study, online assessment and online practice opportunities to their clients and some of the users try to make use of these facilities. Accordingly, the significance of this study lies in the fact that it will be possible to find out the effects of online practice activities on the students' grades in the formal mid-term exams and pop quizzes and their perceptions of online practice activities.

The researcher teaches General English as a Foreign Language to Preparatory class students at the School of Foreign Languages in Suleyman Demirel University, Isparta. The students are required to complete online activities offered although some of the students do not fulfill this requirement. Therefore, by comparing the grades of the students - who use and do not use the website for self-study - in their mid-term exams and pop-quizzes conducted by the school, the aims of this study are:

(a) to investigate to what extent the online practice activity promote learning English as a foreign language for preparatory class students,

(b) to determine the students' attitudes towards the online practice website.

1.1. Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

The introduction of computers and related equipment into language learning contexts has brought about a new approach called Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Canning (2004) defines CALL as "…an approach to language teaching and learning in which the computer is used as an aid to the presentation, reinforcement and assessment of material to be learned, usually including a substantial interactive element". Gündüz summarizes CALL as "…a means of 'presenting, reinforcing and testing' particular language items" (2005: 197). According to Beatty:

Given the breadth of what may go in computer-assisted language learning (CALL), a definition of CALL that accommodates its changing nature is any process in which a learner uses a computer and, as a result, improves his or her language. Although this definition might seem unworkably large, it at least encompasses a broad spectrum of current practice in the teaching and learning of language at the computer (2003: 7).

Following the introduction of technology, three important changes have become apparent in language teaching. Firstly, the range of tasks that teachers can develop for their learners has expanded dramatically from the in-class and homework tasks that comprise most language teaching syllabi to a range of tasks for learning through computer-mediated communication and those entailing interaction between the learner and the computer. The new technology-based tasks stretch the former boundaries of registers in which written and spoken language typically occur, and expand the potential participants in any task. As a result, language teachers ask the learners to do online assignments rather than traditional paper and pencil assignments. Nowadays, course-book designers provide the users with online self-study and language practice facilities. Secondly, technology-based language testing is changing the character of language tests in ways that are important for the classroom. Whereas in the past some learners might question the value of some CALL activities, many such activities are now seen as helpful in preparing for high-stakes tests that are delivered online. Thirdly, a look at any of the journals on technology and language teaching will demonstrate that language teachers use the technology not only for teaching but also for investigating their learners' use of the software (Chapelle, 2005).

The changes explained above have given birth to a new term 'Online Learning', which is defined by White as "…an approach to teaching and learning that includes the use of Internet technologies for learning and teaching. The rapid intensification in online delivery has led to the development of a growing array of software systems that combine the functions of delivering web-based course materials with support for other functions needed for the delivery of courses online – mostly interactive, administrative and support functions" (2003: 27).

Computers and the internet have made foreign language self-study materials increasingly easy to access and use, and there are now many software applications marketed as complete language learning solutions, from free self-study courses such as the BBC's online language offerings or LiveMocha, to for-pay options through companies like Rosetta Stone, Auralog, and Transparent Language. These organizations advertise their products for self-study, and the commercial products are especially appealing for novice learners, arguing that they will help the learners achieve their language learning goals faster than they ever thought possible, or that their program is the most advanced language training program available (Nielson, 2011).

Until recently, an elementary or an intermediate level language course-book pack used to consist of a course-book, a workbook, a dictionary, some short stories or readers and at best audio-cassettes to practice listening. There has been a small but significant change in the content of the course-

book pack nowadays. The students are provided with 'user codes' which will enable them to register websites for online practice and study. This application is becoming more prevalent year by year and students are required to do the activities on the website instead of or in addition to the ones on their workbooks. Carrier (1997) notes that students are motivated to spend longer reading from Internet sources, will listen to long audio passages from multimedia or internet sources, and will therefore benefit, as with other media input, from exposure to the authentic language they encounter, which means that integration of computers and Internet sources into the language learning contexts is motivating at least for many young learners. Moreover, it is important to accept that CALL can genuinely lead to autonomy, to a state in which learners exercise as much control as possible over the learning process and are as little dependent on the teacher as possible (Jones, 2001). According to Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, "technology makes possible greater individualization, social interaction, and reflection on language, and greater student motivation" (2011: 201). Nevertheless, managers and learners alike should consider them as supplements to instructor-mediated training rather than stand-alone solutions (Nielson, 2011).

