Social Presence Techniques and Strategies in a Blended Course: Student Satisfaction and Suggestions

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine student satisfaction and suggestions for social presence techniques and strategies in a blended course. Phenomenological research design was used in the study. Participants of this study were 22 senior undergraduate students at a public university in Turkey. A blended course was offered to students, including both face-to-face and online elements. An online course, including techniques for establishing social presence, was designed and developed in the Moodle learning management system (LMS). Techniques and strategies used in the study included course orientation videos, audio-visual meetings, providing frequent and detailed feedback, limiting class size, using sense of humor, using emoticons, addressing students by name, sharing personal stories and experiences, expressing agreement or disagreement, asking questions and inviting responses, and giving greetings. Students attended the course, which lasted a term. After the course, a form with open-ended questions was administered to the 22 students. A focus group interview was then performed with seven student volunteers. In the analysis of this qualitative data, descriptive and content analysis techniques were used. According to the findings, students were highly satisfied with the course. Students had positive opinions for each online course design technique and participant strategy. They thought that "providing frequent and detailed feedback" and "asking questions and inviting responses" were the strategies that contributed most to establish social presence.

Keywords: Social presence, social presence techniques and strategies, satisfaction, blended course.

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Introduction

Social presence is defined by Short, Williams and Christie (1976) as "the degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships" (p. 65). Social presence occurs if a person is perceived as a "real person" in an online community (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Richardson, Maeda, Lv & Caskurlu, 2017). Social presence has three components: affective expression, open communication and group cohesion. Affective expression is the skill and confidence needed to reveal emotions. Open communication is a mutual and respectful exchange of information. Group cohesion is focused collaborative communication that builds and maintains a sense of group commitment (Garrison et al., 2000).

Social presence positively affects learner satisfaction (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Hostetter & Busch, 2006; Johnson, Hornik & Salas, 2008; Swan & Shih, 2005) and learner achievement (Richardson & Swan, 2003). It should be considered that social presence should be at an optimum level since excessive social presence may prevent learning (Garrison & Anderson, 2003). Oyarzun, Barreto and Conklin (2018) found that instructor social presence positively affected learner achievement. In addition, Pollard, Minor and Swanson (2014) found that instructor and student social presence positively affected the sense of community and learning environment. Thus, it can be said that student and instructor presence had positive effects on learner satisfaction and achievement. Course design elements and instructor behaviors are significant to establish social presence. If instructors/instructional designers do not intentionally add social presence features into online courses, students may not perceive themselves as real people or may have low social presence perceptions, which negatively influences learning.

There are some techniques and strategies for creating online presence in online courses. Lowenthal and Dunlap (2018) offered some techniques to establish social presence:

- Introductions: online courses should begin with introductions. For instance, course instructors and students can introduce themselves

- Orientations: short orientation videos can be used at the beginning of the course

- Personalized detailed feedback: instructors can provide feedback individually in different environments

- Reconnecting: instructors reconnect students with some activities to get to know more about their personalities. With this activity, students can also get to know each other's personalities

- Free-flowing, organic interactions: Twitter (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009) or Facebook groups (Izmirli, 2017) can help with interaction

Aargon (2003) stated some strategies to establish social presence:

- Developing a welcome message such as a video introducing the instructor and the course

- Including student profiles on the course web page

- Using audio

- Limiting class size

- Using collaborative activities

- Contributing discussion boards by instructors

- Answering e-mails

- Providing frequent feedback

- Opening a conversation

- Sharing personal stories and experiences

- Using humor

- Using emoticons

- Addressing students by name

- Allowing students options when addressing the instructor.

In the literature, although there are limited studies specifically examining social presence techniques and strategies in blended learning environments, there are some studies examining social presence in blended learning environments. Akyol, Garrison and Ozden (2009) compared online and blended learning environments according to the community of inquiry model. With regards to social presence, they found that the level of affective expression in online courses was significantly higher than the level of affective expression in blended courses. The level of group cohesion in blended courses was significantly higher than the level of group cohesion in online courses. The level of open communication was similar in both environments. Jusoff and Khodabandelou (2009) examined social presence in the blended learning environment. According to their study, the blended learning environment decreased the distance between participants. It also helped to increase interaction between participants, because they were familiar with each other.

