



Students' Homework Performance and Views on Edmodo

Öğrencilerin Ödev Performansları ve Edmodo'ya İlişkin Görüşleri *

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ABSTRACT: Using Educational Social Networking Sites (ESNSs) in educational settings has been a very popular practice especially in the past decade. Yet, its impact on learning is still under discussion. With this purpose in mind, this experimental study aims to investigate university vocational school students' homework performance in Edmodo, which is an ESNS, and to identify their views on online assignments. During the experimentation, five weekly assignments were given for the experimental group via Edmodo and for the control group as pen-and-paper homework. During the assignment process, semi-structured interviews were held with the participants in the experimental group about online assignments. The findings revealed that both groups usually had high rates of homework submission. Moreover, the participants of the control group had a better performance in homework grades. The study also revealed that students usually have positive views on online assignments. The study concluded with the suggestion that EFL teachers should give assignments as online in university vocational schools since they are more instructive, motivating and enjoyable to do for students, as well as, more practical in terms of submission, checking, and grading.

Keywords: Online assignments, Edmodo, pen-and-paper assignments

ÖZ: Eğitsel Sosyal Ağ Sitelerinin (ESAS) eğitimde kullanılması, özellikle son on yılda çok popüler bir uygulamadır. Ancak, öğrenme üzerindeki etkisi hala tartışılmaktadır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, bu deneysel çalışma, meslek yüksekokulu öğrencilerinin eğitsel bir sosyal ağ sitesi olan Edmodo platformundaki ödev performanslarını araştırmayı ve öğrencilerin çevrimiçi ödevler hakkındaki görüşlerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma süresince, deney grubuna Edmodo üzerinden ve kontrol grubuna ise geleneksel ödev (kâğıt-kalem kullanılarak yapılan ödev) olarak toplam beş adet haftalık ödevler verilmiştir. Ödevlerin verilme sürecinde, deney grubundaki öğrencilerle yaptıkları çevrimiçi ödevler (Edmodo) hakkında yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Bulgular, her iki grubun ödev teslim oranlarının genelde yüksek olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bununla birlikte, ödevleri geleneksel yöntemle yapan öğrenciler ödev başarısında, ödevleri çevrimiçi yapan öğrencilere göre daha iyi bir performans göstermişlerdir. Çalışma sonucunda, İngilizce öğretmenlerinin meslek yüksekokullarında ödevleri, ödevlerin teslimi, kontrolü ve bu ödevlere not vermenin daha pratik olmasının yanı sıra, öğrenciler için daha fazla öğretici, motive edici ve eğlenceli olmasından dolayı, çevrimiçi olarak vermesi gerektiği önerilmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Çevrimiçi ödevler, Edmodo, geleneksel ödevler

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Introduction

Today's adult learners spend a great part of their lives for surfing on the Internet and using Social Networking Sites (SNSs) such as Facebook and Twitter (Manowong, 2016; Türkmen, 2012). These SNSs, which are tools of Web 2.0 technologies, ensure that their members are able to build communities and have opportunities to communicate and collaborate with each other (Balcıkanlı, 2010, as cited in Durak, Çankaya, & Yünkül, 2014). Similarly, Shier (2005) asserts that these sites are often used by students today in order to make new friends, build communities and communicate with each other (as cited in Durak et al., 2014).

The popularity of these sites aroused educators' attention and the focus of the investigations was on how they could be used as teaching and learning tools (Schwartz, 2009, as cited in Durak et al., 2014). Now, there are many ESNSs such as Edmodo, Beyazpano, Edcanvas, Edublogs, Glogster, SchoolTube, Edshelf, Thinkbinder, Busuu, Wikispaces, and Schoology which give educators opportunities to do in-class and out-class activities for their students in order to supplement their teaching process and increase motivation. For instance, Edmodo, which will be explained in the following sections in details, is one of these ESNSs created by educators for educational purposes. This platform was designed for teachers, students and also parents. It is seen as a social learning tool which provides a simple way for teachers and students in a virtual and learner-centred class to connect and collaborate and for parents to be included in the education process. Edmodo is now a worldwide platform used for different ages and levels of education (Doğan, Demir, Bal & Ülkü, 2017).

Depending on our experience, it is possible to argue that lack of motivation and academic failure are among the main problems for university vocational school students in English courses in Turkey. Similarly, the students in Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University (MAKU) Gölhisar Vocational School (GVS) have also insufficient motivation and they are not successful enough in English courses even though they are very much aware of the role of English as a lingua franca and they believe that English will provide new opportunities in the future. (Şevik, Yalçın & Bostancıoğlu, 2017). The students in GVS are usually given homework in EFL classrooms of for the aim of enabling students to reinforce and practice what they learn in class and increase the amount of target language exposure. The assignments are given as pen-and-paper from the workbook consisting of additional exercises which enable learners to practise the target language. However, the students usually forget to do/bring or they do not complete/do their homework as a result of their motivation lack. As a matter of fact, the researcher of this study has a lot of classes to teach and workload at school. As it is stressed in several studies, checking, grading and giving feedback about assignments affect students' success and performance positively (Dufresne, Mestre, Hart & Rath, 2002; Rosário et al., 2015; Dere, Yücel & Yalçınalp, 2016; Kazez & Bahçeci, 2016;). Thus, it is almost impossible for the researcher to check and grade homework or give feedback for each student. Therefore, he plans to give online assignments and use the Edmodo platform in order to provide immediate feedback and instant grading for these assignments.

The main objective of the researchers of this study is to overcome the current shortcomings of traditional homework practices, encourage students to do the given assignments, increase the exposure in the target language and finally to increase their motivation level by integrating an online assignment tool (Edmodo) into the EFL classrooms in GVS.

