INVESTIGATING DISTANCE EDUCATION STUDENTS' STUDY SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

Distance education, which is a planned way of teaching in which students and instructors are brought face to face in a classroom environment in several different ways by means of technology, has started to become widespread in many fields today. In distance education, students and instructors reside in different locations. Students can learn at their pace and control their learning path, content and load of what they have learned and evaluate it. However, they should adopt strategies for effective studying in order not to waste their time and efforts. Because study skills, motivation, time management, exam preparation and coping with exam stress have an impact on students' success. In this context, distance education students' study skills are foregrounded in today's widespread use of distance education. In accordance with this, this study aims to investigate some variables which are influential on the dimensions of distance education students' motivation, time management, exam preparation and coping with exam stress. A personal information form and the Study Skills scale were used for data collection. This study was designed in survey model and SPSS16.0 statistical package program was used for the statistical analyses of the research data. The research findings were discussed in line with the literature and some suggestions were presented for further research and researchers.

Keywords: **Distance education, student, studying, motivation**

INTRODUCTION

In today's information age of technological advances, there have been changes in education not only in Turkey but also in the world. The widespread use of internet technologies in the field of education both nationally and internationally is undeniable (Doolittle and Hicks, 2003).

In this context, distance education, which is a planned way of teaching in which students and instructors are brought face to face in a virtual classroom environment by means of technology, has become widespread in several fields today (Antalyalı, 2004). Distance education, which is carried out by means of communication technologies and especially the Internet, is a modern way of individualised education independent of time and place (Baturay and Bay, 2009). Instructors and students are physically separated from each other in distance education, which is a method of teaching in which communication and interaction between education planners and students are ensured from a specific center via various mediums and specially designed instruction units.

In distance education students can learn at their pace, control their learning path, content and load of what they have learned and evaluate it (Kaya, 2002; Kaya et al., 2004). However, students should adopt effective strategies of studying in order not to waste their time and efforts (Erdamar-Koç, 2010) because students are recommended not to study too hard but study effectively today (Baltaş, 2011).

Study skills, motivation, time management, exam preparation and ability to cope with stress are known to have an impact on students' success (Bay, Tuğluk and Gençdoğan, 2010). Distance education students usually learn by themselves, which requires motivation, skills of planning, regular and efficient studying and analysing learning materials (Teker, 2002). The research by Höçük (2011) highlights the importance of efficient studying in academic achievement and emphasizes quality over quantity. As also suggested by Erdamar-Koç (2010) many research studies (Agnew *et al.*, 1993; Chung &Yip 2002; Jones, Slate &Marini 1995) prove that using effective strategies and skills for studying contributes to academic performance.

Therefore, in today's education, distance education students' study skills have become essential. In line with this fact, this research was planned with the aim of investigating some variables which have an impact on the dimensions of distance education students' motivation, time management, exam preparation, the ability to cope with exam stress.

The research is expected to contribute to the literature and provide a perspective of study skills for individuals who are involved in distance education.

AIM OF THE RESEARCH

This research study aims to investigate distance education students' study skills. For this aim, distance education students' study skills which are influenced by the dimensions of motivation, time management, exam preparation and exam stress were studied in terms of some variables.

Research sub-problems:

- **Do distance education students' study skills differ in terms of gender?**
- **Do distance education students' study skills differ in terms of the type of high school of graduation?**
- **Do distance education students' study skills differ in terms of parental level of education?**
- **Is there a relationship between students' total study skills scale scores and the sub-dimension scores?**

METHOD

This section presents information about data collection, data analysis and the sample of the research, which was carried out in survey model.

Population and Sample

The research population consists of distance education students enrolled at the department of Computer Education and Instructional Technology in İstanbul University. The research sample, on the other hand, is composed of 106 students in their second and third year in 2012-2013 academic year.

Data Collection

The Study Skills scale developed by Bay, Tuğluk and Gençdoğan (2004) and a Personal Information Form prepared by the researcher were used for data collection.

The Study Skills scale is composed of 26 five-point Likert type questions. It includes sub-dimensions of motivation, time management and exam preparation-exam stress.

The reliability coefficient of the scale is .89 in the development process of the scale. However, it was calculated as .81 for this study.

Data Analysis

SPSS19.0 package program was used for the statistical analyses of the data which were collected to answer the rquestions in line with the aim of the research (Büyüköztürk, 2003). Independent t test, Kruskal Wallis and Mann Whitney U tests were used for data analyses.

