Pre-Service Language Teachers' Reflections on the Implementation of a Blended-Learning Environment

Yabancı Dil Öğretmen Adaylarının Harmanlanmış Öğrenme Uygulaması Hakkındaki Görüşleri

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Abstract

The study investigated pre-service language teachers' reflections about a 20-week blended-learning environment. An online social presence training developed by Hauck and Warnecke (2012) was introduced to the face-to-face practicum course during the fall term and the pre-service teachers were immersed in an online learning environment where they can practice their newly acquired skills during the spring term. The course was also a combination of pedagogical and technical training as the pre-service teachers not only learned how to use different tools to participate online, but also experienced using them for teaching and learning purposes whilst constantly reflecting on their practice. The design of this study was a descriptive case study. 42 pre-service language teachers participated in this study during the fall semester and 25 during the spring semester of 2012-2013 academic year. *Canvas* was used as the learning management system in which the participants created audio/visual or written introductions and weekly discussions on the discussion board. The data collection included online forum participations and journal entries per participant at certain intervals throughout the course to obtain participants' ongoing reflections about the course.

The results obtained from an analysis of the participants' journal and forum entries indicated that social presence training enhanced their awareness towards the active use of the online platform; however, the design of the task affected the level of motivation and communication among the pre-service language teachers. The discussion emphasizes the significance of the interrelationship between task design and the maintenance of participation in a blended-learning environment.

Keywords: *Blended learning; online tools; social presence; reflection; teacher education*

Öz

Bu çalışma yabancı dil öğretmen adaylarının kendilerine sunulan 20 haftalık bir harmanlanmış öğrenme ortamı hakkındaki görüşlerini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Hauck ve Warnecke (2002) tarafından geliştirilen ve çevirimiçi bir eğitim olan sosyal bulunuşluk eğitimi güz döneminde sunulan ve yüz yüze sunulan okul deneyimi dersi kapsamına dahil edilmiştir. Bahar döneminde ise öğretmen adayları okul deneyimi seminer dersi kapsamında sunulan çevirimiçi öğrenme ortamında yeni öğrendikleri becerileri kullanma imkanı bulmuşlardır. Harmanlanmış öğrenme ortamı ile hem pedagojik hem de çevirimiçi ile ilgili teknik eğitimin vurgulandığı derste öğretmen adayları yalnızca çevirimiçi ortamlara katılırken farklı araçları nasıl kullanacaklarını öğrenmekle kalmamış aynı zamanda sürekli olarak deneyimlerini değerlendirerek bu araçları öğrenme ve öğretme ortamlarında nasıl kullanabileceklerini deneyimlemişlerdir.

Bu çalışmanın araştırma yöntemi tanımlayıcı durum çalışmasıdır. Çalışmaya 2012-2013 eğitim-öğretim döneminde güz döneminde 42, bahar döneminde de 25 yabancı dil öğretmen adayı katılmıştır. Çalışmada eğitim yönetim sistemi olarak Canvas kullanılmıştır. Sistem içinde katılımcılar kendilerini tanıtıcı görsel/işitsel veya yazılı metinler oluşturmuş ve tartışma panosunda haftalık tartışmalara katılmışlardır. Araştırma verilerini katılımcıların çevirimiçi tartışma panolarına katılımları ve eğitim süresince katılımcıların eğitim hakkındaki gelişen ve değişen görüşlerini takip edebilmek üzere belirli aralıklarla öğretmen adaylarından istenen günlükler oluşturmaktadır.

Katılımcıların günlüklerini ve tartışma panosu katılımlarından elde edilen verilerin nitel analizi sonucunda elde edilen veriler sosyal bulunuşluk eğitiminin öğretmen adaylarının çevirimiçi ortamın aktif kullanımı konusunda farkındalığını arttırdığını göstermektedir. Aynı zamanda, eğitimde kullanılan görev ve etkinliklerin öğretmen adaylarının motivasyon ve iletişimini etkilediği görülmektedir. Bulgular harmanlanmış öğrenme ortamlarında etkinlik tasarımı ve katılımın devamlılığının sağlanması arasındaki sıkı ilişkinin önemini vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Harmanlanmış öğrenme; internet araçları; sosyal bulunuşluk; üstünde düşünme; öğretmen eğitimi*

Introduction

There is a general agreement that developing reflective skills is a valuable aim in teacher education (Farrell, 2007; Freese, 2006; Lougran, 2002). Integrating reflection-based tasks into field-based experiences benefits both pre-service teachers and teacher educators by helping them to better understand the process of becoming a teacher. There are different ways of reflecting on one's beliefs about classroom practices, interaction, and the learning process. These can be explored by the use of classroom observations, video recording of a teaching performance, and synchronous and asynchronous group discussions. Richardson (2006) indicated that online environments could facilitate thinking and collaboration for reflection and decision-making.

In Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, learning is defined as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p.41). Teachers need to create a conversational environment in which they can talk about their experiences as they transform experience into knowledge. They can do this by sharing and reflecting on their experiences. Since 1980s, many synchronous and asynchronous tools have been used in online interaction and exchange to facilitate sharing and reflection practices in learning processes (Dooly & O'Dowd, 2012). Caner (2010) proposed an online platform to facilitate sharing of online lesson plans and video recordings of practice teachings and to foster reflection through peer feedback in an online discussion board. He concluded that continuous feedback from the tutors and peers on lesson plans and teaching practices contributed to pre-service teachers' professional growth.

As technologies have become more and more ubiquitous in learning and teaching settings, it is no longer sufficient to introduce learners to online resources, but "we have to promote the kind of literacy required to use the new democratic learning spaces to their best effect" (Hampel & Hauck, 2006). As Pegrum (2009) suggests, social constructivism plays an important role in preparing students to digitally mediated societies and in equipping them with the necessary digital literacy skills. Hauck and Warnecke (2012) argued that we could ready language teachers for the skills required for the future by offering them an online tutoring skills training with a focus on improving awareness of participatory literacy and social presence.

Participatory literacy involves "digital communicative literacy, which provides a foundation for online interactions, [...] and which facilitates the collaborative processes" (Pegrum, 2009; cited in Hauck & Warnecke, 2012). Hockly (2012) further contends that participatory literacy "involves being able to create and produce digital content; this in turn includes 'cultural/intercultural literacy' when working with international virtual teams". As such, participatory literacy is deemed necessary for full participation in the digital world. Social presence, on the other hand, is defined by Kehrwald (2008) as "the ability of the individual to demonstrate his/her availability for and willingness to participate in interaction" (Kehrwald, 2008) and is developed "through seeing and experiencing … how others interact with one another and how others react to their personal efforts to cultivate a social presence" (Kehrwald, 2010, p.47).

