



USING INTERNET GROUPS IN THE LEARNING OF LITERATURE

EDEBİYAT ÖĞRETİMİNDE İNTERNET GRUPLARININ KULLANIMI

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, an application of one aspect of the Internet technology, namely Internet groups, into the teaching of American and British literatures is evaluated by means of a content analysis of the Internet group which was used as the course component. The aim of this paper was to see how students used the Internet group in the learning of literature so that the effect of the use of an Internet group on learning literature can be discussed. In this study, content analysis was used to understand the nature of the activity situated in the Internet group. The results of the analysis of the Internet group suggest that the Internet group was mainly used by the course takers for formal interaction. It is seen that very little collaboration or real interaction took place amongst the course takers towards creating meaning together. The results support the view that using technology in literature learning has advantages mainly because the students were interested in working in this group although they were neither graded in the activity nor were mandated to take part in it.

Keywords: internet, literature, internet group, blended learning

ÖZET: Bu çalışmada İnternet teknolojisinin bir parçası olan haber gruplarının İngiliz ve Amerikan edebiyatlarının öğretiminde kullanılması bir içerik incelemesi şeklinde irdelenmiştir. Çalışmanın amacı öğrencilerin edebiyat öğreniminde bir internet grubunu nasıl kullandıklarını ortaya çıkarmak ve bu uygulamanın edebiyat öğrenimine etkisini tartışmaktır. Çalışmada içerik analizi yöntemi açık kodlama stratejileriyle ve haber grubundaki tüm öğrenci girdilerinin incelenmesi yoluyla yapılmıştır. Çalışmanın bulguları haber grubundaki iletişimin yüzeysel düzeyde ve tek yönlü kaldığı ve birlikte anlam üretilebilecek karşılıklı iletişimin pek uygulanmadığını göstermektedir. Çalışmanın sonuçları öğrencilerin karma öğrenme ortamlarına katılmaya istekli olduğunu göstermektedir çünkü öğrencilerin haber grubuna katılımı tamamen isteğe bağlı ve notla değerlendirilmeyecek şekilde tasarlanmıştır.

Anahtar sözcükler: internet, edebiyat, internet grubu, karma öğrenme

1. INTRODUCTION

Although literary texts are traditionally used for developing learners' language skills (Buckledee, 2002), there exists a strong view that literature should only be studied for the sake of attaining knowledge of literature. In either case, no one disagrees with the belief that by whatever means English as Foreign Language (hereafter referred to as EFL) learners engage with literature, their linguistic and cultural skills will inevitably develop. As EFL practitioners have struggled to find the best means of teaching literature in the field of EFL, a variety of classroom activities and materials have been produced. Literature teaching is often connected with face-to-face initiation; hence, the growth of technology use in higher education poses a significant challenge for literary studies (Natsina, 2007).

Currently, in foreign and second language teaching, the Internet is used to teach language skills and to develop students' knowledge of cultures and civilizations (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2001; Köksal, 2004). However, little research exists on how literature learning and teaching occurs in the cyberspace. In this paper, an application of one aspect of the Internet technology, namely the Internet groups, into the teaching of American and British literatures is evaluated to see how students used the Internet group while learning about and with literature in a blended learning environment.

1.1. Internet Groups

Being an asynchronous Internet-based tool, Internet groups are also called discussion groups, Usenets, list-serves, newsgroups or electronic bulletin boards although each usage comes along with slightly different content or aims. Internet groups introduce a powerful new form of classroom interaction which was impossible in earlier times since they can be used as an on-line course

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management and content system. Students reluctant to participate in a traditional class discussion may contribute extensively to an Internet group (Partee, 1996). One advantage of the Internet groups is that they can be attained free of charge (Goldborough, 2005) from providers such as www.google.com, www.yahoo.com, or www.microsoft.com.

Because Internet groups have the potential in providing the students with increased asynchronous interaction, in this study, it was chosen as the medium of interaction in the literature course as described below.

2. METHOD

2.2. Data Analysis

Content analysis was used as the main data analysis procedure in this research. Content analysis, as described by Robert & Bouillaget (as cited in Bilgin, 2006), seeks ways to identify, categorize, and interpret various sorts of texts in a systematic way. In this study, the segments of the Internet group were first analyzed independently and then the qualities of the student input in each segment was carefully studied through multiple reading of the content. In this process, properties are counted quantitatively followed by their examination in relation to the other properties in data. Hence, in this paper, the findings are the results of these analytical procedures interpreted in relation to the whole of properties and dimensions of the Internet group.