Pearson Moment-Product Correlation Coefficient was used for the analysis of the relationship between dependent variables. In statistical analyses, the significance level was taken as .05.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings and interpretations regarding the sub-problems in accordance with the aim of the research.

The research findings related to the sub-problem of gender are given in Table: 1.

Table: 1
Results of the Independent Group t Test Performed to Determine Whether Study Habits Scores Differ or Not in Terms of Gender

Scores	Groups	N	X	SS	SH_x	t test		
						t	Sd	p
Motivation	Female	54	3,356	0,595	0,080	2,114	104	,037
	Male	52	3,118	0,562	0,078			
Time Management	Female	54	2,904	0,563	0,076	1,067	104	,288
	Male	52	2,791	0,531	0,073			
Exam Preparation and Stress	Female	54	2,953	0,693	0,094	1,107	104	,083
	Male	52	3,173	0,587	0,081			
Total scale	Kız	54	3,111	0,532	0,072	0,536	104	,491
	Erkek	52	3,047	0,407	0,056			

As shown in Table: 1, as a result of the Independent Group t Test performed to find out whether study habits scores differ or not in terms of gender, it was observed that there was a significant difference ($p<0.05$) in the sub-dimension of motivation in favour of female students.

On the other hand, there was no difference in terms of gender in other sub-dimensions ($p>0,05$).

The research findings related to the sub-problem of high school of graduation are given in Table 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

Table: 2
Results of the Kruskal Wallis Test Performed to Determine Whether Total Study Habits Scores Differ or Not in Terms of High School of Graduation

Scores	Groups	N	Mean Rank	Chi-square	Sd	p
Total Scale Score	Vocational-technical high school	90	55,02	4,271	2	0,118
	High school	10	54,90			
	Anatolian-science high school	6	28,33			
	Total	106				

As shown in Table 2, as a result of the Kruskal Wallis test performed to find out whether total study habits scores differ or not in terms of high school of graduation, it was observed that there was no significant statistical difference (X^2= 4271, p>0,05). Although there was no significant difference in total scores, the sub-dimensions were checked to see whether there was a difference or not in terms of type of high school of graduation. The related results are presented in Table 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Table: 3
Results of the Kruskal Wallis Test Performed to Determine Whether Exam Preparation and Stress Scores Differ or Not in Terms of High School of Graduation

Scores	Groups	N	Mean Rank	Chi-square	Sd	p
Exam Preparation and Stress Scores	Vocational-technical high school	90	52,54	15,648	2	0,000
	General high school	10	81,90			
	Anatolian-science high school	6	20,50			
	Total	106				

According to Table: 3, as a result of the Kruskal Wallis test performed to find out whether exam preparation and stress scores differ or not in terms of high school of graduation, a significant statistical difference (X^2=15,648, P<0.01) was observed between the groups. Mann Whitney U test was also performed to determine between which groups this difference was.

Table: 4
Results of the Mann Whitney-U Test Performed to Determine Whether Exam Preparation and Stress Scores Differ or Not in Terms of High School of Graduation

Type of high school	*N*	*S.T.*	*S.O.*	*U*	*z*	P
Vocational-technical high school	90	47,66	4289,00	194,00	-2,953	,003
General high school	10	76,10	761,00			
Total	100					
Vocational-technical high school	90	50,39	4535,00	100,00	-2,584	,010
Anatolian or science high school	6	20,17	121,00			
Total	96					
General high school	10	11,30	113,00	2,00	-3,073	,002
Anatolian or science high school	6	3,83	23,00			
Total	16					

As shown in Table: 4, the results of Mann Whitney-U test performed to determine whether exam preparation and stress scores differ or not in terms of high school of graduation are as follows: The scores of general high school graduates were found to be higher than the scores of vocational-technical high school graduates (P< 0,05). The scores of vocational-technical high school graduates were found to be higher than the scores of anatolian-science high school graduates (P< 0,05).

Table: 5
Results of the Kruskal Wallis Test Performed to Determine Whether Motivation Scores Differ or Not in Terms of High School of Graduation

Scores	Groups	N	Mean Rank	Ch-square	Sd	p
Motivation	Vocational-technical high school	90	56,57	5,989	2	0,050
	General high school	10	37,10			
	Anatolian or science high school	6	34,83			
	Total	106				

According to Table 5, as a result of the Kruskal Wallis test performed to determine whether motivation scores differ or not in terms of high school of graduation, there was no significant statistical difference (X^2=5,989, P>0.05) between the groups.

