STUDENTS’ ATTITUDES TOWARDS WEB-BASED INDEPENDENT LEARNING AT BILKENT UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

Title: Students' Attitudes towards Web-based Independent Learning at Bilkent University School of English Language

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This study investigated students' attitudes towards web-based independent learning at Bilkent University School of English Language. Because of its flexible nature and numerous options, the internet is believed to be a beneficial tool for promoting independent and autonomous learning. However, before measuring its effectiveness as a learning tool, students' attitudes towards this medium should be investigated to form a basis for further studies. The study also investigated the issues or problems students come across while studying on the internet.

Fourteen volunteer upper-intermediate level prep students from different disciplines were the participants in this study. A six-week web-based independent learning course was designed and implemented with them. The teacher of the course and the students communicated through e-mail only.

To collect the data, the participants were given an attitude questionnaire at both the beginning and the end of the study to find out whether there were any changes in their attitudes. During the course, the students' e-mails to the instructor, which were composed of assignment sheets and reflective e-journals, were collected. In order to explore the issues in the reflective journals more deeply, each week two participants, selected at random, were interviewed.
The pre- and post-treatment questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively through the Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Signed Ranks Test in Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS). For the reflective e-journals and the interviews, categorization was used as a qualitative technique.

The comparison of the results of the initial and final questionnaires revealed that students’ attitudes towards web-based independent learning changed positively and in particular, their knowledge of how to learn on the internet increased considerably as a result of this study.

The results of the interviews and reflective e-journals reveal that despite some pedagogical problems, technical frustrations, and inadequate computer skills, most of the students enjoyed studying on the internet, as they felt that their writing, reading and vocabulary skills had improved, and their motivation and self-confidence had increased as they realized that they were able to complete the tasks on their own. The flexibility and convenience of the internet were two other aspects that made students feel positive about studying on the internet independently.

All the positive changes in students’ attitudes towards taking responsibility for their own learning can be interpreted as initial steps in the development of learner autonomy.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This study is about web-based independent learning in general. The specific aims of the study are to find out students’ attitudes about doing independent study on the internet and what kind of problems or issues students come across in such study and whether such studies have any implications for promoting learner autonomy. The study was carried out at Bilkent University School of English Language with a group of fourteen volunteer upper-intermediate level prep students.

Background of the Study

According to Murray (1999), the revolution of the internet technology has changed our daily life and with the advent of the internet, a new generation of distance education has emerged. He states that from reading news, sending e-mails to education as well as entertainment, the internet with multi-media technologies provides new and attractive opportunities for information exchange. Among these impacts, distance learning seems to be very important and interesting. One of the attractions of distance learning is its flexibility of instruction. Web-based learning, which is a kind of distance learning, is a new trend in education. He claims that the internet is one of the reasons that speeds up this trend and developments in communication technologies and worldwide access to networks enable the internet and the World Wide Web to be an attractive resource and tool for distance education. Various opportunities are provided for learners to be able to work independently by the internet.
As internet and world wide web (www) use and access increase, many educational institutions have started to implement web-based course delivery. Educators can exploit this new technology to provide learners with opportunities that cannot be offered in a restricted classroom context such as helping them to choose materials according to their individual needs.

A major feature of web-based learning is the element of learner control. Various motivational theories (Brophy, 1998) emphasize the importance of learner control. Control gives individuals the possibility to make choices and to affect outcomes, resulting in the learner feeling more competent and the activity having greater personal meaning and interest (Lepper, 1985). According to Schank (1993), the learner on the internet can control the learning strategy, choosing "what to view, how long to view and how many times to view" (p.21). As a result, learning via the internet increases self-esteem, which helps the learner to develop a positive attitude towards his capability as a learner (Wenden, 1998).

In terms of students’ perceptions, the internet seems to be an important and useful educational tool, and therefore, they show willingness to face "the challenges of cyberspace" (p.16) and take risks to manage their own learning (Hsieh & Lin, 1998). Students enjoy being active online and discovering new ideas, which is a significant indication of autonomous learning and learners (Boswood, 1997).

According to Dickinson (1993), three main characteristics of autonomous learners are: first, being able to work on their own pace; second, being able to make relevant choices to manage their own learning, and finally, being able to participate actively in the learning process independent from the teacher. She adds that autonomous learners can reach the same kind of information trying different paths.
selectively and independently, and are capable of evaluating every single situation they find themselves in. These are all important features of being a good and effective learner as the pedagogical justification rests on the claim that reflectivity and self-awareness produce better learning (Benson & Voller, 1997).

Learner autonomy is often set in a contrast to dependence on the teacher (Dickinson, 1993). The teacher’s role is limited to providing learners with guidance and feedback, and raising their awareness of the ways to develop their own study skills. According to Dickinson, autonomy refers to "the degree of the learner’s taking responsibility for his/her own learning" (p.330). Lee (1998) emphasizes the importance of making choices as an autonomous learner and claims that ability to make choices implies that students can work at their own pace.

Autonomous learning is achieved when certain conditions are obtained and a positive attitude to learning is one of them besides motivation, conscious use of learning strategies, and knowledge about language learning (Wenden, 1998) as language learning is not only a cognitive task. “Rather, the success of learning is, to some extent, related to learners’ stance towards the world and the learning activity in particular” (Little, 1991, p.17). It is the positive change in learners’ attitude towards learning that will help them to move towards autonomy (Little, 1991). To encourage "greater self-direction", teachers need to help learners re-examine their expectations that the teacher plans and directs all work, which can be best done in "an environment where practices offer an advantageous context for attitude change" (Wenden, 1998, p.33; Holec, 1988). Web-based education in particular can help learners to change their attitudes and to be autonomous by giving them the means to access information flexibly and individually.
Statement of the Problem

The main aims of this study are to find out how students feel about doing web-based independent study so that we can draw some conclusions about their attitudes towards learner autonomy, and what kind of problems students come across in such studies.

The internet, which encourages people to work independently and make their own choices, can be a valuable instrument to help our students to become autonomous learners. Particularly in Turkey, many university students who need to do research lack this important characteristic and find it very difficult to adapt themselves to such studies (Kaya, 1989).

Helping students to realize their full potential and be independent learners is part of the mission statement of Bilkent University School of English Language (BUSEL), (BUSEL Staff Handbook, 2001). One way of achieving this goal is using self-access centers in which students are exposed to the target language in a less formal, more relaxing, and enjoyable atmosphere than the traditional classroom. Students are expected to visit language labs, computer labs or the self-study centers where they can study on their own under the supervision of self-access teachers.

Despite the fact that all efforts are directed to that end, very few satisfactory results are gained in terms of promoting independent learning. One of the reasons is that the location of these activities is again the school. According to the data gathered from the Evaluation of Learning questionnaires (a questionnaire given to students at the beginning and at the end of each term to evaluate courses, materials, teachers and themselves) and teachers’ observations, students do not feel or realize the difference between studying in the self-access centers and in the classroom since the
environment of instruction is the same. The presence of the teacher in the self-access centers also makes the students dependent on the teacher, which hinders the rationale behind the self-access. Another reason is that students do not want to spend more hours after school as they feel tired.

BUSEL serves as a kind of bridge between students’ lycee education and their university life. Since Turkish students are not offered many opportunities to be autonomous at high school (Kaya, 1989) and since university life requires them to be independent and to move from being passive learners to participants in the creation of knowledge and meaning, BUSEL should better train the students to be autonomous and provide facilities to practice and foster learner autonomy, which will help students to make a smooth transition to university education. Therefore, innovative and motivating models should be provided for the students. Exploiting sources on the internet is a potentially useful and attractive way of helping students take more responsibility for their own learning. However, in order to design such independent study courses based on the internet, we should first learn about students’ attitudes towards independent studies so as to form a basis for further studies.

Research Questions

1. What are BUSEL students’ attitudes towards web-based independent learning?

2. What problems do BUSEL students face in web-based independent studies?

3. What is the relationship of the results of the questions 1 and 2 to the development of learner autonomy?
Significance of the Problem

We are in the age of technology and information. One of the practical ways of reaching information is via the internet. The visual attraction and the variety of information on this medium attract the attention of thousands of people from different backgrounds and help to improve the knowledge of these people. If teachers want their students to get more access to up-dated and various information and materials, to develop their potential as independent learners, they can integrate the internet into their syllabus especially at advanced level, which in return, may increase students’ motivation and make them more competent in learning.

This study is useful in the sense that the number of studies about this subject are very few, and so this study will be an addition to the literature on web-based independent learning, and student attitudes towards independent studies based on the internet. It may also help to promote the wider use of internet in educational programs in Turkey and encourage teachers to consider the internet more as a tool to foster independent learning and as a way to add variety to their interaction with students.

It is hoped that teachers who find it difficult to encourage their students to study outside class, students who want to manage their own learning, and managers who are looking for different ways to enable students to be independent learners will make use of this thesis.
Definition of Terms

**Distance Education**: It is planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching and as a result requires special techniques of course design, special instructional techniques, special methods of communication by electronic and other technology, as well as special organizational and administrative arrangements (Moore & Kearsley, 1996).

**Web-based Education**: A sub-branch of distance education which is done via the internet (Carrier, 1997).

**Independent Learning**: Students’ taking responsibility for their own learning (Dickinson, 1993).

**Learner Autonomy**: "Capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action" (Little, 1991, p.14).
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This study is about web-based independent learning in general. The specific aims of the study are to find out what student attitudes are towards doing independent studies on the internet so that we can learn if such studies have any implications for promoting learner autonomy, and what kind of problems or issues students come across in such studies. The study was carried out at Bilkent University School of English Language with a group of fourteen volunteer upper-intermediate level prep students. A six-week web-based independent study course was designed and implemented with these students.

This chapter reviews the literature about independent learning, web-based learning and its types, problems related to web-based learning, studies related to students’ attitudes towards web-based-learning, and learner autonomy.

Independent Learning

Since mid-1970s, the concept of independent learning has been gaining popularity in language learning. According to Little (1991), to enable students to be independent learners, many educational institutions now provide their students with the opportunity to use self-access materials and centers; some have allocated class time to allow learners to work in the self-access mode while the others allow students to work alone after class designing independent activities and courses so that students get in the habit of finding information on their own, through their own methods or styles. In this way, it is claimed that the learning process becomes more meaningful, personal, and relevant to the learner.
Independent learning achieves its aim when it not only allows the learners to work at their own pace on a topic of their choice, but also to decide what to work they will do and how they will allocate their time. Dickinson (1993, p. 330-31) summarizes these features by identifying five characteristics of independent learners:

1. They understand what is being taught, i.e. they have sufficient understanding of language learning to understand the purpose of pedagogical choices;
2. They are able to formulate their own learning objectives;
3. They are able to select and make use of appropriate learning strategies;
4. They are able to monitor their use of these strategies;
5. They are able to self-assess, or monitor their own learning.

“Modern pedagogical thinking suggests that learners are capable of making important decisions that have to do with the manner of their own learning” (Little, 1991, p. 18). He indicates that by involving learners in the decision making process, and in some cases, giving them decisive roles, and helping them learn independently, there is the likelihood that learning becomes a more effective process as a result of increasing learner reflectivity and self-awareness. Here, the teacher’s role is providing learners with guidance and feedback, and raising their awareness of the ways to develop their own study skills.

Little adds that teachers are no longer an indispensable source of knowledge and information for their students. One main reason for this is that means of communication and information are today highly developed and the learner can have access to these resources without the help of the teacher. In this new situation, teachers are more of a resource person or consultant; they want to train their students to “develop their own learning strategies so that they will not be dependent on them.
Dickinson (1993) states that students will move towards independence in varying degrees, depending on factors such as age, skill, level, and ability in a particular subject and therefore, “it is important to establish the conditions for enlarging student learning in all its variety, thereby encouraging the growth and development of all students towards greater responsibility for their own learning” (p.5).

