

ATTITUDES OF EFL LEARNERS TOWARDS THE INTERNET

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ABSTRACT

Related literature indicates that the Internet has an important role and great potential in foreign language learning. It is also obvious that attitudes of learners affect learning process significantly. This study aimed to investigate the attitudes of foreign language learners and to find the relationship between attitudes and subject variables. A background questionnaire, a test on Internet information and a survey were administered to 115 foreign language learners. Data gathered were analyzed statistically. The results showed that EFL learners had positive attitudes towards the Internet except some items such as addiction, socialization and shopping. It was implicated that positive attitudes would contribute to foreign language learning via the Internet after overcoming some potential problems and disadvantages.

Key Words: Attitude, English as Foreign Language, the Internet

INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language depends on some reasons such as school curricula, need of advancement in professional life, living in a target community permanently or temporarily, interest in different cultures and some specific purposes (Harmer, 1991). Depending on the goals of language teaching, students are expected to be proficient in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, discourse and language skills in target language. However, it is not possible to say that language learning environment always provides learners real and natural settings. For example, EFL learners in Turkey, except the ones at schools that apply intensive language classes, try to learn English in teacher-centered, examination-oriented and textbook-based environments in crowded classrooms. Consequently, decontextualized language knowledge that they acquire not only prevents learning and using language but also causes negative attitudes towards language learning. As a final point, it is clear that one of the ways to overcome the difficulties in EFL learning is to teach them language in real and natural environments.

The Internet, today, has an important role and great potential in foreign language learning and teaching. Yang and Chen (2007) summarize the advantages of Internet use in EFL learning in a general sense:

“The Internet enables English learners to access useful language resources and communicate directly with native English speakers. ... Learners can practice applying information and overcome the decontextualized predicament of English learning. Students can learn listening, speaking, reading and writing English integratively via real-world situations.”

In addition to the statements given above, some more specific aspects of Internet use in EFL learning can be mentioned. First, the Internet increases language use (Kasanga, 1996), enhances synchronous and asynchronous communication of language learners (Kern, 1995; Warschauer and Healey 1998), and helps them to use language in real communication situations (Wiburg and Butker Pasceo, 2002). In sum, communication via the Internet allows learners practice and use their language skills. Second, the Internet changes the interaction between language learners and teachers (Kern, 1995). That is, it changes teacher and students' roles (Peterson, 1997), makes learning more student-centered (Means and Olson, 1997), and increases participation (Warschauer, Turbee, and Roberts, 1996) as there is less teacher and more learner talk in computer classes. Third, the Internet is a potential source authentic materials. It is useful and easy to retrieve, access and use information in the context of foreign second language learning. Fourth, in addition to the benefits of Internet use in EFL learning, these concerns are also significant: The Internet gives the opportunity to learn about target culture, improves higher thinking (Mike, 1996) and computer skills (Means and Olson, 1997), makes learners have a great variety of speech discourse (Sullivan and Pratt, 1996), makes learners use more complex language (Warschauer, 1996). Consequently, it can be said that the Internet has brought new dimensions and opportunities to foreign language learners in the aspects of communication, classroom interaction and authentic materials. In other words, the Internet has been a chance for EFL learners to improve their discourse, grammar, vocabulary and language skills in a real and natural environment. However, efficient use of the Internet as a real environment in EFL learning is

closely and directly related to the attitudes of EFL learners towards it. To be brief, achievement in EFL learning via the Internet depends on the positive attitudes of learners.

