

Title: A Comparative Study of Student Participation: A Case Study Comparing Classroom Discussions with WebCT Bulletin Board Discussions

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ABSTRACT

A Comparative Study of Student Participation: A Case Study Comparing Classroom Discussions with WebCT Bulletin Board Discussions

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The present study is concerned with the impact of WebCT Bulletin Board Discussions on students studying English at the Upper Intermediate level in the preparatory year at a private university in Istanbul, Turkey. Specifically, the study investigates the following research questions:

1. How does the participation level of the 'infrequent' participants compare in WebCT and Classroom environments?
2. How do Upper-Intermediate students studying English in a private Turkish university perceive the usefulness of WebCT Bulletin Board Discussions as opposed to Classroom Discussions?

It was anticipated that WebCT Bulletin Board Discussions would act as communication facilitators for the 'infrequent participants' in classroom discussions.

Data regarding student profiles and the students' perceptions of classroom discussions and WebCT Bulletin Board Discussions was obtained through questionnaires administered prior to the start of the study. Data relating to participation levels was collected through the audiotaping of classroom sessions and tallying the logs of the WebCT Bulletin Board Discussion postings. These were then analyzed according to frequency of turns, turn-size and the nature of turns.

The responses to the questionnaire revealed a noticeable preference for classroom discussions as opposed to WebCT Bulletin Board Discussions. The analysis of turn-taking showed that, in general, students took longer but somewhat fewer turns in the WebCT Bulletin Board Discussions. However, when it came to the 'infrequent participants' the hypothesis was confirmed. These students took considerably more turns during the WebCT Bulletin Board Discussions and these turns were noticeably longer.