According to Kesten (1987), it is important to create a learning environment which furthers this process of independence, and enables students to consciously accept responsibility for and make decisions about their own learning to adapt this role permanently. She claims that independent learning cannot be achieved in isolation and learning is an interactive process among students and between teacher and students; therefore, the teacher plays an important role in providing a supportive environment that encourages students' motivation, self-confidence, curiosity and desire to learn. According to Little (1991) independent learning will be fostered by a climate that is "sensitive, flexible and responsive" (p.7) to the learners' needs. Therefore, teachers should constantly look for new and beneficial ways, tools, or means to enable their students to work independently. One of these new and attractive tools is the internet, which is the medium of web-based learning.

Web-based learning

Web-based education in particular can promote independent learning by giving learners the means to access information flexibly and individually. Murray (1999) states that educators can creatively use this new medium to provide learners with opportunities that are “beyond the present scope of the classroom” (p.22) by enabling
them to enter “a computer-generated second language community” (p.22), in which learners are frequently exposed to the internet for their education.

According to Schank (1993), the flexible nature of the internet enables the learner to control suitable learning strategies, "to choose what to view, how long to view and how many times to view" (p.33), which is also emphasized by Esch (1994). As a result, learning via the internet increases self-esteem, that is, the evaluation the learner makes of himself with regard to the target language or learning in general, in other words, it is "a personal judgement of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes that the individual holds towards himself” (Coopersmith, as cited in Brown, 1987, p. 101-102). Brophy (1998) emphasizes the importance of learner control as a way of increasing students’ motivation. Control enables individuals to make choices and to affect outcomes, which leads to the learner feeling more competent and the activity having more personal meaning and interest (Lepper, 1985).

Schell (2001) states that motivation is a very important factor since web-based courses tend to require learners to actively seek course materials rather than passive consumption of materials. Web-based materials require the student to “perform navigation to pertinent materials” (p.4) instead of relying on the teacher to “find, present, and explain” (p.4) the material. Therefore, when a concept in the web-based materials is not grasped by the students, the students must be self-motivated to explore more since they cannot expect immediate guidance or help from the teacher.

Schell adds that because students feel less inhibited in asking questions when exchange methods such as e-mails are used as opposed to face-to-face communication, they become more motivated in the task due to reduction of stress.
Because the computer provides a less immediate or confrontational environment, it reduces the embarassement associated with the fear of making mistakes and increases the amount of participation by timid students (Beauvois, as cited in Gonglewski, 1999).

The content of internet sites can also help learners to have a more positive and broader cultural awareness, and so breakdown stereotypes of different cultures (Ghasemi, 1996). Unlike the traditional classroom, where teachers often present a fixed concept of the target culture usually due to time-constraints or the teacher’s incomplete knowledge, training or experience, the internet provides invaluable information in understanding “the diversity of the target culture and keeping learners as up-to-date as possible on the news and issues in the foreign culture for example by authentic materials,” such as current magazines and newspapers (Gonglewski, 1999, p.78)).

In addition to its benefits, web-based education has some drawbacks. First, it requires a substantial technical infrastructure to run programs. There should be internet connected computers, and a service provider. Web-based instruction also requires learners to adapt to new methods. Workbooks and videocassette programs are familiar tools, but web-based instruction is new for many learners. It requires learners to master using a browser and a keyboard, and interacting with classmates using unfamiliar tools such as chat rooms (Coburn, 1985). Lack of technological expertise on the part of both teacher and student, resistance to change, student passivity, hardware limitations, and learner isolation are but a few of the perceived drawbacks to distance learning (Plotnik, 1995). For the most part, all these problems are related to training and technological issues.
Basic types of Internet access in EFL and their advantages

There are three basic types of internet access that can be used in EFL activities, each utilizing a different internet service: e-mail, newsgroups, and the World Wide Web (www) (Carrier, 1997).

Today, e-mailing is one of the most popular ways of communication. In pedagogical terms, it involves learners in the following exchanges (Carrier, 1997, p. 279):

1. Teacher-student: e-mail is used for class follow-up, discussing homework, and submitting writing assignments.
2. Student-student: Students strengthen personal links with other students either in their own institution or overseas.
3. Class-class: a group of students makes contact with an overseas group to carry out a project.
4. Teacher-world/student-world: Teachers/student use mailing lists and newsgroups to exchange information and discuss relevant issues (e.g., TESL-L).

Among those exchanges, teacher-student and student-student exchanges are quite popular. In particular, student-student communication is an updated version of the pen-pal system which is called “Key Pal”. The idea is simple: a connection is set up between the learners and individuals in other countries who speak or are also learning the target language.

Using e-mails as a learning aid is becoming popular. According to Warschauer (as cited in Carrier, 1997, p. 284) the benefits of using e-mail in language learning are as follows:

First, e-mail provides students with an excellent opportunity for real, natural communication...Second, e-mail empowers students for independent learning...Finally, the use of e-mail enriches our experiences as teachers...[and allows us to share] new ideas, resources and materials.
E-mailing enables students to express their feelings and exchange opinions in a real context. “The asynchronous nature of e-mail offers students a safe haven, in which they can plan, compose, and self-correct their own work before sending it to the recipient” (Gonglewski, 1999, p. 71). According to a study carried out by Hsieh and Lin, (1998), learning through e-mail helps learners to work in an atmosphere with a low level of stress and anxiety and provides them with the opportunity to interact and negotiate meaning, which will sharpen learners’ critical thinking skills and develop their ability to make inferences.

The second type of internet access is newsgroups. They are lists of e-mail communications, which also provide a forum for open discussion. Learners can start a new topic, ask questions to newsgroup members, respond to messages sent to them, or respond to responses. A collection of messages on one topic (initial message, responses, responses to responses) is called a thread, and can usually be retrieved electronically or downloaded for students’ access. This provides a stress-free environment for students to express and discuss their own opinions and practice English (Carrier, 1997).

The third type of internet access in EFL is the World Wide Web (www), which contains millions of pages of information in text, graphic, audio, and video forms (El-Tigi, & Branch, 1997); and is the major instrument of this study. Learners can scan the web for information with a browser program and an internet connection. The data they find and view may be from a university database, a government department, a newspaper, or an e-mail from an individual. There is almost no end to the information available, which is expected to improve the level and quality of education as long as the quality of these sources are ensured. With the wealth of
authentic materials, students can develop their reading, vocabulary, and writing skills in addition to their research skills. Because they are exposed to different cultures, the internet can develop cultural awareness and can help remove prejudice against some cultures (Carrier, 1997).

Pedagogies used in web-based education

Today, when the three types of internet access are considered, it is seen that there are two main pedagogies used in web-based education: interactive and presentational (El-Tigi & Branch, 1997). In interactive design, there are three communication features, which are a bulletin board, a chat room, and internet-based collaborative writing (Leech & Candlin, 1986). Presentational design, which will be used in this study, is similar to traditional paper-based correspondence courses: materials are provided online. Students work independently at their own pace and teacher–student interaction is restricted to students’ initiated questions and teacher’s feedback on assignments (Ghasemi, 1996).

According to El-Tigi and Branch (1997), since teachers are not familiar enough with the internet, they usually start with something simple and familiar as in this study: correspondance model of writing instruction. They add that this design, based originally on the exchange of e-mails between the instructor and student, promotes autonomous learning and helps learners to work independently with very few direct interactions.

As various studies claim (e.g., Ghasemi, 1996; Hsieh & Lin, 1998), the internet appears to be one of the most appropriate media and resources for language learning. It functions both as a vast source of information and means to connect with other speakers of the language. As such, it affords materials and opportunities for
learners to improve their target language independently. However, to help students exploit the internet more, their opinions and attitudes to web-based learning should be understood clearly.

Students’ attitudes towards web-based learning

The growth of technology as an instructional tool is influenced by both teachers’ and students’ attitudes towards these technologies and their ability to use them successfully (Planow, Bauder, Carr, & Sarrar, 1993). Because this study will be based on students’ attitudes, the following paragraphs are devoted only to students’ attitudes towards web-based learning.

Language learning is not merely a cognitive task. According to Candy (1991, pp. 295-296) “Learners reflect not only on their learning in terms of the language input to which they are exposed, but also on the strategies they need in order to achieve the goals they set.” As he says, “the how and the what of learning are intimately interwoven...The overall approach a learner adopts will significantly influence the shape of his or her learning outcomes,” which means that attitudes affect learning as an affective component. Graham (1997) defines affective variables as the “emotionally relevant characteristics of the individual that influence how she/he will respond to any situation.” (p. 92). Other scholars, such as Schumann (1978) attach less importance to learners' emotions, claiming that social and psychological factors provide a more suitable description for students' reactions to the learning process. Amongst the social and affective variables, self-esteem and desire to learn appear to be the most crucial factors “in the learners’ ability to overcome occasional setbacks or minor mistakes in the process of learning a second
Wenden (1998, p. 52) defines attitudes as “learned motivations, valued beliefs, evaluations, what one believes is acceptable, or responses oriented towards approaching or avoiding.” In a sense, attitudes are a form of “metacognitive knowledge” (p. 52). For her, two kinds of attitudes are crucial: attitudes learners hold about their role in the learning process, and about their capability as learners. She (1998) also claims “learner beliefs about their role and capability as learners will be shaped and maintained by other beliefs they hold about themselves as learner” (p. 54), which affects their attitudes towards autonomy.

Studies done on students’ attitudes towards web-based learning, which will provide an invaluable basis for research about the effect distance learning over the internet has on student achievement, are rare. The view explored in this paper is that in order to evaluate the success or otherwise of a learning environment, it is important to find out how students perceive the internet, whether they are comfortable with it and whether they regard it as improving or changing the learning experience. Student attitudes may be good indicators of how the internet is perceived, and by sharing their experiences and insights, students may enable educators to evaluate technology implementation and its effects.

Student attitudes toward learning is an important factor in eventual academic success, which means the more positive students are towards learning, the better and more they may learn (Ghasemi, 1996). Unfortunately, research literature dealing with students’ attitudes toward web-based learning is very small (Leite, 1994; Usip & Bee, 1998; Roh, Kim, & Yu, 2001; Hara & Kling, 2000) and therefore, this study
aims to add more to the literature in this field. Those very few studies indicate both positive and negative attitudes, neither of which seems dominant toward web-based education.

Among the positive attitudes were that online courses and distance education produce greater flexibility and increase student convenience; improve access/interaction with the instructor; produce better grades; and are a more positive overall learning experience. The major negative features were described as limitations on face-to-face interaction, concerns over the use of this technology, and an increased workload. Also, according to Guernsay (1998), learners new to computer technology experienced some problems about how to use and get access to the data on the internet and they became frustrated, which is the most frequent negative comment related to the use of computers. Finally, he adds that students who lack confidence in their skills with technology are less likely to use it because “it threatens their senses of competence in front of others” (p.7). They are afraid of making fools of themselves.

As empirical evidence of these findings, a few studies can be examined in more detail. In a survey conducted at a private midwestern university by Leite (1994), 143 undergraduate students’ attitudes toward computers were investigated. The study used a 10-item questionnaire called General Attitudes toward Computers. Results indicated that students had positive attitudes toward computers. There were no significant differences in attitudes between male and female students or between students taking and not taking a computer-related class. Comparison of data from freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior students also did not reveal any significant differences. Among the positive aspects, learners listed the greater flexibility and
learner convenience due to time shifting and associated advantages of time management.

