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Students' Attitudes Towards Collaborative Tools In A Virtual Learning Environment

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate prep class university students' attitudes towards collaborative tools used in Moodle. Also it was aimed to find out whether or not there is a difference in students' attitudes towards traditional and collaborative activities. The participants of the study, 28 non-English major university students, who had three-hours of Self Access Centre lessons per week, used a virtual learning environment named 'Moodle' for two hours each week. In order to investigate the attitudes, the participants were administered a computer readiness scale at the beginning of the study. At the end, a questionnaire was administered, and to support the data, screenshots of the activities were taken and twelve participants were interviewed. Results show that the collaborative tools in the virtual learning environment have significant positive effects according to the participants' opinions. The students have significantly positive attitudes towards the collaborative tools, although they have not had enough experience of collaborative work. Also the students do not reflect positive attitudes towards traditional activities and, accordingly do not use them much.

Keywords: virtual learning environment, collaborative tools, students' attitudes.



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Introduction

Technology use in ELT classes has become increasingly vital over the last century. For today's technology native students, it is difficult to teach a language and its skills without integrating technology into the classes, since technology and the internet have become indispensable to them.

With the invasion of technology, many innovations such as mp3 players, iPods, podcasts, the Internet, web 2.0 tools and the like, provide new alternatives for learning and for the teaching of foreign languages. Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), with their inherent dynamism and opportunities, offer cost-free contexts and materials for both teachers and students beyond the limits of time and place. Similar to the face-to-face (f2f) classroom, some VLEs offer participants direct communication with each other via text, audio, and video chat. Whenever and wherever they like, participants can reach each other and the resources of the course. Moreover, VLEs can provide an online platform where the teacher can share with students both documents (Word, PowerPoint, PDF files, etc.) and multimedia files such as audio, video files, webpages and so on, and as a result, participants do not have to physically carry resources around with them all the time. VLEs can create a platform where second language learners can gain much more independence than from traditional classrooms and provides learners with opportunities to work on their learning materials at any time and any place they are able to connect to the net (Lai & Kritsonis, 2006).

Moodle as one of the VLEs described by its creators, "Moodle is an Open Source Course Management System (CMS), also known as a Learning Management System (LMS) or a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). It has become very popular among educators around the world as a tool for creating online dynamic web sites for their students. Many institutions use it as their platform to conduct fully online courses, while some use it simply to augment face-to-face courses." Moodle is a very useful platform for E-learning; preferred among educators because it helps managers control and manage all features of the course content and delivery within a single integrated system.

Moodle achieves many of the learning principles including active learning, interaction and immediate feedback. Students can receive assessment and feedback during collaboration, in forums, blogs, wikis, glossaries and quizzes. Instructors can use real-life material and access literacy material from other agencies. Moodle supports communication, collaboration and interaction among its users. Therefore, instructors can use Moodle to create a sense of community among learners. As a result, as stated on its official site, there are 91,386 currently active sites registered from 241 countries, with 76,143,456 users.

However, the success of efforts to integrate technology with education is largely affected by students' attitudes towards technology (Pektas & Erkip, 2006). Nunan (1988) stated that, "no curriculum can claim to be truly learner-centered unless the learner's subjective needs and perceptions relating to the process of learning are taken into account" (p.177).

Particularly, students' personal beliefs and attitudes towards web-based education are regarded as a critical factor to the successful incorporation and adoption of such systems in the learning practices of an institution. As a result, many studies have examined various

factors that influence users' attitudes towards using an e-learning system (Liaw, 2008; Liaw, Huang, & Chen, 2007; Lin, 2009; Ong & Lai, 2006; van Raaij & Schepers, 2008; Selim, 2003, as cited in Molina A. I., Redondo, Lacave, & Ortega, 2014).

In spite of the popularity of e-learning environments, Liaw (2008) claims that there is not much research on instructors' and learners' attitudes towards e-learning environments. Moreover, in spite of the huge e-learning market, there is still a lack of study on the individuals' attitudes towards the adoption and use of e-learning.

