THE IMPORTANCE OF E-LEARNING AMONG SCHOLARS

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1. INTRODUCTION

People learn languages for a variety of reasons. Some do it for their careers, for travel, interest or simply for fun. Whatever the reason, it is undeniable that learning a language is becoming increasingly important due to globalization.

E-learning is an umbrella term that describes learning done at a computer, usually connected to a network, giving us the opportunity to learn almost anytime, anywhere. (It is the process of learning a language online. This means all interaction takes places on the internet without the need for physical proximity. Online language lessons are now proving to be a very popular alternative to the traditional classroom based or one-to-one language teaching.

Some people find group lessons either daunting or frustrating. Many people are too shy to talk in front of others, so lose out on vital practice. Others want too much individual attention but find the teacher does not have enough time to address their needs. Online language tuition provides the learner with complete one on one language lessons. The aim of our longitudinal study was to determine the level of importance of e-learning among our first, second, and third year students.

2. METHODS

The research was carried out on a total of 163 subjects, students majoring in tourism, marketing, finances, management, and informatics at the University "Juraj Dobrila" Pula - Department of economics and tourism "Dr. Mijo Mirković". 47 students of first year, 38 students of second year and 43 students of third year participated in the study. All of the subjects were part-time students. They attended lectures in Business English as a foreign language. Participation was voluntary and took place during regular class time.

2.1 Measures

Our questionnaire, consisting of five questions, contained a mix of question types, in which the students were asked to estimate the usefulness of long-distance learning of Business English.

Finally, they had to *mark the three main benefits that they find in e-learning*

- *possibility for independent learning and reflection*
- *students can read materials online or download them for reading later*
- *students are unbound by time and place*
- *more experimental approach to subject of study than in traditional learning environments*
- *new ways to present information (use of media elements and special features)*
- *students can skip over material s they already know and focus on topics they would like to learn.*

They were also asked to *mark the three main disadvantages that they find in e- learning*

- *Lack of communication with teacher*
- *Lack of communication with fellow students*
- *The feeling of isolation*
- *Requires self-motivation*
- *Difficulties with the technology*
- *Lack of ways to evaluate learning.*

Instruments were completed with no personal identification (except sex and code) to insure anonymity and increase the probability of honest responses.

2.2. Data analysis

The results from the questionnaires were processed using SPSS for Windows (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). The difference between the years was investigated by paired t-test.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Online learning is different in many respects from the traditional face-to-face learning we're all used to, primarily in the way we get our information and how we interact with instructors and classmates. Many people say they learn more online, and their retention is better too (Steele, Palensky, Lynch, Lacy, Duffy, 2002).

Graph 1. Familiarity with surfing the Web, using e-mail, up/downloading files
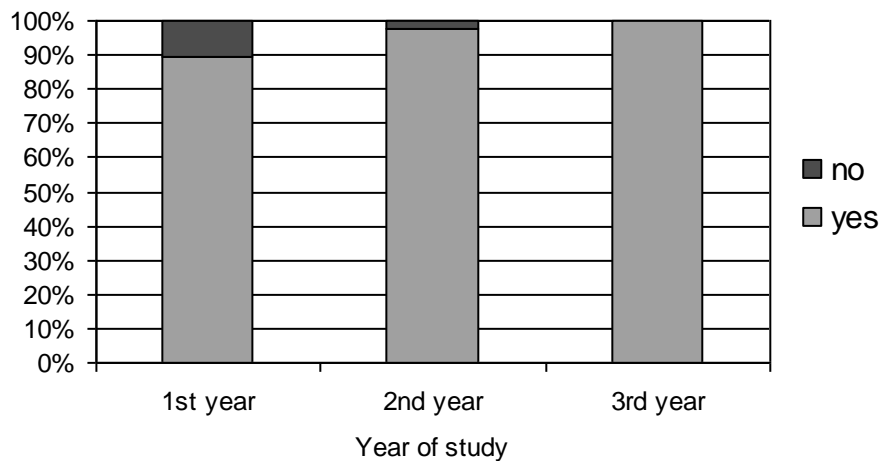

According to the results presented in Graph 1., 89,36% of first year students answered positive just as 97,37% of second year students. All third year students that participated in the study answered that they are familiar with surfing the Web, using e-mail, up/downloading files.

As we can see from the chart, students familiarity progresses every year. They are obtaining new IT knowledges, which results in better e-learning usage. Only a small presentage of first year students (about 10%) replayed that they are not familiar with surfing the Web, which suggests that a majority of them had accumulated prier knowledge during their high school education..

Part-time students, as students who work and study, know that time is money and as they reach a higher educational level their awareness of the opportunities and advanteges of e-learning also rises. We may state that as our students progress with their education, they become more concious of the value of e-learning.

In the third question participants were asked to evaluate the importance of long-distance learning for each of the following learning styles: grammar, vocabulary, phrasal verbs, reading comprehension, listening and communicating. For each learning style, students were asked to estimate their importance on a scale from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important).