In another study, Roh et al (2001) investigated direct and indirect effects of learners’ age, gender, technical training, computer and Web competencies, perceived usefulness of the Web, and perceived needs for the Web on their Web use. Results revealed that there was a negative total effect of the age of participants on the amount of time spent using the Web. Also, their perceived needs for Web use, the technical training they had received, perceived usefulness of the Web, and their computer and Web competencies had positive direct effects on their Web use. In particular, young participants spent more time using the Web and showed slightly more positive perceptions of the usefulness of the Web than more mature participants did. The results also showed that there were gender differences in the participants’ computer and Web competencies in which the male participants showed a higher level of competency in Web use. Overall, the findings of this study suggest that basic skills and knowledge of Web use should be provided formally or informally to learners in order to facilitate the Web use for participants of Web-based instruction. It is also recommended that communication channels be provided for participants of Web-based instruction in order to facilitate their Web use.

While the results of the study above indicate that young learners have a more positive attitude towards web use, in his article, Nadel (1988) claims that adult students are typically more enthusiastic and structured in their approach to distance learning. Perhaps this is due to maturity and recognition of the value of convenient web-based course opportunities. Barron (1987) indicates that students’ attitudes toward technology often evolve with student familiarity with the technology.
Students new to a particular technology may initially exhibit some concern about the role of technology in the learning experience. If this occurs, these students typically demonstrate a reluctance to actively participate in web-based studies. However, a series of studies has shown that familiarity with technology overtime erodes anxious feelings as the user becomes used to the computer and the internet (Jones, 1992).

Gifford (1999) carried out a study to determine graduate students’ attitudes toward the time spent in taking a course via the Internet compared to taking a class in the regular classroom. Graduate students completed a course in research on curriculum and instruction taught entirely via a Web-based program and email. Students would read articles and post their responses to given questions each week; they would read and post comments to assigned group members. Results indicated that the majority of students felt that more time was spent on the Internet-based class than in the regular classroom. They also indicated that self-discipline and self-motivation were necessary to complete a course via the Internet.

To determine students’ distresses in a particular distance education class, a study was done by Hara and Kling (2000) with eight master’s level students who were enrolled to a distant education technology course. The researchers found two foci of students’ distress. The first focus was technological problems. Students without access to technical support were frustrated and expressed their anxieties with the course in their e-mail messages to the teacher. For example, a student wrote the following message regarding a technical problem:

I have spent one hour trying to follow your directions. I am getting an error message. The first time I tried to download it as a zip file, the error says, cannot access this file. I am getting extremely frustrated. (Hara & Kling, 2000, p. 571)
The second focus involved the course content and the teacher’s practices in managing her communications with her students. Students reported confusion, anxiety and frustration when they wanted prompt feedback from the teacher and when they found ambiguous instructions on the web and in e-mail messages.

In general, human communication is "inherently ambiguous", but people can overcome "key ambiguities" when they are face to face (Hara & Kling, 2000, p. 572). According to them, when the primary communication medium is written text, resolving ambiguities may be more difficult for many people, as is indicated in the following interview excerpt:

Though I understand each sentence and word in the e-mail that the instructor sent us, I don’t know how to use the instructions to compose the programming. ...So when I submit my assignment, I always put a note to her (the teacher), “please let me know if I need to do more or if I need to delete something” to make sure if I do the things that I am supposed to do. Because I don’t know exactly what the instructor wants. (p. 572)

Unlike empirical research, the vast majority of the practitioner and popular articles about web-based education tend to emphasize virtues of the internet and to minimize the difficulties of providing high quality distance courses or of students’ learning from it. This promotional bias prevents us from understanding the process and students’ actual learning experiences on the internet.

It is predicted that by the year 2010, more students will be “instructed over a far greater range of technologies than ever previously imagined and it looks very much like it will easily be attained” (Dudeney, 2002, p.9). However, despite all of “the economic promise, the convenience and expanded accessibility ” of the internet (Dudeney, 2002, p. 12), there has been little research done on the quality of educational opportunities that internet-based distance learning presents. While there
are several studies as mentioned above in the field, there is very little data concerning
the delivery of distance learning and the learners’ attitudes in one of the fastest
growing medium: the internet, which might be an invaluable source for promoting
learner autonomy if explored more in detail.

Learner Autonomy

According to Dickinson (1993), learner autonomy is often set in a contrast to
dependence on the teacher and it refers to "the degree of the learner’s taking
responsibility for his/her own learning" (p.330). Little (1991) defines autonomy as “
a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent
action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind
of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning” (p. 14). For
Rathbone (as cited in Candy, 1991, p. 271), the autonomous learner is a “self-
activated maker of meaning, an active agent in his own learning process”. Rathbone
also states that the autonomous learner is “not one to whom things merely happen; he
is the one who, by his own volition, causes things to happen” (p.271). Learning is
seen as the result of the learner’s own self-initiated interaction with the world.
Within such a conception, learning is not simply a matter of rote memorisation; “it is
a constructive process that involves actively seeking meaning from (or even
imposing meaning on) events” (Candy, 1991, p. 271).

There seem to be seven main attributes characterising autonomous learners
(Omaggio as cited in Wenden, 1998, p. 41-42):

1. Autonomous learners have insights into their learning
styles and strategies;
2. take an active approach to the learning task at hand;
3. are willing to take risks, i.e., to communicate in the target language at all costs;
4. are good guessers;
5. attend to form as well as to content, that is, place importance on accuracy as well as appropriacy;
6. develop the target language into a separate reference system and are willing to revise and reject hypotheses and rules that do not apply; and
7. have a tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language.

The points mentioned above are necessary but not sufficient conditions for the development of learner autonomy, and many more factors such as learner needs, motivation, learning strategies, and language awareness have to be taken into consideration (Omaggio, as cited in Wenden, 1998). Teachers should realize that individual learners differ in “their learning habits, interests, needs, and motivation, and develop varying degrees of independence throughout their lives” (Tumposky, 1982, p.33) and guide their students accordingly.

It is of consequence to note that autonomy is a process, not a product. One does not become autonomous; one only works towards autonomy (Little, 1991). One natural result of viewing autonomy in this way is the belief that there are some things to be achieved by the learner, as well as some ways of achieving these things, and that autonomy “is learned at least partly through educational experiences and interventions” (Candy, 1991, p. 115). One indication of such an approach is the fact that learner autonomy does not mean that teachers become redundant, losing their control over the learning process. On the contrary, teachers have a crucial role in helping “learners to assume greater control over their own learning [as] it is important to help them to become aware of and identify the strategies that they already use or could potentially use” (Holmes & Ramos, as cited in James & Garrett,
In that context, the teacher’s role is limited to giving guidance and feedback, and raising students' awareness.

The perceived relationship between educational technology and learner autonomy is an issue which has begun to be assessed recently. This has become increasingly true for the internet. In most recent books (e.g., Esch, 1994; Benson & Voller, 1997), there are always references to this relationship. Benson and Voller (1997, p. 10) make a cautious assessment of the issues:

New educational technologies are often perceived simultaneously as both a promise and a threat. The new technologies of language learning have tended to latch on to autonomy as one justification for their existence. Computer software for language learning is an example of a technology which claims to promote autonomy simply by offering the possibility of self-study. Such claims are often dubious, because of the limited range of options and roles offered to the learner. Nevertheless, technologies of education in the broadest sense (from the textbook to the computer) can be considered to be either more or less supportive of autonomy.

Such a cautious and even a sceptical view reflects the undiscovered and not widely known nature and value of the internet as a useful educational tool. As Carrier (1997) suggests, use of the internet promotes learner autonomy when it is used as a source of intrinsic motivation because learners “being empowered by self-directed work with an international resource like the internet become more confident and autonomous learners.” (p. 278)

According to Dudeney (2002), in the light of the developments in education concerning the learner and the process of learning, and the use of technology, the role of the learner and the teacher has been reinterpreted. The shift in focus from teaching to learning emphasizes the importance of a more experience-based learning
process such as web-based learning, which promotes self-directed learning through developing learner autonomy.

Web-based learning may offer an alternative solution to the drawbacks of the traditional language learning classroom such as limited time and practice, or not enough attention on individual needs. Due to the self-directed nature of the internet, students can create their own learning experiences. The infinite resources and stimulating presentation of the internet provide a rich learning experience for them. According to their individual personal constructs, they are offered opportunities to create their own learning environments in this flexible and vast medium.

As Wenden (1998) claims, autonomy is a state which is achieved when certain conditions such as “cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies on the part of the learner” (p. 23), motivation, and attitudes form a unity. The exploitation of the internet may successfully help to serve this aim.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study aimed to investigate students’ attitudes towards web-based independent learning at Bilkent University School of English Language (BUSEL) and to find out the implications of such study for learner autonomy. Another issue that was investigated was about what kind of problems students face on the internet while studying.

This chapter will present the participants, the instruments that were employed in gathering the data, the procedure that was followed during the data gathering process, and the data analysis which was done after the data collection phase.

Participants

The participants of this study were fourteen volunteer upper-intermediate level prep students from different disciplines at BUSEL. I chose my participants from the upper intermediate level for two reasons: First, as a course requirement all students at this level have to take a computer training course, which was expected to minimize the problems in the study that might appear due to computer literacy. Second, because all participants were upper–level students, they were assumed to have no major problems in understanding the language on the internet due to their high level of proficiency. The first fourteen volunteer students who had signed up for the independent study course (the implementation part of the study) were chosen as participants. The researcher was also a participant in the study as the teacher of the course.
To gather bio-data about the participants’ access opportunities to computers and the internet and to learn how long they study on the computer, the first part of the attitude questionnaire was designed accordingly.

Table 1 shows how many students have a computer at home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While 71.4% of students have access to a computer at home, 28.6% of students do not. Those four students who do not have a computer said that they use the computers in the computer lab of their school. This indicated that students did not feel frustrated about finding a computer to study on.

Table 2 displays the percentages of students who have access to the internet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

85.7% of students use the internet, which implies that access cannot be a reason to develop a negative attitude towards web-based learning. During the experimental web-based course, those who had no access were recommended to use the internet in the computer labs all around the university.
Table 3 shows how many hours a week students use the computer.

Table 3. Hours of weekly computer use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of hours</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-3 hours</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-7 hours</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-11 hours</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-more hours</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While 42.9% of students use the computer between 0-3 hours, the rest 57.1% of students use it more than four hours a week and all are familiar with that tool.

Instruments

The data for this study were collected through different instruments: a questionnaire which was given at the beginning and at the end of the study, semi-structured interviews, and e-mails which were composed of assignment sheets and reflective e-journals.

Questionnaire

The first tool was questionnaire. As indicated by Oppenheim (1993), the reasons of using questionnaire as a research instrument is that it requires little time, there is no extended writing, it is easy to process, makes group comparisons easy, and is useful for testing specific hypotheses. In this study, the questionnaire was designed to ask questions which reveal students’ attitudes towards independent learning, computers, and the internet (see Appendix A). All the questions were designed in light of the literature about independent and web-based learning, and learner autonomy, as well as the way independent learning is perceived in BUSEL. The questionnaire included 44 questions. It had two parts: In the first part (Part A), there were three questions in
which students were given the opportunity to choose the appropriate answer for themselves and these questions aimed to get some factual information about the students (see pp. 27-28).

In the second part of the questionnaire (Part B), there were four different headings under which 41 Likert-scale type of questions were asked. These headings were learning styles, attitudes towards learning, attitudes towards computers and the internet, and students' knowledge about learning on the internet.