Table: 6
Results of the Kruskal Wallis Test Performed to Determine Whether Time Management Scores Differ or Not in Terms of High School of Graduation

Scores	Groups	N	Mean Rank	Chi-square	Sd	p
Time Management	Vocational-technical high school	90	53,46	0,322	2	0,851
	General high school	10	57,10			
	Anatolian or science high school	6	48,17			
	Total	106				

According to Table 6, as a result of the Kruskal Wallis test performed to determine whether time management scores differ or not in terms of high school of graduation, there was no significant statistical difference (X^2=0,322, P>0.05) between the groups.

The research findings related to
parental level of education are presented in Table 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13.

Table: 7
Results of the Kruskal Wallis Test Performed to Determine Whether Total Scale Scores Differ or Not in Terms of Mother's Education Level

Scores	Groups	N	Mean Rank	Chi-square	Sd	p
Total Scale	Never schooled	12	41,42	9,240	4	0,055
Total Scale	Primary school graduate	52	59,98	9,240	4	0,055
	Secondary school graduate	14	62,14			
	High school graduate	18	40,17			
	University graduate	10	46,20			
	Total	106				

As shown in Table: 7, as a result of the Kruskal Wallis test performed to find out whether total scale scores differ or not in terms of mother's education level, there was no significant statistical difference (X^2=9,240, P>0.05).

Table: 8
Results of the Kruskal Wallis Test Performed to Determine Whether Motivation Scores Differ or Not in Terms of Mother's Education Level

Scores	Groups	N	Mean Rank	Chi-square	Sd	p
Motivation	Never schooled	12	40,83	11,435	4	0,022
	Primary school graduate	52	60,02			
	Secondary school graduate	14	65,57			
	High school graduate	18	39,38			
	University graduate	10	42,40			
	Total	106				

According to Table 8, as a result of the Kruskal Wallis test performed to find out whether motivation scores differ or not in terms of mother's educational level, there was a significant statistical difference (X^2=11,435, P<0,05) between the groups. Mann Whitney-U tests were also performed to find out between which groups this difference was.

Table: 9
Results of the Kruskal Wallis Test Performed to Determine Whether Motivation Scores Differ or Not in Terms of the Sub-Dimensions of Mother's Education Level

Mother's education level	*N*	*S.T.*	*S.O.*	*U*	*z*	
Never schooled	12	22,08	265,00			
Primary school	52	34,90	1815,00	187,000	-2,163	,031
Total	64					
Primary school	52	38,88	2022,00			
High school	18	25,72	463,00	292,000	-2,374	,018
Total	64					
Secondary school	14	20,21	283,00			
High school	18	13,61	245,00	74,00	-1,984	,047
Total	64					

As shown in table 9, as a result of the Mann Whitney-U test performed to find out whether motivation scores differ or not in terms of the sub-dimensions of mother's education level, the children whose mothers are primary school graduates have higher motivation scores than the children whose mothers are never schooled and high school graduates. Besides, the children whose mothers are secondary school graduates have higher motivation scores than the children whose mothers are high school graduates (p< 0,05).

There was no significant statistical difference among other sub-groups (never schooled-secondary school graduate-high school graduate, never schooled-university graduate, primary school graduate-secondary school graduate, primary school graduate-university graduate, secondary school graduate-university graduate, high school graduate-university graduate).

Table: 10
Results of the Kruskal Wallis Test Performed to Determine Whether Time Management Scores Differ or Not in Terms of Mother's Education Level

Scores	Groups	N	Mean Rank	Chi-square	Sd	p
Time Management	Never schooled	12	57,00	11,014	4	0,026
	Primary school graduate	52	59,85			
	Secondary school graduate	14	59,64			
	High school graduate	18	37,06			
	University graduate	10	37,30			
	Total	106				

According to table 10, as a result of the Kruskal Wallis test performed to determine whether time management scores differ or not in terms of mother's education level, there was a significant statistical difference (X^2=11,014, p<0.05) between the groups. Mann Whitney-U test was also performed to find out between which groups the difference was.

Table: 11
Results of the Mann Whitney-U Test Performed to Determine Whether Time Management Scores Differ or Not in Terms of the Sub-Dimensions of Mother's Education Level

Gender	*N*	*S.T.*	*S.O.*	*U*	*z*	P
Primary school	52	39,31	2044,00	270,00	-2,688	,007
High school	18	24,50	24,50			
Total	64					
Primary school	52	33,81	1758,00	140,00	-2,319	,020
University	10	19,50	195,00			
Total	64					
Secondary school	14	20,36	285,00	72,00	-2,073	,038
High school	18	13,50	243,00			
Total	64					

As shown in table 11, as a result of the Mann Whitney-U test performed to determine whether time management scores differ or not in terms of the sub-dimensions of mother's education level, there were significant differences in the sub-dimension of time management between the children whose mothers are primary school graduates and the children whose mothers are high school and university graduates in favour of the children whose mothers are primary school graduates (p<0,05); between the children whose mothers are secondary school graduates and the children whose mothers are high school graduates in favour of the children whose mothers are secondary school graduates (p<0,05).