2.3. The Context and Participants

This study employed a convenience sampling method. The context in which this learning process took place was a college of education in Ankara, Turkey, where pre-service English language teachers graduate as future ELT teachers. The core of this course has been the study of literary terms and movements so as to prepare these students to the upcoming literature courses including drama, novel, short story, and poetry. The course was structured as a three credit mandatory course in which collaborative learning was emphasized since many classroom activities were designed by insight gained from constructivist view of learning and teaching. As Arıkan (2005) articulated, there is serious need in literature teaching curricula in many locales to re-consider and re-conceptualize the content of literature courses under the light of some recent theoretical constructs such as emotional intelligence and constructivism and this specific course was designed and instructed by keeping these aims in mind.

The participants were 132 students (111 females and 21 males) who signed into the Internet group voluntarily. The ages of the participants ranged from 19 to 22, the average of which was 20. None of the students had ever had experience in studying literature or arts through the medium of the Internet (as our classroom interactions revealed). Prior knowledge of literature and literary reading was not measured prior to the application because the aforementioned classroom interaction with the students revealed that the majority of the students were not particularly interested in reading literature in a foreign language and the findings of this study did not focus on achievement. The students were not graded for their activity in the Internet group.

2.4. Components of the Internet Group

The instructor had prepared and posted all the materials to be put onto the Internet group. Polls containing questions in multiple-choice formats were created to gather students' opinions of the literary work read. Literary texts to be read and studied were also uploaded along with all other questions, pictures, and links that can be helpful to students. When the first class started, students' e-mail addresses were collected and added to the Internet group. Having been informed about the process, the students logged on and discussions and activities related to the Internet group started. In the process, many digital stories from the Internet were selected and posted and additional polls questions were prepared and put onto the Internet group when necessary. Students were given file folders so that they could keep track of their work and sample photographs and activities were posted

to inform the students on how these segments worked. Discussion assignments were posted by the researcher each week, and students posted their opinions and responses accordingly.

In this study, the term ‘Internet group’ is used over ‘discussion groups’ since discussion groups may also refer to face-to-face interaction, the term ‘USENET’ is not easily recognizable in the field because it is not popularly used in academia and in schools, and ‘list-serves’, although known by many, brings to mind a group of members who passively receive e-mails and messages produced by or filtered through a moderator. In our context, an Internet group was believed to be helpful because the students could have access to it on or off-campus and because it is easy to learn how to manage the components of it. The Internet group used in this course was designed to practice what was being learned in the class. It was assumed that technology enhanced literature teaching would facilitate developing knowledge of literature through visual and online materials. Hence, all course materials including full text resources, assignments, a glossary of literary terms edited by the instructor, discussion questions, activities, and polls which transferred many of our classroom discussions and readings into poll questions were uploaded prior to students’ access to it. The Internet group is available at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hacettepe_elt_literature/. Also, a screen shot of the Internet group used can be seen in Figure 1.

2.4.1. The Entry Page

The entry page shows the segments on the left bar. The students can be directed towards certain segments by instructing them to do so with a notice put on this entry page. In the first two weeks of the use, the entry page informed the students on the uses of the segments of the Internet group. The following were the components of the Internet group used in the teaching of literature.

2.4.2. The Management Page

The management page helps the owner or moderator direct all of the activities situated in the Internet group including memberships, e-mail commands, web features, messages, polls, and external links.

2.4.3. Database (Links)

The database is the place where classroom assignments and web addresses of full text resources were stored so that the students would make use of the full text resources. Also, a handbook of literary terms and concepts was put into this segment so that the students could make use of this dictionary- reference book when they had problems with the terminology. Furthermore, extensions of classroom activities, further study questions, or information on resources were listed in this section.

2.4.4. Messages

Students and the instructor sent numerous e-mails during this learning and sharing process. In the messages segment, all interactions amongst the participants were stored. All emails sent by the members were both sent to each member’s inbox while they could be viewed at this section. A lot of discussion happened with the help of this segment and the students could pick up the issues at a later date and time at their own pace and contribute to the discussion. The students, with the help of this messages segment, asked and answered questions to each other often by providing invaluable examples taken from many literary texts.