In order to foster the development of these two skills, i.e. the skills needed to fully participate online and to demonstrate availability and willingness to participate, Hauck and Warnecke (2012) developed an online tutoring skills training. For the design of the training, they drew on "Hoven's (2006) 'experiential modeling approach' where the tools and processes the tutors were expected to use in their teaching were experienced beforehand from a learner's point of view" (p.102) and on Allwright and Hanks' (2009) understanding of exploratory practice in which the learners (teachers) and the tutors are considered as colleagues helping each other explore and learn from their own practices.

The training was originally developed for practicing teachers teaching in online environments and it was clearly structured around five weeks of study with three tasks to be completed each week. As further explained in the methods section, in the present study, an adapted version of the online tutoring skills training by Hauck and Warnecke (2012) was implement in a blended learning context to equip pre-service English language teachers with the skills they would need in their future careers. The training was further supported with an environment for extended practice and production in the skills gained.

This study focused on online interaction and exchange in which pre-service language teachers interacted with each other by using online networks for the purpose of professional development. In other words, the practicum course was designed in a blended-learning environment in which face-to-face discussions and online exchanges were used simultaneously during the course.Within this context, the guiding questions of the present study were:

1. How do the pre-service English language teachers react to the implementation of online tools used in a practicum course in a blended-learning environment?

2. What are the pre-service English language teachers' opinions towards the integration of online tasks into the face-to-face environment of the practicum course?

Research Methods

This study adopts a qualitative approach to research, which stresses "the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.10). Qualitative research is sometimes criticized to lack rigour and objectivity, yet as Richards (2003) states "qualitative inquiry is anything but a soft option – it demands rigour, precision, systematicity and careful attention to detail" (2003, p.6). Epistemologically, the study takes an interpretivist stance in order to explore the subjective meanings of the participants in a context within which "knowledge is 'constructed not discovered', is 'multiple not single' and cannot "ever be simply '*dis*-covered'" (Stainton-Rogers, 2006, p.80).

The study is a descriptive case study in that it aims to document a naturally occurring implementation of a blended learning situation to provide an in-depth understanding of the reflections of pre-service teachers (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). Yin (2003) commented that a case study approach is especially suitable where contextual conditions are highly relevant. This study is also an opportunistic case study as the case was the most accessible (Creswell, 2007) and provided the highest opportunity to learn (Stake, 2005) because one of the researchers was the tutor of the courses at the time when the introduction of the online training was feasible. While the main aim of a case study is to focus on the particular context of the case (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003), the findings of the study can be used for naturalistic generalizations (Stake, 1995) where other researchers or practitioners can compare their own experience with the one presented here.

Although the data was collected over two semesters (fall and spring) as part of two related practicum courses, the instruction provided in both semesters is perceived as a single case because the spring semester course acted as a continuation of the fall semester and participation to the online training during the fall semester was a prerequisite for the spring semester. Moreover, the online components evolved with continuous interaction and consultation with the participants; i.e. changes were made to meet participant needs and expectations based on prolonged feedback through journal entries, comments on the discussions and face-to-face interactions. Throughout the case, especially between the two semesters, the number of teacher candidates and tutors as well as the nature of the tasks changed as explained in the subsequent sections, and at times whole class discussions had to be divided into group discussions to allow deeper engagement with the content. Each of these changes could have had an effect on the dynamics of the online community at various stages of the study. Therefore, we do not attempt to compare the data from two semesters, but rather to describe and explore the participants' experience and engagement throughout the two semesters.

We also acknowledge the potential influence of our participation and our changing tutor roles in the online environment on the participants' perception of the online context and thereby on their experience. In our analysis, we have been cautious of any willingness on the part of the pre-service teachers to be 'a good research participant' and tried to observe and reflexively interpret the effects of our presence and participation on participant reflections.

Participants and the Case Context

The participants of this study were pre-service English language teachers from the English Language Teaching (ELT) department of an English-medium state university in Istanbul. Pre-service teachers with an age range of 20 to 22 took their practicum course as fourth-year students in their teacher education programme. All of the participants in this study were graduates of teacher training high schools. They were all considered to be highly motivated pre-service teachers. The participants formed a homogeneous group in terms of their educational background, pre-service instructional experience and English proficiency level. They had all learnt English in classroom settings and had been exposed to formal training. Prior to commencing their ELT studies, the participants had all completed the English foundation programme of the university for one academic year and met the minimum English language proficiency requirement on the university's English proficiency test.

In the ELT department in which this study was conducted, students are provided with a foundation in theoretical and applied areas through courses in English linguistics and literature, teaching of grammar and the four skills, first and second language acquisition, teaching young children, syllabus design, language testing, and foreign language teaching methodology to prepare them to teach English at primary, secondary and tertiary level.

The ELT department also offers courses such as school experience and practice teaching in selected private and state schools. Apart from the practice teaching, the pre-service teachers also meet for a two-hour seminar course once a week, taught by the university supervisor, to share their experiences in the cooperating primary, secondary and high schools. The seminar classes aim to help pre-service language teachers make connections between the course materials and the classes they observe and teach.

Data for this study was collected during the fall and spring semesters of 2012-2013. Forty-two pre-service language teachers took the course in the fall semester and twenty-five pre-service language teachers enrolled in the practicum course in the spring semester. All teacher candidates taking the courses in both semesters gave informed consent to participate in the study and their names have been anonymized for analysis purposes. All participant comments in this paper are reported verbatim.

All of the spring semester participants had taken the fall semester course and thus had participated in the fall semester. Both the fall and the spring semesters included a face-to-face component in which the pre-service language teachers shared their practicum experiences and reflected on their teaching performance. One of the researchers was the tutor for the face-to-face component for both semesters.

The Online Component

The focus of this study concerns the data collected in relation to the online component of the courses. During the fall semester, the online component constituted the introduction of an online training developed and offered by Hauck and Warnecke (2012), which focused on the facilitation and improvement of online tutoring skills with special attention paid to social presence and participatory literacy skills. Hauck and Warnecke themselves participated in the online platform as tutors, as well as the researchers, acting as facilitators. For the spring semester, the online component was not structured as a training environment per se, but rather as a platform where participants could have extended practice in online tutoring skills and the use of various Web 2.0 tools in online teaching contexts.