Social presence should be examined in blended learning environments (Pollard et al., 2014; Whiteside, 2015). A blended course includes both face-to-face and online lessons. In the blended

learning environment, students and instructors get to know each other from face-to-face lessons. This may affect social presence perceptions of students in online lessons. How each social presence technique or strategy works in blended courses was the starting point of this study. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine student satisfaction and suggestions for social presence techniques and strategies in a blended course. Research questions are as follows:

1. What are the satisfaction levels of students for social presence techniques and strategies in a blended course?

2. What are the techniques or strategies that contribute most and least to establish social presence in a blended course?

3. What are the advantages and disadvantages that a blended course provides for social presence?

4. What can the possible new techniques to establish social presence in a blended course be?

Method

Design and Participants

Phenomenological research design was used in the study. Phenomenological research describes the common meaning for individuals' experiences related to a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). In this study, the phenomenon is social presence techniques and strategies. In this context, students' experiences of social presence techniques and strategies were examined.

Participants of this study were 22 senior undergraduate students at a public university in Turkey. Students had online learning experience. A blended course was offered to students. The course had both face-to-face and online elements. An online course including techniques for establishing social presence was designed and developed in the Moodle learning management system. Adobe Connect was used for online live lessons. Students attended the course, which lasted a term. After the course, a form with open-ended questions was administered to 22 students. 13 of them were male and nine were female, with ages ranging from 20 to 28. A focus group interview was then performed with seven student volunteers. Five of them were male and two were female.

Online Course Design and Development

An online course was designed and developed. The online course had two main environments. The first was a learning management system, which in this case was Moodle. The second was an online meeting system, which in this case was Adobe Connect. In the course, course design and facilitation strategies were considered to establish social presence. These were as follows:

- Course orientation video (Aargon, 2003; Lowenthal & Dunlap, 2018)

- Audio-visual meetings (Aargon, 2003; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997)

- Providing frequent and detailed feedback (Aargon, 2003; Lowenthal & Dunlap, 2018)

- Limiting class size (Aargon, 2003)

- Using sense of humor (Aargon, 2003; Izmirli, 2017; Richardson et al., 2015; Rourke, Anderson, Garrison & Archer, 1999; Swan, 2003)

- Using emoticons (Aargon, 2003; Izmirli, 2017; Rourke et al., 1999; Swan, 2003)

- Addressing students by name (Aargon, 2003; Izmirli, 2017; Richardson et al., 2015; Rourke et al., 1999; Swan, 2003)

- Sharing personal stories and experiences (Aargon, 2003)

- Expressing agreement or disagreement (Izmirli, 2017; Richardson et al., 2015; Rourke et al., 1999; Swan, 2003)

- Asking questions and inviting responses (Izmirli, 2017; Richardson et al., 2015; Rourke et al., 1999; Swan, 2003)

- Giving greetings (Izmirli, 2017; Richardson et al., 2015; Rourke et al., 1999; Swan, 2003).

While some techniques and strategies helped when designing the course, the other elements helped to facilitate the course in terms of creating social presence.

Data Collection Tools

Two data collection tools were used. The first was a form with open-ended questions and the second was a focus group interview form. The open-ended question form was used to determine the satisfaction levels of students concerning social presence techniques and strategies applied in the blended course. It contained demographic questions (age, gender), eleven open-ended questions to ask about satisfaction levels for each technique and strategy, one open-ended question to ask about general satisfaction level, and one Likert-type question to ask about satisfaction level from a quantitative perspective. One question, which has sub-questions, was "What do you think about the instructor's frequent feedback in the learning management system (Moodle) and the live lesson (Adobe Connect)? Did you feel yourself to be a real person in the online environment thanks to feedback? How did it affect your satisfaction with the lesson?".