2.4.5. Photo Album

Collections of visual materials representing or related to our literary studies were posted in this segment. Students made use of this section to connect their evolving literary knowledge with visual images that were found outside the course work. One student posted a photo which reminded her of Kate Chopin’s work *The Story of an Hour*. Another student uploaded photos for her photo section, relating Christmas to Oblonsky Family of *Anna Karenina*.

2.4.6. Polls

Interesting, thought provoking, and critical questions were put into this section. Students got to choose one of the answers given about a question relevant to the class work. Each week, numerous poll questions were prepared by the instructor and put onto this segment. Likewise, the students prepared and suggested poll questions and put them onto the Internet group so that all students could think through and contribute with their answers.

2.4.7. File folders

In this segment of the Internet group, students keep their assignments, papers or class notes in the files opened under their name. Also, they were able to look through other students' work by visiting their friends' files.

2.4.8. Calendar

Students were able to use the calendar for their schedules and notes related to the class work. Presentations, notes, memos, and reading assignment deadlines could be posted here for students' information. Likewise, students could add their personal notes to their calendar as they wished.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Analysis of the usage

3.1.1. Messages

As can be seen in Figure 1, students used the Internet group mainly for answering the questions posted by the instructor. A total of 213 messages were posted by the course takers. This number is by no means sufficient for the time period specified for using the Internet group (8 weeks) and the number of the course takers. However, the contents of the messages show that the majority of these messages were informative and relevant to the coursework.

The content analysis of the messages revealed that there was no interaction taking place between the course takers in terms of replying or building onto the message of another course taker. This suggests that very little collaboration or real interaction took place amongst the course takers towards creating meaning together. There were 26 messages which were written in response to previously written messages. Thus, only 12% of all messages can be considered as interactional, that is, they were written in response to others' messages. As these results suggest, most of the course takers preferred reading each others' messages, but posted their own messages without referring to the message of the others.

3.1.2. Photographs and pictures

A total of 21 pictures or photographs were posted by the course takers. Three of them were about the author, 3 of them were about the stories read, and 15 of them were students' connection between the stories read and the visual materials with which they involved. Hence, although this activity produced a low number of out-put by the course takers, it is significant that the majority of the students preferred pictorial self expression as a mode of inquiry in the cyberspace.

3.1.3. Polls

A total of 503 votes were casted to answer 22 polls questions initiated by the instructor. The average vote count per question was 22%. Students were mostly interested in answering questions related to their personal opinions such as "X helped me learn..." (59 votes), "Rate the literal value of the following sentence..." (48 votes) and "What does X mean in the sentence written by the author Y" (48 votes). The lowest votes were received in questions which sought to find answers to the course takers' artistic and individual expression in a way to connect the literary piece and other forms of arts or thought. For instance, the question which sought to find students' answers to the stage type that was most appropriate to perform the play Macbeth received only 3 votes, followed by the literary

character's name who the course taker finds likeable (5 votes). As these results suggest, the course takers were not really interested in or not used to imagining and personally reflecting on the text from an aesthetic stand point. This interpretation sounds more logical since the literature teaching method to which these students was exposed was traditional in a way that they were asked to read and respond to the theme based questions asked by the instructor.

3.1.4 File folders

Out of 132 students who participated in this study, 102 of them created a file folder for themselves. Eighty-two of these students uploaded and saved their course related materials into their file folders. Although not all of the participants used file folders, 77% of these students used the filing capability of the Internet group.

It is interesting that the majority of the course takers deleted their reflection papers or homework assignments following the end of the semester. This is interesting because it signals that the course takers did not want their ideas to appear in the cyberspace after the end of the course work. This finding makes more sense when the above mentioned reluctance of these students in expressing themselves in words is considered. In short, it is obvious that the majority of the students are reluctant to share their opinions in the cyberspace in a way to leave traces of their work for the inspection of others.