1.2. Learner Autonomy and Self-Study Skills

CALL applications are closely related to the principle of learner autonomy, which is generally accepted as a condition beneficial to the language learning process. (Beatty, 2003; Brown, 2007; Nielson, 2011; White, 2003) Learner autonomy is generally defined as "…the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Holec, 1981: 3). Furthermore, Nunan (2000) (cited in McMurry, *et al.*, 2010: 100) states that "Autonomy implies a capacity to exercise control over one's own learning". In other words, autonomous learners should be able to determine the general focus of their learning, take an active role in the management of the learning process, and have freedom of choice with regards to learning resources and activities. Jones (2001) discusses various areas in which a learner can be autonomous. These areas are class work, homework, teacher-led autonomy, teaching oneself, full autonomy, and naturalistic immersion.

Teachers can promote autonomy without creating a teacher-dominated learning process, and instead, by letting the students take charge of their own learning. The students are expected to become aware of their strengths and weaknesses and structure their learning in accordance with their specific needs. In this respect, self-study skills are directly related to the learners' notion of 'autonomy'. However; autonomy does not necessarily come about as a result of self-study because learners do not develop the ability to self-direct their learning simply by being placed in situations where they have no other option (Nielson, 2011). Learners need support, interaction, feedback, and appropriate materials to benefit from self-study

and there are many factors that could contribute to the success of self-directed learners, such as learner-internal beliefs and practices, the support available to learners, the way the resources are used, and the content of the resources themselves.

On the other hand, Jones (2001) identifies four major constraints on the potential success of CALL projects and their prospect of cultivating autonomy:

- *Absence of technical support*: The biggest constraint of all, of course, is absence of technical support, without which CALL simply cannot proceed.

- *Learners' lack of technical competence*: Most initial CALL classes are likely to have a mixture of technical abilities, perhaps the whole range from complete or near-novices to expert users. Yet no activity or project can succeed without a prescribed level of mastery, which implies that the learners should possess the technical competence to benefit from the project.

- *Learners' lack of interest*: Clearly, a large number of foreign language students, like students everywhere, are fascinated by the computer, and they would regard computing skills along with the acquisition of English as 'essential for survival in the modern world', but lack of interest on the part of the learners will probably end up with failure.

- *Learners' disinclination to be autonomous*: The overwhelming majority of learners are likely to be interested in learning English by means of the computer, yet even among these students who are committed to CALL it is possible that some will prefer the traditional teacher-directed environment to the self-directed mode that proponents of autonomy favor.

Sokolik (2001) raises the issue of interactivity and feedback and states that "If an activity is intended as self-study, feedback is extremely important. Every learner action should provide an opportunity for learning. Feedback should anticipate the learner's possible wrong responses and give full explanations. The activity should take advantage of interactivity. Unless formatted for printing, pages should be presented on the computer using interactivity, and not merely presented as potential printouts to be completed with a pencil" (Sokolik, 2001: 486). Thus, these constraints may lead to the case of participant attrition, which will show itself as a decline in the number of participants as the project proceeds (Nielson, 2011).