The focus group interview form was used to determine: (1) the techniques or strategies that contributed most and least to establish social presence, (2) the advantages and disadvantages that a blended course provided for social presence, and (3) possible new techniques to establish social presence. The focus group interview form contained five questions. One question was "Does knowing

each other from a face-to-face learning environment support your perception of yourself as a real person (perception of social presence) in a virtual environment? Could you explain?".

Data Analysis

In the analysis of qualitative data, a descriptive analysis technique was used since there were predetermined codes that were techniques to establish social presence. A descriptive analysis technique was used to determine the satisfaction levels of students for social presence techniques and strategies (relating to the first research question). In the analysis of quantitative data, the mean was used. To find answers to the second, third and fourth research questions, content analysis techniques were used. In qualitative research, data analysis starts with data collection. For this reason, the researcher who was primarily responsible for the analysis of the data had also played an active role in the data collection process. Research data were coded and themed by the researchers. Nvivo was used in the data analysis.

Validity and Reliability

Validity in qualitative research is related to the accuracy of findings. Creswell (2007) proposed some strategies to ensure validity. The researcher should spend extensive time in the field and be close to the participants. In this study, one of the researchers was also the course instructor. Therefore, researchers knew the participants and the learning environment. To understand the phenomenon, researchers applied triangulation by using two data collection tools. Within the scope of reliability, when researchers had disagreements on data analysis and coding, they discussed the situation and came to an agreement. Research findings were supported with direct quotations.

Findings and Discussion

Satisfaction Levels of Students on Social Presence Techniques and Strategies

20 students were generally satisfied with the online course. Student 16 stated, "I was so satisfied in general. I want to do it (participation in online course) again. Many thanks for everything". Student 18 said, "I was satisfied. Course was more comfortable, sincere and understandable". Students were asked to answer a quantitative question (using a five-point Likert-type scale) to measure their overall satisfaction rates. The students' mean score was 4.59, which meant that students were highly satisfied with the course. It can be said from the results that students had high social presence perceptions. The next question was "which technique or strategy used to establish social presence did help to improve this perception?"

Learner satisfaction for online course design techniques and participant (course instructor and students) strategies to establish social presence are listed in predetermined themes. Themes are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Themes for online course design techniques and participant strategies

Themes	Satisfied / Positive Opinions (f)	Not satisfied / Negative Opinions (f)
Course orientation videos	21	-
Audio-visual meetings	19	3
Providing frequent and detailed feedback	20	1
Limiting class size in live course	9	4
Using sense of humor	18	5
Using emoticons	17	1
Addressing students by name	22	-
Sharing personal stories and experiences	18	4
Expressing agreement or disagreement	22	-
Asking questions and inviting responses	20	-
Giving greetings	22	-

As seen in Table 1, predetermined themes for online course design techniques and participant strategies were course orientation videos, audio-visual meetings, providing frequent and detailed feedback, limiting class size in live course, using sense of humor, using emoticons, addressing students by name, sharing personal stories and experiences, expressing agreement or disagreement, asking questions and inviting responses and giving greetings.

Course Orientation Videos

The instructor added a course orientation video at the beginning of the course in LMS. 21 students were satisfied with the course. Student 3 said, "It (adding course orientation video) created a sincere environment. Thanks to this, it was not hard to participate in the class". Student 7 expressed, "It was positive because the instructor introducing himself and the course helped me to prepare for the course and to get used to the course". Student 14 stated, "Since there was a sincere speech, I was not shy in the course". Adding a course orientation video is very helpful for creating social presence and improving student satisfaction. This finding is parallel to Aargon's (2003) and Lowenthal and Dunlap's (2018) suggestion, which is introduction and orientation should be included in an online course to establish social presence.

Audio-Visual Meetings (Live Courses)

In this study, audio-visual meetings were conducted via Adobe Connect. Most students had positive opinions on online live meetings. Student 2 said, "There was a sincere environment. I think every course should be given online". Student 21 stated, "Live class provides everything equivalent to face-to-face class. It is like a real class. The only difference is that in the live class you are in front of the computer screen…". This finding was parallel to the literature. Aargon (2003) stated that using audio is a strategy to establish social presence. However, audio-visual communication triggers more intimacy than audio-only communication, since it contains eye contact (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997). In addition to positive opinions, students stated technical problems such as connecting to the live class. Student 5 expressed, "It (live meeting) is perfect except for technical problems".