We used the open-source Learning Management System (LMS) *Canvas* by Instructure (http://www.instructure.com/) as the learning platform for the online components in both semesters. The platform was easy to use and did not require much technical knowledge neither to set it up nor to run it. The participants' instructional technology skills were varied and thus usability was a main concern. Accessed via a menu on the left-hand side of the web page, the platform offers a discussion board, personal pages, syllabus, quizzes and a synchronous videoconference tool. It also has a course analytics page, which provides both overall and individual quantitative course data. In addition to introducing the participants to the active use of an LMS, several other freely available Web 2.0 tools were included in the tasks. Some of these were:

- audio and/or video recoding (recording within *Canvas* and www.voxopop/com)

- screen recording (www.screenr.com)

- story creation (www.storyjumper.com)

- online posters (www.glogster.com)

- onlinesmartboard (http://express.smarttech.com/)

- synchronous teaching environment (http://bigbluebutton.org/)

    -     other tools of interest (websites, blogs, video and presentation creation tools including www.goanimate.com and www.prezi.com)

The activities in both semesters were designed with a task-based online learning format. A task is an activity "designed for learners … to share ideas and opinions and to collaborate towards the accomplishment of a goal" (Pica, Kanagy & Falodun, 1993). The online training for the fall semester was designed around five topics, which were 1. Introductions and online icebreaker ideas, 2. Patterns of participation, 3. Forums and motivation, 4. Online smartboards, and 5. Task design. Tasks for each topic lasted two weeks during which participants carried out the tasks and discussions on the discussion boards within *Canvas*. Each topic was built around three tasks and had the same structure. The first stage for each task aimed to relate the topic to participants' earlier experiences, the second stage was planned to get participants engage in the theoretical background, research findings or practitioner recommendations, and at the third stage the participants were asked to reflect on their own experiences (Hauck & Warnecke, 2012). Therefore, the task stages for each topic was highly structured and based on activating prior knowledge, learning about the theory and reflecting on experience. While some tasks were more theoretical and the reflection consisted of contemplation on earlier experiences (Figure 1), others encouraged participants to create and reflect on an actual experience during the course (Figure 2).

Week 5 - Task 1

Week 5 - Task 1: Task design in online learning

This activity is designed to raise your awareness of the importance of task design in online learning. Learning in environments like our Canvas VLE supports and encourages different learning styles and processes from those which might happen when people learn in face-to-face classrooms or on their own. One of the central tasks of online tutors is to facilitate interaction and collaboration. Tutors can do this in two ways:

- in the way in which they design tasks
- in the way in which they moderate and foster interaction

1. Please have a look at the activities in our Canvas course. Can you find similarities in the way in which all of the tasks are designed?

2. Then establish and comment on the way in which we, your tutors/moderators, have facilitated this course.

- What were our main activities in running this course?
- Where and when were we most 'visible' to you as students?

3. In order to establish some guidelines for successful and effective task design, think about and summarize your answers to the following questions:

- Think back to week 1 when we asked you to suggest an icebreaker activity. Would you now, that you have studied this course for longer, suggested a different activity or change the one you suggested to fit the online context better?
- In your experience here in this course, what components should online tasks for a course like ours have?
- What do you think is a safe way of measuring the 'success' of an online activity?

Now post your thoughts in our forum discussions for week 5 - and don't forget to let us know which tasks worked well for you and which maybe did not work so well …

Looking forward to your thoughts and comments!

Further reading

Maria Kuteeva gives a well- focussed guideline (http://su-se.academia.edu/MariaKuteeva/Papers/1221791/THE_USE_OF_ONLINE_FORA_IN_LANGUAGE_TEACHING_THE_IMPORTANCE_OF_TASK_DESIGN) on aspects that need to be taken into consideration when designing collaborative language learning online. Maybe some of her findings can function as guidelines for you, too?

Figure 1. Fall Semester Task Design 1

Week 5 - Task 2

Week 5 - Task 2: Designing your own task

This is again the creative part of the weekly task. For this, we would like you to put some of the aspects you have been thinking about into practice. You have three options to choose from. Please do one of the following:

Option 1

- Have a look at these 6 favourite teaching online activities (http://www.emoderationskills.com/?p=299) by Lindsay Clandfield.
- Select one you like best.
- Produce an example using screenr / glogster / prezi (http://prezi.com/) / Bee Clip (http://edu.beeclip.com/) (a scrapbook tool) / slideshare (http://www.slideshare.net/) / youpublisher (http://www.youblisher.com/ or using any other way of presenting your realisation of one of these activities.

Option 2

- Go back to your suggestion for an icebreaker activity.
- Rework and adapt it.
- Write down the task instructions in the way you would post them online for your students.

Option 3

- Think of a new activity on a topic of your choice.
- Write down the task instructions as you would post them to your students online.
- If needs be, create/suggest any visual aid or other material, i.e. a link to a video/audio etc., for this activity which you'd provide the students with.

Finally, bring your example to our final online synchronous meeting and present it there to us.

Very keen to see your example activities. :-)

Figure 2. Fall Semester Task Design 2

The online component for the spring semester was a venue for experimentation, creation and discussion. There were three topics each to be completed over a period of three weeks. The topics were 1. Exploring Web 2.0 tools, 2. Job interviews, and 3. Animated stories. All topics incorporated trying out a new tool to create a material for language teaching purposes and, in the case of the second topic, recording a job interview and then reflecting on the effects of recording learners for language teaching purposes. The participants were also allowed to start their own discussion threads independent of the three topics presented to them in which they shared ideas for teaching including lesson planning and classroom management. Task design for the spring term was production oriented. There were mainly two stages to task design. During the first stage, the topic or a variety of Web 2.0 tools were presented and the participants were encouraged to experience using the tool and to produce an activity or material. For the second stage, the participants were asked to reflect and comment on each other's productions and reflect on their uses in language learning contexts (Figure 3).

TASK III - Create an online story

Dear all,

This is the final task of our course. In this task, we will ask you to

1. create an online story for young learners (6-9 years old),

2. share your story with us by posting the link in the discussions,

3. discuss a) the differences and similarities between asking students to write/create a story using pen and paper and doing it online; b) the ways in which you can use these tools with your students.

Here are two tools that you can choose from:

1. http://goanimate.com/videomaker (http://goanimate.com/videomaker)

This is a great tool to make animated videos. You can either choose the quick video maker and add dialogues to existing templates or choose the full video maker to create your own scenes and even characters. To make your characters speak, you can record your own voice or just write it in and use the text-to-speech technology. Here is a quick video explaining what you can do with it.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QjTENGaoE0&feature (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QjTENGaoE0&feature)

▷

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QjTENGaoE0&feature)

2. http://www.storyjumper.com/ (http://www.storyjumper.com/)

If you do not want animations and sound, but want to create a simple story book, this is the tool for you. It allows you to create a story book with a great choice of props to choose from - lots of objects and different backgrounds. You can build a book from scratch or personalise other books online. The "help" menu on top is very useful and explains all you need to know.