This study aims to investigate university vocational school students' homework performances in Edmodo and to identify students' views on online assignments. In line with this purpose, the present study addresses the following research question:

1. How do students perform in online EFL assignments in university vocational schools?

2. What are students' views about online EFL assignments?

The current study is significant for both theoretical and practical reasons. At the theoretical level, it sheds light on an area of research in EFL assignments which is neglected by researchers worldwide. At the practical level, the study will help EFL instructors teaching in the local research site in understanding students' homework performance in Edmodo as an online homework platform. Moreover, this study is among the first studies carried out in a Turkish university vocational school context especially about Edmodo and online assignments.

What is Edmodo?

Even though we come across to a few definitions of Edmodo in the literature, three definitions in particular give us a better understanding. First, Edmodo is “a web-based platform that provides a safe and easy way for your class to connect and collaborate, share content, and access homework, grades, and school notices. It is like Facebook but in a safe and controlled environment appropriate for school” (Educational Technology and Mobile Learning, Para.1). Second, Kongchan (2012) describes Edmodo as a modestly designed platform, similar to Facebook but intended for educational purposes, which enables teachers, students and even parents to extend the teaching and learning process. And third, Edmodo, in the official website, is metaphorically defined as: “... a learning-first network that puts your classroom in the cloud and powers communications for your entire district” (What's New on Edmodo, 2018).

Edmodo was founded by Nic Borg, Jeff O'Hara, and Crystal Hutter in Chicago, Illinois, in 2008 with the intention of connecting all students with the people and resources (About Edmodo, 2018). This social learning network also aims to bridge the gap between the lifestyles of students and the way they learn in school. It is based in San Mateo, California and today it has 87.743.748 members all around the world. Edmodo is used in 190 different countries, 7.400 districts, and 400.000 schools all over the world.

The Advantages of Edmodo

Edmodo is a popular educational social network tool around the world and it provides many educational benefits for teachers, students, and also parents. The most pertinent advantages of Edmodo can be listed as follows:

- It is free of charge for all users of it. This seems to be the most alluring feature of Edmodo and unignorable fact especially for teachers and parents because many online homework systems require each student to pay for access besides the cost of a textbook and/or other material (Doorn, Janssen & O'Brien, 2010).

- Edmodo provides a secure online environment for its users (Kongchan, 2012; Alemdağ, 2013; Dere et al., 2016). SNSs, in general, have many security risks for their users such as copying of personal data and cyber-attacks. These sites are not created for educational purposes (Manowong, 2016) and they include many advertisements and inappropriate content and abuse of the Internet (Alemdağ, 2013). Edmodo, as an ESNS, is beyond security risks and its primary concern is providing pedagogical benefits for its members.

- Edmodo provides multi-language support (About Edmodo, 2018). None of ESNSs provides Turkish language support except for Busuu and Edmodo. Edmodo has had the Turkish language support since 2013 (Polat, 2016). Thus, even though some researchers claim that the Turkish language support of Edmodo is insufficient (Sırakaya, 2014; Kazez & Bahçeci, 2016; Ekici, 2017), the users of Edmodo whose native language is Turkish will unlikely have problems with using the Edmodo website in general.

- The main reason why Edmodo was designed is to help teachers to reduce their workload and to make it easier for them to keep in touch with their class and students. (Edmodo, 2018).

- Edmodo enables the teachers all over the world to collaborate (Alemdağ, 2013). They are able to share their ideas and resources regarding educational issues.

- Edmodo improves the communication between teachers and students (Kılıçkaya, 2012; Thongmak, 2013; Balasubramanian, Jaykumar & Fukey, 2014; Sırakaya, 2014; Torun & Dargut, 2015; Dere et al., 2016; Kara, 2016; Kazez & Bahçeci, 2016; Durak, 2017; Ekici, 2017; Özkan, 2017). Teachers can make announcements, instant notifications and alerts. Besides, learners are able to share their ideas easily via Edmodo when they are reluctant to participate in the classroom (Rogers, 2011; as cited in Hamutoğlu & Kızılcı, 2017). Bright (2013) claims that Edmodo increases the communication between not only teachers and students but also teachers and parents. In short, Edmodo provides active participation of students and supports the face-to-face learning environment.

- Edmodo is a user-friendly and practical platform (Kongchan, 2012; Alemdağ, 2013; Balasubramanian et al., 2014; Sırakaya, 2014; Dere et al., 2016; Ekmeççi, 2016; Kara, 2016; Kazez & Bahçeci, 2016; Manowong, 2016; Polat, 2016; Doğan et al., 2017; Hamutoğlu & Kızılcı, 2017; Özkan, 2017). Edmodo is accessible via both a web browser and a free smartphone application (iOS and Android) (Manowong, 2016). Thus, its usefulness is not limited to only in-class, teacher-directed learning environment. That is, Edmodo ensures that teachers, students, and parents are able to access the platform anytime and anywhere from any computer or device with an Internet connection.

- Edmodo is enjoyable (Kongchan, 2012; Alemdağ, 2013; Balasubramanian et al., 2014; Dere et al., 2016; Kara, 2016; Polat, 2016). Both teachers and students like using this online tool (Kongchan, 2012; Dere et al., 2016).

• Edmodo is motivating (Türkmen, 2012; Alemdağ, 2013; Uzun, 2015; Dere et al., 2016; Ekmekçi, 2016; Manowong, 2016; Doğan et al., 2017; Durak, 2017; Hamutoğlu & Kıyıcı, 2017; Özkan, 2017) and it eases engagement of students cognitively (Purnawarman, Susilawati, & Sundayana, 2016; Hamutoğlu & Kıyıcı, 2017). Teachers can reward and praise their students with rosettes such as “Hard Worker”, “Perfect Attendance”, “Star Performer” and “Student of the Month” in Edmodo because of their positive behaviours or achievements (Edmodo, 2018).

• Edmodo is instructive. Students are able to practise at night what they are taught during the day in Edmodo (Teach More Learn More, 2018). In parallel with this point, some researchers argued that Edmodo is also helpful for increasing learners' academic success (Sırakaya, 2014; Kazez & Bahçeci, 2016; Polat, 2016).

