Chapter 4
Perceptions of Students and Teachers about the Use of E-Learning / Sharing Portal in Educational Activities

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the perceptions of the students and the teachers of METU Development Foundation Schools about the use of e-learning / sharing portal technology in their educational activities. Their perceptions were investigated in terms of three aspects: effects of the use of this technology on their perceived motivation, the perceived usefulness, and the perceived ease of use of this technology. A central server was installed for setting up an e-learning / sharing portal environment. Microsoft SharePoint, which is a Sharing Portal Software, was used to access to the central server. The study was conducted in the form of action research. The data were collected from 6th and 7th grade students by using a questionnaire. In addition to the questionnaire with students, interviews were conducted with the teachers. Descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, and descriptive analysis methods were used to analyze the results. The findings of the study indicated that the students and the teachers perceived that e-learning / sharing portal technology is a useful and easy to use technology. It was found out that the students and the teachers are satisfied with advantages of the use of this new technology in their learning environment. Furthermore, the teachers and the students stated that using the system affected students' perceived motivation towards the educational activities positively.

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INTRODUCTION

Computers have been integrated into every part of our daily routine and education is inevitably one of those areas. The powerful features of computers make them become an important instructional technology tool. Computers could not be used effectively before the Internet because they lacked interconnection. Computers' significance, for various educational purposes both face-to-face and distance, improved after the introduction of the Internet. The use of the Internet as an instructional tool forced educators to rethink their ways of teaching and administering courses (Longe, Ogege, et al., 2005).

The World Wide Web (WWW) made e-learning a reality by the use of various multimedia elements such as images, sounds, animations, interactions, and communication technologies such as e-mail and instant messaging tools. The worldwide e-learning industry is estimated to be worth over €38 billion according to conservative estimates; even though in the European Union only about 20% of e-learning products are produced within the common-market. In 2006 nearly 3.5 million students were participating in online learning at institutions of higher education in the United States (Allen & Seaman, 2008). A range of new terms such as e-learning, online learning and virtual learning are being used interchangeably. The terms virtual learning or online learning now describe a time-independent and place-independent educational activity in an online learning environment. Time and place independent means that teachers and students are separated by time or space, and course content is delivered through some kind of course management system. Course management systems support the delivery of various multimedia resources and textual materials whenever and wherever it is convenient for them.

Many research studies have demonstrated that a student's active involvement in the learning process enhances learning. This process is often referred to as active learning (Benek-Rivera & Mathews, 2004). Active learning can be defined as "instructional activities involving students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing" (Bonwell & Eisen, 1991). Interactive instruction or "learning by doing" has been found to result in positive learning outcomes (Picciano, 2002). Because many new technologies and Web-based activities are interactive, online coursework has a potential to create environments where students actively engage with materials, learn by doing, and refine their understanding as they build new knowledge (Johnston, Killion et al. 2005). When students actively participate in knowledge construction working with ideas becomes more important than covering the curriculum (Scardamalia 2002).

Computer systems provide a lot of advantages for their users, but they cannot improve performance if they are not used (Davis, Bagozzi et al. 1989). According to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), whether an information system is used or not is mostly determined by its perceived usefulness and the perceived ease of use (Gefen and Keil 1998). Davis (1989), states that "people tend to use or not to use an application to the extent they believe it will help them perform their job better." Davis (1989) also notes that the TAM, based on perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and attitude, has been widely used to predict user acceptance and use.

As a virtual learning environment (VLE), an e-learning / sharing portal (Weller 2007) is a software system designed to support teaching and learning. It facilitates the e-learning process over the Internet and typically provides tools such as those for assessment, communication, uploading of content, return of student's work, administration of student groups, questionnaires, tracking tools, wikis, blogs, chats, forums, etc. There are various names used to identify e-learning systems: learning management system (LMS), course management system (CMS), learning content management system (LCMS), managed learning environment (MLE), learning support system (LSS), learning