**Interviews**

As contrasted with questionnaire, which provides no immediate feedback, the interview permits the research worker to follow up leads and thus obtain more data and greater clarity. The interview situation usually permits much greater depth than the other methods of collecting research data.” (Borg & Gall, 1983, p. 436)

Supporting the view above, I used the interview technique to collect more data about students’ feelings and ideas about web-based independent learning. This was a semi-structured interview to give more flexibility both to the participants and the researcher. Moreover, as Dowset (cited in Nunan, 1992, p.149) claims:

The semi-structured interview is quite extraordinary—the interactions are incredibly rich and the data indicate that you can produce extraordinary evidence about life that you don’t get in structured interviews or questionnaire methodology-no matter how open ended and qualitative you think your questionnaires are attempting to be. It’s not the only qualitative research technique that will produce rich information about social relationships but it does give you access to social relationships in a quite profound way.

I used an interview guide, which was the same as the reflective e-journal guidelines (see Appendix B), to obtain the data required to meet the specific objectives of the study and to ensure the reliability of the data I had collected by then, to find out any problems that had not been reflected in the reflective journals and to
reduce the subjectivity of the study. Because the interviews were semi-structured, there were some pre-determined questions to ask the participants about things that they like most about the course and their reasons, things that they like least about the course and their reasons, their suggestions to improve the course, and their overall feelings about the course. These questions were expanded on during the interview. The interviews were held in the library of MA TEFL program at Bilkent University every Wednesday with two students chosen randomly. All the interviews were in Turkish to make the participants feel more relaxed and to learn more about their attitudes. The interviews were taped and supported by written notes. The relevant portions were transcribed and translated into English. Pseudonyms are used to report the interview data in this study.

Journals

The third instrument was a retrospective one: journals, which Bailey (1990, p. 215) defines as “a first person account of a language learning and teaching experience, documented through regular, candid entries.” Because this was an attitude study and the aim was to find out students’ feelings and ideas about the course, journals provided valuable insights into social and affective factors that influenced the students and their performance in the course. The students wrote their ideas and feelings about the course each week regularly using a guideline provided by the teacher of the course (the researcher) (see Appendix B).

Procedure

An experimental course, based on an independent course given by Mark Algren at Kansas University, was designed and implemented to investigate and evaluate students’ attitudes toward web-based learning and to collect empirical data. The
course lasted for 6 weeks and all the communication between the teacher and the students except the interviews was done through e-mail.

The study started with the announcement of the course at BUSEL and formation of the class with the first 14 students who had signed up for the experimental study. Then the first instrument, the questionnaire was piloted with a group of upper-intermediate level students who were not participants in the study to understand and respond to any drawbacks of the questionnaire related to the wording and the content. After the questionnaire was revised and finalized, it was given to the participants of the study to learn about their initial attitudes towards independent learning and learning on the internet.

After the questionnaire, a meeting was held with the students to inform them about the aim of the course which was to help students to improve their English by being independent learners and active seekers of knowledge, and to give the course description and outline (see Appendix C), a list of suggested web-sites (see Appendix D), and guideline sheets for completion of the assignment sheets (see Appendix E) and reflective e-journals.

When the course started, the participants studied on the internet each week about one specific area where they thought they needed more practice and input and filled in the assignment sheet in their e-mail boxes after they studied. They wrote the name of the sites they had entered, the activities they had done, the summary of what they had done and learned, and finally the amount of time they had spent to do the activities. They also wrote their reflective e-journals, in which they wrote about their feelings, ideas, and suggestions about the activities and the course. Then, they sent these assignment sheets and reflective e-journals to the teacher’s e-mail (see
Appendix F for a sample) by every Friday and the teacher wrote short comments to the students about their tasks. To check the reliability of data gathered through assignment sheets and reflective e-journals, and to detect any problems or issues that were not reflected in these instruments, the teacher checked the web sites students entered and studied and interview two participants randomly each week (see Appendix G for a sample interview). The interviews were tape-recorded and supplemented with written notes to enhance the interpretation of the data. After the interviews, the relevant portions were transcribed and translated into English. At the end of the course, in week 6, the initial questionnaire was administered again to find out if there were any changes and differences in students’ attitudes towards web-based independent learning after the course.

Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were used in this study. The pre- and post-questionnaires were analyzed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS). For Likert-scale type questions, Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Signed Ranks Test was used in SPSS to determine any negative or positive changes in students’ attitudes towards web-based independent learning. For the bio-data type questions in the first part, frequencies and percentages were calculated and displayed in tables.

For the qualitative analysis, common points were sought in the data gathered through the e-reflective journals and interviews, and interpreted.

Typical of all qualitative analyses is that at different stages of the analysis, the researchers identify, delimit, and sort the relevant segments of the text according to an organizing scheme. They look for commonalities, regularities, or patterns across the various data texts. (Seliger & Shohamy, 1990, p.205)
As mentioned above by Seliger and Shohamy, to find out the common points across the data collected through different means, categorization technique was used as a qualitative method for the analysis of the rest of the instruments in the study, namely the e-reflective journals and interviews. In categorization, I grouped the answers according to the major common points appearing in both instruments. Data gathered from the interviews and journals were categorized as positive aspects and negative aspects of learning on the internet. The positive aspects were subdivided into positive pedagogical outcomes, higher motivation and self-confidence, and greater flexibility and convenience in learning, while the negative ones were categorized as negative pedagogical issues, technical problems, and inadequate computer skills. Assignment sheets were used only to check the reliability of the data gathered from these two instruments.
CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The aim of this study is to investigate students’ attitudes towards web-based independent learning. Fourteen upper-intermediate level students at Bilkent University School of English Language participated in this study. Students attended a six-week web-based independent study course, in which they sent their assignments and reflective e-journals via e-mail, and were given a questionnaire at the beginning and at the end of the course. Twelve of them were chosen randomly to be interviewed during the course.

In this chapter, first questionnaire results are presented in tables. This is followed by the discussion of the results in the tables. Next, the data yielded from the reflective e-journals and interviews are presented and discussed under two major categories, positive and negative aspects of web-based independent learning.

Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire given at the beginning and at the end of the experimental course consisted of 44 questions. Three of them were Yes/No questions to gather bio-data and were presented in chapter three. The 41 remaining questions were five-point Likert-scale type questions and aimed to show whether students' attitudes towards web-based independent learning changed after being exposed to a web-based course for six weeks. The data-analysis of the two questionnaires was conducted by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). In order to determine any changes in terms of students’ attitudes in the pre- and post-treatment of the same questionnaire, one type of nonparametric test, Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Signed Rank Test, which takes “magnitude of differences within the same questions
in the pre and post treatment of the questionnaire into consideration” (Conover, 1980) and gives more weight to a pair where there is large difference than to a pair with a small difference, was used to analyze the data.

I will present the results of the data along the following lines.

Part B of the questionnaire sought information in four sections, which covered learning styles, attitudes towards learning, attitudes towards computers and the internet, and students’ knowledge about learning on the internet. The comparison of the results of the initial and final questionnaires revealed that students’ attitudes towards web-based independent learning changed positively and in particular, their knowledge about learning on the internet increased considerably as a result of this study.

A large number of results in the questionnaire were non-significant. These results can be interpreted as the artifacts of the design of the course, which lasted only for six weeks. Therefore, these results are not surprising but expected. If it had been a longer study, more significant results could be obtained. Also, this study was carried out with a small number of students (14), which again decreased the possibility of getting more significant results. Finally, the most important reason for getting a lot of non-significant results may be the fact that all the participants were quite positive towards web-based learning at the beginning, which was revealed by the initial questionnaire. This fact left no room for students to become more positive. If a seven point scale questionnaire had been given to them, the number of non-significant results might have been fewer and more significant results could have been obtained. Another general comment that can be made about the questionnaire is that the results do not show any negative changes in any parts of the questionnaire.
Results showing significant changes are displayed in the following four tables with an asterisk next to the Z score. A single asterisk means that $p$ is equal to or less than .05; with two asterisks, $p$ is equal to or less than .01, indicating a highly significant result.

The first section in part B of the questionnaire investigates students’ learning styles. All the items are the characteristics of independent learners. Table 4 gives the results of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for students’ learning styles.

**Table 4**

**Test Statistics of Students’ Learning Styles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Question Items</th>
<th>z</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b1</td>
<td>I can plan and organize my time well.</td>
<td>-1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b2</td>
<td>I can study on my own.</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b3</td>
<td>I can find learning resources when I need them</td>
<td>-2.53**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b4</td>
<td>I can look for help with my educational problems.</td>
<td>-.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b5</td>
<td>I like problem-solving tasks.</td>
<td>-1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b6</td>
<td>I learn from my mistakes.</td>
<td>-.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b7</td>
<td>I review my lessons regularly.</td>
<td>-.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b8</td>
<td>I can evaluate my work.</td>
<td>-.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b9</td>
<td>I can evaluate my progress in learning English.</td>
<td>-.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b10</td>
<td>I can change my learning strategies if I need to.</td>
<td>-1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b11</td>
<td>I can learn by myself without depending on others.</td>
<td>-1.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b12</td>
<td>I choose my own way to learn without imitating others.</td>
<td>-.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I go to self-access centers at school regularly.</td>
<td>-.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b14</td>
<td>I find trying different ways of learning useful</td>
<td>-2.80**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b15</td>
<td>I like having choices while studying.</td>
<td>-.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: No = Question number  $z$ = obtained value

**$**p < .01

The results show that items 3 and 14, which were asking whether students can find learning resources when they need them and whether they find trying different ways of learning useful or not respectively, were both highly significant. The signed rank test for item 11 which investigated whether the students can learn by themselves
without depending on others also indicates a fairly strong positive, though non-
significant, change with \( p = 0.58 \).

These results show that students are becoming independent from the teacher, which can be interpreted as an increase in participants’ self-confidence and awareness in reaching the needed information, which leads to learner autonomy. As Omaggio (cited in Wenden, 1998) states one of the characteristics of autonomous learners is their ability to identify their own needs and then to take responsibility and risk for choosing the appropriate content of learning. Having such a control increases self-esteem and makes learners more aware of ways to enhance the quality of their own learning. Introducing means or tools which promote independent learning like the internet to the students make them aware of their responsibilities and capabilities as learners as they can access information flexibly and individually (Schank, 1993).

In order to learn about the participants’ attitudes towards learning, in particular towards independent learning the second part was designed. Table 5 shows the results of the Wilcoxon signed rank test for questions regarding students’ attitudes towards learning.
Table 5
Test Statistics of Students’ Attitudes Towards Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No:</th>
<th>Question Items</th>
<th>z</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>c1</td>
<td>For me, learning means discovering and exploring new ideas.</td>
<td>-1.406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c2</td>
<td>For me, teachers are the best source of information</td>
<td>-1.249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c3</td>
<td>I learn best in the classroom.</td>
<td>-1.930*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c4</td>
<td>I don’t need to study outside class if I learn well in class.</td>
<td>-1.634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c5</td>
<td>Teachers are responsible for students’ learning.</td>
<td>-.994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c6</td>
<td>I think I should seek knowledge by myself to be a good learner.</td>
<td>-.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c7</td>
<td>For me, learning requires involvement.</td>
<td>-.587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c8</td>
<td>I should use different sources to learn better.</td>
<td>-.816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c9</td>
<td>I am responsible for my own learning.</td>
<td>-.816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c10</td>
<td>I think students cannot monitor their own progress.</td>
<td>-1.088</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05

Note: No = Question number z = obtained value

The results revealed that students’ attitudes towards learning generally did not change significantly. Only item 3, “I learn best in the classroom”, indicated a significant change. It was seen that participants’ beliefs about classroom learning did change as a result of this study. They became more aware of the fact that the classroom is not the only place to study or to learn. Moreover, when item 2 “For me, teachers are the best source of information” and item 5 “Teachers are responsible for students learning” were analyzed, it was found out that students’ perception of a teacher had changed considerably, although not significantly, and their answers moved towards the negative end on the Likert-scale, which can be interpreted as a sign of becoming independent and autonomous, as well as more aware of their responsibilities as learners. While in the first questionnaire 12 out of 14 students agreed that teachers are the best source of information, this number decreased to five on the positive end of the scale in the final questionnaire. With item 5 “Teachers are
responsible for students learning”, there is again a move towards the negative end as the number of positive answers decreased from nine to four in the final questionnaire.