Related literature indicates that foreign language learners usually have positive attitudes towards the Internet. In an analysis (Slate, Manuel and Brinson, 2002) of learners' views on Internet use for educational purposes, it was found that language used was a significant variable that affected their attitudes towards Internet use. In the same study, gender was also a significant subject variable that affected attitudes towards the Internet. In Usun's survey study (2003) that aimed to investigate the attitudes towards educational uses of the Internet, 207 undergraduate students who had must EFL courses were used as sample group. The participants mostly had positive attitudes towards Internet use. In another study (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2003), it was noted that 71% of the ESP learners had positive attitudes towards the Internet while only 43% of teachers admitted its usefulness. In one of the studies conducted in Turkey (Isman and Dabaj, 2004), the results indicated students at graduate and postgraduate levels had positive attitudes towards the Internet. This study was significant since EFL was a must course for undergraduate students in the sample group. In a study conducted by Asan and Koca (2006), it was found that the majority of the students have positive attitudes. However, it should be noted that 77 of the 667 students in the sample group of the study were Language Center students. Since there was no significant difference between institutions based on the students responses, it could be said that foreign language learners had positive attitudes towards the Internet. In another study (Yang and Chen, 2007) that focused on the integration of Internet tools in language learning activities, it was found that the Internet increased learning possibilities. 44 male students liked and approved EFL learning using the Internet but had different opinions about its benefits. With respect to the attitudes of EFL learners towards the Internet, the findings indicated that learners were positive about the potential of the Internet. To sum up, though the studies show that learners have positive attitudes toward the Internet, it is necessary to emphasize that there is not a study in which only EFL learners were used as sample group.

This study was guided by two reasons: First, it seems significant to investigate attitudes of EFL learners towards the Internet that can be used as a real environment in EFL learning and teaching. That is, though the Internet has certain advantages in foreign language learning and teaching, it is clear that attitudes may affect learning level positively or negatively. Additionally, increase in achievement and proficiency in foreign language via the Internet is closely and directly related to attitudes of learners. Second, the studies on the issue in Turkey consisted of sample groups in which some part are foreign language learners. In other words, there has not been a study that investigated attitudes of students as only EFL learners yet. Depending on these concerns, the study has two research questions: What are the attitudes of EFL learners toward the Internet? Is there a relationship between the attitudes towards the Internet and some subject variables?

METHOD

Sample group of the study consisted of 115 students at English Language Department of Balikesir University. Mean of the participants' age, with the range between 17 and 24, was 19.8. In Table 1, distribution of the students according to age, gender, grade, places they live and the types of high schools they graduated from were given in number and percent.

Table 1. Distribution of participants according to some variables

Variables	N	%	
Age	17	3	2.6
	18	22	19.2
	19	20	17.4
	20	32	27.8
	21	30	26.1
	22	6	5.2
	23	2	1.7
Gender	Male	25	21.7
	Female	90	78.3
Grade	1	31	27.0
	2	27	23.5
	3	30	26.1

	4	27	23.5
	Dormitory	44	38.3
Place where they live	Home with mates	40	34.8
	Home with parents	31	27.0
High school they graduated	Super	44	38.3
	Anatolian	71	61.7

Mean score of the Foreign Language Examination, an official selection and placement test that is administered once a year was 360.6. The participants stated that they spent 286 YTL (158 Euro) a month. They have been using the Internet 1.88 hour a day while they have been familiar with it for 4 years. Lastly, more than half of the students' fathers were public employees while their mothers were mostly housewives, as seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Sectors of participants' parents

Sectors	Father		Mother	
	n	%	N	%
Public	61	53.0	17	14.8
Industry	18	15.7	1	0.9
Education	11	9.6	2	1.7
Trade	14	12.2	-	-
Agriculture	10	8.7	1	0.9
Engineering	1	0.9	-	-
None	-	-	93	80.9
Health	-	-	1	0.9

The instruments used to gather data consisted of a test, a background questionnaire and a survey. The test with 20 items aimed to measure information level of the students on the Internet. The background questionnaire asked students' age, gender, grade, where they live, which high school they graduated from, score of Foreign Language Examination, how much money they spend a month, how long they use Internet a day, how many years they are familiar with it, and the sectors in which their parents were employed. In addition, it asked if they have computers, Internet connection, Internet instruction and how often and where they used the Internet. The survey ($\alpha=0.77$), adapted from *Tendency towards Internet* designed by Kilincoglu and Altun (in Isman, 2004), contained 21 items in Likert type (*strongly agree=5, agree=4, undecided=3, disagree=2, strongly disagree=1*) and aimed to measure the degree of the attitudes of the subjects toward the Internet (See Appendix 1).