As long as these problems are taken into consideration and preventive measures have been taken, the experience will prove to be motivating and yield positive results. As Larsen-Freeman & Anderson notes "CALL programs can even adapt to diverse learners by analyzing their input and providing customized feedback and remedial exercises suited to their

proficiency. There are also programs that feature computer adaptive testing so that students respond to test questions at an appropriate level" (2011: 200). Even though the expectation that computers would be a panacea for those trying to learn second languages has not been realized, it is beyond controversy that computers are providing instructors and students alike with a new battery of tools with which language can be learned more effectively. (Sokolik, 2001)

2. METHODOLOGY & DATA ANALYSIS

This study adopts an experimental approach in that the participants of the study have been divided into two groups. The participants in the control group consist of students who do not make use of online practice activities and the students in the test group participate in online practice activities. In addition, the study consists of two steps and three research questions are aimed to be investigated:

1. Is there a meaningful difference in the scores of the students - who use and do not use the website for self-study - in their mid-term exams and pop-quizzes conducted by the school?

2. To what extent do Online Practice Activities promote learning English as a foreign language for preparatory class students at a state university in Turkey?

3. What is the attitude of the students towards Online Practice Activities?

In this study, these three research questions are investigated using a quantitative research design. In order to answer the first and second research questions, the grades of the students - who use and do not use the website for self-study - in their mid-term exams and pop-quizzes are compared and discussed. For the second part of the study, a questionnaire as to the students' attitudes towards the online practice activities has been conducted. The results of the questionnaire are discussed within the study.

2.1. Context

This study has been conducted at a state university located in the Mediterranean Sea region of Turkey (Isparta Suleyman Demirel University - SDU) with undergraduate and pre-undergraduate students enrolled in the Undergraduate Compulsory Preparatory Program. The school adopts a four-skills-integrated curriculum and the 'European Language Portfolio' (ELP) has been employed and applied in the school. The students have 24 hours of English classes. By the time this study has been conducted, the students have

completed about 6 months (24 weeks) of the academic year and they have taken three mid-term exams.

2.2. Participants

The number of participants, who are studying in the Undergraduate or Pre-Undergraduate Compulsory Preparatory Program of SDU, is 60. This study has been conducted in two different classes lectured by the researcher himself. 31 students are enrolled in the pre-undergraduate preparatory class and the level of the students is A2-B1 according to the CEFR. 29 students are enrolled in the undergraduate preparatory class and the level of the students is B1-B2 according to the CEFR. Of these 60 students, 41 do the Online Practice Activities. Therefore, 41 students form the experiment group whereas the other 19 students constitute the control group. Of these 60 students, 35 are male and 25 are female. 55 students are 18-22 years old and 5 are 23-30 years old. The distribution of the participants according to their departments is as follows:

-Foreign Trade: 17 students

-Tourism and Hotel Administration: 14 students

-Engineering: 22 students

-Business Administration: 7 students

2.3. Data Collection Instrument

In order to determine if there is any meaningful difference in the academic achievement of the students in the control group (consisting of the students who do not do online practice activities) and in the experiment group (consisting of the students that do online practice activities), the students' three mid-term exam grades and seven pop quiz grades have been collected by the researcher. Their mean scores have been computed and compared.

In the second part of the study, a questionnaire as to the students' attitudes towards online practice activities has been constructed by the researcher. The questionnaire contains 22 questions dealing with the advantages and disadvantages of online practice activities and the students' attitudes towards online practice activities. The questionnaire has been designed in the format of a '3 point Likert-type scale' (1: *agree*, 2: *undecided*, 3:*disagree*). The reliability level of the data collection instrument has been computed via Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20.

Table 1. Reliability Coefficiency of Data Collection Instrument.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
,876	22

The reliability level of the data collection instrument has been computed as ,876, which indicates that the questionnaire has a high reliability. Additionally, with the aim of preventing any misunderstanding, the items in the questionnaire have been written in the native language (Turkish) of the participants. The results of the questionnaire are handled and discussed item by item in the 'data analysis' section of the study.