Methodology

Participants

A total of 49 university vocational school students studying in the Department of Computer Programming in GVS in Burdur MAKU in the 2016-2017 academic year in Gölhisar, Burdur voluntarily participated in the current study. They were all first-grade students studying in day-time-education and taking the compulsory English I-II course. Of 49 participants; 28 were students of class A chosen as the experimental group, 21 were students of class B chosen as the control group. The participants of this study were aged between 18-22; 36 were males and 15 were females. The experimental group was aged between 18-22; 20 were males and eight were females and the control group were aged between 18-21; 16 were males and seven were females.

Instruments

In the total duration of the experimentation, the experimental group was supposed to do five online assignments, which were attached in Edmodo online platform, in total and control group was supposed to do five pen-and-paper assignments, which were given as handouts. The participants in each group were given the same homework and they had a one-week duration for submission of homework. These assignments were composed of multiple-choice, true/false, matching, fill in the blanks and short answer questions containing vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension parts related to the topics studied in class time and the deadline was weekly. Finally, a 5-question semi-structured interview was held in Turkish with each participant in the experimental group. The duration of each interview was about five minutes and the interviews were recorded using a voice recorder program on a mobile phone. Weekly interview questions were as follows:

1. Was Edmodo practical to use and how would you compare with pen-and-paper assignments?
2. Do you feel that Edmodo assignments are helpful in learning English?
3. Do you feel that Edmodo assignments are helpful in improving your study habits?
4. Did you have any external assistance while doing Edmodo assignments?

5. Do you have any suggestions about Edmodo?

Data Collection and Analysis

This study benefited from a mixed methods research design which involves both quantitative and qualitative data. For the quantitative phase of the study, first two groups' assignment turnout and success rates were gathered separately in tables and graphics were created using Microsoft Excel 2016 in order to compare and analyse collected data.

As for the qualitative phase of the study, the recorded data in the interviews that might provide opportunities to collect a detailed and wide range of information on the issue was transcribed. All these transcriptions were translated into English. Prior to analysing the interview data, the responses to the interview questions were classified. In this stage, the objective was to find any specific examples of university vocational school students' perspectives on online assignments in their answers to the interview questions. Furthermore, the names of the participants were not used because of ethical considerations. Therefore, the participants were coded from 1 to 28. Next, the results of each question in the interviews were interpreted by means of sample quotations.

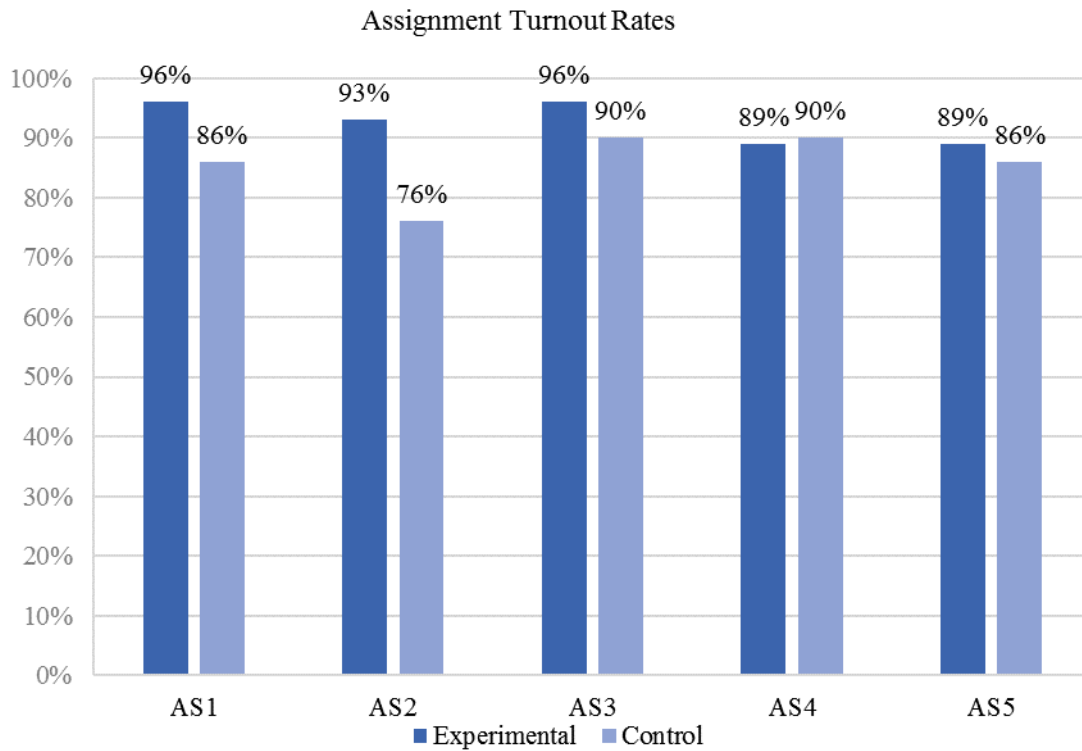
Findings

In this section, first quantitative data obtained from the assignment turnout and success rates of both groups will be presented. Next, qualitative data gathered from the participant interviews in the experimental group will be presented.