Providing Frequent and Detailed Feedback

Frequent and detailed feedback was provided to students in both LMS sessions and live meetings. 20 students were satisfied with the provided feedback. Student 9 said, "I felt that I was there (live class) and it is intimate like a face-to-face class". Similarly, Aargon (2003) and Lowenthal and Dunlap (2018) stated that providing frequent and detailed feedback enhanced social presence. On the other hand, one student had negative opinions about feedback. He said, "Feedback is more effective in face-to-face classes. I think since the live class was crowded, the instructor cannot give feedback to everyone…." (Student 7).

Limiting Class Size in Live Courses

The live class involved 22 students. While nine students were satisfied with class size in the live course, four students were not satisfied. Student 13 expressed, "Class size in the live class is good. But if the number of students increases, some students cannot engage in the class actively. In that case, some students may drop out". Student 10, who had negative opinions, said, "Class size is high. Some students cannot engage in the lesson". Because the majority of students were satisfied with class size, it can be said that class size was acceptable. In the literature, there is no consensus on class size in an online course. Based on the instructor's workload, Tomei (2006) found that the ideal online class size was 12. Based on instructors' perceptions, Orellana (2006) found that optimal online class size was 18.9 in order to have real interaction. In this study, students took a blended course. It can be expressed that because they have face-to-face lessons, they are satisfied with class size. More studies would be needed to determine ideal online class size.

Using Sense of Humor

Both instructor and students used a sense of humor in both LMS and live meetings. The instructor used it intentionally to establish a social presence. Most of the students were satisfied with the sense of humor in the online course. One student said, "When sense of humor was used, I felt that I was in face-to-face class. I was at my home but it is like I am in the class…" (Student 16). This finding is parallel to the literature (e.g. Aargon, 2003; Izmirli, 2017; Richardson et al., 2015; Rourke et al., 1999; Swan, 2003). Some students stated their negative opinions about that topic. Student 1 said, "When it (sense of humor) was overused, we could not have an effective lesson".

Using Emoticons

Emoticons were used in LMS and live meetings by instructor and students. 17 students were satisfied with emoticons. Student 3 expressed, "Using emoticons was good because I felt that I was in the face-to-face class". Another student said, "Using emoticons showed that people were sincere. There was not a serious environment thanks to emoticons. I felt happy" (Student 16). Just one student had a negative opinion. She said, "I don't think that it (using emoticons) is necessary" (Student 8). As

in the literature (e.g. Aargon, 2003; Izmirli, 2017; Rourke et al., 1999; Swan, 2003), using emoticons should be used to establish social presence.

Addressing Students by Name

The instructor addressed students by name in LMS and live meetings. All students were satisfied with being addressed by their names. Student 6 said, "I was satisfied that my instructor addressed me by my name. My interest towards the course increased". Student 17 expressed, "It (being addressed by name) affected me positively because I understood that the instructor knew me. One of the most important things for a student is being addressed by name. Because it is motivating". This finding is parallel to the literature (e.g. Aargon, 2003; Izmirli, 2017; Richardson et al., 2015; Rourke et al., 1999; Swan, 2003).

Sharing Personal Stories and Experiences

Both instructor and students shared their personal stories and experiences in LMS and live meetings. While 18 students had positive opinions, four students had negative opinions. Student 3 expressed her positive opinion by saying, "I felt that it (sharing personal stories and experiences) created an environment as if I was in the classroom". Student 9 said, "… it was good since it helped to create a sincere environment". According to this result, Aargon's (2003) suggestion was confirmed. On the contrary, Student 8 said, "When it takes too much time, it affects the lesson negatively".