2.4. Data Analysis

For the first part of the study, the students' grades in the three mid-term exams which were conducted in November 2016, January 2017 and March 2017, respectively and in the seven pop quizzes conducted once or twice a month have been obtained by the researcher from the 'Student Affairs Department' of the school. For each student, 10 different scores have been summed up using 'Microsoft Office Excel 2003' and their mean scores have been computed. There are 41 students in the Experiment Group and the mean of their scores is 83 out of 100. In the experiment group, the highest mean score is 97 out of 100 and the lowest mean score is 53 out of 100. On the other hand, the Control Group includes 19 students and the mean of their scores is 62 out of 100. In the control group, the highest mean score is 87 out of 100 and the lowest mean score is 23 out of 100. As can be seen, the difference between the scores of the experiment and control group is 21 out of 100.

Table 2. Mean scores of the experiment group and control group in the mid-term exams and pop-quizzes.

	Experiment Group (41 students)	**Control Group (19 students)**
Mean Scores in 3 mid-term exams and 7 pop quizzes	83 %	62 %

For the second part of the study, a questionnaire has been constructed by the researcher and it has been answered by 41 participants forming the experiment group. The questionnaire consists of 22 questions which aim to arrive at an understanding of students' attitudes towards online practice activities. The items in the questionnaire are presented at the end of the study (See Appendix).

The following table presents the distribution of students' answers for the questionnaire. The discussion of the data is presented on the next chapter of the study.

Table 3. The results of the questionnaire.

	AGREE		**UNDECIDED**		**DISAGREE**	
	Students	%	Students	%	Students	%
ITEM 1	27	(65,8 %)	9	(21,9 %)	5	(12,1 %)
ITEM 2	20	(48,7 %)	12	(29,2 %)	9	(21,9 %)
ITEM 3	15	(36,5 %)	14	(34,1 %)	12	(29,2 %)
ITEM 4	8	(19,5 %)	10	(24,3 %)	23	(56 %)
ITEM 5	25	(60,9 %)	10	(24,3 %)	6	(14,6 %)
ITEM 6	23	(56 %)	9	(21,9 %)	9	(21,9 %)
ITEM 7	10	(24,3 %)	12	(29,2 %)	19	(46,3 %)
ITEM 8	6	(14,6 %)	11	(26,8 %)	24	(58,5 %)
ITEM 9	2	(4,8 %)	4	(9,7 %)	35	(85,3 %)
ITEM 10	25	(60,9 %)	5	(12,1 %)	11	(26,8 %)
ITEM 11	24	(58,5 %)	10	(24,3 %)	7	(17 %)
ITEM 12	5	(12,1 %)	3	(7,3 %)	33	(80,4 %)
ITEM 13	7	(17 %)	3	(7,3 %)	31	(75,6 %)
ITEM 14	30	(73,1 %)	5	(12,1 %)	6	(14,6 %)
ITEM 15	10	(24,3 %)	9	(21,9 %)	22	(53,6 %)
ITEM 16	4	(9,7 %)	7	(17 %)	30	(73,1 %)
ITEM 17	28	(68,2 %)	7	(17 %)	6	(14,6 %)
ITEM 18	27	(65,8 %)	7	(17 %)	7	(17 %)
ITEM 19	19	(46,3 %)	11	(26,8 %)	11	(26,8 %)
ITEM 20	14	(34,1 %)	9	(21,9 %)	18	(43,9 %)
ITEM 21	27	(65,8 %)	8	(19,5 %)	6	(14,6 %)
ITEM 22	15	(36,5 %)	7	(17 %)	19	(46,3 %)

3. DISCUSSION & RESULTS

The first and the second research questions addressed in this study are related to the first part of this study. The first research question is if there is a meaningful difference in the scores of the students - who use and do not use the website for self-study - in their mid-term exams and pop-quizzes conducted by the school. And the second research question aims to find out to what extent Online Practice Activities promote learning English as a foreign language for preparatory class students. Accordingly, the participants have been classified into two groups (Experiment Group – 41 students and Control Group – 19 students). The students in the 'experiment group' do the online practice activities regularly and the students in the 'control group' do not do the online practice activities.