The third section in Part B of the questionnaire was composed to find about the participants’ attitudes towards computers and the internet. Table 6 displays the test statistics for the part “attitudes towards computers and the internet”.

Table 6

Test Statistics of Students’ Attitudes Towards Computers and the Internet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Question Items</th>
<th>z</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>d1</td>
<td>I enjoy doing things on computer.</td>
<td>-1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d2</td>
<td>I feel comfortable working with a computer.</td>
<td>-.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d3</td>
<td>Working with a computer makes me nervous.</td>
<td>-1.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d4</td>
<td>Using a computer is difficult.</td>
<td>-.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d5</td>
<td>I use my e-mail account often.</td>
<td>-.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d6</td>
<td>I mostly use the internet to enjoy myself (e.g., chats, games, etc.).</td>
<td>-1.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. No = Question number z = obtained value

The results showed no significant changes in students’ attitudes towards computers and the internet. Although the results in this part were discouraging, still, this outcome provided valuable information for better preparing for any future web-based course. The technical problems or inadequate computer skills which were revealed by student e-mails and interviews may have been the causes of this lack of change. If this had been a longer study, the results might have been different. The more students got used to exploiting the computer and the internet, the more competent or confident they would feel to overcome the problems they faced, which emphasizes the need for more training and guidance to achieve this.
The fourth section in part B of the questionnaire was designed to learn about the participants’ knowledge about learning on the internet. Table 7 shows the test statistics for the part “attitudes towards learning on the internet”.

Table 7

Test Statistics of Students’ Knowledge about Learning on the Internet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Question Items</th>
<th>z</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e1</td>
<td>I regularly use a computer for my studies.</td>
<td>-3.17**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e2</td>
<td>I regularly use the internet to study.</td>
<td>-2.80**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e3</td>
<td>Studying on the internet is time-consuming.</td>
<td>-1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e4</td>
<td>Studying on the internet is difficult.</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e5</td>
<td>I use the internet to improve my English.</td>
<td>-2.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e6</td>
<td>I am familiar with educational sites on the internet to study English.</td>
<td>-3.09**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e7</td>
<td>I use the search engines (e.g., alta vista and yahoo) to find educational sites and materials to study English.</td>
<td>-3.21**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e8</td>
<td>Students learn more from books rather than from a computer.</td>
<td>-.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e9</td>
<td>The internet is a useful learning tool.</td>
<td>-.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e10</td>
<td>I enjoy studying on my own on the internet.</td>
<td>-.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: No = Question number  z = obtained value  * p < .05  **p < .01

The results of items 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7 are statistically significant. Although these results are mainly due to the wording of the items and show the reality of a web-based course which requires a computer and the internet more than a positive attitude, they also reveal how familiar students have become with the basics of web-based education in such a short period of time, supporting the notion that students are becoming more independent as they become more familiar with the tool used: the internet.

Another point the test statistics for this part of the questionnaire show is that there is no significance for item 9 “the internet is a useful learning tool” and item 10 “I enjoy studying on the internet on my own”, which were to be the two strong
attitude questions. This finding can be interpreted in two ways: First, the participants’ frustrations due to technical problems and inadequate computer skills might have caused such a non-significant result. In a similar study, Guernsay (1998) found that the most frequent comment of students related to the overall web-based experience was the frustration with the use of computer. Second, as stated before, the small number of students, the short time period of the study, and the students’ being positive at the beginning of the study might have effected the results as it would be unrealistic to expect them to become more positive in such a short period of time.

Reflective E-journals and Interviews

The data gathered from other instruments, namely reflective e-journals and interviews were analyzed through categorization qualitatively. The worksheets were not analyzed as they were used as a tool to check students’ study, and kept for a future study to look at the effectiveness of the internet on independent learning.

The data gathered from the reflective e-journals and the interviews were categorized as positive aspects and negative aspects of studying independently on the internet which were reported by the students.

The major positive aspects reported by the students are positive pedagogical outcomes, higher motivation and self-confidence, and greater flexibility and convenience in learning, while the negative ones are negative pedagogical issues, technical problems, and inadequate computer skills. The analysis of the data revealed that more students feel positive about studying on the internet independently through taking this course.
Positive Aspects

1. Positive Pedagogical Outcomes

Eleven out of 14 students reported that studying on the internet has improved not only their language skills and study skills, but also their computer skills. Through extensive reading of internet material, they mentioned that their reading and vocabulary skills had developed, and through e-mails their writing skills got better. They also emphasized how they had developed their skills while looking for the necessary information they needed in different sites and through different search engines.

Language skills.

During the interview, Irem mentioned how her receptive vocabulary knowledge has expanded as a result of this course:

I am being exposed to a lot of new words and this creates familiarity or at least awareness...The more I see these words on the net, the more I remember them.

Teachers usually complain about their students’ limited range of vocabulary or their inadequacy in reading skills mostly due to lack of necessary vocabulary. Internet access can help the teachers in that sense by enabling them to offer their students more varied opportunities to improve their vocabulary especially to expand their range of high frequency words. This notion is supported by Burge (1994) who claims that the internet provides a perfect context to increase the amount of receptive vocabulary and to learn high frequency words as they are repeated frequently.
Two students, Seyit and Adnan wrote that sending e-mails regularly had improved their writing skills. During the interview when I asked Seyit whether he felt he had learnt something during the course, he said:

I want to thank you for giving us this opportunity because in daily life I don’t study hard, so at least in this way my writing is improving while writing these evaluations.

Because the only way to communicate on the internet is through writing and students have to rely on words to express themselves as there is no face-to-face communication, this medium provides good opportunities for students to improve their writing skills.

**Study Skills.**

In addition to language skills, the participants felt that they improved their study skills during the experimental course.

Ali talked about the benefits of being provided with so many options on the internet, which changed his study habits. He said:

I prepared my presentation using a variety of sources on the internet. I searched Alta-Vista, for example. I had never thought of preparing my presentations or finding sources I need from the internet before until I attended this course. The result was more than satisfactory, particularly in terms of the content of my presentation.

Making students aware of the fact that they do not need to feel limited in terms of finding resources by the help of the internet can increase the number of autonomous learners as displayed in the example above. The abundance of options and choices offered by the internet encouraged the student (Ali) to do more research and made him satisfied with his presentation as the content was rich enough to meet his needs. As Lee (1998) states, giving learners choice is crucial to the development
of learner autonomy and learner choice suggests genuine choice with as many
options provided as possible like the ones on the internet.

Serdar mentioned the advantage of having the right to choose what to study. He wrote:

Because what you study is your own choice, learning is more
effective and long-lasting compared to the information imposed
by the teacher. You can’t learn well by force.

This is a very good example to realize how independent learning on the internet
makes students move towards autonomy by giving them the means and the
opportunities to take control of their own learning in a setting offering a large
number of language data and by enabling them to choose among those that best fit
their preferences and needs. As Lepper (1985) claims having opportunities to make
choices results in the activity having greater personal meaning and interest, which
enhances learning.

Esin wrote in her mail how the independent study course has changed her
perception of the internet. She commented:

In the past, the internet was a tool for entertainment. In a way,
for me it was a fool box like TV. It was there to entertain me,
but now it is my support teacher and I like this knowledgeable
teacher who provides me with lots of materials.

As can be seen in Esin’s sentences above, such a course not only promotes
independent learning, but also helps students to remove their misconceptions about or
prejudices against the internet by broadening their visions and knowledge of the
internet, which is an important step in changing study habits.
Computer Skills.

In addition to language and study skills, two students, Ali and Sinem reported that their computer skills had improved as much as their language skills. For example, Ali wrote:

Isn’t it great? I am learning not only English but also how to use the internet. I couldn’t learn much about computers during the computer course but now I am. As my teacher says “practice makes perfect”.

Although the participants in this study were attending a computer course, they complained about not getting enough practice. The six-week web-based independent learning course gave them a real purpose to make more practice on the internet. This is what Widdowson (1979) defines as the authenticity of experience, which means “engaging the interest of learners in developing their knowledge of a particular area of inquiry and ensuring that what is presented to them takes on the reality of intellectual experience” (p. 170). According to him, the means or tools which will help learners to realize “an authentic relationship with genuine discourse of relevance to their purposes in learning” (p. 170) will make learning more effective.

2. Higher Motivation and Self-confidence

Both in their reflective journals and the interviews, nine out of fourteen students mentioned that the internet had increased their motivation and encouraged them to study more. Not only did their self-confidence increase, but also they realized that they could manage studying and learning on their own in a vast, enjoyable, and attractive environment with numerous choices.

The visual appeal of the pages on the internet appeared to be one of the main sources of motivation. For example, Esin wrote in her mail:
Studying on the colorful and attractive web-sites is no doubt much more enjoyable than looking at white or even worse recycled paper: There is a lively spirit on the net which keeps me active.

Cihan commented on why he enjoyed himself and felt motivated while studying on the internet. He mentioned its audio features:

Listening to my Mp3s while doing the exercises on the website relaxes and motivates me. Studying becomes fun for me.

Despite the fact that what Cihan likes about the internet does not necessarily mean effective studying, it is, however, an important factor which motivates him to study.

Some students also reported that lowered-anxiety was another factor which motivated them to study more on the net.

Halil Ibrahim told me in the interview how the internet motivated him to study and increased his self-confidence. He said:

On the net, I enjoyed using English outside without being afraid of making a fool of myself in front of my classmates and teachers. I made mistakes, but I didn’t get embarrassed for that.

Because affective factors such as motivation and low-anxiety are promoted by flexible nature of the internet, students feel more confident about their own learning. Schell (2001) claims that since students feel less inhibited in asking questions when methods of exchanges such as e-mails are used as opposed to face to face communication, they become more motivated in the task due to the low-level of stress involved. Ali evaluated the same issue in the following way:

The internet builds one’s self-confidence because it gives a sense of achievement without the help of another person.

Similarly, Elvan made the following comment in her e-mail:
I liked studying vocabulary on the internet this week and I managed without depending on anyone. The web-site gave me the correct answers. I enjoy working on my own.

By giving the control to the learner and empowering them, the internet increases self-esteem and confidence, as in the examples above, which is one of the most important components of optimal learning environments (Lepper, 1985).

Like Ali and Elvan, Adnan mentioned the effect of the design of the web-site which increases motivation and self-confidence. He wrote:

I liked this site very much. While you read, the computer times the activity and when the time is over, the passage disappears. This really made me excited and concentrate more in the task. Also when you answer the reading questions, an informative box appears above the answer, which helps the reader to find out where he has made a mistake and to understand the passage better, and what’s fascinating, I am doing all these by myself.

In fact what Adnan was trying to say was how autonomous he was becoming by the help of the materials and the way they were designed.

Hüseyin emphasized the element of curiosity which is resulted from the design of web-sites and motivates students to study. He wrote:

The web-sites I visited tonight provided me with lots of suggested links to other similar sites. This aroused my curiosity and I searched the other sites as well to learn more. It was fun indeed.

Curiosity is assumed to be one of the most important feelings which motivates people to learn and to search, and the internet seems to be a very effective means in that sense as it provides numerous options in different forms.

3. Greater Flexibility and Convenience in Learning

Most students in the study (nine out of 14) mentioned that web-based independent learning let them work at home and save time compared to studying in
the library or in a self-access center. It provided flexible time management as they studied whenever they liked.