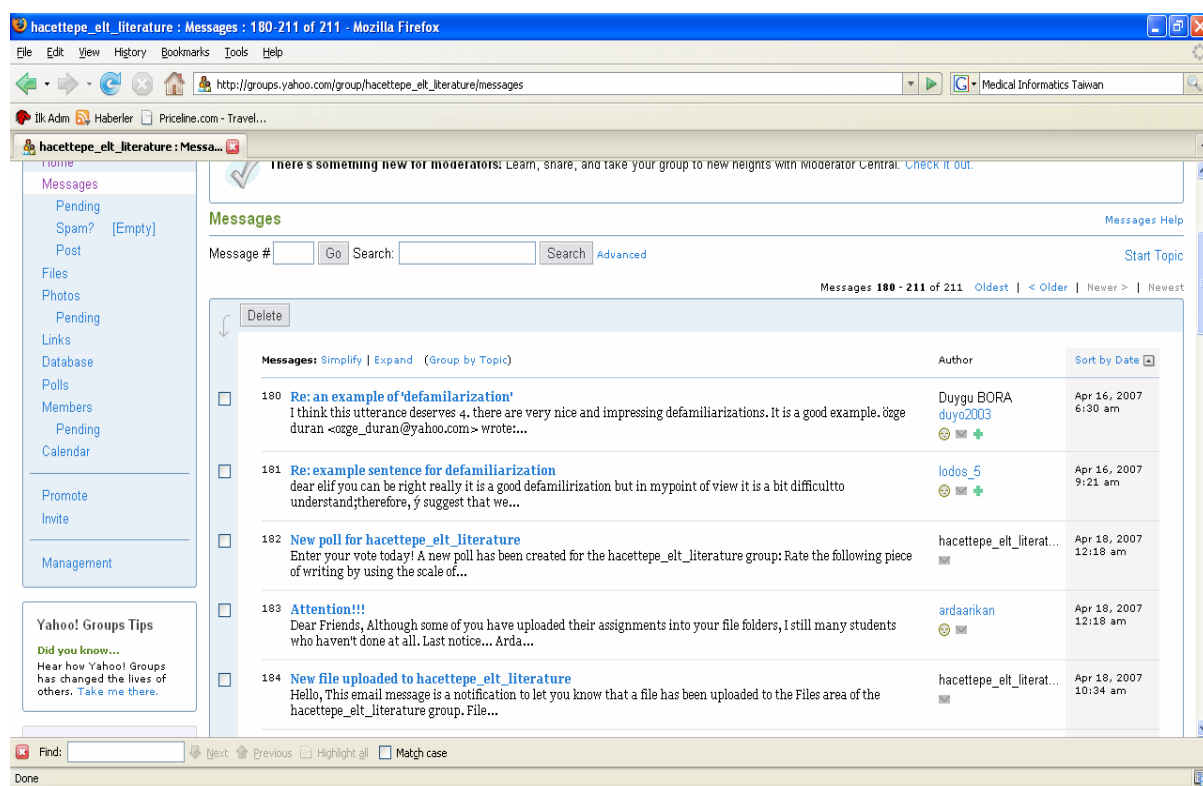


Figure 1. Messages section

3.1.5. Calendar

Results suggest that none of the students used the calendar.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although participating in the Internet group was a voluntary activity, most of the students joined the process. Thus, it can be said that the students were interested in carrying their learning of literature into the cyberspace. The main concern in this application was not to reproduce the teaching

and learning habits that are found in traditional methods in an online learning environment. Rather, the application sought ways to leave students on their own with little guidance coming from the instructor. Hence, the results of the analysis of the Internet group suggest that the Internet group was mainly used by the course takers for interaction. It is obvious that very little collaboration or real interaction took place amongst the course takers towards creating meaning together. This can be explained either as the students were not used to working in this new medium or traditional educational habits which do not encourage learners to collaborate affected the nature of their interaction within this new medium.