The author administered the test during the second week of the semester. The background questionnaire and survey were administered in the following week. Next, the data were analyzed with the aid of SPSS in two steps. First, the frequencies were found for the survey questions. Then, the values of ANOVA and independent samples tests were computed in order to see the correlations between the dependent and independent variables. In the study, the dependant variables were 21 items in the survey while the independent variables were age, gender, grade, places they live, types of the high schools they graduated from, Foreign Language Exam scores, amount of money they spend in a month, the duration of Internet use a day, Internet familiarity in years, sectors of the participants' parents, information level on the Internet, computer ownership, Internet connection, Internet instruction, the frequency of Internet use in hours, and the places they use it.

FINDINGS

Statistical findings in the study can be divided into three sections. The first section gives the findings on computer availability, Internet connection and instruction, the frequency of Internet use, place used Internet and Internet test results. In the second section, the findings on the attitudes of the subjects towards the Internet are presented. The third section presents the relationship between their attitudes and the independent variables.

According to the findings given in Table 3, more than half of the participants have their own computers while only 27% of them have Internet connection. The values also indicate that 67.8% of the students have not had any

Internet instruction. Most of the learners say they used the Internet today or a few days ago. However, 67% of the students state that they use the Internet at Internet cafes. Additionally, the mean of the test used to measure their information level on Internet use is 51.5 in the scale of 100. The range of the test is between 0 and 90 while standard deviation was 17.9.

Table 3. Computer availability, Internet connection and instruction

Variables		n	%
Computer availability	Yes	49	42.6
	No	66	56.4
Internet connection	Yes	31	27.0
	No	84	73.0
Internet instruction	Yes	37	32.2
	No	78	67.8
Frequency of Internet use	Today	36	31.3
	A few day ago	59	51.3
	Last week	10	8.7
	Last month	3	2.6
	More than one month	7	6.0
Place	Home	27	23.5
	School	2	1.7
	Internet Café	77	67.0
	Dormitory	6	6.1

As seen in Table 4, findings show that the participants’ attitudes vary in the statements in the survey. The students believe mostly that the Internet is a universal library, the fastest way to teach knowledge, a place that creates close relationship among societies, an effective training tool and a way to provide learning for people in order to search. Most of them think that it is exciting to get information about the Internet and vital to enhance exchanging cultures. For them, the Internet provides an easy life while they do not believe that it includes unnecessary, non-useful information, causes destroyed societies, and creates cultural dilemma. On the other hand, the values indicates that the subjects believe that it causes to be far away from real life, creates addiction, and forces people to be alone. They do not think the Internet can provide stable friendship by chatting and endless freedom to people. The participants also believe that chatting prevents to be socialized. Lastly, they do not find safe shopping at the Internet.

Table 4. Attitudes towards the Internet

Statements	Strongly agree and agree		Undecided, disagree and strongly disagree	
	N	%	N	%
Internet is a universal digital library.	112	97.4	3	2.6
Internet provides easy life.	111	96.5	4	3.5
Internet is a fastest way to reach knowledge.	111	96.5	4	3.5
Internet is a digital place that creates close relationship among societies.	100	87.0	15	13.0
Internet provides endless freedom to people.	47	40.9	68	59.1
Internet is vital to enhancing exchanging cultures.	80	69.6	35	30.4
Internet has a potential to be an effective training tool.	88	76.5	37	23.5