Onur, regarding this issue, wrote in his journal:

Studying on the internet saves time and it is more comfortable when compared to studying in the self-access center. Now, I am in my pajamas and eating my sandwich in my warm room while writing this e-mail to you.

Sinem similarly told about the advantage of studying on the net in terms of convenience in the interview. She said:

To tell the truth, I have never been to the self-access center in the school because I don’t like staying at school after classes. I want to go home and relax. This course provided me with an excellent opportunity to study more on my own at my comfortable home (Appendix G, lines 59-63).

The two examples above show how important it is for students to study on their own under conditions which are comfortable, stress-free and far from the school context. The internet seems to satisfy students’ needs in that sense, providing them with flexibility in learning, which is defined by Esch (1994) as one important criterion for establishing a supportive environment to be more independent as learners can change options according to their needs and interests.

Ali approached the issue from a different perspective. He mentioned the burden of keeping paper materials in files unlike the ones on the internet. During the interview he said:

It’s perfect. I don’t need to carry heavy files with me to keep these materials in. I know they are there and won’t disappear.

Having tons of materials and not worrying about where to keep them or how to carry them is another positive side of the internet for students who are fed up with loose paper materials.
Negative Aspects

1. Negative Pedagogical Issues

The analysis of the reflective e-journals and the interviews show that some students (5) were frustrated because of pedagogical issues. Discrepancies between sites in terms of level, inadequate instructions, and low-quality materials turned out to be the main concerns.

Seyit’s frustration was originated from having difficulties in determining the right level to study. In his diary, he wrote:

I wished my teacher had been with me when I entered the website and couldn’t decide which level to choose to study. First, I tried medium level but I found that they were much easier than I expected. I couldn’t do high level ones because they were too difficult.

Like Seyit, Ali mentioned the same problem during the interview. When I asked him what the most frustrating thing was in the course, he said:

Each site has a different difficulty level. Medium-level in one site may mean low-level in another one. Each time, I have to check the levels first, and then choose the correct level to study. It is really difficult.

Although the internet provides students with lots of materials, its vast nature makes it very difficult to maintain a standard across the educational sites as it is almost impossible to control all sites. Teachers need to guide and help their students to overcome such problems.

Hüseyin was unhappy about the unfamiliar exercise and question types which made a task undoable:

I didn’t want to continue because those exercises were very different from the ones I did in the class.
Hüseyin’s frustration resulted from not getting any guidance or feedback from the teacher and not being familiar enough with the educational sites on the internet. In a study done by Hara and Kling (2000), similar results were obtained due to lack of teacher support and teacher-student lack of communication which indicates how learner autonomy is misinterpreted. It does not necessarily mean teacherless learning. In fact, as Little (1991) argues learner autonomy is best achieved when, among other things, the teacher acts as a facilitator or as a counsellor.

During the interview, Adnan talked about another problem related to exercises. He complained about the abundance of unproductive mechanical exercises. He said:

Most of the time, because I couldn’t find better ones, I did only mechanical exercises, which didn’t help me much to learn something and weren’t different at all from doing from a boring grammar book.

Untrustworthy sites and low-quality materials are the basic problems in the internet-based learning. Because students are not competent enough in choosing the appropriate or good sites, they sometimes waste their time with unproductive exercises or tasks. That is why students were provided with a list of suggested web-sites at the beginning of the experimental web-based independent course in this research. Without teacher guidance, students may not cope with such problems.

Another problem related to pedagogical issues was the ambiguous instruction on the web-sites. Particularly, during the interviews, the students said that some of the instructions were too vague, and therefore, could be interpreted in different ways. For example, İrem said:

I couldn’t understand how to do the exercise after I read the instruction “rewrite the sentences”. Was I expected to change the sentences from active to passive or rewrite with a different linker, or just to play with the vocabulary? That was a big problem for me.
This is another example which shows how important teacher guidance is for learners to choose the appropriate sites to study, to decide the content, and to determine the route or sequence while studying on this medium. The quote also reveals how the design of the sites affects learners’ effectiveness on the internet.

2. Technical Problems

Six students reported their distress with technical problems which in some way impeded their learning. Technical problems such as frequent internal errors and disconnections, virus attacks, and slow connections seemed to be a major issue as they decreased students’ motivation and make them afraid of exploring the resources on the internet more in detail. Barron (1987) states that students’ attitudes towards technology change with students’ familiarity with technology. Jones (1992) claims that the more students are familiar with technology, the less anxious or reluctant they feel. When they feel more competent in using the computer, they tend to overcome the problems they meet related to the computer or the internet by taking risk.

Halil Ibrahim wrote the following e-mail regarding a technical problem:

I am bored. The connection is very slow. Without boosting up the speed of my internet, it will be exhausting to wait for the pages to open up.

Ali talked about the same problem during the interview and said:

The speed of the internet affects our desire to study considerably. I don’t want to study anything when I wait for a couple of minutes to enter a web-site.

Likewise, Hüseyin wrote in his journal:

I can’t study on the net whenever I like. I have to wait until 10 p.m. when the internet gets faster and cheaper.
Duygu was another student who suffered from technological problems. Her computer broke down because of a virus infection. In her e-mail, she wrote:

I am sorry that I missed the deadline and couldn’t send you my assignment and reflective journal on time. A virus infected my e-mail box. Now, I am trying to send it again. I hope this time, I will manage to send them.

Onur reported the difficulties he had experienced with technology in the following e-mail:

I was eager to study on the net last night, but because I couldn’t enter the sites I wanted to and I got an error message each time, after one hour struggle, I gave up and went to bed.

All the quotations above show how hardware or software may become a barrier to studying on the internet. The more time students spend on getting the software to run smoothly, the less time they spend on the task they want to concentrate on. Gifford (1999) states that students typical demonstrate reluctance to study on the internet when technology causes frustration. In order to avoid making technology a barrier, we should demonstrate software and teach students essential computer skills such as word-processing, and provide them with enough practice so that they will be at ease and will not be discouraged easily by technical problems when they are on their own.

3. Inadequate Computer Skills

Six students were also concerned about their inadequate computer skills, which prevented them either from handling some of the assignments and exercises or simply from being motivated.

Hilal wrote in her reflective journal:

My lack of competence in using a computer discourages me to study more and to search more. I waste a lot of time on the net and I am afraid of breaking down the machine.
Similarly, Duygu was worried about the inadequacy of her computer skills. She wrote:

I am not very familiar with the keyboard, so it takes time to write an e-mail. So far, I have spent half an hour to write those very few lines. I feel tired.

Adnan mentioned the same problem during the interview. He said:

If you are slow at word-processing, studying on the net becomes both frustrating and time consuming. Good training is a must to be more effective on the net.

All the examples above reveal the need for earlier computer training before such a course. In order to cope with the problems and to feel more competent, learners need to be trained well in word-processing, and software and hardware knowledge.

The three points mentioned above were the common problems reported by the students. Two other minor problems that concerned the participants were the sense of isolation (Sinem and Onur) and physical discomfort (Sinem and Adnan).

During the interview, Sinem said:

I usually work alone at midnight on the internet and sometimes I really need for face to face interaction with my friends and teachers. When I can’t cope with a problem, I want to be in the class.

This remark shows that it takes time to be independent, which varies depending on factors such as personality as in the example of Sinem who needs a company to overcome her loneliness and problems on the internet. Guiding students to the educational sites in the tutorial mode can help them to deal with such problems.

She also mentioned that her eyes get tired and sore if she studies more than one hour on the net. Adnan reported the same problem in his e-mail. He wrote:
I can’t focus on the screen for a long time. My eyes get hurt.

Such a problem reveals the need for a screensaver which will protect the eyes from radiation. Long hours of studying on the internet and sitting too close to the monitor irritates and tires eyes, and therefore can discourage students to do more work on the net. However, using an anti-glare screen or screen filter and keeping the screen clean (as dust can cause glare and reflection) can prevent or at least minimize such a problem (Steele, 2002).

In this chapter, the results of the questionnaires, the reflective e-journals and the interviews were presented and analyzed. In the next chapter, the discussion of the results will be made to reach final conclusions and to draw implications for practice and further research.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Introduction

This study investigates students’ attitudes towards web-based independent learning. One of the institutional goals of Bilkent University School of English Language (BUSEL) is to provide different and better ways to enable students to become independent learners so that students will not need to have continual recourse to the teacher, but will be equipped with certain study skills to carry out their own research, make their own decisions and actively direct the course of their own learning for future academic success. The reason for this investigation is the need to find effective ways to achieve this aim. As the internet appears to be an innovative tool which might serve this aim, before trying to measure its effectiveness and efficiency, this study was done to find out students’ attitudes towards independent learning in a web-based environment.

First, examples from the literature about the internet as an educational tool, independent study and its expected outcome, learner autonomy were reviewed. As the attitudes of the students in BUSEL were the ones being investigated, the students in this department were the only participants. Fourteen students at upper intermediate level participated on voluntary basis. First they were given a questionnaire to learn about their attitudes towards independent learning, the computer, and the internet. Then, they attended a six week web-based independent study course in which they studied a different topic they had chosen each week. They sent their assignment sheets including a reflective journal, in which they wrote their ideas, feelings and suggestions about the internet and the sites they had entered, via e-mail. At the end of
the course they were given the initial questionnaire again and their responses were analysed to find out whether there were any changes or not in their attitudes.

In this study, three research questions were considered:

1. What are BUSEL students’ attitudes towards web-based independent learning?
2. What problems do BUSEL students face in web-based independent studies?
3. What is the relationship of the results to the questions 1 and 2 to the development of learner autonomy?

Results and Discussion

Research question 1

What are BUSEL students’ attitudes towards web-based independent learning?

The analysis of the quantitative data revealed that students feel positive about learning on the internet, which was further supported in the qualitative data. In general, all the significant results are positive and there is no statistical evidence to support any negative significant changes in students’ attitudes towards web-based independent learning. The results showed that students have started to acquire essential properties of being independent such as reaching the needed information individually, which may lead to autonomy in the long run. Their knowledge about the internet and learning on the internet has increased significantly. The results in the last part of the questionnaire show that students have become familiar with the educational sites and research engines on the internet, and realized that the internet can be used to improve and practice English.

The analysis of the reflective journals and the interviews revealed that students enjoyed their experiences despite technical problems or inadequate computer skills.
The experimental course aimed to help students to improve their English by being independent learners and active seekers of knowledge. As they mentioned in the journals and the interviews, they enjoyed having this practice; they liked having numerous options and felt that they had improved, especially their vocabulary and writing skills. The design of the sites and other audio and visual factors such as mp3s or animated pages increased their motivation. As they managed to study on their own, they began to feel more self-confident about their own learning. As Wenden (1998) claims, without awareness learners “will remain trapped in their old patterns of beliefs and behaviors and never be fully autonomous” (p. 90).

This course also developed the students’ knowledge of the internet, which was generally limited to interactive games and chat rooms before, and computer skills as they had the opportunity to practice regularly for six weeks. Most students (10) enjoyed the flexibility of the course as it encouraged students to develop their own methods of study. The majority (9) did not feel overwhelmed, as they were not supposed to study in a restricted time. They learned at their own pace. They took as much or as little time as they needed to study their subjects. There was no need to keep pace with anyone else. As stated by Guernsay (1998), such a greater flexibility and convenience motivates and encourages students more to work on their own.

All the points mentioned above signify the major qualities of autonomous learning and autonomous learners. Little (1991) claims that when students are given the opportunities or appropriate means to manage their own learning, they possess the qualities of independent learning in varying degrees through changing their study habits and attitudes. According to Schell (2001), simply teaching learning strategies
and suitable target behavior does not enhance learning unless students are able to experience them first hand. The internet provides learners with this opportunity.

Research Question 2

What problems do BUSEL students face in web-based independent studies?

