

EVALUATION OF EFFECTIVENESS OF VITAMIN TEACHER PORTAL

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Abstract

Distance education systems have been developing rapidly in the field of education. Since the beginning of FATİH (Opportunities to Increase and Technology to Improve Motion) Project applications, educational softwares and the concept of e-learning have been important concerns. Besides the lack or insufficiency of softwares for tablets or smart boards, the education content websites which already exist have been struggling to take part in this field. As a result, it is inevitable that there has been a competition between government supported applications and private sector. Vitamin Teacher Portal is an application that serves as a teacher training program. It is a distance education website designed for teachers to improve their both personal and professional skills. It includes live courses, forum, shares, teachers' resources and educational videos. It is a synchronous application with Vitamin Education website which is designed for students. In this study, qualitative research method has been used. It is conducted with teachers who use Vitamin Teacher Portal to have valid results. The aim of this study is to work out the sufficiency level of this application from the point of view of teachers. By this means, it could be work out whether it is sufficient enough to meet the needs of teachers or not. We also to find out how effectively teachers, what they acquired from the portal in class.

Keywords: Distance Education, Vitamin Teacher, Portal

Introduction

As the developments regarding use of technology in education continue, the importance of the distance education is understood better. New words have been added to our vocabulary with the distance education concept. E-learning, forum and portal etc. are some of these words. The education method that is conducted in electronic media through the Internet is called e-learning. The media where information is shared in the Internet

environment are called forum. The portals used on the Internet are the beginning points, entrance doors that are designed in order to access the Internet or intranet information and application sources easily and rapidly (www.pbs.com.tr). The word portal is defined as the gateway and door in the Turkish Language Association's dictionary (tdk.gov.tr).

The lexical meaning of the Portal concept, which has been started to be used frequently since 1995, is expressed as follows in various dictionaries; Redhouse: gateway, large or imposing door or entrance; Oxford English Dictionary: a large and imposing door, gateway, doorway or passageway; Whatis.Com: gateway, websites visited to access other websites; Webopedia: is a Website offering various services such as very large sources and e-mail, forums, search engines and online shops etc. (www.pbs.com.tr). According to another definition, the "Web Portal" can be defined as a "Super website" which functions as an access point to numerous sources and services through the Internet (www.workcube.com).

The first Web portals, such as Yahoo, AOL etc., were the websites providing services through the Web. By the time, in order to reach larger masses, many websites, notably the search engines, have accommodated themselves with the Portal characteristics, and the concept has broadened accordingly. The advantages of Portal can be listed as follows; availability to reach the relevant information, time savings for the end user, making decisions better and faster, effective communication with the employees, providing more effective cooperation, possibility for the users to access information that the users are unaware of their existence, creating and sustaining competitive advantage, effective communication with the suppliers and business partners, and decreasing the affairs that have been neglected in terms of information technology (portal.nedir.com).

The portal types can be classified in terms of scope, according to their target audience, according to the sectors, according to their purposes, and according to their subjects. Characteristics of a portal can be listed as; integration, customization, personalization, categorization, searching, content management, work flow, single login, and security (portal.nedir.com).

Importance of Learning Portals in Education

Learning portals are an e-learning environment used in National Education, private sector and the universities. The purpose of using portal in education is to facilitate accessing information and to provide service better. Portals are used in many other education areas such as private organizations, coaching companies, and language learning centers etc. The portal which is known most commonly in our country is the "turkiye.gov.tr" website. This website is expressed as the gate to the state.

Online learning is facilitated largely in an asynchronous text-based environment. Online learning necessitates a qualitative shift in the nature of the communication and interaction (Cleveland-Innes, 2004). The phenomenon of web-based teaching and learning is dramatically affecting faculty roles in higher education. (Cleveland-Innes, 2014). Increasingly, organizations are connecting to the Internet to establish a business and electronic commerce presence and to access information rapidly. When an organization's networks are connected to the Internet without adequate security measures in place, the organization will become vulnerable to attacks from external adversaries (Lim and Jin, 2006). Some of educational portals are used as, in each service, interested students begin with a free telephone-advising session to determine whether their workplace learning might warrant course credit. Students who pass that threshold are invited to sign up for an online course that will teach them to prepare portfolios that reflect their learning (Glenn, 2011).

