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Perceptions of undergraduate students about synchronous video conference-based English courses

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Abstract

The use of videoconferencing technology in higher education has grown substantially in recent years although there is limited information about how these courses are perceived by students. The purpose of this study was to find out the perceptions of undergraduate students with regard to video conference-based English courses. The participants of the study included eighty 3rd year students at two state universities in Turkey. The data were collected through a questionnaire about the perceptions of video conference-based English courses. The results indicated that participants supported the view that university-level English courses should not be taught through video conferencing. Although they agreed upon many advantages of video conferencing, a vast majority of participants thought that English courses should be conducted only in a traditional classroom setting and they did not think video conferencing will help students to learn English better.

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1. Introduction

Advancing technology is changing the way courses are developed and delivered around the world, especially in higher education. Advanced computer technology has globalized learning through the development of different online vehicles, and higher education institutions are trying to keep up with the demand by developing online courses to meet the needs of the increasing number of students who wants to obtain education by these means (Liu,

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2007). Videoconferencing is just one of the technological systems that can be used in distance education. Videoconferencing is a synchronous model for interactive voice, video and data transfer between two or more groups/people (Wiesemas & Wang, 2010).

There are numerous advantages of video conferencing in educational institutions. It is indicated in the literature that videoconferencing technology reduces time and costs between remote locations, fill gaps in teaching services, increases training productivity, enables meetings that would not be possible due to travel costs, and improves access to learning (Martin, 2005).

Several studies have examined students' attitudes towards videoconferencing in the classroom. Although students predominantly think that videoconferencing has certain benefits, such as increasing motivation, interaction, novelty and improvements in communication skills, not all students are comfortable with the new technology, which may stem from different learning styles, strategies and unfamiliarity with new technological tools (Martin, 2005).

In his study titled as "The Videoconferencing Classroom: What do students think?", Dogget (2008) found out that over 80% of the students responded favorably to the videoconferencing. However, 80% of the students stated that they would have been more comfortable in a conventional classroom setting. Additionally, videoconferencing was found to have no significant effect on students' achievement in the course.

In the study, "The Quality of Teaching and Learning via Videoconferencing", Knipe and Lee (2002) examined the quality of teaching and learning activities performed via video conferencing. The study was conducted with 66 students. 45 students participated in traditional, face-to-face courses and 21 students participated in distance education. After the study, the students participating in the course via distance education felt alone and as if they were not a part of class when they could not make eye contact with other students and the teacher. This situation impaired the concentration of these students and made a negative impact on their learning.

The study conducted by Umphrey et al. (2008) studied the impact of interaction, class communication experience and the relational features displayed by an instructor when engaging directly with students, compared to student perceptions in regard to video conferencing education. According to the research results, students believe that face-to-face education is more positive than video conferencing, in terms of the teacher's proximity, understanding the teacher, mutual communication in the classroom, success and quality. From these results, it seems that the most effective video-conference courses would include interaction and in-class engagement.

A study carried out by Marsh et al. (2010) investigated the benefits of taking the live implementation of learned theoretical information via video conference. The research took place with the cooperation of Sussex University and 6 schools. The video conference technologies provided a way to overcome the limitations of the learning center's physical site. Teacher trainees could access various class applications and practice with the instructor. Course records aided the trainees by refreshing their memories about subjects they forgot.

Gillies published a paper in 2008 titled "Students Perspectives on Videoconferencing in Teacher Education at a Distance". It was focused on the experiences of students who took courses via video conference for one year within the scope of initial teacher training. After the interviews, the students stated that the technological problems occurred in the sound, the image and the connection caused them to feel as if they were not real students. Moreover, live interaction with the teacher and receiving simultaneous answers to questions were situations frequently mentioned by the students.

In the study titled "Experiences with a Synchronous Virtual Classroom in Distance Education", Koppelman and Vranken (2008) aimed to determine the viewpoints of the teachers and 10 students in a synchronous computer technologies education. The students stated that they liked the courses given in short intervals and they had no problems with concentration. In addition, they noted that the applied technologies prevented the waste of time. While the students evaluated the sound quality quite good, some students stated that they did not like the delays.

Dallat et al. (1992) found a saving in travel time and cost as an anticipated advantage of videoconferencing after questioning both lecturers and students before and after they had used videoconferencing for teaching and learning. They also found that the university would enhance its public image due to this new approach to providing education. However, they stated that none of the tutors believed that videoconferencing had the potential to provide students with an entirely effective learning experience. They also found that some tutors dominated more than usual and students were not given the opportunities to interact with other students or the tutor. Participants did not found videoconferencing as an effective way of instruction delivery especially for the classes where a high level of interaction is essential.

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