On both websites you need to create an account and sign in before you can save and share your work.

Looking forward to reading and watching your stories :)

Have fun!

Figure 3. Spring Semester Task Design

Data Collection Techniques

Case studies collect "*multiple sources of information* (e.g. observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case *description* and case-based themes" (Creswell, 2007, p.73, italics in original). In the ensuing analysis, participants' perspectives about the online component are reported based on the data obtained from eight journal entries (one after each topic; five in the fall semester and three in the spring semester) and the participants' reflections in the online discussions throughout both the fall and the spring semesters.

Methods of Data Analysis

A qualitative in-depth analysis of the data was conducted drawing on grounded theory principles laid out by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and thematic analysis for case studies as explained by Stake (1995). Grounded theory analysis begins by the identification of salient categories and then constantly looking for other confirming or contradictory examples of the categories by constant comparison method. Stake (1995) describes four stages of data analysis. Categorical aggregation is the first stage where the researcher looks for instances in the data that represent issue-relevant meanings. In the second stage, direct interpretation, the researcher tries to make sense of each instance without looking for multiple instances. Following this, the third stage, pattern establishment, involves establishing relationships between categories and finally the fourth stage, naturalistic generalizations, enables the readers to draw conclusions from the case.

Following these principles, initially, both researchers individually coded and looked for salient themes constantly trying to make sense of the data and checking for examples that confirms or disconfirms the

initial coding. This was followed by a cross-comparison of the themes coded by each researcher to obtain recurrent themes and finally drawing conclusions from the case.

Analysis

Before embarking on an explanation of the emerging themes, for descriptive purposes, it is perhaps useful to provide an outline of the amount of engagement with the online environment. To that end, Table 1 represents the number of pages viewed during the fall and spring semesters. Fall semester page views were highest during the first two weeks of the course reaching 1800 pages, and then dropping down to 700 pages towards the end of the semester. On the other hand, page views in the spring semester reached 1000 pages, with highest page views towards the middle and end of the semester. The figures indicate a high level of interest in the online platform in terms of logging in and viewing the pages. However, it would be presumptuous to draw any conclusions on the reasons for the fluctuations in page views given the data analyzed for and the scope of this paper because the fluctuations might have been due to changes in the number of participants, the nature of the tasks and the content, and the number of tutors as the semesters developed; hence, due to changes in the dynamics of the community, or simply in relation to factors irrelevant to the course, such as students' workload throughout the year.

Table 1
Number of Page Views

Fall semester – 42 pre-service teachers	Spring semester – 25 pre-service teachers
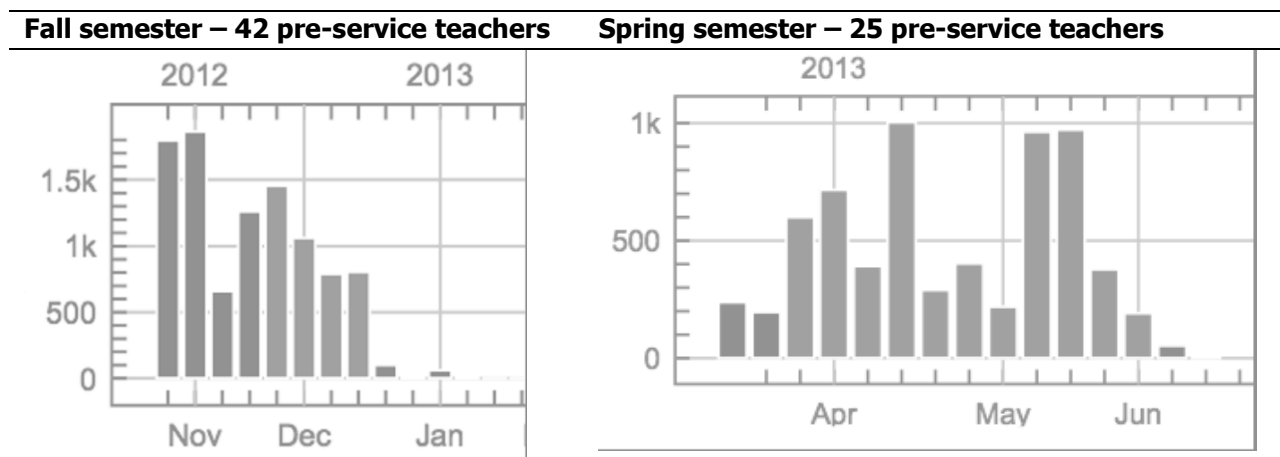
Thematic Analysis of Participant Reflections

Following the qualitative analysis of the data in order to explore participants' perspectives on the integration of an online component to the existing face-to-face practicum course and their opinions on the tasks used, five recurring themes emerged. These are presented in Table 2 below. Each of these themes is explained and exemplified in the following sections.

Table 2
Recurring Themes

1. Web 2.0 tools	4. Participation
2. Workload	5. Task design
3. Group versus whole class discussion	

Web 2.0 tools

For both semesters, participants were pleased with the fact that they were introduced to Web 2.0 tools and given the chance to develop language teaching materials using these tools. The online platform, i.e. Canvas as the LMS, was in itself a point of interest as the participants were well aware of the increasing use of these systems in secondary schools, especially in private ones. Below are the comments of two participants, at different times of the year, explaining their awareness of the need to use Web 2.0 tools in their future careers and their enthusiasm in learning about the tools.

> *"In week 1, what I find most useful was "sharing an icebreaker idea" because I think that as a prospective teacher it will be useful for me in the near future. I can use them ... in forums like this if I become a teacher in a private school because the usage of forums like canvas, moodle etc. is very common in private schools." (Fatma G., Fall, Journalentry 1)*

> *"The best thing I learned was amazing web tools that I can make use of in my future career. ... As teaching with webtools is the latestf ashion at schools, I would create activities with different tools. For example, creating a story online with a new web tool was amazing. I would have used it in my officials as main activity if I had known it before." (Zehra Y., Spring, Journalentry 3)*

In the extracts above, Fatma G. comments on one of the tasks in the fall semester, the topic of which was "sharing an icebreaker idea" that could be used online. By their final year, pre-service teachers were well informed about such activities to be used in face-to-face classrooms yet face-to-face activities cannot easily be transformed to online contexts. Zehra Y., on the other hand, shares her eagerness to develop teaching materials online and to be able to use them not just in online contexts, but also in face-to-face settings.