The students did not make use of the calendar and this should be carefully examined in terms of the reasons behind this choice. Noting that the only component which was not used by the students was the calendar, it can be said that students either did not need the functions provided by the calendar or they simply were not used to working with it. Similarly, photographs and pictures posted by these students show that only a small number of photographs was posted. Similarly, the polls questions which sought to find answers to students' aesthetic and imaginative responses received very little votes, all suggesting that students are not traditionally encouraged to use their imagination and personal reflection while studying literary texts. However, as these results also indicate, the majority of the students were interested in learning with this new medium which facilitated classroom interaction by extending it to the cyberspace. The results also show that it was perceived by the participants that taking the study of literature into the cyberspace had many benefits among which being exposed to numerous and detailed input about literature was the leading one. The results support the view that using technology in literature learning can have potential in the development of learners' knowledge of literature as well on the knowledge of computers and the Internet technologies. Hence, future research should examine the outcomes of literature learning in the cyberspace.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Öğretmen adaylarının eğitim yaşamımızda gerçekleşmekte olan değişikliklere uyum sağlamalarına ve gereken öğretim değişikliklerini yapmalarına duyulan gereksinim gittikçe artmakta ve bu gereksinim özellikle de öğrenci merkezli yeni öğretim uygulamalarının öğretmen adaylarına gösterimini zorunlu kılmaktadır. Bu gereksinimlerden biri de eğitim ve öğretimin her alan ve seviyesinde teknolojik gelişmelerin parçaları olan uygulamaların özellikle öğrenci merkezli olarak kullanılmasıdır. Bu araçlardan biri olan İnternetin öğretmen adayları tarafından etkili bir şekilde kullanmalarını gerçekleştirmek için de İnternetin ileride uygulamalarını beklediğimiz öğretmen adaylarına tanıtılması ve hatta uygulamaları izlemelerine olanak sağlanarak işlem hakkındaki

görüşlerinin alınması da gerekmektedir. İnternet hemen tüm düzey ve derslerde kullanılabilmekte ve öğrenci merkezli öğretime ciddi katkıları olabilmektedir

Yabancı dilin edebiyatıyla ilgilenen öğrencilerin hedef dile ait kullanımları ve o dille ilgili kültürel öğelerini de öğrendikleri kabul edilmektedir. Yabancı dildeki edebiyatın İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenmekte olan öğrencilere aktarımının en uygun yöntemlerini bulup uygulamaya çalışan öğretmen ve eğitimciler edebiyat öğretimini gerçekleştirebilecekleri bir çok etkinlik örneği ve modeller üretmişlerdir. Her ne kadar edebiyat öğretimi yüz yüze ve sınıf içi ortamlarında gerçekleştirilmiş olsa da teknolojinin gelişim ve değişimi özellikle yüksek öğretim düzeyinde gerçekleştirilen edebiyat çalışmalarında büyük değişikliklere neden olmuştur.

Son yıllarda İnternet hedef dilin ve kültürün aktarımında kullanılması gereken bir araç olarak kabul edilmiştir. Buna karşın, sanal ortamda gerçekleştirilen edebiyat öğretiminin uygulama ve öğrenci başarısına etkisi hakkındaki araştırmalar halen sınırlı sayıdadır. Bu çalışmada, İnternetin bize sunmuş olduğu sayısız uygulamalardan biri olan İnternet gruplarının Amerikan ve İngiliz edebiyatlarının öğreniminde kullanılması ele alınmaktadır. Çalışma, geleneksel yüz yüze edebiyat öğretime ek olarak kullanılmış bulunan bir İnternet grubunun içeriğinin konusal olarak incelenmesine dayanmaktadır.

Çalışmada ağlararası teknolojinin bir parçası olan haber gruplarının İngiliz ve Amerikan edebiyatlarının öğretiminde kullanılması konusal bir inceleme şeklinde irdelenmiştir. Çalışmada konusal inceleme yöntemi haber grubunun tüm öğrenci girdilerinin incelenmesi yoluyla yapılmıştır. Çalışmanın bulguları haber grubundaki iletişimin formal düzeyde ve tek yönlü kaldığı ve birlikte anlam üretilebilecek bir karşılıklı iletişimin pek uygulanmadığını göstermektedir. Çalışmanın sonuçlarına göre, öğrencilerin geleneksel edebiyat derslerine ek olarak karma öğrenme ortamlarına katılmaya istekli olduğunu göstermektedir çünkü öğrencilerin haber grubuna katılımı tamamen isteğe bağlı ve ders geçme notu alınmayacak şekildedir.