The portals used in the National Education are "www.egitim.gov.tr", "www.vitaminogretmen.com" and "www.vitaminegitim.com" websites. It is aimed to promote use of technology in education and to improve the quality of education with the use of these websites. The students and the teachers can access information on the same platform. These portals providing e-learning ensures that individual diversities are taken into consideration and every student is able to access information and study either at school or home depending on his/her speed. Thus, it is aimed to develop self confidence in the students as well. Moreover, with these portals, parents have the chance to follow their students more closely.

Problems in Use of the Learning Portals

If it is necessary to list the obstacles to use widely the information technologies in education in Turkey; we can list the facts that the shareholders are not included adequately in the decision processes, the poor-quality of in-service trainings (in terms of suitable pedagogy and technological integration), quality and quantity problems of e-materials, syllabus strictness (syllabus does not provide adequate clear opportunities to the teacher autonomy), BOTE (Computer and Instructional Technologies Training) graduates does not have sufficient opportunity, managers' and teachers' concerns/attitudes/self-efficacy perceptions, lessons regarding information technology are not included adequately in the schools, and it is considered that the technology literacy consists of only writing with MS Word and following our friends in Facebook (Sezer, 2014).

The most important problem of the learning portals is not having the adequate knowledge level. Since the portals are not promoted well enough, teacher, student and parents are not aware of this website. And even if they

are aware of it, they refrain from using it because they are not familiar with its content. Another point is that to what extent the webmasters of the websites are involved in education is disputable. When designing an education system, opinions of the individuals involved in education should be taken.

Another important problem is poverty and living conditions. From the viewpoint of students, while there are children without electricity and running water in their homes, how it can be possible to make discussions about e-learning is yet another matter of debate. A considerable number of children do not have an Internet connection in their homes. And this is one of the obstacles to e-learning.

The Purpose of the Vitamin Teacher Portal

The Vitamin Teacher Portal was put into practice by private company named Sebit. It is the Vitamin Teacher portal itself that tells us what it is and what its purpose is. In the "vitaminogretmen.com" website, its purpose is explained as follows: "Learning, assimilating the knowledge, is pleasing for everyone. When you follow the right way, and discover the right methods....And it is reassuring to feel that you are not alone, your efforts are valued among your colleagues who share the common purpose with you. Just as the strength that nearly 250 thousand teachers who come together in the professional development and sharing portal, the Vitamin Teacher, take from each other, as a company that has ensured a significant progress in use of technology in education, we have known from the beginning that effective use can be possible only through correct and conscious application, and that the most important factor in this process is "teacher". Teacher should have been supported continuously and intensely for compliance with both the technology and the innovations brought by the new education paradigm. And we set off... In 2009, in order to ensure that the computer aided education is used in the in-class processes, we have held more than 100 meetings in 81 provinces and reached 24 thousand teachers. Then, witnessing closely the value added to the teachers by the inter-teacher communication and sharing during the in-service training that we gave to around 700 teachers with our Teacher Professional Development Training (OMGEP) program, by our nature, we decided to develop a portal in order to offer such an environment to them as an online service and to make that close contact sustainable. Thus, the Vitamin Teacher commenced its broadcasting life as a product of such an intense inspiration on a meaningful day, November 24, 2009. The purpose of the Vitamin Teacher is simply to add value to the lives of our teachers, all the enlightened teachers who feel responsibility in raising the quality standards in Education, who believe that they are in the center of

transformation, who continuously renew themselves, who are interested in modern and experimental education methods, and who appreciate sharing..."

Content of the Vitamin Teacher Portal

A renovation process was carried out in all websites of the National Education in December 2014. For example, while the websites of the National education used to be accessible by means of the Internet Explorer, now they are accessible through any browser. This has been a useful renovation for facilitation of works and transactions. And the Vitamin Teacher website also took advantage of this situation as well. As of December 2014, the website has attained its new design.