Graph 2. Main benefits of e-learning
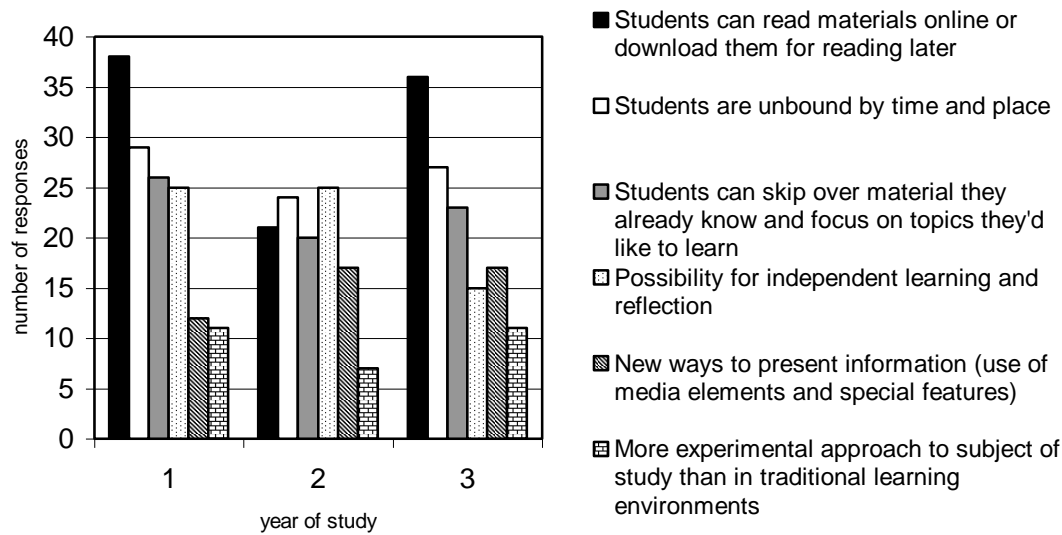
The results showed that first and third year students recognize *the possibility of reading materials online or downloading them for reading later* as the main benefit. It is very convenient for the students to have reading materials accessible according to their schedule, which does not require physical attendance.

Whereas, second year students, evaluated *the possibility for independent learning and reflection* as the main benefit of e-learning. Online learning will draw students to topics they like and enjoy, and to subjects which interest them.

A great number of third year students rated *unbound ness by time and place* as the second most important benefit. The benefit of e-learning for part-time students is that they have access to learning materials wherever they are (at work, when on break, while traveling) so they can use every moment of their time which is precious to that kind of students. It is also very important for them that the courses are available 24/7.

Graph 3. Main disadvantages of e-learning
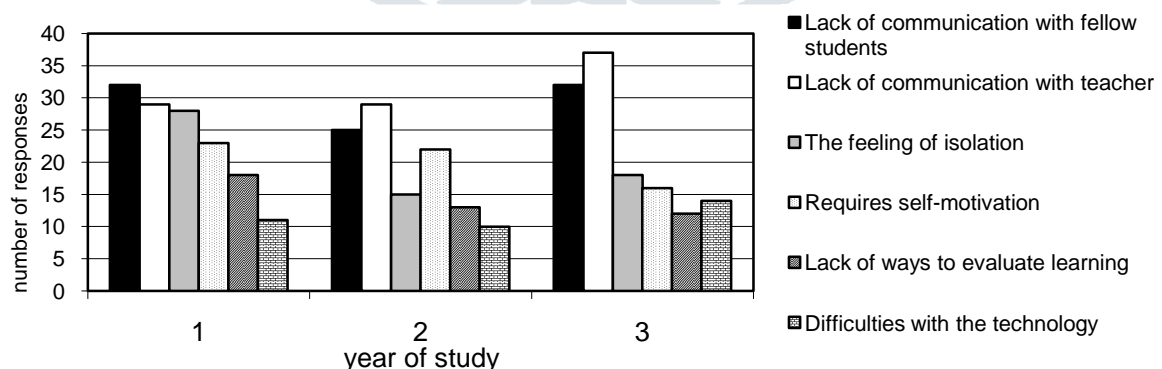
Students of all three years rated *lack of communication with fellow students* and *lack of communication with teacher* as the two most important disadvantages. The feeling of isolation experienced by distance learning students is often cited (Snyder, 2001; Husbands, 2006), although discussion forums and other computer-based communication can in fact help ameliorate this and in particular can often encourage students to meet face-to-face and form

self-help groups. Human interaction, faculty-to-student as well as student-to-student, should be encouraged.

4. CONCLUSION

E-learning is not unlike any other form of education - and it is widely accepted that e-learning can be as rich and as valuable as the classroom experience or even more so. With its unique features e-learning is an experience that leads to comprehension and mastery of new skills and knowledge, just like its traditional counterpart.

In this research our students show awareness of the importance of e-learning. They are conscious of its advantages and disadvantages, and as their education progresses they use e-learning more often. This piece of information is worthwhile. According to the results presented in the study, teachers will have opportunities to adjust and improve their way of teaching.

The demands and opportunities of a distance learning context make it necessary for students to re-evaluate their role(s) and responsibilities as language learners and their need for self-direction requires them to develop a comparatively higher degree of metacognitive knowledge, particularly in terms of self- or person knowledge.

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