Workload

Another theme that ran over both semesters was workload. For the fall term, the requirements of the online tutoring skills training, specifically the amount of material the students needed to engage with, the number of tasks they had to complete and their participation in the discussion forum, was the main contributing factor to workload.

> *"I would be very happy if there were fewer tasks. ... This is because it is really hard to catch up with it." (Zehra Y., Fall, Forum entry, Topic 1)*

> *"At first, it was easy to follow the discussions, and I was really eager to do it, but then the messages kept coming and coming, then I felt that I was lost. And I started not to be able to keep up with the messages, and missed many of them. ... However, no matter how much more I want to participate in the discussions, I only have 1 or 2 days to visit*

> *here and read the messages. … This is my last year as the rest of my friends, and we have lots to do right now: we have our observations in high schools and primary schools (practicum), some of us (including myself) are working part time, we are taking tests that are required forgetting hired, and I'm also taking open university courses." (Zeynep K, Fall, Journal entry 1)*

The extracts above indicate that while Zehra Y. expresses her wish for fewer tasks to reduce workload, Zeynep K.'s concern is focused on not being able to engage with and participate in the discussions fully. Her comment is from the beginning of the fall semester, where there were forty-two students enrolled in the system. With the novelty effect, participation was high, which made it really time-consuming to read and respond to all or most forum contributions. The second part of Zeynep K.'s comment reflects the busy life of a senior undergraduate student with a variety of commitments as part of their degree and extra-curricular concerns. This latter concept of workload was highly relevant especially for the spring semester implementation of *Canvas*. Although workload for the online component was considerably reduced, some students, e.g. Filiz B. and Mehmet T., still found it difficult to balance the load for the online component and the face-to-face component in addition to other life concerns. These are exemplified in the extracts below.

> *"The worst thing [about the online component] is it really increased the load of the lesson. It became overwhelming. … We have already been doing an intense internship programme. Also, we have other classes and right now we are in job hunting process. Thinking all of these, canvas made [code of the practicum course] overwhelming." (Filiz B., Spring, Journal entry 3)*

> *"[code of the practicum course] is a very demanding course. … Using Canvas is a nice idea, yet ...There are too many other things to do apart from Canvas." (Mehmet T., Spring, Journal entry 3)*

Group versus whole class discussion

Another salient feature of participant reflections directly follows from the previous theme in that in order to reduce the workload caused by the time required to read and respond to the discussion posts, the participants were allocated to smaller discussion groups for the last three topics during the fall semester. The participants were divided into three randomly selected groups each with a separate discussion thread. This received both positive and negative reactions.

> *"I just want to thank you that you understand our workload, and try to help us by grouping us for the discussions." (Zeynep K., Fall, Journal entry 2)*

> *"It was definitely different than the whole class discussions as, now, I can read each of my group-mates' posts. I can actually follow the discussions, and share my ideas with them." (Zeynep K., Fall, Journal entry 3)*

> *"I think as a hindsight that the whole class discussions was better. That is because now there are only a few posts in my group. Everybody did not participate contrary to original purpose in setting groups. I enjoy reading others' posts. Therefore I was disappointed when few participated. But I should admit that this whole thing turned out to be less time consuming, though." (Yigit A., Fall, Journal entry 2)*

As the extracts above indicate, the idea of making smaller discussion groups did help reduce the workload, especially for pre-service teachers like Zeynep K., who wanted to engage in all the posts by reading and reflecting on them and adding her own comments. Her appreciation of the change is clearly visible in the comments she made at separate occasions. However, the move was not always welcome, particularly in one of the groups where there was less active participation. Not surprisingly, each participant's pattern of participation was different; while some preferred to read more and write less, others enjoyed being more vocal. In groups where there were more 'quiet' students, lack of inviting and intriguing comments caused the discussions to die off despite tutor efforts to encourage participation and stir discussion. Consequently, pre-service teachers like Yigit A. were put at a disadvantage.

Participation

As one of the topics of the fall semester was online participation, there was a wealth of data in which participants reflected on their participation patterns. Throughout the course, not all students actively participated and engaged in the discussions at all times. This was an expected outcome given potentially different interests and communication styles of the participants in learning environments. In terms of passive participation, where participants read, but not contributed to discussions, three reasons were put forward. One of these was a lack of a 'need' to contribute and the notion that feeling involved did not necessarily require active participation. Zeynep K., who was actually one of the active participants, expressed this idea as in the following extract.

> I think I could read my friends' posts, and felt that I was involved in the discussion even though I didn't feel the need to write a response to many of them. (Zeynep K., Fall, Journal entry 2)

Another idea that participants' put forth relates to 'ease' and perhaps their already established patterns of participation and ways of indicating online presence in social media where much of the interaction involves short comments and expressing 'likes' by clicking on a 'like button'.

> I rarely participate forums, but i read a lot when searching for a piece of information. sometimes i want to thank to the writer of that topic but the forum requires to be signed up. Thats why i always want a "like button" which, i believe, makes things a lot easier :) (Mehmet T., Fall, Forum entry, Topic 2)

Finally, when learners participated in online discussions, they wished to be 'noticed' and 'valued', which happened when others commented on their posts. As expressed by Dilek S. and Merve C. below, platforms that are not 'sincere' and the fear of 'going unnoticed' and 'not being liked' might become the primary reasons for reduced active participation in the discussions within the learning management system.

> "When I partipate in discussions, I feel valued when someone comment on my ideas. I think that they read my ideas and try to understand me." (Dilek S., Spring, Journal entry 2)

> "The only place where I sometimes share something and participate is facebook. Even in facebook I seldomly share something or comment on something. In general I like the comments of others, but do not post a comment. there are many reasons behind it: I do not find these types of platforms sincere, but the main reason that even I myself do not accept can be 'I have the concern of going unnotticed, not being able to catch the attention of others and not being liked." (Merve C.,Fall, Forum entry, Topic 2)

Task design

The final theme that emerged in the analysis of the data was related to online task design. As explained in the methods section, the online component for the course had different task designs in the fall and spring semesters. Each topic in the fall semester was clearly structured around three tasks, the focus of which were, consecutively, activating earlier experiences, engaging in theoretical background and production and reflection. Therefore, the output for the first two tasks was discussions while the third also included a concrete output produced by experimenting with an online tool. Participants seemed to prefer the first and the third tasks more as they supported free expression of earlier experiences and production and did not require prior theoretical reading. Zeynep K.'s comments on these ideas were as follows.