When we look at the new content, we see that the Subjects are collected under three headings. It consists of educational sharings, professional development and content archive tabs. Furthermore, there are buttons that facilitate searching documents according to any levels and any branches. There are documents and discussions under the educational sharing. Documents can be uploaded or downloaded according to the available topics under the documents heading. Under the discussions option, besides being able to type comments for and participate in the available subjects, teachers can also create new topics and discussions. Under the professional development tab, there are certain topics such as the subject assessment and evaluation, classroom management, educational world of 21th Century etc. And various videos, documents and discussions with respect to the topic can be accessed under these headings. In the content archive, there are important and useful documents such as educational videos, live videos, educational scripts, and annual plans etc. Entrance by the government teachers and entrance by the private school teachers are designed separately. State school teachers log in using the MEBBIS (Ministry of National Education Information Systems). Private school entrance can be used by private school teachers as well as by the teacher candidates and the academicians. The Vitamin Teacher website which has a substantially rich content allocates a significant space to main courses and technology, while it gives slightly lesser space to the art courses. The fact that certain courses such as the music, visual arts, physical training etc. have lesser contents provides the most important evidence of our examination-based education system.

Another sharing in the website is that good examples are included in the education. Such sharings give add meaning to the website, create awareness in other teachers, and set them an example. By means of involving extracurricular educational videos, it fulfills the duty of guiding those teachers that want to improve themselves. By virtue of the Vitamin Teacher portal which has interaction with the Vitamin Education website, the

teachers can create a class with the students who are subscribed to the Vitamin Education, prepare examinations, and give homework. It is a highly useful application in this respect as well.

Problems in Use of the Vitamin Teacher Portal

The Vitamin Teacher website has not yet reached the desired number of users. It should reach more teachers throughout the country. For this reason, it is essential to ensure that each teacher uses the Vitamin Teacher website at least once. This is the sole way for creating awareness in the teachers. It is thought that the teachers who see the richness of the website would strive to make the website even more enriched.

On the other hand, the fact that our teachers who try to practice their profession under challenging conditions have difficulties in finding adequate time for improving themselves appears as another problem. It seems a little bit difficult for our teachers who serve as a deputy headmaster alone at their school to enter in any websites where they could provide individual and professional improvement. There are teachers who cannot allocate some time to educational portals on account of dealing with the paperwork of the school and education of the students. In addition to that, the fact that there are teachers who are not enthusiastic about improving themselves is, besides being discouraging, a factor for the low number of users of such websites. However, the updates for the uses in the website have a hitch from time to time. When a teacher who has appointed to another duty enters into the website, sometimes the name of the former school might be displayed. For this reason, user updates should be followed-up more frequently.

Method

The question of the study is; Is the Vitamin Teacher Portal an application which is satisfying in its field and which has achieved its goal in the teachers' opinion? Is it useful for training and education environment by creating awareness in the teachers? In this study, semi-structured interview method was used to investigate these questions.

Interview is one of the data collection techniques most commonly used in the qualitative researches. It is more effective in making use of experiences and opinions of individuals. On account that the persons participating in the interview state their opinions verbally, they have the opportunity to express themselves more comfortably. (Yildirim and Simsek, 2011).

Interview is a data collection technique by means of verbal communication. Though interviews are mostly conducted face to face, it can also be conducted by means of instant audio and video transmitters such as telephone or video-phone systems. Furthermore, sign language

communication with deaf and dumb is also included in the interview classification (Karasar, 2012).

The reason for using the qualitative research method in this study is to obtain in-depth information about the subject. In order to examine the effectiveness of the Vitamin Teacher Portal, the opinions of teachers were resorted to. The most suitable way to examine the Vitamin Teacher Portal's effectiveness and its reflection to the classroom environment from the viewpoint of teachers is application of the interview technique. For this reason, the interview technique, which is one of the qualitative research methods, was used as the data collection means to obtain quality data with open-ended questions. 10 questions were asked during the interviews. It was assumed that the participants gave sincere answers to the questions.

Findings

The interview forms within the scope of the study were assessed separately based on the questions. 10 persons participated in the research. The statistical information regarding gender, seniority and age of the participants can be seen in the following Table 1.

Table1-Participant Information

Participants	Gender	Age	Seniority
P1	F	52	29
P2	F	29	8
P3	M	28	6
P4	M	30	8
P5	F	34	12
P6	M	30	7
P7	M	32	9
P8	F	31	7
P9	F	49	28
P10	F	36	13

10 questions are asked in the interview form prepared to investigate the effectiveness of the Vitamin Teacher Portal for teachers. The questions were prepared by the author. The answers given were evaluated within the scope of the content analysis. The results for each question are as follows.