Assignment Turnout Rates

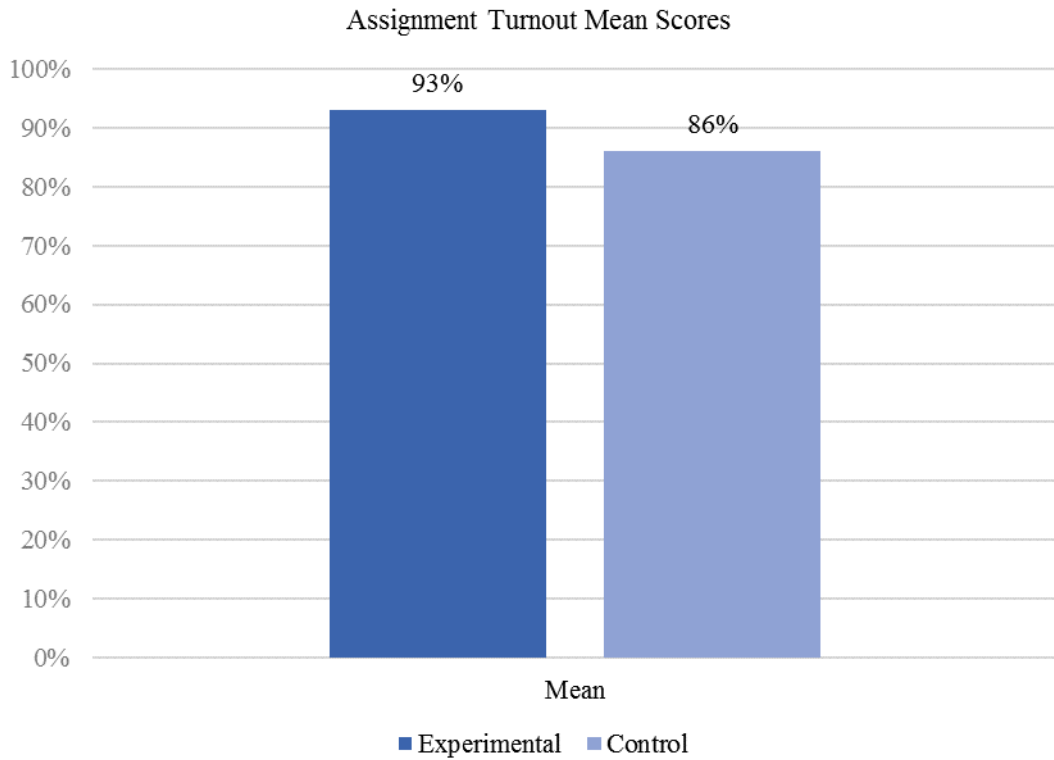
An analysis of turnout rates on assignment basis

The items as shown in percentages in Figure 1 provide the turnout rates of the experimental and control group on assignment basis. The results show that the two groups have high turnout rates for all assignments. However, what stands out in Figure 1 is that the homework submission percentage of the experimental group is higher than the control group except for Assignment 4 (AS4).

Figure 1. Assignment Turnout Rates of the Experimental and Control Group

An Analysis of Assignment Turnout Mean Scores

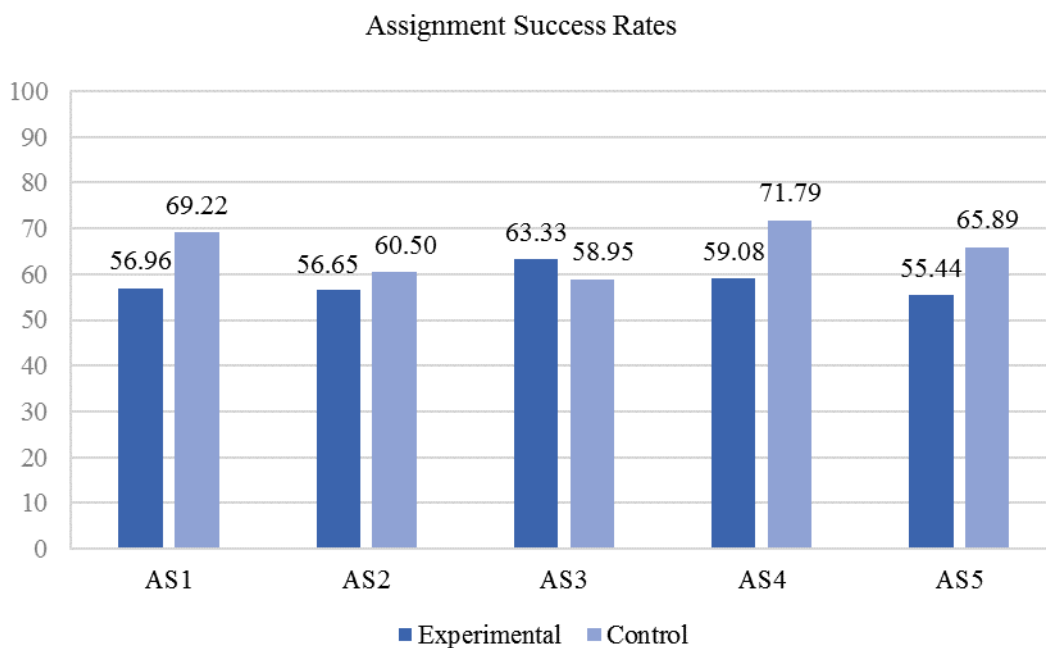
Figure 2 presents the mean scores of both groups' assignment turnout rates in percentages. As shown in Figure 2, both groups sent or brought their assignments in due time (93% & 86%) and the experimental group has a 7% higher turnout rate than the control group.