Expressing Agreement or Disagreement

In live courses, instructor and students expressed their agreements or disagreements by verbal expression or written text. All students were satisfied with the method to express agreements and disagreements. Student 10 said, "Expressing agreement/disagreement positively affected the interaction between students and the course". Student 21 expressed, "It provides that we participate in the lesson actively". This finding is parallel to the literature (Izmirli, 2017; Richardson et al., 2015; Rourke et al., 1999; Swan, 2003).

Asking Questions and Inviting Responses

The instructor asked questions and invited responses in live meetings. 20 students stated that they were satisfied to be asked questions and being invited to respond. Student 7 said, "Being asked questions and being invited to respond affected me positively". In addition, student 16 expressed, "Instructor increased my motivation by asking me questions". This finding is parallel to the literature (e.g. Izmirli, 2017; Richardson et al., 2015; Rourke et al., 1999; Swan, 2003).

Giving greetings

The instructor greeted students with a friendly "hello" in each live meeting. All students had positive opinions about giving greetings. Student 8 said, "Greetings provide a more sincere

environment". Another student expressed, "I think it (greetings) creates a friendly class environment" (Student 13). This finding is parallel to the literature (e.g. Izmirli, 2017; Richardson et al., 2015; Rourke et al., 1999; Swan, 2003).

The Techniques or Strategies That Contribute Most and Least To Establish Social Presence

Seven participants in the focus group discussed selecting the techniques or strategies that contributed most and least to establish social presence. They voted for the eleven techniques and strategies presented in the previous sub-headings of the findings and in the discussion section. According to focus group results, the techniques or strategies that contribute "most" to establish social presence are: (1) providing frequent and detailed feedback (n=7), (2) asking questions and inviting responses (n=7), and (3) addressing students by name (n=5). A student said, "I would like to emphasize feedback. It makes me perceive myself as a real person in that environment" (Focus Group Participant 1). Another student stated, "One of the most influential factors is that the instructor asks questions to us" (Focus Group Participant 3). Another student stressed, "The fact that the instructor addresses me by my name makes me focus on the subject" (Focus Group Participant 5).

Students voted for the eleven techniques and strategies presented in the previous sub-headings of the findings and discussion section to select the techniques or strategies that contribute least to establish social presence. The techniques or strategies that contribute "least" to establish social presence are: (1) limiting class size in live course (n=6); (2) giving greetings (n=4), (3) course orientation videos (n=3), and (4) using emoticons (n=3). One student stated, "Class size is not a problem for me" (Focus Group Participant 2). Another student said, "It doesn't affect me much if the teacher says "hi or hello" to me" (Focus Group Participant 3). Another student stated, "One of the least influencing factors is the course orientation video and the use of emoticons in the system" (Focus Group Participant 4).

The Advantages and Disadvantages That a Blended Course Provides for Social Presence

The advantages and disadvantages that a blended course provides for social presence are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The Advantages and Disadvantages for Social Presence

Advantages	Disadvantages
Knowing others	Knowing others
Being more entrepreneurial	Being shy
Being more comfortable	Having problems with friends
Anticipating others' reactions	
Shortening the adaptation process	

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As seen in Table 2, knowing other students and instructors from face-to-face class has both positive and negative effects to establish social presence in online class. Being more entrepreneurial, being more comfortable, anticipating others' reactions and shortening the adaptation process under the theme of knowing others are advantages for social presence. Being shy and having problems with friends under the theme of knowing others are disadvantages for social presence.

Focus group participants stated that knowing others from face-to-face class has advantages to establish social presence. Similarly, Jusoff and Khodabandelou (2009) found that a blended learning environment supported interaction between participants because participants were familiar with each other. A student who expressed that being more entrepreneurial helps to establish social presence said, "Because we knew each other, we were more entrepreneurial when speaking, expressing opinions, or creating a discussion environment… I'm shy in an environment including people I don't know. If I know the people in the environment, I can express myself more easily." (Focus Group Participant 2).