Smith, Caputi, & Rawstorne (2000), defined attitudes towards computers as "a person's general evaluation or feeling of favourableness or unfavourableness toward computer technologies (i.e. attitude toward objects) and specific computer-related activities (i.e. attitudes toward behaviours" (p.61). Personal attitudes are an important factor that affect individual usage of information technology. In other words, understanding users' attitudes towards e-learning helps the creation of appropriate e-learning environments for teaching and learning.

Generally students with traditional a background in education are not accustomed to collaborative activities and normally prefer the same kind of traditional language education when they attend university.

However as educational research increases and the methods improve, it is accepted that the collaborative activities are very important in order to make students accustomed to working collaboratively and cooperatively. Turkish students are mostly used to very traditional methods of learning and teaching, having not experienced collaborative activities within their classes. At university, in their lessons they experienced some collaborative activities and it was felt to be important to find out their attitudes towards these activities.

There are many researches about students' attitudes towards VLEs, but not enough research about prep-class students' attitudes towards the collaborative tools of Moodle. Many researchers focus on ESP classes and the teaching of other subjects, rather than English teaching (as a second/foreign language), so this study may be considered important for the field.

The aim of this study is to investigate students' attitudes towards the collaborative tools used in Moodle in a compulsory English language prep class at a Turkish university. It also aims to find out whether or not there is a match between students' attitudes towards the tools and their frequency of usage. Accordingly, the study tries to answer the following research questions:

- What are the students' reported attitudes toward the Collaborative Tools in Moodle as a Virtual Learning Environment in a compulsory English (second/foreign) language course?
- What kind of activities do the students prefer, collaborative or traditional activities?
- Does the students' preference towards activities match the frequency of using particular activities?

Methodology

This study was carried out in an English language class (with 28 students) as part of the preparatory program of Kahramanmaraş Sutcu Imam University, Turkey. The study was conducted in three hours of Self Access Centre (SAC) classes (with students working independently using self-study CD-ROM course books and Moodle [Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment], a course management system using e-learning software). In this lesson the researcher was also their main course teacher.

The convenience sampling method was used for the group selection. The choice of this sampling strategy was guided by practical reasons (the accessibility of the participants for the researcher who was also their instructor) and also the researcher wanted to give all individuals in the group an equal chance to participate in the study.

The Computer Readiness Scale was conducted in November 2012. The students were accustomed to using the Moodle in their writing classes and SAC lessons so they did not experience difficulty in attending to the tasks during the research. The students have already been using Moodle in their SAC classes, but they have had little experience of using the collaborative tools in Moodle. As the researcher was not their SAC class instructor in the first semester, she did not have the opportunity of introducing the collaborative activities to the class at the beginning of the year. However, since the beginning of the second semester, the researcher studied the classes' history in Moodle and found that they did not use Moodle either effectively or actively. Before the research, she introduced the tools to the students for one week and showed them how to use them collaboratively and they have since used these tools regularly each week for three months.

As a collaborative tool, she introduced Wiki to the students and the students were asked to work in groups of three or four, found a common interest and prepared a composition about that subject. The subjects range from "The radio" to "PES Football Game" and the students were free to choose the subjects and the students they wished to study with.

The other collaborative task was Forum, where the teacher posted questions or tasks and the students answered the questions or wrote about the task. The teacher could edit their entries and the other students were able to comment on their friends' entries and observe each other's errors. The task ranged from introducing themselves to answering a question about the effective ways of learning vocabulary.

Another collaborative activity that the students used actively during the research was Glossary which they had not used in the first semester, but 129 words were entered into the glossary during the second semester by the students, together with pictures of some objects.

The researcher focused on only three collaborative tasks, wiki, forum and glossary, because she wanted to observe the students' attitudes clearly and also a separate question related to the students' preferences of these tools was asked to the students and analyzed separately. Moreover, the students' logs, which show how many times they viewed the activities, were examined by the researcher in order to get an idea of whether or not their preferences of tools matched to their usage of these tools.

