

# Analysis of University Students' Attitudes Towards Distance Learning in Foreign Language Education Based on Various Variables

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## Abstract

This study is aimed at analyzing the attitudes towards distance learning of students who attended ENG 101 and ENG 102 courses in a private university during the fall semester of 2016-2017 in terms of gender, distance learning, experience in using computer and learning styles. Data collection tools included the Scale of ATDL (Attitude Towards Distance Learning). Findings indicated that ATDL scores were significantly unrelated with gender. However, there is a significant difference between the students who take 101 English courses and those who take 102 English courses. Previous participation to any distance learning course and experience in using computers significantly affect ATDL.

**Keywords:** Distance Learning; Attitude; Learning Style; Foreign Language.

## 1. Introduction

Language is the most powerful means of communication used by individuals to reflect their feelings, ideas and wishes. Therefore, it is the most important factor which distinguishes human beings from other creatures. Individuals using the same language get on with each other and are able to communicate with people in different countries due to learnability. Through language, individuals can convey other languages acquired in the past to next generations. Briefly, bridges may be built between generations (Akın and Çeçen, 2015). On the other hand, globalization and the rapid spread of English have challenged traditional notions of Standard English and language education practices (Shomoossi & Ketabi, 2008).

Modern English language learners use English to communicate with native speakers and increasingly, with non-native speakers. The main aim of learning English as an international language is to effectively communicate with those from other cultures. English should therefore be taught as a means of cross-cultural communication. (Kılıçkaya, 2009; Jenkins, 2006; Erling, 2005; McKay 2003).

According to Taşkiran (2015), concretization of abstract concepts in a foreign language is important as students find abstract concepts difficult and complicated. Thus, supportive aids should be used in teaching concepts. Augmented reality where a sense of reality is created with three dimensional visualization has a strong influence on abstract concept teaching. According to Sirakaya (2015) and Taşkiran vd. (2015), augmented reality enables students to become more active during the lesson and increases participation when compared with standard materials.

Distance learning, which incorporates several features desired to be included in the education system is regarded as an ideal system for education. In this system, the student is not passive but active. In educational programs, the interest and abilities of the student is taken into consideration. This system signifies receiving education anytime and anywhere for the individual and providing education anytime and anywhere for the State. This, in turn, brings about equality of

opportunity in education. Thus, individuals can have access to education under the same conditions and at the same level. The notion of education anytime and anywhere will generally bring along life-long learning with it. With life-long learning, individuals assume their own responsibility, which directs them to individualized learning (Beyza, 2011). Education students receive individually and without being subjected to school environment is defined as distance learning (Tuncer & Taşpınar, 2008; Yüksekdağ, 2015).

Distance education is planned learning that occurs in places that are different from the teaching. Distance education makes a significant contribution to studying where students and teachers are in separate physical locations. In this way, distance education allows increased access to education and more flexibility for the students. Thus, distance learning allows more access in the field of education and flexibility for students (Holly, 2009; Lowert & Pector, 2014).

Distance education is one of the fastest developing educational methods of the last decade (Holly, 2009). Developments in information technologies like satellite, television, optic fiber, computer, radio, the Internet and others affect the structure and form of education. Accordingly, new educational programs and learning-teaching models have been required for educators. Educators using the information technology indicate that global education applications are absolutely needed along with such technologies. And distance learning is the primary global education facility (Işman, 2011).

Klob, who made significant studies on forms of learning, identified the learning style which is the way preferred by an individual in the process of obtaining and processing knowledge. Another researcher with valuable studies on forms of learning, however, is Dunn. According to Dunn, the learning style brings with it separate and unique ways each student uses while he gets prepared to learn, learns and remembers new and challenging information. According to Honney and Mumford, who are researchers working on this field, the learning style is the preference of the individual with respect to learning activities. Şimşek, on the other hand, argues that it is the characteristic and consistent approach of an individual in perceiving, processing and arranging knowledge and attaching meaning to it (Şimşek, 2004).

The problem statement of the study is as follows: How do the attitudes of university students towards distance learning in foreign language learning vary depending on several variables?

To that end, answers have been sought to the following sub-problems related to the research.

- 1-What is the distribution of the students in the research group by gender?
- 2-Do the attitudes of students towards distance learning vary significantly by gender?
- 3-Do the attitudes of students towards distance learning significantly vary depending on previous participation to a distance learning course?

## **2. Objective**

There is an increasing tendency of using technology for teaching purposes. Yet, there are not adequate researches in Turkish based on variables of the attitude of students towards distance learning and learning preferences. Structuring of the needs of students in distance learning programs is of importance in meeting the increasing demand in that regard.

## **3. Methodology**

### **Research Model**

This is a descriptive research which uses the screening method. Therefore, it contains explanations which seek to describe phenomena, entities, objects, groups, institutions and fields. Survey models are suitable for researches which intend to define the past or current situation as it is (Karasar, 2013).

### Study Group

The study group of the research comprises student candidates who take ENG 101 and ENG 102 courses in the academic year of 2016-2017 in a private university. Since having been knowledgeable about distance learning and web-based education technologies is set as a precondition, the first and second- year students who had taken the course of “Distance learning English” form the study group for this research. 314 students who accepted to participate have been included in the study. Thus, the distribution by class and gender of the participants who were designated through purposive sampling is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of the Study Group by Year and Gender

Year	Gender					
	Female		Male		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	100	31.84	80	25.47	180	57,32
2	59	18.79	75	23.89	134	42,68
Total	159	50.63	155	49.36	314	100,00

As per Table 1, 57.32 % of the participants comprise first-year (ENG 101) and 42.68% of them comprise second-year (ENG 102) students. Also, 50.63% of the participants are female and 49,36% of them are male students.