Participants in the focus group expressed that being more comfortable has positive effects for social presence. A student stated, "For example, I know my friend Ali very well. I can use sense of humor and emoticons" (Focus Group Participant 1). Participant 2 said, "We know these people (from face-to-face class). For example, if I attend a class of an instructor I've never met, I'm shy about asking questions. But since we know our instructor and friends, we can express ideas against their ideas". Participant 3 and Participant 6 had online learning experience in an online live class where they did not know the other participants. They compared their fully online and blended course experience. Both of the participants thought that a blended course helps to improve social presence because knowing other students brings more confidence to participation. Participant 3 stated that he had attended online certificate programs. He said, "I had just watched online live lessons there. Like watching a video. I didn't know anyone. Except for 2-3 people, no-one wrote a post… I was more comfortable in the environment I knew."

It was found that anticipating others' reactions helps to improve social presence. A student stated, "Because of the face-to-face environment, we know the others' names, what they like and what they don't like. We know in advance what people react to and how they react. I'd be shy if I didn't know the participants" (Focus Group Participant 6). Another student said, "I know how my friends will react to me when I make jokes. Getting the same reactions in an online environment makes me feel like a real person in that environment… For example, I make a joke. He's sending me 10 smile emoticons. I know he burst out laughing because I know him from the classroom" (Focus Group Participant 5).

Knowing people from face-to-face experience shortens the adaptation process to the online environment. This will help to establish social presence. Participant 3 stated, "If there are people I know in a new environment I enter, my adaptation process is shortened. Thanks to that I do not waste

my time in an adaptation process. I think this will help to support our information exchange process." (Focus Group Participant 3).

Focus group participants stated that knowing others from face-to-face class may also have disadvantages to establishing social presence. A student who expressed that being shy has negative effects to establish social presence said, "I feel more comfortable in an environment where I don't know anyone" (Focus Group Participant 7). Similarly, another participant said, "If there are people we know, we might be shy to talk. It can create a disadvantage" (Focus Group Participant 1). On the contrary, Participant 2 stated, "It depends on the characteristics of the person. Shyness may provide an advantage for social presence. A shy person can express himself well in an environment where there are people he knows.

Participants in the focus group expressed that having problems with friends in face-to-face class brings disadvantages to establishing social presence in online class. A student said, "I don't want to be in the same environment with a person I don't like. I don't want to talk because he's there. I don't want to connect (to the live class). I don't participate." (Focus Group Participant 2). In addition, these kinds of problems may arise in online environments. Xie, Lu, Cheng and Izmirli (2017) stated that student interaction can sometimes trigger tension and distress. In this case, conflictual presence, which is a negative part of the presence framework, may happen in online lessons.

As a result, it can be said that although a blended learning environment brings some disadvantages, it contributes to social presence in general and can even facilitate it.

Possible New Techniques and Strategies To Establish Social Presence

It was found in the study that there are possibly new techniques and strategies to establish social presence. These are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Possible New Techniques and Strategies To Establish Social Presence

Techniques And Strategies
Presentation in online live class
Using teaching methods and techniques that enable group work
Conducting individual live meetings with students (guidance)
Rewarding
Using 3D virtual environments in online live class

As seen in Table 3, students can be offered new techniques and strategies to establish social presence. These are presentations in online live class, using teaching methods and techniques that enable group work, conducting individual live meetings with students (guidance), rewarding and using 3D virtual environments in online live class.

According to the findings, when students make presentations in online live class, they feel themselves to be real people. A student stated, "For example, in a live lesson, a student may be asked to explain a particular topic to his friends… In the face-to-face lessons, the instructor makes the

students perform activities. It can be effective to do this in live class. If the instructor makes the students perform activities in the online live class, they will feel as if they have experienced the face-to-face classroom environment" (Focus Group Participant 5).

It was found that using teaching methods and techniques that enable group work may help to establish social presence. A student said, "I propose the use of methods used in face-to-face lectures, such as discussion, in the live class. Think of that. You divide the face-to-face class into groups. You will also divide the live class into groups. Those groups will discuss among themselves" (Focus Group Participant 2). Another student added, "Discussion can be made in a three-dimensional virtual classroom. In the Second Life environment (a 3D virtual environment), students are divided into groups by opening different sub-classes. Each group discusses in its own class, and then students return to the main class. After that, the group spokespeople explain what they have done" (Focus Group Participant 5). Similar to this design and strategy suggestion, Aargon (2003) offered to collaborative activities to support social presence, while So and Brush (2008) found that collaborative learning positively affected social presence. In addition, Rovai (2002) mentioned that small group work can be created in online environments as it is like face-to-face environments.