In this study, we investigated the students' attitudes towards collaborative tools in Moodle in preparatory language classes, so the findings are related to the participants of the

study, and thus they cannot be generalized. Also this study was a case study due to the researcher's restrictions, an experimental study could also be conducted to see the attitudes differences of the students.

Moreover, the research lasted a period of three months, but it could be conducted over a longer period. Also in the first semester, another instructor attended the class and the researcher did not have the opportunity to observe the class or introduce the collaborative tools during the first semester. The study could later be replicated by one instructor over one whole academic year. In this study, two kinds of instruments were used to collect data: two questionnaires and interviews. A Computer Readiness Scale was distributed to the participants at the beginning of the semester and a questionnaire was administered at the end of the study. Many studies are reviewed in the development of the questionnaires; however, the studies conducted by Farrah (2011), Inozu and Ilin (2007) and Ozkan (2011) were used by the researcher in the designing of the questionnaires due to their similarity to the research questions and aims of this particular study. After the questionnaires, a semi-structured interview was conducted with twelve students in order to support the findings and to understand the students' attitudes clearly and objectively. The semi-structured interview also functions as a means of triangulation to check the results obtained with other data collection tools and procedures (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). The researcher chose interviewees who had differing attitudes towards the tools. The interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for the purposes of content analysis.

Findings

The obtained data was analyzed separately. While the data gained through the questionnaires was analyzed statistically using SPSS, the data gained through the semi-structured interviews of the students was exposed to content analysis. To address the first research question, percentages, mean scores and standard deviation values were separately calculated for each item, which allowed for analyzing the students' attitudes according to the domains covered in the scale. In order to answer the second research question, which addressed the participants' preferences of collaborative tasks, their rank of choice, percentages, mean scores and standard deviation values were separately calculated for each item. In order to gain better understanding about the perceptions of the students, all the participants' results were tabulated. To address the third research question, after the results of the second analysis, the students' logs on Moodle were studied and the most viewed tasks' were noted. Screenshots were taken to support the results.

Table 1. Statistical Data Analysis of Attitudes Scale towards Online Collaborative Tools

Questions	Yes	Undecided	No	\bar{X}	SD
1. When I study alone, I understand better and learn better	57.1%	17.9%	25%	1.678	.8629
2. I prefer to write alone rather than in a group	42.9%	7.1%	50%	2.071	.9786
3. Working in groups fostered exchange of knowledge, information and experience	82.1%	14.3%	3.6%	1.214	.4986
4. Working in groups made problem-solving easier	71.4%	17.9%	10.7%	1.392	.6852

5. Working in groups stimulated my critical thinking skills	64.3%	17.9%	17.9%	1.535	.7926
6. Working in groups helped me to work in a more relaxed atmosphere	50.0%	10.7%	39.3%	1.892	.9560
7. Working in groups helped me to receive useful feedback from my friends	64.3%	17.9%	17.9%	1.535	.7926
8. Working in groups helped me to receive useful feedback from my teacher	64.3%	32.1%	3.6%	1.392	.5669
9. Working in groups helped me to focus on collective efforts rather than individual effort	42.8%	28.6%	28.6%	1.857	.8482
10. Working in groups helped me to have a greater responsibility for myself and the group	85.7%	7.1%	7.1%	1.214	.5681
11. Working in groups enabled us to help weaker learners in the group	71.4%	7.1%	21.4%	1.500	.8388
12. Working in groups enhanced our communication skills	75.0%	17.9%	7.1%	1.321	.6118
13. Working in groups improved our performance	53.6%	21.4%	25%	1.714	.8544
14. Working in groups helped us to participate actively in the teaching/learning process	71.4%	14.3%	14.3%	1.428	.7418
15. Working in groups is a waste of time as we keep explaining things to others	14.3%	32.1%	53.6%	2.392	.7373
16. Working in groups makes it difficult getting members to actively participate in tasks	46.4%	32.1%	21.4%	1.750	.7993
17. Working in groups should be encouraged/continued	57.1%	28.6%	14.3%	1.571	.7418
18. Having completed group projects, I feel I am more cooperative in my writing	52.1%	25.0%	17.9%	1.607	.7859
19. Having completed group projects, I feel I have more confident working with other students	39.3%	32.1%	28.6%	1.892	.8317
20. Working in groups enabled us to use skills which individual assessments do not	57.1%	17.9%	25.0%	1.678	.8629