> *And I think the first task of that week worked the best, as we didn't need to get informed on something first to share our response. We had the info, and we wrote it right away. But, that doesn't mean that the rest of the tasks didn't work. I especially like tasks 3 where we need to produce something. In those tasks, we learned new tools, and had a meaningful reason to use them. (Zeynep K., Fall, Journal entry 3)*

Furthermore, some participants acknowledged the fact that different learners would prefer different types of tasks. For example, for Deniz G.: "*some of us like writing or some of us are in favour of making projects*" (Fall, Journal entry 2). Ozkan L. was another participant who expressed similar views. For him, it was necessary for online tasks to be engaging and to make students feel independent. Yet he also accepted that 'a fierce consolidating discussion' could be as attractive.

> *To encourage students online learning the tasks should be engaging, I mean Students need to feel independent and at the same time they need to have some fun. ... For example, collaborative group works on online projects, ... writing and academic essay together, going over articles related to relevant issues. ... sometimes, even feeling that you are in a fierce, consolidating discussion that will add your bulk of knowledge could be a trigger for students to go online and share their ideas, there. (Ozkan L., Fall, Forum entry, Topic 5)*

On the other hand, the spring semester tasks did not involve much theoretical reading. The main focus in these tasks was concrete productions using Web 2.0 tools and reflections on the implementations of the tools in language learning settings. Hence, the tasks were highly related to the participants' immediate contexts. The spring semester also allowed participants to start their own discussion threads and share useful ideas and web links. The quotes from Sema P. and Burcu Z. below reflect the positive effect of relevance on their willingness to participate.

> *"The discussions and tasks which are more related to our job/practicum make it easier for us to participate. ... I think I participate in Canvas more often because the topics are more related to our field and I feel happy to share my experiences and learn from others."* (Sema P., Spring, Journal entry 2)

> *"During the second semester canvas was more meaningful and practical. Whenever I searched for an idea, I checked it because my friends and tutors shared some useful links."* (Burcu Z., Spring, Journal entry 3)

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore pre-service English language teachers' reflections on the integration of an online component in two fourth-year face-to-face practicum courses as part of an English Language Teaching undergraduate program in Istanbul. The findings represented participant reflections under five themes: Web 2.0 tools, workload, group versus whole class discussions, participation and task design.

It is now widely accepted that the inclusion of new technologies in our lives requires the inclusion of new skills, i.e. information, media and technology skills, in education programs (Hockly, 2012). It is not only the students who need to become competent in digital literacies, but the teachers also need to use new tools and teach in online environments. One of the findings in our study indicated that this need was widely acknowledged by the pre-service teachers and their willingness to learn about the use of new technologies in teaching was high. This means that the introduction of digital literacy skills and Web 2.0 tools are no longer optional, but they should become an essential component of language teacher training programs.

Another finding of this study was related to participant comments on their workload. It became apparent that blended courses should be carefully designed specifically in terms of the workload because participating in online communities and using Web 2.0 tools and creating materials with such tools might take much more time than the tutors can envisage. An iterative design would perhaps be suitable where workload is adjusted based on the needs and skills ofeach student group as well as the feedback obtained from previous groups. Moreover, introduction of such platforms should perhaps take place in the earlier years of the undergraduate program where students are less distracted with other life concerns. As Goldman (2011) suggests, the demanding workload of online education can also be reduced by being more flexible in choosing a convenient time and day for students for discussion tasks. Student retention and learning outcomes can be accomplished through systematic announcements, innovative tasks, and group projects (Goldman, 2011).

A solution to the increased difficulty in participating in the discussions due to a high number of posts was to divide the participants into smaller groups. While participants who were then able to participate at a deeper level welcomed this move, it created uneasiness in groups with little active participation. This indicated that any intervention to the online group would probably change the dynamics of the online community affecting the efficiency of the discussions. Hence, tutors should carefully observe the dynamics within the community and be flexible enough to make changes as necessary.

However, this might increase the workload of the tutor further. As Peachy (2013) contends, "If the tutor is unhappy, or feels overwhelmed or exploited then the course is unlikely to be successful, however well you may have designed your materials" (p.72). Here, it is important to note that in addition to the pre-service teachers, it was also difficult for the tutors to monitor and facilitate the discussions. The availability of four tutors during the fall semester and two tutors during the spring semester helped reduce the workload as we were able to notify each other when we would be available or unavailable as online tutors and hence share the workload. Where this is not possible, an alternative would be to assign different aspects of the tutor role, e.g. facilitator, critical reflector, summarizer, to different participants in the course (Vonderwell & Sachariah, 2005). The impact of such distribution of roles on the group dynamics and participation patterns should also be considered. As Vonderwell and Sachariah (2005) argued: "It becomes essential to understand the implications of online roles and tasks for learner participation, specifically in the context of a course that relies on interdependence, participation, and interaction" (pp.222-223).

Although one of the aims of the online tutoring skills training was to allow pre-service language teachers explore participatory literacy skills (Hauck & Warnecke, 2012; Pegrum, 2009), some of the participant comments indicated their preference for passive participation, i.e. observing the participation of others. They indicated a feeling of involvement even though they did not contribute to the discussion themselves. Sutton (2001) and Williams (2004) found similar results and argued that 'absorbing' and 'processing' the interaction among others might as well lead to learning. Yet, Vonderwell and Sachariah (2005) concluded that "online presence and participation is essential for motivation and ongoing dialogue among course participants" (p.225). Therefore, the expected idea of participation should be clearly identified and explained to the participants.

Online tutors should also need to be aware that there could be other reasons for silence and lack of participation. As our findings suggest, one such reason could be worries about not being valued and paid attention to, while another could be participants' already established participation patterns in social media which are limited to expressing likes using a 'like button' or adding short comments. Given that collaboration and reflection are invaluable resources in learning contexts, tutors need to monitor and acknowledge learner participation carefully. Moreover, tutors' attention alone would perhaps not be sufficient, but learners would need to be noticed and valued by their peers, too. To that end, tutors should encourage learners to find ways of expressing their understanding of their friends' comments and to engage in higher order thinking skills that foster engaging dialogue among the learners.