There was no significant statistical difference (P>0.05) among other sub-groups (never schooled-primary school graduate, never schooled-high school graduate, never schooled-

university graduate, primary school graduate-secondary school graduate, secondary school graduate-university graduate, high school graduate-university graduate).

Table: 12
Results of the Kruskal Wallis Test Performed to Determine Whether Exam Preparation and Stress Scores Differ or Not in Terms of Mother's Education Level

Scores	Groups	N	Mean Rank	Chi-square	Sd	p
Exam preparation and stress	Never schooled	12	44,17	6,662	4	0,155
	Primary school graduate	52	54,65			
	Secondary school graduate	14	64,64			
	High school graduate	18	42,06			
	University graduate	10	63,70			
	Total	106				

As shown in Table 12, as a result of the Kruskal Wallis test performed to determine whether exam preparation and stres scores differ or not in terms of mother's education level, there was no significant statistical difference (X^2=6,662, P>0.05).

Table: 13
Results of the Kruskal Wallis Test Performed to Determine Whether Total Scale Scores Differ or Not in Terms of Father's Education Level

Scores	Groups	N	Mean Rank	Chi-square	Sd	p
Total scale	Never schooled	4	58,25	7,418	4	0,115
	Primary school graduate	46	53,30			
	Secondary school graduate	16	70,88			
	High school graduate	26	46,23			
	University graduate	14	46,23			
	Total	106				

As shown in Table 13, as a result of the Kruskal Wallis test performed to find out whether total scale scores differ or not in terms of father's education level, there was no significant statistical difference (X^2=7,418, P>0.05).

Kruskal Wallis test was also conducted to check whether there was a difference in the sub-dimensions of motivation (X^2=4,256, P>0.05), time management (X^2=4,939, P>0.05), exam preparation and stress (X^2=8,186, P>0.05) and no significant difference was detected between the sub-dimensions.

The findings related to the sub-problem of "is there a relationship between the students' total study skills scale scores and the scores obtained from the subdimensions" are given in Table: 14.

Table: 14

Results of the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Analysis Conducted to Determine the Relationship Between the Total Study Skills Scale Scores and the Sub-Dimension Scores

	Motivation	Time management	Exam preparation and stress	Total Scale
Motivation	X = 3,240 SS = 0,588 N = 106	r= 0,713 p=0,000	r= 0,332 p=0,001	r= 0,888 p=0,000
Time Management	r= 0,713 p=0,000	X = 2,849 SS = 0,548 N = 106	r= 0,256 p=0,008	r= 0,794 p=0,000
Exam Preparation and Stress	r= 0,332 p=0,001	r= 0,256 p=0,008	X = 3,061 SS = 0,650 N = 106	r= 0,677 p=0,000
Total Scale	r= 0,888 p=0,000	r= 0,794 p=0,000	r= 0,677 p=0,000	X = 3,079 SS = 0,473 N = 106

When the fact that the scale is five-point Likert type is considered, the highest mean score to be expected is X=5.00. When table 14 is examined, the mean score to be received from this research study is X=3.079. Hence, distance education students involved in this research study can be said to have moderate study skills when their scores –just above the moderate level– are considered. As a result of the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis conducted to determine the relationship between students' usual study habits scores and the sub-dimensions, there was a positively meaningful relationship at the level of p<.01 statistically. The strongest relationship was detected between motivation and time management (r=0,713 p<.001) whereas the weakest relationship was detected between time management and exam preparation and stress (r=0,256 ; p<.01). When the relationship between total scale scores and sub-dimensions is examined, the strongest relationship was detected between total scale scores and motivation (r=0,888 ; p<.001) while the weakest relationship was detected between total scale scores and exam preparation and stress (r=0,677 ; p<.001). Accordingly, it can be concluded that there is a positive relationship between students' usual study habits and their study habits measured in the sub-dimensions and this relationship is harmonious.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

According to the research findings, there was a significant difference in favour of female distance education students in the sub-dimension of motivation of the study habits scale; however, there was no difference in the other sub-dimensions. Accordingly, it can be concluded that distance education students' study habits do not usually differ in terms of gender. On the other hand, the finding that there was a significant difference in the sub-dimension of motivation in favour of females might stem from the fact that females attach more importance to academic achievement.