In the first and second items, the students were asked about their preferences of writing alone or in a group, and they usually mentioned that they like writing alone. However, when we analyzed the other items related to the students' attitudes towards the group work; we found the students had positive attitudes towards the group work. The students stated that working in groups fostered the exchange of knowledge, information and experience, made problem-solving easier, stimulated their critical thinking, helped them receive useful feedback from both teachers and friends, and helped them to have greater self-

responsibility and for their groups. Moreover, as seen in Table 1, there is a significant difference between students who have positive attitudes and negative attitudes towards collaborative tasks. However, in item six, while 14 students (50.0%) stated that working in groups helped them to work in a more relaxed atmosphere, 11 students (39.3%) did not agree with the statement, which is a quite high number. The reason could be that the students only worked in groups in a class environment, where some students may not feel that relaxed.

As seen in Table 1, many students had positive attitudes towards the group work, with students generally supporting the group work. In item eleven, a high number of students ($n=20$, 71.4%) mentioned that working in group enabled them to help weaker students and helped them to participate actively in the teaching and learning process. Moreover, in item twelve, 21 students (75.0%) stated that working in groups enhanced their communication skills, which is an encouraging result for the researchers in order to apply collaborative tools in classrooms full of students from a traditional educational background. However, in item fourteen, 13 students (46.4%) mentioned that working in groups makes it difficult getting members to actively participate in tasks and nine students (32.1%) were undecided about this issue. It was more or less an expected result for the researcher, because we cannot force the students to participate in tasks actively and equally, and some of the students are just more active by their nature.

In item nineteen, it is interesting that 11 students (39.3%) agreed that having completed group projects, they felt they had more confidence working with other students, while nine students (32.1%) were undecided and eight students (28.6%) did not agree on this issue at all. This result is reasonable, since the students did not have any prior experience of collaborative tasks. Other statistics were more or less the same, with students stating that working in groups improved their performance and enabled them to use skills which individual assessments do not. Also they said that working in groups should be encouraged and continued.

Table 2. Students' Attitudes towards the Disagreements in Group

Questions	Yes	Undecided	No	\bar{X}	SD
21.While working in groups, all group members contributed equally to the project	42.9%	25.0%	32.1%	1.892	.8751
22.We sometimes disagreed about what to say or how to express our ideas	60.7%	14.3%	25.0%	1.642	.8698
23.Despite disagreement, the group was able to reach consensus	82.1%	7.1%	10.7%	1.285	.6586
25.I had the chance to express my ideas in the group	85.7%	7.1%	7.1%	1.214	.5681

In Table 2, the first item shows that 12 students (42.9%) believed in that while working in groups, all group members contributed equally to the project, while nine students (32.1%) did not agree on the this item and seven students (25.0%) were undecided.

Moreover, in item twenty-two, 17 students (60.7%) accepted that they sometimes disagreed about what to say or how to express our ideas, but 23 students (82.1%) stated that despite any disagreement, the group was able to reach consensus. It is a normal

situation to have disagreements within a group, but it is hopeful that they reached a consensus. Also, in item twenty-five, 24 students (85.7%) believed that they had the chance to express their ideas in the group, while only two students mentioned that they did not have the chance to express their ideas in the group.