Çalışmada kullanılmış bulunan konusal incelemede önce öğrenciler tarafından serbest bir şekilde kullanılmış bulunan İnternet grubunu oluşturan parçaların çoklu bir şekilde okunmasını ve her bir parçaya eklenmiş bulunan öğrenci çalışmasının niceliksel ve niteliksel olarak incelenmesinden oluşmaktadır. Katılımcılar İngiliz Dili ve Eğitimi Anabilim dalında öğrenim görmekte olan ve İngiliz Edebiyatına Giriş II dersine ait İnternet grubunu kullanmış bulunan 132 İngiliz Dili Eğitimi 2. sınıf öğrencisinden oluşmaktadır. İnternet grubu tamamen sınıf çalışması dışında tutulmuş ve notla değerlendirme yapılmamıştır. Dolayısıyla, ders programının bir parçası olmaktan çok ona ek olarak kurulmuş bulunan serbest ve gönüllü çalışmayı temel alan bir uygulamadır.

İncelemelerden elde edilen sonuçlara göre öğrenciler İnternet grubunu daha çok mesajlaşmak amacıyla kullanmışlardır. Ancak öğrenciler daha çok öğretim elemanı tarafından sorulan sorulara yanıt vermeyi bir birleriyle serbestçe fikir alışverişinde bulunmaya tercih etmişlerdir. Gruba postalanan 213 mesajın 8 haftalık bir uygulama ve 132 olan öğrenci sayısı açısından bakıldığında yeterli olmadığı görülmekte ama mesajlaşmanın hemen tümünün dersin konu kapsamında olduğu anlaşılmaktadır.

Öğrenci mesajlaşmalarının incelenmesi grupta gerçek bir düşünce değişiminin olduğunu iddia etmenin zor olduğunu göstermektedir ki bu da öğrencilerin düşünce alış verişleriyle ortak düşünceler meydana getirmede eksik kaldığını göstermektedir. Öğrencilerin birbirlerine yanıt olarak verdikleri mesaj sayısı yalnızca 26'dır ki bu da toplam mesajların %12'sine karşılık gelmektedir.

Öğrenciler grubu yalnızca mesajlaşmak için kullanmamışlardır. Öğrenciler tarafından gruba eklenen 21 görsel araç vardır ki bunların 3 tanesi yazarlar hakkında, 3 tanesi okunmuş bulunan öykülerle ilgili ve 15 tanesi de öğrencilere okudukları eserleri anımsatan görsel araçlardan oluşmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, öğrencilerin görsel araçları yaratıcı bir şekilde yani okunan edebi eserin onlarda yarattığı duygu ve düşüncelerin görsel araçlarla yansıtılması şeklinde kullandıkları görülmektedir. Gruba eklenmiş bulunan görsel araç sayısının az olmasına rağmen öğrencilerin İnternet temelli bir grupta edebiyat eserlerinin onlarda yarattıkları düşünce ve duyguları görsel

araçlar yoluyla açığa vurmaları yeni bir öğrenme deneyimi olarak kabul edilmektedir ki böyle bir deneyime geleneksel edebiyat öğretimi ortamında pek rastlanmamaktadır.

İnternet grubunun anketler kısmında bulunan toplam 22 anket sorusuna öğrenciler tarafından 503 oy atılmıştır ki bu da soru başına 22 oy demektir. Katılımın en yoğun olduğu anketler öğrencilerin edebiyat öğrenme deneyimlerinde yer eden sınıf içi uygulamalar hakkındaki görüşlerini toplayan sorular olmuştur. Örneğin, *Literary criticism helped me* başlıklı soru 59, cümlelerin edebi değerini ölçen sorusu 48 ve “*Yazarın şu cümlesinden anladıklarım*” başlıklı soru da yine 48 öğrenci tarafından oylanmıştır ki bu sayılar İnternet grubunun en çok izlenen ve kullanılan kısmının anketler kısmı olduğunu göstermektedir.

İnternet grubunu kullanan toplam 132 öğrenciden 102 tanesi kendilerine ait birer dosya açmışlar ancak bunlardan yalnızca 82’si çalışmalarını buraya koymuştur. Sonuç olarak, İnternet grubuna katılmak bireysel ve gönüllülük esaslı bir çalışma olmasına rağmen öğrencilerin bir çoğunun katıldığı dikkate alındığında, öğrencilerin edebiyat öğrenimine sanal ortamda devam etme düşüncesinin olumlu karşılanıldığı görülmektedir. Bu uygulamanın sonuçları da, edebiyat öğretiminde İnternet gruplarının kullanımının geleneksel öğretim ortamlarına eklenilebileceğini ve bu potansiyelin öğrencilerin edebiyat öğrenimlerinde olumlu katkıları olabileceğini göstermiştir.