Question: When we say Vitamin Teacher Portal to you, what does it mean for you?

In the answers given, the general opinion is that the website is very useful. The most prominent word is the expression of "development". 6 of the participants used the "professional and personal development" expression. The second most commonly used expressions were "source provider" and "sharing". Only 1 participant highlighted that it provides examples from life. In this respect, the answer given by P2 is as follows: *"Lecturing video, video examples from life, shortly it is helpful to me for my*

branch." P9 stated as follows: *"Innovation, easy access, teacher colleagues who aspire after self-improvement and I am very happy to help them and to learn, share new things."* When the answers are reviewed, looking from the general frame with respect to the Vitamin Teacher website, it is seen that the teachers demonstrate positive attitude. They think that the website supports them in terms of development.

Question 2: Would you please mention about what the Vitamin Teacher Portal has gained you in the professional and personal development areas? Have you used it mainly for personal or professional or branch purposes?

According to the answers given, 4 participants mentioned only about the professional development, while 5 participants mentioned that they have gains in both personal and professional areas. 1 participant stated that it is not possible to mention about any gains on account that there isn't any material in relation to his/her branch. It was stated that the materials in the website offers creative and diverse examples. The answer of P3 about the subject is: *"I think it is useful personally and professionally. It is helpful to us for the techniques and methods to be used in the classroom."* P1 commented as follows in this respect: *"Primarily personally. For personal development reflects consequentially to the profession, I can say in both areas."* When the answers given are evaluated, it was revealed that there is a deficiency in terms of branches. On account that there aren't lectures and sources in relation to each branch, it is seen that certain branches cannot avail of the website efficiently.

Question 3: Would you please explain how you have managed to find the opportunity to reflect the professional and personal development you have gained to your school life?

The answers in favor of increase of the education quality are the same and positive. 9 participants stated that the quality of education has increased, while 1 participant stated that there isn't any point for him/her to represent the quality of education because there isn't any document supporting his/her branch. In general, interrogating the events, gaining the problem solving skills, and enriching the lecture by creative examples were mentioned about. The comment by P7 on the subject is: *"I think that I will find the opportunity to reflect the developments I have gained to the school life when the portal's content with respect to my branch is enriched"*. P10, on the other hand, stated that: *I tried some of the methods in the classroom. I have seen that you obtain different attainments depending on the age groups. If the activities lectured are applied in the classrooms, you can rally change the atmosphere of the class. The students enjoy learning by entertaining. They get more pleasure from the school and the course."* It is seen that the participants are

of the same opinion that the attainments gained from the Vitamin Teacher Portal make positive contributions to the courses.

Question 4: Which applications are there in the Vitamin Teacher Portal? Which of these applications do you use?

Live broadcasting, videos, lecture summaries, questions and writings, educational studies, videos for branches, sample lectures and the forum page are the answers given. However, 3 of the participants stated that they participate in the live broadcasting activities. 9 participants stated that they use videos for their branches and sample lectures. It is seen that there isn't any participant using the forum page. There is also a participant who considers the lecture summaries insufficient. The answer of P6 to this question is as follows: "*Lecturing, homework, tests, I make use of all.*" P8's answer on the other hand is as follows: "*I follow mostly the videos and writings regarding professional development in the Vitamin Teacher Portal. Also I watch the sample lectures and I try to adopt such lecturing to my class as well.*" The answers show that the participants are aware of the applications in the website and they use all of them. They prefer to use only those professional development videos that are related to their own branches. The reason why participations in the live broadcastings are low is identified as the broadcasting times.

Question 5: Have you ever used the Vitamin Teacher desktop application? If yes, what is your evaluation about it?

9 of the participants answered as no to this question. Because, it was understood that only 2 participants are aware of such application. It is seen that only one of the 2 participants who are aware of the desktop application uses it. The participant who stated that he/she uses it for it provides convenience also mentioned that he/she is satisfied with the application. The other participant who is aware of the application, however, stated that he/she has not used it because he/she has not needed it. From hence, it can be concluded that a better informing should be carried out with respect to the desktop application.

Question 6: Which lectures and lecturers take your attention most in the Vitamin Teacher Live Lectures?