Table 3. Students' Attitudes towards Editing of Their Work

Questions	Yes	Undecided	No	\bar{X}	SD
31.While working in groups, we spent more time revising than I do when I write alone	57.1%	21.4%	21.4%	1.642	.8261
26.While working in groups, we spent more time planning than I do when I write alone	39.3%	25.0%	35.7%	1.964	.8811
27.While working in groups, we spent more time generating ideas than I do when I write alone	42.9%	17.9%	39.3%	1.964	.9222
28.While working in groups, we spent more time checking spelling than I do when I write alone	42.9%	17.9%	39.3%	1.964	.9222
29.While working in groups, we spent more time checking grammar than I do when I write alone	46.4%	10.7%	42.9%	1.964	.9615
30.While working in groups, we spent more time checking punctuation than I do when I write alone	21.4%	17.9%	60.7%	2.392	.8317

When it comes to editing of the written work, students' attitudes are different from their general attitudes. In the first item, 16 students (57.1%) stated that while working in groups, they spent more time revising than they do when they write alone which is a positive aspect for the researcher. As for checking grammar and spelling, the number of students was nearly the same, and maybe the students could not decide on these issues. Maybe as they worked in groups, some of them spent time editing the text and the other students trusted them and did not spend more time on editing.

Table 4. Students' Attitudes towards Learning New Things

Questions	Yes	Undecided	No	\bar{X}	SD
24.I learned new ways to plan my paragraph from the group	42.9%	25.0%	32.1%	1.892	.8751
32.I learned new ways to support my points of view	71.4%	7.1%	21.4%	1.500	.8388

As seen in Table 4, in item twenty-four, 12 students (42.9%) stated that they learned new ways to plan their paragraph from the group, which is a low number compared to the other results and nine students (32.1%) did not think that they learned new ways to plan their paragraph. However, in item thirty-two, 20 students (71.4%) mentioned that they learned new ways to support their points of view.

Table 5. Students' Attitudes towards Collaborative Writing

Questions	Yes	Undecided	No	\bar{X}	SD
33.I enjoy writing more than I did before due to collaborative writing	50.0%	32.1%	17.9%	1.678	.7723
34.I get more work done when I work with others	57.1%	10.7%	32.1%	1.750	.9279
35.The group produced a better description and a story as compared to individual writing	42.9%	28.6%	28.6%	1.857	.8482

In item thirty-three, 14 students (50.0%) declared that they enjoyed writing more than they did before due to collaborative writing, while nine students (32.1%) were undecided about this issue. Also in item thirty-four, 16 students (57.1%) believed that they got more work done when they worked with others, but nine students (32.1%) did not agree on this issue. However, many students stated that the group produced a better description and a story as compared to individual writing.

Table 6. Students' General Attitudes towards Collaborative Tools

Questions	Yes	Undecided	No	\bar{X}	SD
36.Overall, this was a worthwhile experience	57.1%	28.6%	14.3%	1.571	.7418
37. Wiki was useful	67.9%	28.6%	3.6%	1.357	.5587
38.Forum was useful	75.0%	21.4%	3.6%	1.285	.5345
39. Dictionary was useful	92.9%	3.6%	3.6%	1.107	.4162

When the students are asked to give their opinions about whether this was a worthwhile experience in item thirty-six, 16 students (57.1%) said "yes" while only four students (14.3%) said "No". Also in items thirty-seven, thirty-eight and thirty-nine, 19 students (67.9%) thought that Wiki was useful, 21 students (75.0%) stated that Forum was useful, and 26 students, the highest number recorded (92.9%) thought the dictionary (Glossary) was useful. Furthermore, only one student did not find these activities useful.

Findings from the Question about the Collaborative Tools

To address the second research question, the students were asked about their preferences of the collaborative tools and they were asked to number the tools according to their preferences. "First" is defined as the most liked task and "Fourth" is defined as the least liked task.

Table 7. The Rank of Students' Preferences of Collaborative Tools

	First	Second	Third	Fourth
Wiki	35.7%	32.1%	17.9%	4.14.3%
Glossary	25.0%	35.7%	21.4%	5.17.9%
Forum	28.6%	17.9%	28.6%	7.25.0%
Quizzes	25.0%	10.7%	21.4%	12.42.9%

Forums can be considered as a collaborative tool since the students can interact with each other and comment on and edit their writing. However, it can be understood from Table 7 that students are neutral about the forums and that they are undecided about this task. For the Glossary, the researcher created a relaxed atmosphere for the students to build

a dictionary, and 129 entries were created by the students; so it can be assumed that generally the students enjoyed doing this task. Wiki was the most preferred constructivist tool among the others (n=10, 35.7%), and also it should be noted that (n=9, 32.1%) almost as many people preferred the wiki as their second choice. It can be concluded that the wiki was the most liked and preferred collaborative task among the participants. As the traditional task, quizzes was not preferred among the participants, with only seven students (25.0%) choosing quizzes as their first ranked task. Also 12 students chose quizzes as the least preferred tasks.