Conducting individual live meetings with students (guidance) is another strategy. Participant 1 stated, "It is important that the instructor meets with students individually at certain times online. The students can be asked what they have done and can be told what to do."

Students stated that rewarding can help to improve social presence. A student said, "Rewards can be given to those who attend more lessons, ask questions, interact with teachers and other friends in the virtual environment. Gold, silver, bronze badges… Rewarding both motivates the student and makes him feel like a real individual." (Focus Group Participant 4). Another student who stated a student should be rewarded, not only for his participation in the live course, but also for his participation in the learning management system said, "Does the student do the assignments on time? Does he watch video a recording if he can't attend a live class? How long does the student stay online in the learning management system? How much does he participate in discussion forums? Depending on these participations, the student may be rewarded" (Focus Group Participant 3). According to results, student participation should be rewarded. However, Cameron and Pierce (1994) suggest that instructors should use rewards after students successfully complete problems, therefore students spend a desired time on the activity. To come to a conclusion on this, as Rourke et al. (1999) suggested that the effects of different levels/types of rewards on social presence should be examined with experimental studies. Weegar and Pacis (2012) state that, thanks to new technologies, in online class instructors can provide real-time rewards, which is a concept based on behaviorism theory. They expressed that although there is a shift from behaviorism to constructivism in online education, there are still a great deal of behaviorist learning practices, such as rewarding students.

Using 3D virtual environments such as Second Life in online live class can increase the social presence perception of students. A student stated, "In Second Life, there are avatars of teacher and students, blackboard, students' desks, the teacher's desk. Everyone sits in their chairs. It's like a real classroom environment. The students feel like they are in that environment." (Focus Group Participant 5). Another participant said, "It is better that the teacher has an avatar instead of his own image and the teacher's avatar writes on the board" (Focus Group Participant 2). Cho, Yim and Paik (2015) found that social presence significantly affected perceived achievement in a 3D virtual environment (Second Life). On the contrary, in their study, Topu, Reisoğlu, Yılmaz and Göktaş (2018) found that although information retention was correlated with cognitive and instructional presence, it was not correlated with social presence in Second Life. They thought that technical problems such as weak Internet connections might hinder interaction between students. Based on their findings, it can be said that to effectively use 3D virtual environments such as Second Life, students and instructors need to have strong Internet connection and up-to-date computers.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Student satisfaction levels and suggestions for social presence techniques and strategies in a blended course were examined. In the online course, some techniques and strategies were used to create social presence. These were course orientation videos, audio-visual meetings, providing frequent and detailed feedback, limiting class size, using sense of humor, using emoticons, addressing students by name, sharing personal stories and experiences, expressing agreement or disagreement, asking questions and inviting responses, and using greetings. Students' course satisfaction levels were found to be high. Students had positive opinions for each online course design technique and participant strategy. While giving feedback and asking questions were the strategies that contributed most to establish social presence, limiting class size was the strategy that contributed least.

Blended learning environments have the power of socialization presented by face-to-face environments. Knowing other participants and instructors brings advantages to participants. Students suggested new techniques and strategies to establish social presence. These were "presentations in online live class", "using teaching methods and techniques that enable group work", "conducting individual live meetings with students", "rewarding", and "using 3D virtual environments in online live class". Instructional designers and course instructors should consider social presence while designing a blended course. In addition, instructors should use social presence strategies in their blended courses.

This study has some limitations. First, the study was conducted on a blended course. Research studies should be conducted on fully online courses to find out about learner satisfaction regarding social presence techniques and strategies. Second, participants of the study were senior undergraduate students. Studies with different participants could be conducted. Third, this qualitative study examined

student satisfaction. The effects of social presence features in online courses on achievement as well as on satisfaction could be examined with experimental studies.

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