3 individuals using the live educations responded to this question. P9 of these is as follows: "*In the live broadcastings I have watched, I liked the teaching methods and techniques, educational videos, slides, film sections and music pieces. Creativity and leadership subjects are very useful. Motivation, reading, creating strategy, mentorship and coaching, body language, and innovation attract my interest much.*" P10, on the other hand, responded as: "*As subject, mostly the lectures in my own branch, classroom management and teaching techniques subjects attract my interest much. Educational management and leadership subjects are also good. As the*

lecturers, Nurdan KALAYCI and Necati CEMALOGLU are the lecturers that I listen to with much pleasure." From the answers given, it is seen how useful the live broadcasting videos are. It is understood that the subjects followed mostly are the educational management and teaching techniques.

Question 7: The studies that you find generally about which area are the works that you consider as the most efficient in the Vitamin Teacher Portal?

The works about the educational methods and techniques were preferred by 3 participants. This is followed by the sample lectures and materials for the branches. Personal development, educational management and Turkish are among the answers given by one participant at a time. The answer by P8 about the subject is as follows: *"I find the sample lectures productive. I believe that if they were about more subjects and in each branch, they could have been more useful for us the teachers. When we see different lecturing methods with examples and apply them to our own classroom environment, the lectures will get rid of mediocrity and become more interesting. Thus, we may apply the methods we have not applied before in our courses in different ways."* P10 who expressed opinion about the subject answered as: *"In my opinion the works where different teaching methods are explained are very productive. For example, some movies are mentioned about. The movie recommendations for teachers and students to watch are also highly fruitful. They open up people's horizons."* The teaching methods and techniques, and sample lectures are the works that are found to be the most productive ones in both the live broadcast and other documents. Furthermore, it is seen that the materials included in the basis of branches are also found productive. It can be concluded that the teachers are aware of the fact that they should renew themselves in order to be able to cope with the changing student profile. Because, using different teaching methods and techniques is a must of our contemporary educational system.

Question 8: What can you say about whether the Vitamin Teacher Portal is sufficiently up-to-date or not? What would you like to find more in the website?

According to the answers given, 4 participants stated that they consider the portal up-to-date. 3 participants stated that they do not consider it up-to-date. And 2 participants stated that they consider it moderately up-to-date and that it could be improved further. P4 of the participants stated that he/she wants that there is information about the project preparation processes. The answer by the P7 of the participants is: *"I do not consider the website as up-to-date. There should be works that the teachers may use in the courses and that can be interesting for the students."* And the answer by the P8 is as follows: *"I don't think that the website is up-to-date. When we look at the sharings, we can see that much time has passed since the*

sharings. If its contents are improved a bit more, if it becomes a website where teachers can find whatever they need and share any subject in any branch, where more up-to-date subjects, news about education and training are included, then the teachers can use this website much more actively. The website is grouped based on the branches and levels, but when we look at it in terms of branches, it is hard to find up-to-date subjects and sharings. If it becomes as a website which is social on the basis of each branch, there would be no need for the teachers to access and make sharings in other websites." As can be understood from the answers, the missing aspect of the portal is its up-to-dateness and the fact that equal materials are not offered to the branches. It is assumed that the participants finding the website up-to-date are the teachers of the main courses included in the general exams. Because materials for the main courses are given more place in the website compared to the auxiliary courses and elective courses.

Question 9: What can you say about the background of the Vitamin Teacher Portal?

Here, it is intended to determine whether the participants have knowledge about the kitchen of the work. According to the answers given, it is understood that 4 participants are aware of the kitchen of the work. The comment by P1 about this subject is: *"I know that Sebit and Gazi University cooperated in this work."* P7 brought a different comment in this respect: *"There should be separate studies for each educational region. The means of the schools, environment, and the economic structure of the people of that region should be taken into consideration. Regional differences should be taken into account for ensuring provision of the requirements in the studies."* Though it is normal that the teachers are unaware of the background of the portal, it is useful if they know it. Knowing who have placed efforts for and who have taken charge in and assumed responsibility for this work is the information necessary to discuss the quality of the website. It will be appropriate if the teachers have knowledge about this matter. For this reason, the kitchen of the work should be explained better to the teachers.

Question 10: Would you please share with us what you want to add about the Vitamin Teacher Portal?