One way to encourage learners to actively participate is a thoughtful design of tasks. The findings in this study illustrated that the participants saw the real value of the online component in tasks where they could produce and share their output, which was not feasible in the face-to-face component. The participants also stated that they enjoyed sharing their individual experiences online, potentially because of limited time allocated for sharing of individual experiences in the classroom due to time constraints of the face-to-face setting. However, the participants were not as enthusiastic about the theoretical readings for the online course. One interpretation of this could be their perception of theoretical reading and discussion to be part of the face-to-face component or simply the workload, as discussed earlier. Finally, participant comments demonstrated the importance of immediate relevance of the online content. Peachy (2013) underscores the importance of task design in triggering deeper engagement. Tasks, especially the ones that require theoretical discussions, rather than production of materials, need to be designed and monitored to stimulate "fierce, consolidating discussion", as one of the participants described. Peachy (2013) also recommends unity and continuity between the online and face-to-face components of the blended learning, using social interactivity as the core element for the design of online tasks, encouraging autonomy and reflection, being time realistic and being prepared to change based on the lessons learned and the developments in technology and materials.

Conclusion

The online tutoring skills training in our study enhanced pre-service language teachers' awareness towards the active use of the online platform; while the design and topic of the tasks affected the level of motivation among them. There was a strong relationship between task design and maintenance of participation.

The experiential learning tasks used in the blended-learning environment of the practicum course offered pre-service teachers opportunities to make meaning from direct experience. They were actively involved in the experience, reflected on it and shared their ideas with their peers. As reflected in the words of one of the pre-service teachers, Zeynep, four words capture the nature of this learning experience clearly: "Learn, Comment, Produce and Share". The participants also frequently benefited

from their decision-making and problem-solving skills to generate new ideas and implement them into their practicum schools.

Experiential activities are among the most powerful teaching and learning tools for most educators in the field. It is obvious that reflection has a prominent place in the experiential learning process in which pre-service teachers learn how to apply online tools to their own teaching practices in real classes.

Further research is needed on the interrelationship between task design and participation in blended-learning settings designed for the practicum course. Future qualitative studies on perceptions and experiences of pre-service teachers in different online environments would also be beneficial to further our understanding of participation in such settings, including motivation and group dynamics.

Acknowledgements

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZ

Öğretmen eğitiminde öğrettiğinin üstüne düşünme becerilerinin geliştirilmesi çok önemlidir (Farrell, 2007; Freese, 2006; Lougran, 2002). Öğretmen adaylarının, alan deneyimleri hakkında konuşup deneyimlerini paylaşarak bu deneyimleri bilgiye dönüştürmeleri gerekmektedir. Bilgisayar teknolojileri günlük hayatımızın olduğu gibi eğitim ve öğretim ortamlarının da ayrılmaz bir parçası haline gelirken, öğrencilere çeşitli internet kaynak ve araçları hakkında sadece bilgi vermek yeterli olmamakta; yeni demokratik öğrenme ortamlarını en etkili şekilde kullanabilmek için gereken okuryazarlık becerilerinin de desteklenmesi gerekmektedir (Hampel and Hauck, 2006). Hauck ve Warnecke (2012)'ye göre katılımcı okur-yazarlık (Pegrum, 2009) ve sosyal bulunuşluk (Kehrwald, 2008 ve 2010) kavramları temel alınarak geliştirilmiş bir çevirimiçi öğretmenlik becerileri eğitimi ile dil öğretmenlerini gelecekte ihtiyaç duyacakları becerileri kullanmaya hazırlamak mümkündür.

Bu çalışmada mesleki gelişimleri için bir harmanlanmış öğrenme ortamına katılan öğretmen adaylarının çevirimiçi iletişim ve etkileşimleri incelenmiştir. Araştırmada şu sorulara yanıt aranmıştır:

1. Yabancı dil (İngilizce) öğretmen adaylarının okul deneyimi dersinde harmanlanmış öğrenme ortamında sunulan eğitim ve internet araçları hakkındaki görüşleri nelerdir?

2. Yabancı dil (İngilizce) öğretmen adayları yüz yüze yürütülen okul deneyimi derslerine dahil edilen çevirimiçi görev ve etkinlikler hakkında ne düşünmektedir?

Yöntem

Bu çalışmanın yöntemi tanımlayıcı durum çalışmasıdır (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). Çalışmada öğretmen adaylarının görüşlerinin derinlemesine araştırılması için çalışma gerçekleştirildiği sırada gerçekleşmekte olan bir harmanlanmış öğrenme ortamı betimlenmektedir.

Çalışmaya Istanbul'da İngilizce eğitim öğretim yapan bir devlet üniversitesinde İngilizce Öğretmenliği bölümünde okumakta olan dördüncü sınıf öğretmen adayları katılmıştır. Çalışma verileri adı geçen bölümdeki harmanlanmış öğrenme modeli ile sunulan okul deneyimi ve seminer dersleri kapsamında toplanmıştır. Veriler, özellikle bu derslerdeki çevirimiçi eğitime ilişkindir.

Hauck ve Warnecke (2012) tarafından geliştirilmiş olan çevirimiçi öğretmenlik becerileri eğitimi, güz döneminde sunulan çevirimiçi materyalin içeriğini oluşturmaktadır. Bu eğitimde öğretmen adaylarının sosyal bulunuşluk ve katılımcı okuryazarlık becerilerinin desteklenmesi ve geliştirilmesi amaçlanmaktadır. Bahar döneminde ise, çevirimiçi eğitim yönetim sistemi, öğretmen adaylarının çevirimiçi öğretmenlik becerileri eğitimi ile edindikleri bilgi ve becerileri kullanmaya devam edecekleri ve çeşitli internet araçlarını çevirimiçi öğrenme ortamlarında kullanımını deneyimleyebilecekleri bir platform olmuştur.

Hem güz hem de bahar dönemindeki etkinlikler göre odaklı öğrenme ilkeleri çerçevesinde geliştirilmiştir. Güz dönemi çevirimiçi öğretmenlik becerileri eğitimi beş konu etrafında tasarlanmıştır. Her konu üç etkinlikten oluşmuş ve her etkinlik önceki bilgilerin etkinleştirilmesi, bilgi edinme ve tecrübenin üstüne düşünme basamaklarından oluşmuştur. Bahar döneminde eğitimin çevirimiçi basamağı bir deneme, yaratma ve tartışma ortamı halinde sunulmuştur. Bahar dönemi içerisinde yaklaşık dokuz-on haftaya yayılan bir süreçte üç etkinlik tamamlanmıştır. Her etkinlik, dil eğitiminde kullanılabilecek yeni bir internet aracının keşfedilip denenmesi ve daha sonra bu deneyim üzerine fikir ve görüşlerin paylaşılmasından oluşmuştur.