Internet is a way to provide learning for people in order to search.	113	98.3	2	1.7
It is exciting to get information about Internet.	86	74.8	29	25.2
It is enjoyable to chat at Internet.	71	61.7	44	38.3
Having friends in Internet is temporary.	79	68.7	36	31.3
Internet causes to be far away from real life.	71	61.7	44	38.3
Chatting in Internet prevent to be socialized.	81	70.4	34	29.6
Internet can provide stable friendship by doing chatting.	29	25.2	86	74.8
Internet creates tendency to people for getting prepared knowledge.	99	86.1	16	13.9
Internet includes unnecessary, non-useful knowledge.	30	26.1	85	73.9
Internet causes destroyed societies.	31	27.0	84	73.0
Internet creates addiction.	94	81.7	21	18.3
Internet creates cultural dilemma.	44	38.3	71	61.7
Internet forces people to be alone.	56	48.7	59	51.3
It is not safety to make shopping at Internet.	76	66.1	39	33.9

In the research, it was found that some of the variables and some statements in the survey are correlated. The findings show that age is correlated with one statement while there is a correlation between age and three statements. As seen in Table 5, the older the students are, the less they feel excited about getting information about the Internet. Similarly, first and second grade students feel less excited about having information about the Internet than third and fourth grade learners (Table 6). However, this result may depend on the parallelism between grade and age.

Table 5. Age and attitude (ANOVA)

Statement	Age	Mean	St. D.	F	Sig.
It is exciting to get information about Internet.	18	4.4	0.7	2.3	0.04
	19	3.9	1.1		
	20	3.6	1.0		
	21	3.6	1.0		

Table 6. Grade and attitude (ANOVA)

Statement	Grade	Mean	St. D.	F	Sig.
It is exciting to get information about Internet.	1	4.3	0.7	3.5	0.02
	2	3.8	1.1		
	3	3.6	1.0		
	4	3.5	1.0		

According to the findings on the correlation between gender and attitudes, males have more positive attitudes about finding the Internet vital for cultural exchange and feeling excited to have information about the Internet than females do. Additionally, females agree more that the Internet causes tendency to people for prepared knowledge, as indicated in Table 7.

Table 7. Gender and attitudes (Independent Samples Test)

Statements	Gender	Mean	St. D.	F	Sig.
Internet is vital to enhance exchanging cultures.	Male	3.9	0.6	4.9	0.03
	Female	3.7	0.9		
It is exciting to get information about Internet.	Male	4.0	0.7	6.0	0.02
	Female	3.8	1.1		
Internet creates tendency to people for getting prepared knowledge.	Male	3.6	1.1	9.0	0.003
	Female	4.2	0.7		

Findings show that there is no significant correlation between attitudes towards Internet and some independent variables such as where the students live, their parents' jobs, amount of money they spend in one month, and Foreign Language Exam scores. On the other hand, three statements are correlated significantly with the types of high schools they graduated from. According to the values shown in Table 8, the subjects graduated from Anatolian High Schools agree more that the Internet is a fastest way to reach knowledge. Additionally, participants in the same group believe more that friendship in the Internet is temporary. Lastly, the same students think more that the Internet creates cultural dilemma.

Table 8. Educational background and attitudes (Independent Samples Test)

Statements	School	Mean	St. D.	F	Sig.
Internet is a fastest way to reach knowledge.	Super	4.5	0.8	8.5	.002
	Anatolian	4.7	0.5		
Having friends in Internet is temporary.	Super	3.8	1.1	7.4	.01
	Anatolian	4.0	0.9		
Internet creates cultural dilemma.	Super	3.0	1.1	5.2	.02
	Anatolian	3.2	1.1		

Values indicated in Table 9 show that there is a significant correlation between computer ownership and six items in the survey. According to the findings, the students who have their own computers have more positive attitudes towards the Internet as a universal library, an important tool for cultural exchange and training than the ones who do not. They also think that it makes life easy and feel more excited about getting information about the Internet than the participants who do not have computers.