Figure 2. Mean Scores of Both Groups' Assignment Turnout Rates

Assignment Success Rates

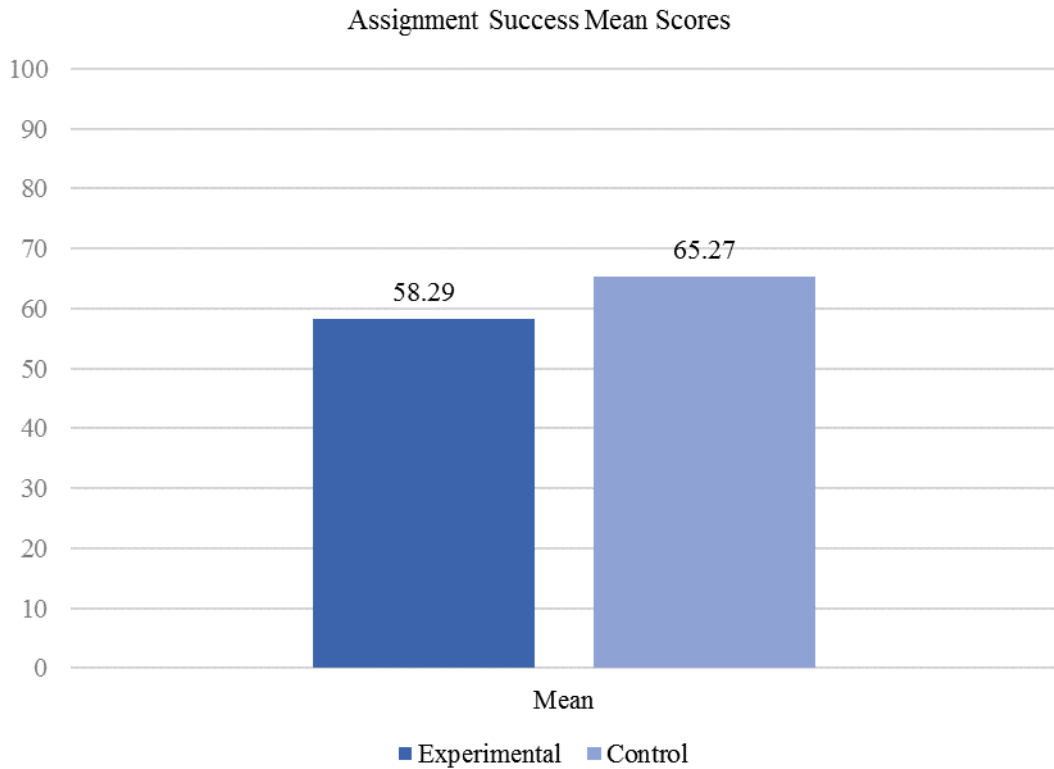
An analysis of success rates on assignment basis

Figure 3 presents the success rates of the experimental and control group on assignment basis. First, the figure shows that the success rate of the control group is higher than the experimental group except for AS3. Second, the figure reveals that there is a fluctuation in the success rates of the control group (AS1 69.22; AS2 60.50; AS3 58.95; AS4 71.79; AS5 65.89) although the experimental group students had a steady performance in all assignments (AS1 56.96; AS2 56.65; AS3 63.33; AS4 59.08; AS5 55.44).

Figure 3. Assignment Success Rates of The Experimental And Control Group

An Analysis of Assignment Success Mean Scores

Figure 4 displays the mean scores of both groups' assignment success rates. Looking at Figure 4, it can be found out that the control group students had a higher performance in assignments in general contrary to their lower turnout rates shown in Figure 1. That is, the control group students answered the questions in pen-and-paper assignments more correctly than the experimental group students who were responsible for answering online assignment questions in Edmodo.

Figure 4. Mean Scores of Both Groups' Assignment Success Rates

The Analysis of Student Interviews with the Experimental Group

In this section, qualitative data gathered from the participant interviews in the experimental group will be presented by means of sample quotations. The presentation will follow the same order as the questions that were asked during the interviews.

Question 1: Was Edmodo practical to use and how would you compare with pen-and-paper assignments?

The first question of the interview aimed firstly to find out the participants' views about the practicality of Edmodo and secondly to compare their overall impression of online assignments versus pen-and-paper assignments. The overall response to the first part of this question was very positive. That is, the interviewees' answers revealed that Edmodo was practical to use.

Moreover, a great majority of the interviewees was well aware of the fact that online assignments are easier to do since they are computer-based and that they study in the department of Computer Programming.

For example, participant 15 (P15) said:

“It was practical. It was really easy to use. It was easy to learn the usage and to adapt quickly.”

Another interviewee (P18) told that:

“Edmodo is more practical. For example, when you give homework from the coursebook, it is so boring. But, when it's via a computer, it becomes enjoyable.”

In response to the second part of Question 1, according to the interviewees, online assignments are more enjoyable, instructive, motivating and easier to do compared to pen-and-paper assignments although a few of them mentioned some disadvantages.

First, most of the participants think that online assignments are more enjoyable to do.

For example, P4 stated that:

“Since Edmodo is enjoyable, ... learning becomes permanent.”

One interviewee (P9) stated that:

“It was easy and practical, sir. It makes us busy and ..., Moreover, Edmodo is enjoyable.”

In parallel line with the statements above, P8, 11 and 16 also stated that they learn more in Edmodo and what they learn in Edmodo becomes permanent in the mind since they have the opportunity to search in the net. In fact, when we analyse the performances of P4, 8, 11, and 16 in the pre-post-tests (see Appendix 8), it is possible to say that their improvements in the post-test match with their thoughts about online assignments.

Talking about this issue P20 commented:

“Edmodo is more enjoyable. I started to get interested in English.”

P7, 20, 22 and 25 uttered that they are not enthusiastic about doing pen-and-paper assignments and they are eager to do online assignments.

For example, P7 said:

“I think we are enthusiastic about online assignments. They are easier and more enjoyable to do. We have difficulty in pen-and-paper assignments.”

Next, P18 said that pen-and-paper assignments are so boring and P3, 7 and 12 found pen-and-paper assignments more difficult to do. Furthermore, P6 and P27 thought that they usually forget doing pen-and-paper assignments. In addition, P23 stated that it is possible to be confused in pen-and-paper assignments.

In one case, an interviewee (P11) stated that Edmodo and Facebook are alike.

He said that:

“First, Edmodo is very practical to use. It's already a social media tool similar to Facebook.”

On the other hand, some of the interviewees thought that there are a few disadvantages of online assignments as well.

For instance, P3 said that:

“Moreover, if your mobile phone doesn't have enough charge, you may have more problems.”

In addition, P9 said:

“It makes us busy and since it's online and we may have connection problems, we try to do and finish the assignments immediately.”

Moreover, P14 stated that:

“If I didn't have any problems with the Internet connection, I could do better.”

These three comments above illustrate that while doing online assignments there may be some technical problems such as discharging of device batteries and disconnecting to the net. Finally, P25 stressed another disadvantage of online assignments that computer may strain the eyes.

Question 2: Do you feel that Edmodo assignments are helpful in learning English?