According to the results of three mid-term exams and seven pop quizzes conducted by the school, the mean score of the experiment group is 83 out of 100 whereas that of the control group is 62 out of 100. The difference between their mean scores is 21%, which is not a negligible figure. The school employs 'criterion referenced assessment' and the passing grade is 70 out of 100. Considering this fact, it is possible to claim that the mean score of the experiment group is above the passing grade whereas that of the control group is below the passing grade. Therefore, it is clear that doing online practice activities has a positive influence on the academic success of the students.

The third research question is related to the attitude of the students towards Online Practice Activities and a questionnaire which includes 22 items has been prepared by the researcher and completed by the students in the experiment group. The items in the questionnaire can be classified according to the following sub-titles:

-Four language skills: items 2, 5, 10, 15

-Language areas: items 18, 20, 21

-Self-study skills and computer-literacy: items 19, 7, 14

-Perceived influence on general proficiency and exams: items 1, 11, 17

-Integration of English and technology: items 3, 4, 6

-Problems and drawbacks: items 8, 9, 12, 13, 16, 22

In terms of four language skills, the majority of students believe that online practice activities contribute to their listening, reading, and writing skills. The number of students who agree that online practice helps develop their receptive skills (listening and reading) is higher compared to productive skills (speaking and writing), speaking being the lowest. This finding can be interpreted as online practice activities are more helpful in terms of receptive skills. In addition, the students do not think that their speaking skills can be developed through online practice. This finding is directly related to the design of the website because the students are asked to speak on a topic for a limited period of time. The absence of an interlocutor makes this task unrealistic and an 'interaction' type of task rather than a 'production' type would be more realistic.

As to the language areas (vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation), the majority of students agree that online practice helps them improve their grammar and vocabulary, but not their pronunciation. The reason underlying this tendency may be that grammar and vocabulary are more emphasized in the classroom and in the exams compared to pronunciation. This tendency

possibly influences the students' perceptions and also may lead to a washback effect. Therefore, pronunciation remains a language area that is ignored both by the teachers and the students.

Majority of the students believe that online practice improves their self-study skills and related to this issue, the benefits of being able to see and correct their mistakes instantly are accepted by the highest number of students. 30 students (73.1%) believe that while doing online practice, it is very helpful to see and correct their mistakes instantly. On the other hand, majority of the students do not believe that online practice helps them develop their computer-literacy, which can be interpreted as they have already acquired computer-literacy by the time they have started university.

Items 1, 11, and 17 are related to the students' attitudes towards the influence of online practice on general English proficiency and their scores in the exams. Not surprisingly, majority of the students agree that online practice has a positive influence on their English proficiency and their exam scores. This is in parallel with the findings of the first part of the study in that the students in the experiment group have higher scores than the students in the control group in three mid-term exams and seven pop quizzes.

As to the integration of computers and the Internet into English Language Education, most of the students believe that English Language Education should be integrated with technology, which is not surprising as most of the students tend to use electronic dictionaries on their mobile phones. However, a slight majority of the students agree that printed materials (such as workbooks) rather than online practice are more helpful, which contradicts the previous item. Furthermore, majority of students agree that doing online practice is more interesting for them as they are also interested in computers and the Internet.

Items 8, 9, 12, 13, 16, 22 are related to the problems and drawbacks of online practice activities. Items 8 and 13 reveal that the students do not have difficulty in finding computers and Internet access to complete the activities. Moreover, the students do not have difficulty doing online practice as they are good at using computers and the Internet and they do not experience technical problems while doing the online practice activities. Another drawback of online practice is that the students may do the activities with the help of a friend or have him/her do the activities on behalf of him/herself in order to get a higher score or in order not to spend too much time. A majority of students claim that they do the activities themselves. In addition, a slight majority of students agree that they have enough time to complete 'online practice activities'.