Table 9. Computer Availability and attitudes (Independent Samples Test)

Statements	Computer Availability	Mean	St. D.	F	Sig.
Internet is a universal digital library.	Yes	4.7	.5	4.7	.03
	No	4.6	.6		
Internet provides easy life.	Yes	4.6	.5	3.9	.05
	No	4.5	.8		
Internet is vital to enhancing exchanging cultures.	Yes	4.0	.8	5.6	.02
	No	3.7	.9		
Internet has a potential to be an effective training tool.	Yes	3.9	.9	5.5	.02
	No	3.8	1.1		
It is exciting to get information about Internet.	Yes	3.9	1.0	4.4	.04
	No	3.8	1.1		
Internet creates addiction.	Yes	4.1	.8	5.2	.02
	No	3.9	1.1		

The learners who have Internet connections believe more that the Internet is a universal digital library than the ones who do not, when the significance level, presented in Table 10, is considered. The frequency of Internet use is correlated significantly with that friendship in the Internet is not stable. Mean scores in Table 11 show that the students who use the Internet more frequently believe less that having friends in the Internet is temporary.

Table 10. Internet connection and attitudes (Independent Samples Test)

Statement	Internet connection	Mean	St. D.	F	Sig.
Internet is a universal digital library.	Yes	4.8	0.4	20.2	.00

No	4.5	0.6
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Table 11. Internet instruction and attitudes (ANOVA)

Statements	Internet use	Mean	St. D.	F	Sig.
Having friends in Internet is temporary.	Today	3.6	1.1	3.1	.01
	A few days ago	4.1	.9		
	Last week	4.2	.6		
	Last month	4.3	.6		

According to the ANOVA results, places where the participants use the Internet, duration of Internet use in a day and Internet familiarity in years are not correlated with their attitudes towards the Internet. However, the information level of the participants on the Internet is correlated significantly with two statements. Mean scores in Table 12 show that the ones who have high level information think that it is safety to make shopping at the Internet. They also believe more that the Internet is a universal digital library than the students who have low level information on the Internet.

Table 12. Internet test and attitudes (ANOVA)

Statements	Scores	Mean	St. D.	F	Sig.
Internet is a universal digital library.	2 (21 – 40)	4.3	.8	5.2	.001
	3 (41 – 60)	4.7	.5		
	4 (61 – 80)	4.9	.3		
It is not safety to make shopping at Internet.	2 (21 – 40)	4.0	1.0	3.0	.02
	3 (41 – 60)	3.9	.9		
	4 (61 – 80)	3.3	1.3		

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The results found in the study can be summarized in three topics: *Positive and negative attitudes of ELF learners towards the Internet* and *correlations between attitudes and independent variables*. First, EFL learners have positive attitudes towards the Internet as a universal library, the fastest way to teach knowledge, a place that creates close relationship among societies, an effective training tool, and a way to provide learning for people in order to search. They find the Internet exciting to get information about the Internet and vital to enhance exchanging cultures, and think that it makes life easy. Additionally, they do not agree that it includes unnecessary, non-useful information, causes destroyed societies, and creates cultural dilemma. Second, they believe that the Internet causes to be far away from real life, creates addiction, and forces people to be alone. They also think that it cannot provide stable friendship by chatting and endless freedom to people and socialization. Interestingly, they do not find safe shopping at the Internet. Third, some of the independent variables are correlated significantly with some statements in the survey. Younger learners feel more excited about getting information about the Internet. Male students have more positive attitudes about finding the Internet vital for cultural exchange and feeling excited to have information about the Internet than females do. Females also agree more that the Internet causes tendency to people for prepared knowledge. Anatolian High School graduates agree more that the Internet is a fastest way to reach knowledge. They also think more that the Internet creates cultural dilemma and friendships in the Internet is not stable. Computer ownership has a positive effect on the point of that it is a universal library, makes life easy and an important tool for cultural exchange and training. Computer owners also feel more excited about getting information about the Internet. Having Internet connection is a significant variable that affect positively on that the Internet is a universal digital library. Students who rarely use the Internet think that having friends in the Internet is temporary. Learners who have the Internet instruction have more positive attitudes towards the Internet as a universal digital library, while they do not think shopping at the Internet is safe. On the other hand, places where students live, their parents' jobs, amount of money they spend, foreign language proficiency level, places they use the Internet, duration of Internet use a day and computer familiarity in years do not have effect on their attitudes towards the Internet.