Findings from the Interviews

After analysis of the questionnaires, 12 students were interviewed. Designed in line with the research questions and according to findings obtained from the questionnaires, the interview questions focused on:

- The effectiveness of Moodle in SAC lessons.
- The effectiveness of collaborative tools such as wikis, forums and glossaries.
- The difference in attitudes between the first and second semesters.

The content analyses of the interviews are presented in the following sections.

General Attitudes towards Moodle

The students in the semi-structured interview were asked about their experiences with Moodle in general. Nearly all the students stated that generally they found Moodle to be useful. They were also asked in what way Moodle was effective. The participants stated different reasons for its effectiveness.

Extract 1

“Generally, I found the Moodle useful because I improved myself and it was very enjoyable and effective.”

As stated above, the participant found Moodle to be effective and enjoyable and believed that it improved himself.

Extract 2

“If I describe it in percentage I can say that it was 70% or 80% useful but it was enjoyable, I enjoyed using Moodle 100%.”

As seen in this quote, the participant stressed that he enjoyed Moodle and in general he found it useful.

Participants’ Change of General Attitudes towards Moodle

To understand the effectiveness of the collaborative tools actively used in the class during the second semester, first of all, the students were asked about whether or not there was a difference in their attitudes towards Moodle between the first semester and the second semester. Then, according to their answers, the researcher asked why their perceptions of Moodle had changed. Here are some extracts from the participants’ answers:

Extract 10

“Yes, I used Moodle much more actively in the second semester, and why? Because we started to use Forum, Dictionary and Wiki, they were enjoyable and everybody could express and support their ideas, I learned a lot of vocabulary.”

The participant expressed that he liked and used Moodle because of collaborative tools and also mentioned that it improved his vocabulary knowledge.

Extract 6

“In the first semester I was not interested in using Moodle, but in the second semester I was much more interested in using Moodle.”

Another participant also stated that her attitudes towards Moodle changed in the second semester and she became much more interested in using Moodle.

Extract 8

“In the first semester I did not know how to use it well, but in the second semester I learnt it and used it a lot.”

The participant mentioned that she did not know how to use the Moodle in the first semester and as she learned to use it in the second semester quite a lot. As understood from the statements of the students, they started to use Moodle much more actively and they saw its purpose with collaborative activities in the second semester. Moreover, many of them said that their perceptions changed in a positive way because of these tools.

Effectiveness of the Collaborative Tools

The interview results for the collaborative tools reflect the positive opinions obtained from the questionnaires. All the interviewees agreed with the effectiveness of collaborative tools. However, there were some attitudes differences between the tools. The students generally found these tools effective.