9 Participants shared their comments about the subject. It was indicated in the comments that conducting face to face activities from time to time might be useful as well. It was stated that more branches should be given place. It was stated that in case appropriate equipment is provided in the classroom environment, the lectures will be more enjoyable. Stating that there isn't any sharing about especially the Physical Training course, it was recommended to enrich the content. It was stated that the section called discussions should be more functional. One of the deficiencies is that a questions and answers section should be added. P6 commented as: *"In fact if*

we have the opportunity to lecture the courses in the school with application like the vitamin, the lectures might become more enjoyable and understandable for the students." And P9 commented that: *"I appreciate it for being a mediator for me to improve myself about the distance learning. I always learn something new while watching live broadcasts or videos. I wish we could communicate certain live broadcasts to many more teachers and introduce them the Vitamin Teacher; it is for sure that many of my friends would like to follow it after their initial sharings. It is important to create awareness. Best regards."* It is understood that the teachers using the Vitamin Teacher Portal are satisfied with the website in general. They gave certain advices thinking that it could be enriched with certain recommendations. The most important one of these advices is the matter of giving place to more branches. The desire that the courses other than main courses are given the necessary importance was also stated. Furthermore, it was concluded that the website should be promoted in a better way and it should reach more teachers, and awareness should be created in the teachers.

Conclusion

The teachers of our age should keep step with the advancing and changing world and should use the websites where they can provide both professional and personal development. When we examine the new student profile, we recognize the fact that we are confronted with a generation that came into the world inside the technology. The teachers have fallen behind their students in terms of technology. In order to make up for this gap, also the teachers should do their part and integrate the technology into their courses. They should know that this is the only way that they attract the attention of their students and lecture properly.

The Vitamin Teacher Portal is a website which aims to provide professional and personal development to the teachers and which place importance to use of technology in education. When we look at the website from the viewpoint of the teachers, it can be said that it functions as a source making contributions to education and teachers with its rich content and the materials it provides. All the teachers participating in the study and using the Vitamin Teacher Portal stated that they consider the website highly effective. They stated that they were successful in increasing the quality of the education by conveying the information they learned to the classroom environment. There are teachers who started to use smart phones and Facebook in their courses with the information they learned from the Vitamin Teacher website. To be able to appeal to the students, one should speak their language. And the Vitamin Teacher website was designed to provide the teachers with such opportunity. The teachers are encouraged incentivized with the videos involving good examples and sample lectures.

However, the number of teachers using the website is not at a sufficient level yet. The updating is also being neglected. When a teacher whose school was changed access the website to use the Vitamin Education and when the information regarding the former school is displayed, the teacher cannot communicate with his/her students. For this reason, the user information should be followed more carefully. Necessary studies should be carried out in order to create awareness in the teachers. Media's power should be exploited. It is an undisputable fact that the website will be even more enriched when the teachers are introduced with the website and when awareness is created in the teachers. Because the teacher sharings are posted in the website, and inter-group cooperation is encouraged in the website. When limited number of people uses the website, the sharings remain limited as well. Another point having a role in why the number of teachers using the website is less is that documents from each branch are not given place at equal levels. On account that our educational system is based on examinations and tests, more importance is placed on the main courses of which the questions are asked in the examinations. Since adequate place is not given to certain branches such as the Visual Arts, Music and Physical Training, the website has failed to gain these users. Only the content providing personal development serves all the teachers. When it comes down to the branches base, it is confronted with a situation that can be deemed as an accusation of discrimination among the teachers. But, a different approach should be taken for the matter. Instead of saying that there isn't any document regarding their branches, these teachers may prepare their own documents and present them for sharing. Instead of enjoying free-riding, they may be pioneers in their branches by placing their own efforts. If it is a teacher who is in question, then free-riding is an unbecoming situation. If there is a situation requiring a solution, the teachers should themselves be the solution.

As a conclusion, the Vitamin Teacher Portal is a highly efficient application despite the low number of its users. It is an important source which provides personal and professional development for the teachers, gains new approaches to the education and training environments, and makes up for a gap in the field. The videos that were prepared by working in cooperation with the academicians provide opportunity for self-improvement for the teachers. Nonetheless, involving more academicians in the work, the subjects can be lectured in a wider range. Thus, the opportunity to reach more teachers can be obtained.

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