In the second question of the interview, the interviewees were asked to indicate whether online assignments are helpful in learning English or not. When the interviewees' answers for this question are analysed, it is possible to say that online assignments are beneficial to learning English and participants usually stated that online assignments were helpful especially for improving their vocabulary since they were allowed to search and learn in the net.

For example, P2 said:

“Yes, they're helpful. Because, when there is an unknown thing, I check it from the net and it sticks in the mind.”

P8 stated that:

“Since I do the assignments via a computer, it is possible to search and find unknown things. Then, it becomes permanent in the mind.”

P11 pointed out that:

“They're online and they drive people to search and learn.”

P25 uttered that:

“Because, if they are from the book, we don't have an itch to do them. But, when they're in computer, we have a chance to connect to the net. When we open Google Translate, we translate them.”

When we analyse the statements of P2, 8, 11 and 25, it's possible to say that since online assignments are online, they participants are able to check the things that they do not know or that they are not sure about on the Internet. As P2, 8, and 11 mentioned above, they permanently learn what they checked or searched in the net.

Moreover, a great majority of the interviewees, as P25 said above, used Google Translate for translating unknown words. However, what P23 said contradicts with others' thoughts:

“Of course, Edmodo is so logical for learning English. It is an easy way. It is nonsense if you use Google Translate.”

Another interviewee, P8, commented:

“Although my English is good, I've learnt a lot of things.”

The utterance of P8 shows that online assignments are helpful in learning English even for the ones who are already good at English.

Furthermore, P6, 20, 21 and 27 stressed that online assignments are helpful especially in improving vocabulary in English. Finally, according to P13, 14 and 26, online

assignments are partly helpful. They thought that learning English is not just to do homework.

Question 3: Do you feel that Edmodo assignments are helpful in improving your study habits?

In the third question of the interview, the participants were asked to indicate whether online assignments are helpful in improving their study habits or not. The interviewees' answers for this question revealed that online assignments are helpful in improving their study habits and the participants usually agreed that online assignments enable especially less hardworking students to study and motivate them.

P4, 7, 8, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 22 and 27 stated that online assignments may help to develop study habits for those who never study. On the other hand, P18 and P19 thought that these assignments are not much helpful in improving study habits and they said that a student who never studies does not do the assignments, either.

In addition, P1, 11, 15, 17, 27 and 28 admitted that they do not usually study and do not do pen-and-paper assignments, but Edmodo promotes them to study and do their assignments.

Moreover, P3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 15, 17, 20, 23 and 25 felt that they have to do online assignments.

For example, P3 commented:

“Since we learn new things and new knowledge, we do it better. ... we have the ambition to do the assignments as we compete with our friends.”

Another interviewee (P9) said:

“We try to do and finish the assignments immediately. But, if it were a pen-and-paper assignment, I would think that I could do it last day or in the last hour. I feel in a hurry in Edmodo and try to do it on the same day on which the assignment is given.”

P17 stated that:

“You generally give homework from the coursebook. To tell the truth, I don't do them. But, in Edmodo, ... there's a deadline. ... as we do the assignment, you grade us for our answers. This affects us.”

The statements of P17, 3 and 7 indicate that the factors of the deadline, countdown system and instant grading in online assignments are so effective on students that they feel that they have to do and finish their assignments immediately and competitively.

Finally, P10 and P21 thought that online assignments are also helpful for their exams. Commenting on the effects of online assignments on exams, for example, P10 said:

“When I do these assignments or study lesson, I don't have difficulty in exams. I can remember the words and their meanings.”

Question 4: Did you have any external assistance while doing Edmodo assignments?

The fourth question of the interview aimed to find out whether the participants had an external assistance while doing the assignments or not. On the basis of the interviewees'

answers for this question, it can be said that most of the them did not get any help from other people while doing their assignments except the Internet, Google Translate, and dictionaries.

In addition, one-third of the participants (P1, 3, 4, 7, 13, 19, 21, 24 and 25) stressed that they never had an external assistance while doing assignments even the net and that they did them all on their own.

For example, P3 said:

“No, I didn’t. Because we promised you.”

P7 pointed out that:

“No, never. I never get help since I promised you.”

The utterances of P3 and P7 and the fact that most of them did their all assignments without any help show that the letter of declaration they had signed at the very beginning of the experimentation worked on these participants. Unlike these interviewees, only P2, 6, 14, 17 and 27 admitted that they occasionally got help from their friends just for some parts of their assignments that they did not understand or just for the words that they did not know or they were not sure about.

For example, P6 stated that:

“No, but I got help from my friend only in the first assignments. Because I didn’t understand it.”

One individual (P14) stated that:

“I did once. In the second assignment. ... Well, from my roommate. His English is good.”

And another (P17) commented:

“There were just some sentences or a few things that I didn’t know. I got help from my friend just for them.”

Finally, P27 said:

“I’m asking my friends about unknown words.”

Question 5: Do you have any suggestions about Edmodo?

In the final question of the interview, participants were asked whether they have any suggestions about Edmodo or not. The interviewees’ answers for this question indicated that Edmodo is a well-designed, helpful and enjoyable platform and it is practical to use. However, there were a few suggestions about Edmodo and some parts in Edmodo assignments.

First, over half of those interviewed stressed that it would be better and easier for them to do if the words were given in fill in the blank part.

For example, P6 said:

“It will be better if you give the words in fill in the blank part. For example, you can give 10 words for the five blanks and we choose the correct ones.”

It can be said that the reason for the fact that they had difficulty in filling a missing word in a sentence might be due to their insufficient vocabulary knowledge or low level of English because of their inadequate English language education background.

In addition, P13 and P22 stated that Edmodo application has some limitations about its interface. The suggestion of P13 was regarding the page design of Edmodo. He commented:

“I’m in trouble in matching part. It could be shorter, in terms of the size of the page. It would be easier if it was on one page. It’s difficult to match using the mouse because it exceeds one page.”

P22 had a problem with the mobile application of Edmodo and said:

“Its mobile application isn’t good. For example, it doesn’t open the questions and so on.”