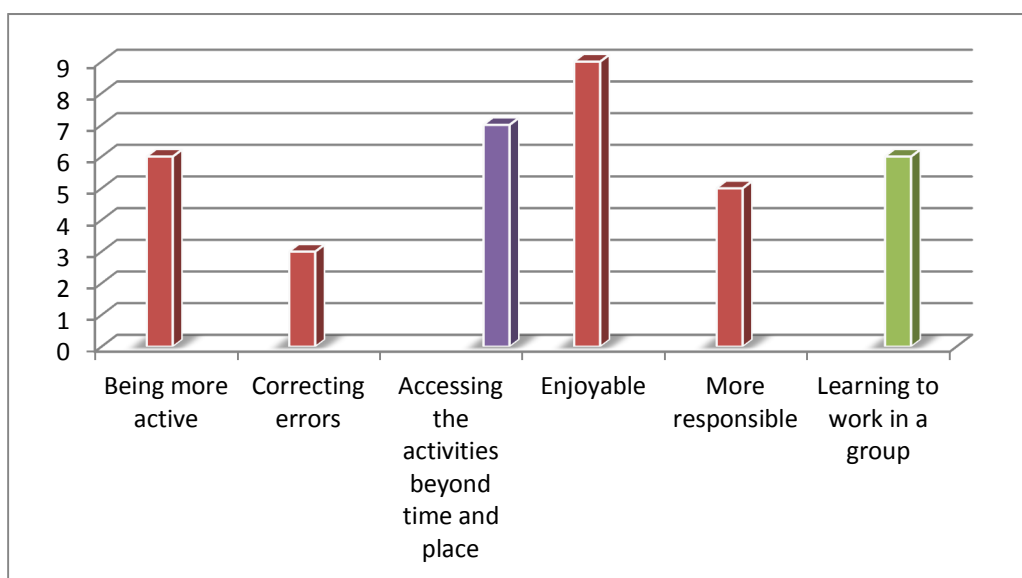


Figure 1. Reasons for the Effectiveness of Moodle Courses

As seen in Figure 1, being enjoyable, and accessing activities beyond time and place were the favorite reasons for the effectiveness of Moodle courses, according to the

interview results. Also they were much more active, responsible and they learned to work in a group. Regarding the effectiveness of the collaborative tools, here are the statements of some of the students:

Extract 6

“I spent a lot of time using wiki, forum and glossary in SAC lessons. We were more active and responsible for our own learning.”

As stated, the participant mentioned spending a lot of time using the collaborative tools. It can be concluded that by using these tools the students took responsibility for their own learning process.

Extract 11

“I didn’t even open a book, but I learned a lot of things from my friends, we were correcting our friends’ writings. We learned from our friends not only teacher.”

As indicated, the participant tended to learn from the experiences of their friends. It can be interpreted that being in co-operation with other students might enable us to reach new understanding about the learning process.

Findings from the Moodle Website

In this study, the researcher tried to find out whether or not the students' preference towards activities matched the frequency of using particular activities. In order to get the answer, the researcher took screenshots of the tools the students used. How many times the students viewed the activities are written on the screen. By analyzing these screenshots and the results of the questionnaires, we can understand whether or not there is any relationship. The students’ first and second choices were taken into account in order to understand the preferences of the students. Wiki was the most popular tool; the students viewed wiki 1,338 times, which is a large number compared to the small number of participants and the limited time of the research. However, the final result for wiki was not inspiring. They could not be considered ‘quality work’, but even so, this result does not change the reality that students frequently used wiki.

1. Vocabulary I	-	-	
2. Vocabulary II	-	-	
3. Was Going To	-	-	
Learning Strategies 2 - Speaking	68	-	Thursday, 18 April 2013, 12:37 PM (245 days 3 hours)
Topic 20			
1. Vocabulary	-	-	
2. Conjunctions Quiz	-	-	
3. Scrambled Sentences	-	-	
Wiki	1338	-	Saturday, 14 December 2013, 9:14 PM (4 days 18 hours)

Figure 2. Frequency of Students’ Usage of Wiki

Quizzes, as the traditional activity in Moodle, was the least favorite tool among the students and only ten students chose it as their most liked or second most liked activity. The

results were also interesting since the quizzes were parallel to their main course syllabus and the students had the chance of revising the subjects they learned in their main course lesson. However, the students did not even do the quizzes or only some of them did the quizzes.















 Soruları nasıl cevaplayacaksınız	4	-	Saturday, 23 November 2013, 3:05 PM (26 days)
 1. Reading Quiz I	4	-	Thursday, 9 May 2013, 8:49 PM (223 days 18 hours)
 2	-	-	
 3	-	-	
 4	-	-	
 5	-	-	
 6	-	-	
 7	2	-	Thursday, 21 February 2013, 2:48 PM (301 days)
 8	-	-	
 9	1	-	Thursday, 13 December 2012, 10:02 AM (1 year 6 days)
 10	-	-	
 11	-	-	
 12 More	-	-	
 13. Vocabulary Units 11 - 12	1	-	Thursday, 11 April 2013, 2:28 PM (252 days 1 hour)

Figure 3. Frequency of Students' Usage of Quizzes

As seen in Figure 3, students were not interested in doing the quizzes. However, the low number of frequencies could be because of the nature of the exams, as students did them only once and they did not check their friends' answers. However, in general the students' preference towards activities matched the frequency of using particular activities. The students used the collaborative tools more often than the traditional tool such as quizzes.