Selwyn (2008) state that female students use the Internet better than male students for academic research. This is also supported by PISA report results. For instance, according to 2006 PISA research results, female students are more successful than male students in terms of their mean performance scores in natural and applied sciences in Turkey. Female students perform better than males in every participant country (MNE, 2007). Özkal and Çetingöz (2006) state that primary school second stage female students use learning strategies more than male students. Özay and others (2003) suggest that female students are academically more successful.

The research findings above which suggest that female students are more successful require female students to have a high level of motivation. The finding of this research study which suggests that female students have high levels of motivation overlaps the research finding about success. There is a consistency between this research and the research studies by Eymur and Geban (2011) and Balkıs and others (2006). According to the findings of the research by Eymur and Geban (2011), females perform better than males in all types of motivation. Balkıs and others (2006) state that the tendecy of female students to put off their academic studies is lower than that of male students.

When distance education students' study habits are examined, it is observed that total scale scores do not differ in terms of high school of graduation. Accordingly, the finding that there was no relationship between distance education students' study habits and the high school of graduation might be due to the fact that the students involved in this study study in the same department. The students of the same department were probably admitted with similar scores. It is not surprising that students with similar scores have similar study habits. On the other hand, exam preparation and stress scores differ in terms of high school of graduation. Accordingly, general high school graduates' scores are higher than the scores of vocational-technical high school graduates and anatolian-science high school graduates. As is known, the research sample consists of CEIT (Computer Education and Instructional Technology) students. Most of the vocational high school graduates who attend the department of CEIT are composed of the students of Computing department of vocational high schools. Since both the Computing department of vocational high schools and anatolian high schools require a competitive placement exam for admission, it is probable that the students they elect are more successful ones. When students are academically more successful, they have more self-confidence and less exam stress. The fact that high school graduates have more exam stress might be due to their previous experiences about academic self-confidence. Another factor which influences academic self-confidence might be that vocational high school graduates study at similar departments at high school, so they are more familiar with the contents and thus they have less exam stress during the exam preparation.

Lufi (2003) studied student attendance in higher education and found out that academic attendance is positively dependent on high school grades. According to these findings, students who are academically successful study at their ideal higher education departments and perform well in their fields which they have chosen according to their interests and skills (cited in Bahçetepe, 2013).

The finding that graduates of vocational and anatolian high schools, which require a placement exam for admission, feel less exam stress might be related to their previous experiences.

The research suggests that there are no significant differences in terms of father's education level; however, there are significant differences in terms of mother's education level. Especially the children whose mothers are primary and secondary school graduates have higher levels of motivation and time management scores when compared to the children whose mothers are never schooled and high school graduates.

Gülten, Poyraz&Deringöl (2012) studied study habits of pre-service teachers and came up with similar results about parental level of education. Similarly, they found out that the children whose mothers are primary and secondary school graduates have higher study skills scores. It is highly probable that mothers who are never schooled are not able to influence their children about motivation and time management since they lack previous school experience. Children are known to be influenced by their mothers to adopt some habits and attitudes in their early years. On the other hand, it is surprising that the children whose mothers are high school graduates have low scores of motivation and time management. If mother's education level is a positive factor, motivation and time management scores are expected to increase when mother's education level rises. However, this is not the case in this research. The reason might be that mothers who are high school and university graduates spend more efforts in work life; and therefore, they cannot spend much time with their children. Moreover, the fact that educated mothers are more success-oriented and expect high levels of success from their children might have affected their motivation and time management skills negatively. The reason why there was no relationship between father's education level and children's study habits might be that fathers are not much into their children's academic studies.

SUGGESTIONS

Overall, students' study habits are observed to be at moderate levels. Distance education programs are advised to encourage students to improve their study habits.

According to the research findings, there were no significant differences detected in terms of type of high school of graduation. Since the study group consists mostly vocational school graduates, it might be a better idea to study with distance education students that compose a larger population and sample.
It might be a good idea to compare formal education and distance education in order to explore the difference between them.

According to the findings, the children whose mothers are never schooled are observed to be affected negatively by the situation. The children whose mothers are primary school graduates compose the most advantageous group. Being a high school and university graduate has no effect on the situation. It might be a good idea to increase mother's education level and create environments where mothers can spend more active time with their children.

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