It is necessary to study failures as well as successes, as Simpson (1985) stated:

Provided that we understand the limitations of each technology as well as its capabilities, and more importantly, provided that we understand the people we are trying to educate and the kind of education we are trying to give them, we can use technology in ways that will really help. There is no technological panacea; there are only technological solutions to some educational problems (p. 91).

The results gathered from student journals and interviews revealed that some students suffered from negative pedagogical issues (five students), technical problems (six), and inadequate computer skills (six). Five students complained about the quality of materials in the sites and difficulty in determining the appropriate level to study as the levels vary across the educational sites. Although those sites were colorful and attractive enough to motivate the students, some did not want to study as the exercises were mechanical and boring. This finding indicates the importance of providing students with the necessary support to choose appropriate sites that meet their needs. Although the students did not report any problems related to the sites suggested by the teacher of the course, they complained about the sites they had found on their own, which emphasizes the importance of teacher guidance in such courses.

As Little (1991) argues, to acknowledge that learners have to follow certain paths to be independent is "tantamount to asserting that there has to be a teacher on whom it will be incumbent to show the way" (p.5). In other words, independent
learning does not necessarily mean teacherless learning. In fact, the relationship between teacher and learner should foster increasing learner responsibility. Teachers should assist students in mastering the decision-making processes as instructors, guides, and facilitators (Kesten, 1987). However, as teachers encourage students to take greater responsibility for decision making, they must also judge students’ readiness for such responsibility. Such judgements are based on the learner’s age, maturity, ability, and knowledge and can only be made by teachers who know their students well (Candy, 1991).

Slow internet connections, old computers and virus attacks made accessing materials and sites frustrating for some students (6). Such technical frustrations discouraged them from exploring the internet in more detail for their aims. Because they found it troublesome to use, they were afraid to go further. Several studies (e.g., Burge, 1994; Kang, 1988) report similar student frustrations with computers and the internet, and how students resist using the computer as they believe that computers complicate their life.

Another reason for their distress was inadequate computer skills. Some participants (6) were beginner level computer users and felt frustrated too often because of a lack of keyboard knowledge. Therefore, they found it very time consuming to send e-mails or to search on the internet.

The findings about inadequate computer skills indicate how important it is for students to be computer literate in order to study effectively on the internet and imply the need for computer skills training right at the beginning of school. Similar conclusions were drawn by Roh et al (2001), the findings of whose study suggest that
basic skills and knowledge of Web use should be introduced to students either formally or informally to facilitate web-based studies.

Research Question 3

What is the relationship of the results of questions 1 and 2 to the development of learner autonomy?

The positive results of the study revealed that the course helped the students to take an initial step towards autonomy. Giving the students the opportunity to study independently in a flexible environment at their own pace caused most of them to change their attitudes positively.

Because the fact that individual learners differ in their study habits, motivation, interests, and develop differing degrees of independence throughout their education (Tumposky, 1982) was considered in the design of this experimental web-based course, the course provided them with as great a degree of flexibility as possible by letting learners choose what to study, how to study, and when and where to study. Because of Turkish students’ non-autonomous educational background, not every participant was expected to show willingness to be autonomous throughout this study. Those who felt frustrated were encouraged through e-mails by the teacher and were persuaded that autonomy is a capacity and therefore like any other capacity will grow with practice.

Little (1991) states that autonomy is not only a capacity but also a matter of intention, and learners cannot accept responsibility for their own learning unless they have some idea of what, why, and how they are trying to learn, which implies learners’ taking some of the initiative that shapes the learning process. This web-
based course gave the students the means to practice independence as they directed their own learning, and monitor and judge their progress.

Students’ frustrations implied the need for training. Of course, autonomy is quite possible without training and training does not entail autonomy; they exist in a relationship which is “unsteady, yet fruitful when dynamic” (Dee, 1995, p.1). As Holec (1988) claims, training - especially strategy training - can broaden the horizons of the learners and may empower them to become autonomous or at least to realize a sense of autonomy; therefore, it is worthwhile.

Pedagogical Implications

Because students felt frustrated due to inadequate computer skills, the first thing to be done should be to train them at the beginning of their university life, not at upper-intermediate level right before they move to their faculties. The results imply that it is too late to wait until this level to train those students.

As Bilkent University has an orientation program for all newcomers during the registration period, computer training sessions can be held during this time to teach students at least the basics of computer use such as word-processing, how to send and check e-mails, and how to search on the internet, in addition to basic computer vocabulary, and computer use can be incorporated into other classes of BUSEL. Because some technological problems they face while studying on the internet result from lack of adequate computer skills, as they become more competent in using the computer, the number of problems will probably decrease.

In addition to traditional courses, web-based independent courses may be designed to encourage students to study outside class on their own and to use the computer more. Although there are workshops at the beginning of each academic
year to train students to be independent learners and to have certain study skills, because it is not a permanent process, those workshops only increase students’ awareness about the strategies and techniques to be independent. In order to help students to be independent learners, we should engage them in tasks, activities, and courses in which they can practice necessary skills and develop strategies to direct the course of their own learning. Instead of forcing students to study in self-access centers after tiring classes, letting them work at their own pace with greater choice wherever they feel comfortable can increase their motivation and self-reliance, and improve their study skills and habits.

Such independent study courses can be assessed as a part of student portfolios, and the print-outs of all their assignments and reflective journals about the course can be kept in their files, which will make students take the course more seriously and help the teacher to monitor or, if necessary, to modify the course more effectively.

However, while designing such courses, the sites to be suggested to students should be chosen with care. There are many untrustworthy and unrefereed sites. Therefore, the first thing to do is to analyze the websites first and to train students about how to choose and to evaluate the appropriate sites. Perhaps a selection criteria can be developed and given to students. The sites students enter should have trustworthy owners, such as distinguished universities; meet students’ needs and provide clear samples, practice, and feedback; and be appealing to students for study.

One way of enabling students to be independent learners that may lead to autonomy in the long run is to start training students from the beginning and train them to have necessary skills and strategies to be able to work independently.
According to Kesten (1987), the atmosphere, environment and the structure of the school itself must support independent learning. Strategies that address the interests and concerns of students and a curriculum relevant to student needs will contribute to the development of independent learning.

The curriculum should provide a link between independent learning inside the classroom and putting these skills into practice outside the classroom. The BUSEL curriculum supports such a view by enabling teachers to adopt certain classroom strategies which encourage students to become used to working on their own and aware of effective ways of studying by setting an independent study component, the Learning Portfolio, which acts as the practice of the theory. It also provides the opportunity to learners to further implement their study skills in self-access centers where students can study on their own.

However, because independent learning requires working on one’s own according to individual needs, and it is very difficult to judge and respond individual needs of large number of students in class, the efforts to that end do not always result in success. In addition to this institutional constraint, students’ teacher-centered backgrounds cause them to expect things to stay the same and to continue their reliance on teacher support (Kaya, 1989). Because of such expectations and background of students, it will be unrealistic to expect them to want to become independent learners initially. Therefore, it is important to start from where the students are and to train them by gradually encouraging learner independence. Although BUSEL carries out workshops on independent learning in the very first week of the academic year, the results show that it should not be limited to the first week and should be treated as an ongoing process.
Implications for Future Research

The specific findings of this study lead to the following recommendations for further studies:

1. This study was limited to one school and to one level. This can be repeated with different participants from different universities and levels, and their attitudes can be studied.

2. Due to time constraints, the study lasted only for six weeks, so a study over a longer period can be carried out on students’ attitudes to get more significant results. In BUSEL, courses last from eight to sixteen weeks, so an eight week or sixteen week study could reveal more satisfactory results.

3. In this study, the gender of participants was not considered as a variable due to the small number of participants. In a further study, the effect of gender on the attitudes towards web-based education can be focused on. As Herring (1994) claims, gender differences influence students' performance. She interpreted the stereotype of male students being more interested in information exchange in light of the socio-cultural screen where male students are expected to be "knowledgeable, rational, and dispassionate" (p. 105) and asserted that these expectations are exaggerated in the "Information Age," where technology and computers are inherently thought of as male domains. She further posited that in practical consequences, these stereotypes produce a reluctance in female students to go online and a lack of confidence in their abilities when they do use the medium. "These trends are cause for concern no matter what their source, but they are more egregious if underlying them are stereotypes about gender and computer use that are demonstrably false" (p. 105).
4. Apart from this, this study was done with students who were attending a computer training course; an attitude study can be done with students who have very limited computer skills and the changes in their attitudes can be compared to those with advanced computer skills.

5. The indications from the study suggest that students have positive feelings about studying on the internet independently. In further research, whether the novelty of the experience may be responsible for students’ positive feelings or not can be investigated. This question was untested and so can make an interesting premise for a future study.

Limitations of the Study

The first thing to say about the limitations of the study is that it may not be generalizable. It was carried out at Bilkent University School of English Language with 14 upper-intermediate level students for six weeks. Although the quantitative data do not show much significant change, the qualitative data indicate a strong positive change in students’ attitudes despite a few frustrations. However, because this was a local study and conducted with a very small number of participants, it will not be sensible to generalize the findings. The short time period of the course, which was only six weeks, also makes it difficult to rely on the results.

Moreover, this study would have greater reliability and less subjectivity if I had had other people to classify the data as they might have come up with different categories than those which I used to analyze the reflective journals and the interviews.
Conclusion

This was a small-scale study which investigated students’ attitudes towards an innovative educational tool: the internet. The exploitation of the internet for educational purposes is quite a recent trend in Turkey. Before measuring its effectiveness, I investigated students’ attitudes towards this medium to form a basis for further studies. Because the concept of independent learning seems to build well on the internet due to the flexible nature of this medium and the numerous choices it offers, I tried to find out students’ feelings and ideas about studying independently on the internet. The positive results are quite encouraging as they imply a welcoming of a new and beneficial educational tool which can offer learners who seek their own paths various opportunities for better learning leading to autonomy, which is claimed to make learning a more meaningful, effective, and long-life experience.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX-A

Student's Name: ____________________ Student's e-mail address: ____________________

STUDENTS’ ATTITUDES TOWARDS WEB-BASED INDEPENDENT LEARNING

PART-1 Circle the appropriate answer.
1. I have a computer at home.   YES   NO
2. I have access to the internet.   YES   NO
3. I use the computer approximately _______ hours a week.
   a. 0-3 hours   b. 4-7 hours   c. 8-11 hours   d. 12-more hours

PART-2
Read the sentences below and tick the most suitable number.
5: Strongly agree      4: agree        3: Not sure      2: Disagree      1: Strongly disagree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>LEARNING STYLES</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I can plan and organize my time well.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I can study on my own.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I can find learning resources when I need them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I can look for help with my educational problems.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I like problem-solving tasks.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I learn from my mistakes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I review my lessons regularly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I can evaluate my work.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I can evaluate my progress in learning English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I can change my learning strategies if I need to.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I can learn by myself without depending on others.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I choose my own way to learn without imitating others.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I go to self-access centers at school regularly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I find trying different ways of learning useful.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I like having choices while studying.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II</th>
<th>ATTITUDES TOWARDS LEARNING</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>For me, learning means discovering and exploring new ideas.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. For me, teachers are the best source of information.
3. I learn best in the classroom.
4. I don’t need to study outside class if I learn well in class.
5. Teachers are responsible for students’ learning.
6. I think I should seek knowledge by myself to be a good learner.
7. For me, learning requires involvement.
8. I should use different sources to learn better.
9. I am responsible for my own learning.
10. I think students cannot monitor their own progress.