As a general overview of the findings of the two parts of this study, it is possible to claim that online practice has a positive influence on the students' English language learning experiences according to their scores on the exams. In addition, this positive influence is also perceived by the students and their general attitude towards online practice is mostly positive.

4. CONCLUSION

The importance of learner autonomy and self-study skills for language learners in foreign language education has been repeatedly highlighted in the literature (Figura & Jarvis, 2007; Reinders, 2010). Another issue that has been emphasized in the relevant literature is the potential uses and benefits of computers and the internet in foreign language education (Balçıkanlı, 2012; Jones, 2001; Rüschoff & Ritter, 2001). The benefits of recent technology can be summarized as: 1) new opportunities for learners to take more control of their learning and access their own customized information, resources, tools and services, (2) a wider range of expressive capability, (3) more collaborative ways of working, community creation, dialogue and sharing knowledge, (4) a setting for learner achievements to attract an authentic audience, (5) a venue for language learners to be engaged in authentic language. More specifically, online learning gives language learners control over the selection of materials and over the strategies to use, and of course independent action. According to Balçıkanlı (2012: 10), "…it is more than a necessity that web technologies be employed at the service of language learning as frequently as possible".

As a consequence, many course-book companies have been offering online practice facilities to their clients or users in the last five years. Although these online practice activities may have some problems or weaknesses such as lack of interactive speaking activities or pronunciation activities, they provide the users with the opportunity to improve their general language proficiency as well as their self-study skills. Anyway, the integration of technology into foreign language education makes the experience more interesting and motivating for young learners.

As the results of this study clearly indicate, the potential of online practice activities in terms of improving the learners' receptive skills rather than their productive skills is greater. This fact should be taken into consideration by the designers of the online practice activities and productive skills of the users should also be aimed improved. In a similar vein, pronunciation is another area that needs to be improved by the designers. On the other hand, as the participants of this study have agreed, self-study skills of the learners are improved with the help of online practice activities and their autonomy as language learners has been enhanced. Furthermore, the

participants of the study are aware of the fact that doing online practice has contributed to their comparatively higher grades in the mid-term exams and pop quizzes.

However, it should also be noted that online practice activities are not to be considered as stand-alone solutions but as supplements to instructor-mediated training. As long as this fact is taken into consideration and precautions are taken regarding the specific weaknesses of the activities, these activities contribute to the overall proficiency of the learners besides bringing novelty into foreign language education.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

1. I believe that 'online practice' helps me develop my English.
2. I think that 'online practice' helps me develop my writing skills.
3. I think that printed materials (such as workbooks) rather than 'online practice' are more helpful.

4. I do not approve of integrating computers and the Internet with English Language Education.

5. I think that ‘online practice’ helps me develop my reading skills.

6. Doing ‘online practice’ is more interesting for me as I am also interested in computers and the Internet.

7. I believe that ‘online practice’ helps me develop my computer – literacy.

8. I do not have Internet access available where I live/stay.

9. I have difficulty doing ‘online practice’ as I am not good at using computers and the Internet.

10. I think that ‘online practice’ helps me develop my listening skills.

11. I think that computers and the Internet assist me in English Language Education.

12. I often experience technical problems while I am doing the ‘online practice’ activities.

13. I have difficulty finding a computer to do ‘online practice’ where I live/stay.

14. While I am doing ‘online practice’, it is very helpful to see and correct my mistakes instantly.

15. I think that ‘online practice’ helps me develop my speaking skills.

16. In order to get a higher score or in order not to spend too much time, I prefer to do the activities with the help of a friend or have him/her do the activities on behalf of myself.

17. I believe that doing ‘online practice’ affects my scores on the exams positively.

18. I think that ‘online practice’ helps me develop my grammar.

19. I think that ‘online practice’ helps me develop my self-study skill.

20. I think that ‘online practice’ helps me develop my pronunciation.

21. I think that ‘online practice’ helps me develop my vocabulary.

22. I do not find enough time to complete ‘online practice’ activities.