### Data Collection Tools

The data collection tools used for the research are as follows:

a) Student information form: The form includes questions on students' year at school, gender, experience in using computers, knowledge level with respect to distance learning and previous participation to a distance learning application.

b) Scale of Attitude Towards Distance Learning: The scale used in this research is formed of 44 items and the views of the students were taken into consideration while the scale was being prepared. To prepare the scale, first and second year students studying in a private university in 2016 and taking ENG 101 and ENG 102 courses, were asked to write compositions to cover educational materials, environments, methods, aims of distance learning and their own ideas and subsequently expressions to indicate their attitude were determined. These were used to form a scale with 60 items. Following a series of evaluations, the number of items was decreased to 44 and the scale was presented to a field expert for his rating in respect of content validity. To ascertain scale reliability, the data collection tool was applied to a group of 122 randomly chosen ENG 101 and ENG 102 students and the reliability coefficient was found as 0.84. A factor analysis, where a principal components analysis was used, was also conducted to identify the construct validity for preliminary application. Ultimately, all the items in the scale led to a single factor load. The alpha coefficient was calculated for the repetition of scale reliability with respect to the application on 314 students and it was revealed to be 0.90. Thus, scale reliability was found to be at a high level consequent to the application.

### Data Analysis

The numerical data obtained consequent to data collection were transferred to a statistical package. While descriptive statistics like frequency, percentage distribution, and cross-tabulation were evaluated in the analysis of the students' demographic data, t-test and analysis of variance were used in the analysis of students' attitude towards distance learning.

#### 4. Findings

This section of the research contains findings obtained in relation to three sub-problems.

##### 4.1. Distribution of Students in the Research Group by Gender

Table 2. Distribution of Students by Gender

Gender	N	%
Female	159	50,6
Male	155	49,4

As indicated in Table 2, 159 female student candidates (50.6 %) and 155 male student candidates (49.4 %) participated in the research. The majority of the participants thus comprises female student candidates.

##### 4.2. Do the attitudes of students towards distance learning vary significantly by gender?

Table 3. T-test Results of ATDL (Attitude Towards Distance Learning) Scores by Gender

	N	$\bar{X}$	SS	SD	t	p
Female	159	42.79	9.19	312	2,89	0,00
Male	155	39.84	8.90			

When the t-test results of ATDL scores by gender are analyzed, it is seen that the means of female students ( $\bar{X}$ :42.79) are higher than that of male students ( $\bar{X}$ :39.84). As a result of the t-test conducted to reveal if the difference is significant, it was found out that there is a significant difference in favor of the female students at a level of 0,01. ( $t$ :2.89 (312),  $b < 0,01$ ).

##### 4.3. Do the attitudes of students towards distance learning vary significantly by previous participation to a distance learning course?

Table 4. Distribution of previous participation to distance learning application by course

Course	Participation to a DL Application				Total	
	f	%	f	%	F	%
1 (ENG 101)	90	28.66	85	27,07	175	55.73
2 (ENG 102)	69	21.97	70	22,30	139	44.27
Total	159	50.63	155	49,37	314	100

As per Table 4, 50.63% of the participants participated in a distance learning application previously whereas the 49.37 % did not. 28.66% of the former comprise first year (ENG 101) and the 21.97% comprise the second year (ENG 102) students. Table 6 indicates whether previous participation to a distance learning application has a significant influence on the attitude of students towards distance learning.

Table 5. T-test Results of ATDL Scores by Previous DL Participation

DL Participation	n	X	SS	SD	t	p
Yes	159	59.40	11.18	312	2.75	0.00
No	155	55.63	13.01			

As indicated in Table 5, it has been found out that there is a significant difference in ATDL based on previous distance learning participation.

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

The analysis of the attitude of university students towards distance learning in foreign language education based on several variables (gender, previous participation to a distance learning course, computer usage experience and learning style) has been dealt with and the following results have been concluded under the present study.

Consequent to the findings obtained and as a result of the t -test, a significant difference has not been found based on variables like gender, having a personal computer and having an internet connection (Abdullah, 2013).

When the results of the study group were analyzed, it was seen that the attitude of students towards distance learning was close to the level of "hesitant". The fact that the attitude of students towards distance learning was close to the level of "hesitant" shows similarity with the findings of the research made by Alev (2008).

When the distribution by gender of the students participating in the research was examined, it has been seen that the percentage of female students was 50.6 %. When the attitude of students towards distance learning was analyzed by gender, it has been seen that there was a significant difference of 0.01 in favor of female students.

While 50.63% of the participants have participated to a distance learning application previously, 49.37% have not. 28.66% and 21.97% of the participants comprise first year (ENG 101) and second year (ENG102) students respectively. When the attitude towards distance learning was analyzed in terms of previous participation to a distance learning application, a significant difference has been found out. It has been discovered that previous participation to a distance learning application had a positive overall effect on the attitude of students towards distance learning (Alev 2008).

Students receiving education within distance learning for the first time have stated that the courses are not effective since they are not easily comprehensible. They also indicated that they had difficulty finding computers and accessing the Internet. Moreover, they stressed that explanation of the subjects by the instructor would be better and more preferential and that they also experienced technical difficulties with teaching materials when they were online (Öztürk, Eyikara & Baykara, 2016).

In brief, education serves to enhance one's abilities to make him become more powerful, creative and constructive. Technology, on the other hand, helps to apply what is gained through education in a more productive and effective way. Therefore, education and education technology have become elements prevailing in personal development.

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