### III. Attitudes Towards Computers and the Internet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I enjoy doing things on computer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I feel comfortable working with a computer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Working with a computer makes me nervous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Using a computer is difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I use my e-mail account often.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I mostly use the internet to enjoy myself (e.g., chats, games, etc.).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### IV. Knowledge about Learning on the Internet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I regularly use a computer for my studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I regularly use the internet to study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Studying on the internet is time-consuming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Studying on the internet is difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I use the internet to improve my English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I am familiar with educational sites on the internet to study English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I use the search engines (e.g., Alta vista and yahoo) to find educational sites and materials to study English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Students learn more from books rather than from a computer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The internet is a useful learning tool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I enjoy studying on my own on the internet.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THANK YOU *All the information given in this questionnaire will be kept confidential.*
APPENDIX B

Reflective e-journal (and Interview) guideline

While writing your journals try to answer the questions below in addition to your other comments.

1. What did you like most about the activity and/or the process? Why?
2. What did you like least about the activity and/or the process? Why?
3. Do you have any suggestions to improve the activity and/or the process?
4. How did you feel in general while studying on your specific topic on the internet this week? and why?
5. Did you learn anything from the activity and/or process this week? If yes, what did you learn? If no, what are the reasons?
APPENDIX C

WEB-BASED INDEPENDENT LEARNING COURSE

The name of the teacher: Neslihan Pekel
Her e-mail address: pekel@bilkent.edu.tr

Aim: This 6 week course aims to help students to improve their English by being independent learners and active seekers of knowledge, which makes learning long-lasting. You are expected to study on the internet approximately for two hours each week.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Each week, you will choose one topic to study on the internet. The topic may be a grammar point (e.g., relative clauses) or any practice related to reading (e.g., skimming and scanning), writing (e.g., combining sentences) or listening (e.g., taking-notes). A list of suggested web-sites will be sent to your e-mail addresses.

2. Each week, by Friday you will e-mail your completed worksheet (which will be sent to your e-mail addresses) and your reflective e-journals to the teacher. (The teacher will reply your e-mails within two days). Journals can be written in Turkish.

3. Each week, one or two students will meet the teacher to talk about the course in more detail (in room Z-45). Those students will be chosen randomly.

DUE DATES

WEEK 1 = 22 March
WEEK 2 = 29 March
WEEK 3 = 5 April
WEEK 4 = 12 April
WEEK 5 = 19 April
Last day of the Course: 22 April (Filling in questionnaire in Z 45 at 3 o’clock)
APPENDIX D
SUGGESTED WEB-SITES FOR INDEPENDENT STUDY

- Activities for ESL Students
- Interesting Things for ESL Students
- ESL Blue(s)
- English Quizzes
- ESL Partyland
- Virtual Language Centre - Hong Kong Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab
- English Listening Room
- Learning Oral English Online
- UVic English Language Centre
- Cambridge Reading Practice
- Toefl Reading Practice
- Writing Help.HUT
- Study-skills Self
- Ultra Lingua's Web Dictionary
- Ask the Grammarian
- Dave's ESL Help Center
- SchMOOze.U (Chatline for students of English)

APPENDIX E

Web-based Assignment Record Guidelines

Use the headings below to keep a record of the work that you do each week.

Please write as detailed as possible (note-form is preferable).

A. Name of the Web sites you entered to study

B. Types of the activity / activities you did. (e.g., cloze tests, fill-in the blanks, combining sentences with linkers)

C. Summary of what you did and learned/ practiced.

D. Amount of time
APPENDIX F
A SAMPLE OF STUDENT E-MAIL

From    hallibo korkmaz <hallibokorkmaz@yahoo.com>   <Save Address>
To      pekel@bilkent.edu.tr
Date    29 Mar 2002 18:12
Subject  my report

A)http://www.pacificnet.net/~sperling/quiz/eval-
mc.cgi.http://www.pacificnet.net/~sperling/quiz/eval-
mc.cgi.http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/class/material/quiz/toefl/no-1.htm
B)all of them is multiple choice C)ı studied the
difference between present perfect and past
simple,also past progressivea and some toefl
quizzes.D)almost 40 minutes 2.PART

1)call lablarda bazı
calismalar da multiple choice yok;bunun yerine cevabi
klavye yardımıyla yazmak zorunda kahiyodum.bu hafta
yaptığım calismalarda bu yoktu.bu güzeldi.

2)ben,inanmiyacaksın ama sayfanın renginden bile
etkileniyorum.sayfalardan birinin rengi
bembeyazdi.biraz renkli olsa herhalde biraz daha fazla
dikkat cekerdı.begenmedigim olaylardan biri buydu.bi
de;kelimelerin ağırlığı beni olumsuz yonde etkileyen
bolumlerden biri.bazen kelime ogreniyoruz ama bazen
hıcbir sey anlayamıyorum

.3)bu haftaki önerim;bu
calismayı yapan öğrencinin internet bağlantısı
yavassa;insani sikabiyo.onerim bu calismann
yapildiği ortamda internet bağlantısının hızının çok
1yı olması.

4)gecen hafta da dedığum gibi kendimi bir
farklı hissediyorum;ama internetimin yavas olmasından
dolayı yeni sayfa açılırken biraz sıkıldım.

5)tabi ki
ister istemez bir kaç kelime kapiyosun.okuldaki bu
hafta konumuz da past tense revision idi.birkaç text
cozdüm.pekistirmis oldum.IS IT ALL OK??İYİ TATİLLER.....
APPENDIX G

A SAMPLE TRANSCRIPTION OF STUDENT INTERVIEWS

ARAŞTIRMACI: Senem, 3 haftadır internette ders çalısun. Internette çalışmanın pozitif yönleri neler? Neleri sevدين?
SEDEM: herşeyden önce evde çalışıyorsun. Internette çalışmanın pozitif yönleri neler? Neleri sevdin?
ARAŞTIRMACI: Neden?
SEDEM: Çünkü ev çok rahat. Örneğin, kendi başına çalışmak için uzun saatler öğrenme merkezindekiler gibi sert sandalyelere oturmak zorunda değilim.
ARAŞTIRMACI: Başka pozitif yönler?
SEDEM: Evet. Internete bakıma açıqım değildim. İnternete chat yapmak yada oyun oynamak için girerim ama sizin ve kursunuz sayesinde İngilizce pratik yapabileceğim milyonlarca site olduğunu fark edince, bu anlamda onu çok daha sevdim ve yararlı buldum.
ARAŞTIRMACI: Nasıl yararlıdır? Örnekler verebilir misin?
ARAŞTIRMACI: İnternet yada girdiğin sitelerle ilgili şikayetlerin var mı?
ARAŞTIRMACI: Ne tür sorunlar seni böyle hissettiriyor?
SEDEM: Ne tür sorunlar mı?...Imm, direk bilgisayara yazıyorum, önce daima kağıda yazıyorum ve buda çok zaman harcatıyorum. Ayrıca okuma parçasını ve soruları birarada görememek hem rahatsız edici hem de motivasyonu engelleyici bir şeyse. Bu tür kısıtlamalar nedeni ile konstantre olamıyorum ve bu nedenle çıktısını almayı tercih ediyorum. Ve yine uzun süre ekranı bakmadığım netteki uzun parçaları okuyamıyorum.
ARAŞTIRMACI: Peki öyleyse bu sorunları çözmek için herhangi bir önerin var mı?
SEDEM: ohh ondan önce ..bir şey söyleyemeyi unuttum.
ARAŞTIRMACI: Evet?
SEDEM: Nette çalışırken virüsler büyük bir problem olabiliyor. Örneğin, e-mail adresimdeki bir virüs nedeni ile size ilk ödevimi zamanında gönderemedim.
ARAŞTIRMACI: Oh evet o tür teknik problemler sık sık sıkıntı yaratıyor?
SEDEM: Evet, öyle. Önerilerime gelince...Bence internetten ve ders kitaplarında yada İngilizce kitaplardan örtak faydalanmalıyız. Her ikisi de faydali...Ayrıca öğretmenimiz de zayıflıklarımızı belirleme de ve çalışma sitelerini bulmada bile yardımcı olmalı. Internette pek çok yeni kelime var.
Bunları kelime defterlerimize yazabiliriz.

ARAŞTIRMACI: Nette karşılaştığınız bütün yeni kelimeleri mi?

SENEM: hayır, sadece browse gibi çok sık gördüğümüz kelimeleri...

ARAŞTIRMACI: Peki Senem. Çok teşekkürler. Çok değerli bilgiler verdin.

Söylediklerine eklemek istedigim bir şey var mı,

SENEM: Ben teşekkür ederim çünkü internetin bir öğretmen gibi ingilizce öğretip pratik yapmanıza yardımcı olduğunu farkına vardım ve son bir,


ARAŞTIRMACI: Bunu duyduğuma memnun oldum, Senem.(Gülme).

Peki..tekrar bu röportaj için çok teşekkürler.

SENEM: Bir şey değil.
RESEARCHER: Senem, you have been studying on the net for three weeks. What are the positive sides of studying on the internet? What did you like about it?

SENEM: First of all, it is very good to be studying at home.

RESEARCHER: Why?

SENEM: Because home is very comfortable. For example, I don’t need to sit on hard chairs as the ones in the learning center for long hours in order to study on my own.

RESEARCHER: Any other positive issues?

SENEM: Yes. My perception of the internet has changed. I used to enter the internet for chatting or playing games, but when I realized that –by your help and your course- there are millions of sites to practice English, I liked it more and found it very useful in that sense.

RESEARCHER: How is it useful? Can you give me some examples?

SENEM: For example, the TOEFL sites are very informative and there are lots of practical hints in these sites. Also some other sites explains the correct answers in detail and this is very helpful. By the way, it is much more enjoyable than studying from a book. The sites which are designed as java are very motivating as they attract my attention with different animations and colorful page designs… and my computer skills has somewhat improved. Now, I am a bit faster at typing.

RESEARCHER: Do you have any complaints about the internet or about the sites you entered?

SENEM: Yes, a few...It is difficult to focus on the screen for long hours. It tires eyes. Also, I usually work alone at midnight on the internet and sometimes I really need for face to face interaction with my friends and teachers. When I can’t cope with a problem, I want to be in the class.

RESEARCHER: What kind of problems make you feel in that way?

SENEM: What kind of problems?…Er, I cannot write on the computer directly, I always first write on a piece of paper and this is something time-consuming. Also it is disturbing and demotivating not to be able to see the whole reading text and questions together. I cannot concentrate on the activity because of such limitations, so I prefer printing them out. And again because I cannot look at the screen for a long time I cannot read long texts on the net.

RESEARCHER: Ok then do you have any suggestions to solve those problems?

SENEM: Ohh before that I forgot to say one thing.

RESEARCHER: Yes?

SENEM: Viruses can be a big problem while studying on the net. For example I could not send you my first assignment on time due to a virus attack against my e-mail account.

RESEARCHER: Oh yes those technical problems often create frustrations.

SENEM: Yes, they do. When it comes to my suggestions... I think we should make use of the internet and the course books or English books in
an integrated way. Both of them are useful. Also the teacher should help us to determine our weaknesses and to find better sites to study. There are lots of new words on the internet. We can write them in our vocabulary journals.

RESEARCHER: All the new words you come across on the net?
SENEM: No, only the ones that we see often such as the word *browse*.

RESEARCHER: Ok Senem. Thank you very much. You really gave me lots of valuable information. Do you have anything to add to what you have already said?
SENEM: I thank you because I became aware of the fact that the internet teaches and helps you to practice your English like your teacher and as a last point...I want to confess one thing. To tell the truth, I have never been to the self-access center in the school because I don’t like staying at school after classes. I want to go home and relax. This course provided me with an excellent opportunity to study more on my own at my comfortable home.

RESEARCHER: I am happy to hear that, Senem (laughs). Ok. Thank you again for this interview.
SENEM: Not at all.