Conclusion and Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate students' general attitudes towards collaborative tools in a virtual learning environment named Moodle, as used in compulsory English language prep classes for Turkish university students. It also aimed to find out whether or not the students' preferences towards activities matched the frequency of using particular activities.

Dörnyei (1997) claimed that collaboration or group work enables learners to develop positive attitudes towards learning in comparison to teacher-centered instructions, thus the study expected to find positive attitudes toward collaborative tools in Moodle. In accordance with the prediction, the overall results of the questionnaire indicate that the majority of participants did have positive attitudes towards the collaborative tools in Moodle. This result is in line with previous research about attitudes of students towards using computers in an ELT environment (Chen, 2003; Ayres, 2002; Lin, 2002). Although many of the students came from a traditional background of education, they found the collaborative activities useful and they enjoyed using these tools. Moreover, the students stated that their attitudes have changed owing to the inclusion of collaborative tools in their lessons. It may be important to

point out that applying collaborative learning in any university language course or skill course may increase the autonomy of the students, and they may take more responsibility for their studies. It can be concluded that, the collaborative tools were viewed by all of the participant students as an opportunity to reflect on their learning process by working together in the activities in a friendly and constructive environment.

According to the results of the questionnaire, and the interview results, Wiki was the most preferred tool, with Glossary the second, Forum third, and Quizzes were the least preferred. In fact, these results are in line with the questionnaire results, but during the interviews, the students declared that the glossary was their favorite tool and they learned a lot of vocabulary thanks to it. The reason for this result can be that the students put their personal photos next to the word that they defined in the Glossary and everybody commented on it or laughed at some of the pictures. Also Wiki was a useful tool, but there was a problem regarding “copy-paste” and some students were unwilling to work together. Since the students were not accustomed to working collaboratively and cooperatively and it was the first time they had any experience of using collaborative tools in a Virtual Learning Environment, their final works of Wiki were not very inspiring. However, it was still a valuable experience for them and they showed their attitudes and support in a positive way in the questionnaire and also during the interviews.

As can be seen in the above findings, the collaborative tools may be useful for most of the problems encountered by the teachers in the classroom. Therefore, it is highly recommended to integrate some sort of VLE into classroom-based compulsory foreign language education in higher education institutes. Various studies have shown that virtual learning environments and applications such as web 2.0 tools facilitate the use of social constructivist principles (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007; Woo & Reeves, 2007). It is also important to give opportunities to students to experience collaborative activities through the integration of VLE into the learning process. In this respect, designing online courses and collaborative activities in accordance with pedagogical principles of language learning and teaching is very important. Also, the use of collaborative tools appears to increase the opportunities for collaboration and interaction. However, one difficulty that a teacher may encounter is the teacher and students’ new roles. Contrary to expectations, online courses do not decrease the teacher’s work, as Adair-Hauck, Willingham-McLain, & Youngs (1999) indicate, “Instead, his/her energies are channeled in different directions such as evaluating, choosing, designing, adapting software, serving as consultant to students, assuring that the overall course learning objectives are being met, and that the course is an integrated whole.” (p.293). Not only students, but also teachers may spend a lot of time online. Compared to students, the teacher can spend more time on the VLE preparing activities, interacting with students, giving feedback, evaluating and such like.

Since many of students may not have prior experience of collaborative work, they may feel that they do not improve or learn something. Also some students may feel that it is a waste of time. The teacher needs to be patient with these students and encourage them to take part in the activities and experience the process of collaboration. Moreover, the teacher may need to be much more active as facilitator or guide in the classroom. Furthermore, the effectiveness of collaborative tools on skills such as writing, speaking, listening and reading could be investigated in further studies.

Notes

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