Harmanlanmış eğitimde katılımcıların çevirimiçi uygulama hakkındaki görüşleri, uygulanan her etkinliğin ardından öğretmen adaylarının tuttuğu toplam sekiz günlük girdisi ve güz ve bahar dönemleri boyunca çevirimiçi tartışma panolarında yer alan tecrübe üzerine düşünme yoluyla elde edilen veriler ile incelenmiştir.

Verilerin nitel derinlemesine incelenmesinde gömülü (grounded) kuram (Strauss ve Corbin, 1998) ilkeleri ve Stake (1995) tarafından tanımlanan durum çalışmaları için tematik analiz ilkelerinden faydalanılmıştır.

Bulgular ve Tartışma

Bu çalışmanın amacı İngilizce Öğretmenliği bölümü dördüncü sınıf öğretmen adaylarının yüz yüze eğitime dahil edilen bir çevirimiçi öğrenme ortamı hakkındaki görüşlerinin araştırılmasıdır. Çalışma bulguları katılımcı görüşlerinin Web 2.0 araçları, iş yükü, grup ya da tüm sınıf tartışmaları, katılım ve görev tasarımı olmak üzere beş tema altında incelenebileceğini göstermiştir.

Çalışmada, öğretmen adayları, hem öğrenci hem de öğretmen olarak dijital okuryazarlık becerileri edinmeye ihtiyaçları olduğunu belirtmişler ve öğretme ortamlarında yeni teknolojilerin kullanımı konusunda öğrenme isteklerini ortaya koymuşlardır. Bu durum, yabancı dil eğitimi programlarında dijital okuryazarlık ve Web 2.0 araçlarının kullanımı konularında ilgili becerilerin kazandırılmasının isteğe bağlı olmaktan çıkıp bu programların vazgeçilmez bir parçası olması gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır.

Çalışmada elde edilen bir başka bulgu da katılımcıların iş yüküne ilişkindir. Harmanlanmış öğrenme ortamlarının özellikle gerektirdiği iş gücü, yani öğrencilerin ayırması gerekecek zaman göz önüne alınarak dikkatle yapılandırılması gerekmektedir çünkü çalışma bulgularında görüldüğü gibi çevirimiçi topluluklara katılma ve Web 2.0 araçlarını kullanma ve bu araçları kullanarak materyal geliştirme eğitimleri öngörülen zamandan çok daha fazlasını gerektirebilir. İş gücünün doğru şekilde değerlendirilmesinde yinelemeli bir tasarım ile eğitim her sunulduğunda öğrenci grubunun ihtiyaç ve becerilerinin göz önüne alınması ve önceki gruplardan elde edilen geri bildirimin yorumlanması oldukça önemlidir.

Bu çalışmada tartışma panosuna oldukça yüksek sayıda yeni giriş olması ile görüşleri takip etme ve katılımın zorlaşması öğretmen adayları tarafından karşılaşılan güçlüklerden biridir. Bu güçlüğün aşılmasında katılımcıların sınıf halinde değil de daha küçük gruplar halinde tartışmaları sürdürmesi ön görülmüş ve katılımcılar tartışmaların devamında üç gruba bölünmüştür. Yeni gruplama sonunda katılımcıların bir kısmı daha derin tartışmalara katılma fırsatı bulmuş ve bu düzenlemeyi memnuniyetle karşılamıştır. Ancak aktif katılımın düşük olduğu gruplarda bu yeni düzenleme huzursuzluk yaratmıştır. Buradan yola çıkarak çevirimiçi grup bir kere oluştuktan sonra yapılacak her türlü düzenlemenin dikkatle gerçekleştirilmesi gerektiğini söylemek mümkündür çünkü küçük değişiklikler çevimiçi topluluktaki dinamikleri değiştirebilmekte ve tartışmaların etkinliğini etkileyebilmektedir. Bu nedenle eğitmenler, yaşanacak güçlüklerin aşılması için değişikliklere her zaman açık olmalı, ancak bu değişiklikleri yaparken katılımcılar arasındaki dinamikleri de dikkatle gözlemlemelidirler.

Tartışmalarda sessiz kalma ve tartışmalara aktif olarak katılmamanın çeşitli sebepleri olabilmektedir. Bu çalışmada öne sürülen sebepler arasında değer verilmeme ve dikkate değer bulunmama konusundaki endişeler ile katılımcıların diğer sosyal medya araçlarındaki katılım eğilimlerini transfer etmeleri yer almıştır. Bu eğilimler kısa yorumlarda bulunma ve beğenileri sadece bir "beğen" butonuna tıklama ile ifade etmedir. Eğitmenler, öğretmen adaylarına arkadaşlarının katılımlarını anladıklarını göstermenin farklı yollarını bulmalarına yardımcı olmalı ve öğretmen adayları arasında üst bilişsel düşünme becerilerini destekleyici iletişimin gelişmesini desteklemelidir.

Öğretmen adaylarının aktif katılımını desteklemenin bir yolu görev ve etkinliklerin özenle tasarlanmasıdır. Mevcut çalışmada öğretmen adayları çevirimiçi ortamın asıl değerinin materyal üretebilme ve ürettikleri

paylaşabilme olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Öğretmen adayları ayrıca bireysel deneyimlerini de bu ortamda paylaşabilmekten memnun olmuşlar, ancak kuramsal bilgi edinmeye dayalı etkinlikler öğretmen adayları tarafından daha az ilgi görmüştür. Bu çalışmadaki katılımcı görüşleri ayrıca çevirimiçi içeriğin öğretmenlik deneyimleri ile bire bir ilintili olmasının önemi vurgulamaktadır.

Sonuç ve Öneriler

Bu çalışmada sunulan çevirimiçi öğretmenlik becerileri eğitiminin, öğretmen adaylarının çevirimiçi ortamlara aktif katılma konusundaki farkındalığını arttırdığı; görev ve etkinliklerin konu ve tasarımlarının katılım motivasyonunu etkilediği görülmüştür. Gelecek çalışmalarda, okul deneyimi dersi için harmanlanmış öğrenme ortamlarında görev tasarımı ve katılım arasındaki ilişkilerin incelenmesi faydalı olacaktır. Öğretmen adaylarının farklı çevirimiçi ortamlardaki deneyim ve görüşlerini inceleyecek nitel çalışmalar, bu ortamlarda öğrenci katılımı, motivasyon ve grup dinamikleri gibi konulardaki mevcut bilgileri derinleştirecektir.