In one case, P4 suggested a remarkable proposal. She pointed out that:

“Maybe Edmodo can also be used in primary schools at the beginning of education. It may be good for children’s learning.”

Conclusion and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate university vocational school students’ homework performance in Edmodo and to identify their views on online assignments, discuss them in the light of other sample studies and to fill a gap in locally situated research. In line with this purpose, five different assignments were prepared and given to the experimental and control groups. The assignments were given as online via Edmodo to the experimental group and as pen-and-paper homework to the control group. During the implementation phase, two groups’ assignment turnout and success rates were analysed separately and the attitudes of the students towards online assignments were determined by analysing the interviews held with the participants in the experimental group in order to find possible answers to the research questions of this study. The findings of this study showed that both groups usually had high rates of submission and the participants of the control group had a better performance in homework grades. The study also revealed that students usually have positive views on online assignments.

Considering the assignment turnout rates of the two groups, it is clearly seen that both groups sent or brought their assignments in due time (See Figure 1 for the assignment turnout rates of the experimental and control group) while the experimental group out rated the control group in the mean scores (See Figure 2 for the mean scores of both groups' assignment turnout rates). This may mean that students were mostly well aware of their responsibilities. It is, therefore, encouraging to compare this finding with those found by V. Kaya and Kaya (2018) who suggested that homework develops learners’ sense of learning responsibility and those claimed by Kazez and Bahçeci (2016), Doğan et al. (2017), and Özkan (2017) who stressed that the Edmodo platform helps learners to feel more responsible for learning and doing assignments. In addition, it is also obvious that the experimental group had a 7% more homework submission rate than the control group. There can be several possible explanations for this result. First, it may have been the case

that the students in the control group may have sometimes lost, forgotten to do their pen-and-paper assignments or forgotten to bring them to the class in due time. However, the students who are responsible for doing online assignments have several options to do their homework such as using their personal notebook computers or desktop computers, mobile phones, school computers in laboratories, Internet cafés and other devices with an Internet connection. In other words, they have various stimulus during the assignment submission process. Second, the main reason for the difference between the two groups' mean turnout rates could be related to the assignment due system in Edmodo which was already mentioned in the literature review. That is, whenever students start to do any part of their assignment in Edmodo, the countdown begins for that part. Therefore, this condition may have driven them to finish and send their assignments on time. Finally, we may speculate that the students in the experimental group were more hardworking than the ones in the control group.

As for the assignment success rates of the two groups, it is clearly noticed that the participants of the control group had a better performance in homework grades in opposition to their lower turnout rates compared to the experimental group. This may mean that the control group students are more successful than the ones in the experimental group. Although this finding is consistent with the study of Demirci (2007) who compared university students' homework performance in Physics course based on web-based and paper-based assignments, surprisingly, it differs from Gök's (2013) paper in which a similar implementation was done for Physics course for university students. Additionally, this result contradicts with what Bonham et al. (2001) stated while comparing the mean scores of computer-graded homework and human graded homework for Calculus course. Besides, it is also seen that the control group's assignment success rates fluctuate within assignments. This fluctuation might be related to the simplicity or difficulty of the topics or the questions in the assignments for students.

When the transcriptions of the interviews are analysed, the overall responses regarding to Edmodo was very positive. In other words, the participants mostly agreed that online assignments are practical, encouraging, motivating and enjoyable. This finding is consistent with those of Holland and Muilenburg (2011), Türkmen (2012), Kongchan (2012), Alemdağ (2013), Thongmak (2013), Sırakaya (2014), Balasubramanian et al. (2014), Yagci (2015), Uzun (2015), Qalaja (2015), Polat (2016), Ekmekçi (2016), Kazez and Bahçeci (2016), Kara (2016), Dere et al. (2016), Manowong (2016), Hamutoğlu and Kıyıcı (2017), Durak (2017), Doğan et al. (2017), and Özkan (2017) who used the Edmodo platform in their studies and those of Bonham et al., (2001), Demirci (2007, 2010), Arıkan and Altun (2007), Altun (2008), Bridge and Appleyard (2005, 2008), Doorn et al. (2010), Richards-Babb and Jackson (2011), Weimer (2013), Serhan (2014), Özdemir and Erdemci (2014), and Yıldırım, Erdoğan, and Çiğdem (2017) who used other web-based systems in their studies. The reason for the students' agreement on the practicality of Edmodo in the current study could be related to the fact that the participants were students in the Department of Computer Programming and as a consequence, they had high levels of computer literacy and familiarity. Moreover, it can be said that they are accustomed to

using other SNSs, i.e. Facebook, thus they did not have any difficulty to use Edmodo as an educational social network site.

Furthermore, the interviewees mostly agreed that online assignments were more enjoyable than pen-paper-assignments and they learnt more in the net and felt enthusiastic about doing online assignments. Serhan (2014), Dere et al. (2016), and Ratniyom, Boonphadung, and Unnanantn (2016) also stated that students agreed that web-based assignment systems contributed more to the learning process. The participants' preference on online assignments in the current study parallels with the findings of Balasubramanian et al.'s (2014) and Kazez and Bahçeci's (2016) studies and what Dere et. al. (2016) suggested about online quizzes.

One participant said that doing pen-and-paper assignments are boring and three participants agreed that it is more difficult to do pen-and-paper assignments. There are similarities between the attitudes towards pen-and-paper assignments expressed by those participants in this study and those described by İleri (2013) in a comprehensive study conducted in university prep class context for EFL students.

Furthermore, two participants thought that they usually forget doing pen-and-paper assignments. This finding reflects that forgetting is the primary reason for not doing homework (Calp, 2011).