As mentioned before, this reach differs from the studies presented above since the sample group consisted of only EFL learners. Thus, it seems useful to discuss the similarities and differences. In Slate, Manuel and Brinson's study (2002); gender was a significant variable that affected attitudes towards the Internet. However, in this research, it was found that gender had a significant effect on only three statements among 21 items. The findings in this study seemed similar to the results found in Usun's (2003) research. Results in other related research (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2003; Isman and Dabaj, 2004; Asan and Koca, 2006, Yang and Chen, 2007) also indicated that learners have positive attitudes as found in this study.

Depending on the conclusions, some implications can be noted. First, though learners generally have positive attitudes towards the Internet, some potential problems should be mentioned. Two most significant problems are inaccessibility and inequity issues. As found in the study, more than half of the students do not have computers. In addition, language learners mostly do not have Internet connection and instruction, and have to use the Internet at Internet cafes. Consequently, the problem is that the Internet is not always accessible by all learners though EFL learners have positive attitudes. Statistics indicate that Internet accessibility in Turkey is 14.2% for overall population while the values are 75.6% in Sweden, 61.4% in Holland, 68.7% in Japan, 50% in Germany, 17.7% in Greece (The World Bank, 2004). In other words, even though accessibility rate of the sample group is higher than the average rate of Turkey, inaccessibility and inequity issues are discouraging for both language teachers and students in educational settings (Mike, 1996) in our country. Other problems about Internet use are Internet unfamiliarity and lack of training. These problems are also an anxiety source for language learners. Internet training is one of the ways to decrease not only the level of negative attitudes and but also anxiety. Doubtless, positive attitudes of learners are not enough to solve these potential problems. Educational and economic policy makers have important roles for solving them. Second, there are some disadvantages of Internet use in foreign language learning. Though it is a fact that the Internet improves the communicational and language skills, the significant point is that learners are not sometimes aware of why, how and where they learn. Additionally, although a mass of materials in the Internet can be found, the integration of the materials into foreign language curriculum is another disadvantage. Thus, Internet use in language learning may be the waste of time if it does not depend on a language curriculum. In order to overcome these drawbacks learners should be instructed, and have the chance of the Internet accessibility, experience and familiarity with its all functions in educational life. As a final point, positive attitudes can contribute to create a real-life language learning environment via the Internet after solving the problems and overcoming difficulties mentioned above without forgetting that the Internet is not a purpose but only a tool for all learning necessities.

Some limitations of the research can be noted. The study is limited to 115 EFL learners at ELT Department of Education Faculty at Balikesir University, Turkey. It is limited to the scale and the variables given above. Considering that the study is limited to the attitudes of EFL learners towards the Internet, further research should be focused on the attitudes of foreign language teachers. In addition to attitudes, why, where and how learners use the Internet are other areas to investigate.

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APPENDIX 1

The scale of attitudes towards the Internet

Statements	Strongly agree	agree	Undecided	disagree	strongly disagree
Internet is a universal digital library.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Internet provides easy life.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Internet is a fastest way to reach knowledge.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Internet is a digital place that creates close relationship among societies.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Internet provides endless freedom to people.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Internet is vital to enhancing exchanging cultures.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Internet has a potential to be an effective training tool.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Internet is a way to provide learning for people in order to search.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
It is exciting to get information about Internet.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
It is enjoyable to chat at Internet.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Having friends in Internet is temporary.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Internet causes to be far away from real life.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Chatting in Internet prevent to be socialized.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Internet can provide stable friendship by doing chatting.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Internet creates tendency to people for getting prepared knowledge.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Internet includes unnecessary, non-useful knowledge.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Internet causes destroyed societies.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Internet creates addiction.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Internet creates cultural dilemma.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Internet forces people to be alone.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
It is not safety to make shopping at Internet.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]