On the other hand, the interviews held with the participants showed that there have been some limitations of Edmodo application. The participants of the current study were well aware of the fact that while doing online assignments in Edmodo, there may be some technical problems such as running out of batteries and disconnecting to the net as the disadvantages of online assignments. This finding, as a limitation of the online assignments application, is in parallel line with the results of Manowong's (2016), Ekici's (2017), and Yıldırım et al.'s (2017) studies. Another limitation is regarding the interface of Edmodo mobile application. This finding is consistent with the claims of Ekici (2017) and Hamutoğlu and Kılıcı (2017) who investigated the opinions of the Edmodo users about that platform.

In reviewing the literature, it was seen that learners and educators agree that the EFL assignments which contain vocabulary, grammar and reading skills are so helpful for learning the English language (İleri, 2013). In parallel line, the participants of the current study mostly felt that online assignments are helpful in learning English especially for improving their vocabulary. A great majority of them stated that they mostly used Google Translate for the unknown words or phrases and that they used the net to check the things they do not know or they are not sure about.

Similarly, the participants thought that online assignments are helpful in improving their study habits. Six participants admitted that they do not study regularly and they do not do pen-and-paper assignments, however Edmodo encourages them to study and they do the assignments given via Edmodo. In short, they agreed that online assignments are quite helpful especially for less hardworking students. This finding parallels with the study of Hamutoğlu and Kılıcı (2017) who examined first-grade university students' views about Edmodo in a similar study. It is also encouraging to compare this finding with that found by Cooper (1989) who claimed that doing homework affects a student's study habits

positively. On the other hand, this outcome is contrary to that of İleri (2013) who found that computer-based assignments are not useful.

The interviewees who participated in the current study also stated that the factors such as the deadline, countdown system and instant grading in Edmodo made them feel that they have to do these assignments. Participants' stress on instant grading reflects that the immediate feedback is a useful feature of the Internet-based tools that students may use while doing online assignments (Doorn et al., 2010). This finding also supports that grading EFL assignments affects student performance positively (Rosário et al., 2015). In the same vein, Dufresne et al. (2002), Rosário et al. (2015), Kazez and Bahçeci (2016), and Dere et. al. (2016) in their studies stated that checking, grading and giving feedback about assignments are also effective for students' success and performance.

Additionally, two participants thought that online assignments are also helpful for their exams. This finding parallels with the findings expressed by Dufresne et al. (2002), Doorn et al. (2010), Sırakaya (2014), Ratniyom et al. (2016), Kazez and Bahçeci (2016) and Polat (2016).

Furthermore, a great majority of the participants commented that they did not have any external assistance while doing online assignments except for the sources in the net, Google Translate and dictionaries, however only five participants openly confessed that they got help from their friends for some parts of the assignments. Therefore, what will always remain unclear about the current research is the answer to the following question: Did the students in two groups do all their assignments on their own or had any external assistance while doing them? Although this possible case (copying from other students) is discussed as one of the negative effects of homework on students' study habits (Cooper, 1989), it is therefore likely that there is no other way to hinder this uncertainty except relying on the participants' performance and what they said in the interviews.

Finally, the participants in the experimental group commented that, for the final question of the interviews, Edmodo is already a well-designed, helpful and enjoyable social learning network and that they do not usually have any suggestions about it except the fill in the blank part of the assignments and some problems they had in the interface of the Edmodo application. In one case, an interviewee stated that Edmodo is similar to Facebook. What this participant stressed matches those observed in earlier studies (Holland & Muilenburg, 2011; Kongchan, 2012; Türkmen, 2012; Sırakaya, 2014; Torun & Dargut, 2015; as cited in Manowong, 2016) which found that Edmodo resembles Facebook. Türkmen (2012) and Manowong (2016) suggest that adult learners usually spend most of their time, even in school hours, on engaging SNSs such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. Accordingly, it could benefit the learners in university vocational schools to adopt Facebook-like applications (i.e., Edmodo), which are created for educational purposes, in foreign language education in order to increase their motivation and make English an inseparable part of their daily lives rather than a compulsory course at school.

In the light of the findings of this research, several pedagogical implications will be made.

Online Assignments Should Be Used

Based on the findings regarding the assignment turnout and success rates in the previous chapter, it is possible to suggest that assignments should be given as online. Several factors could explain this suggestion. Firstly, the turnout rate of the experimental group was always higher than the control group except in one assignment (AS4) even though the paper-based group outperformed the web-based group in homework performance in the current study. Next, when the interviews held with the focus group are analysed, it seems that online assignments are more instructive, motivating and enjoyable to do for students, as well as, more practical in terms of submission, checking, and grading. Moreover, there is less possibility of having an external assistance or copying other homework papers in the usage of online assignments, which requires individual usage of technological devices, compared to pen-and-paper assignments.

Edmodo Should Be Used

Besides, it is possible to suggest, at the end of this study, that Edmodo could also be used in the English courses of the other departments except Computer Programming in university vocational schools since it resembles Facebook which is not a new phenomenon any more in the Internet Age. Therefore, many learners and educators will most probably be able to use this application in education without being in much need of computer and Internet literacy. What is more, the similarity between Edmodo and Facebook will ensure that teachers will have more motivated and enthusiastic learners in their classes and it will be helpful for engaging students in learning process and creating a student-oriented environment. Additionally, thanks to Turkish language support in Edmodo, teachers and students can easily use Edmodo in other subjects at school as well.

Online Activities Are Motivating

Furthermore, Türkmen (2012) and Manowong (2016) suggested that learners can easily be motivated and engaged in the learning process in an EFL classroom thanks to using online activities such as assignments, quizzes, and other online tasks in this educational social networking site. Thus, it is possible to suggest that, when university vocational school students' motivation lack and academic failure are considered, educators in university vocational schools can benefit from the Edmodo application, which provides a motivating learning atmosphere, both in their classes and outside the classroom effectively for a permanent learning.

Edmodo Provides Many Pedagogical Benefits

The findings of the present study also support the suggestion that language learners should be encouraged to make use of many facilities such as the Internet and social networking which provide students with lots of opportunities for improving their learning as well as a stress-free environment (Amiryousefi, 2016). It can also be suggested that Edmodo is a potential innovative tool for education and it provides many pedagogical benefits.

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