E-LEARNING FROM LEARNERS' PERSPECTIVE

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The concept of "e-learning" is ambivalent. On the one hand, it is used to describe the "distant learning", on the other hand, it refers to "blended learning". This article focuses on classic "blended learning", which means combination of face-to-face instruction with online activities. The study examines students' attitudes to integrating online activities into the traditional English language classroom. The respondents are the University students of three different specializations who study English for Specific Purposes. The frequencies of positive and negative responses to a specially designed questionnaire are analyzed. Not all the students enjoy e-learning in spite of its advantages, which might be expressed due to individual likes and dislikes. Statistical treatment of the students' responses by means of Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) includes the computations of correlation coefficients, which indicate the strength of relationships, and their statistical significance.

Keywords: attitudes to e-learning, respondents of different specializations, statistical treatment by SPSS.

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Introduction

The concept of e-learning comprises all forms of electronically supported learning. The term is most likely utilized to reference outof-classroom and in-classroom educational experiences via technology. Majority of people associate online learning with an online course or so called distance learning. However, it may include either full classroom learning with online support or the classic 'blended learning,' i.e. integrated combination of traditional learning with web based online approaches.

This article examines students' attitudes to the advantages of e-learning in the traditional English language classroom. The group of respondents in this study includes the University students of three different specializations who study English for Specific Purposes. The frequencies of positive and negative responses to a specially designed questionnaire depend on students' specialization, referring different levels of resistance towards e-learning. Statistical treatment of the students' responses by means of Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) presents the computations of reliability and correlations coefficients, which indicate the strength of relationships and their statistical significance.

The object of the research is the use of e-learning in the traditional English language classroom.

The aims of the research are to investigate learners' attitudes to the use of e-learning in the traditional English language classroom and to examine their attitudes to advantages and disadvantages of e-learning.

The methods of the research include designing an appropriate survey, its administration and analysis of the obtained responses The intended outcome: implications for language teachers on the use of e-learning in teaching English. First, it is important to find out what the students' perceptions of the use of e-learning are and if its use in learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is relevant to the teaching/learning process and second, to describe the activities which raise learners' awareness of the language use in e-learning. It is assumed that e-learning might help learners to activate language usage and serve as a tool to improve language skills.

Literature background

Recently the number of publications related to online language teaching and learning has been growing. According to Hockly & Clandfield (2010), the concept is broad, ranging from the use of a virtual learning environment to desktop video conferencing. Lately blended learning has become popular. Three definitions of "blended learning" are relevant in the world of education (Sharma 2010): the classic definition of the term means the integrated combination of traditional learning with web based online approaches, while two other definitions refer to either a combination of technologies or methodologies.

The Internet offers a variety of ways for language learners to engage in communicative activities. Due to the increased opportunities of the Internet, reading, writing, speaking and listening activities can be included (Chinnery 2010). The use of computers in the foreign language classroom has greatly influenced how teachers teach and students learn, and continuing advances in the Internet technology will most likely continue to affect the profession of teaching languages. In order to make online teaching successful, some conditions must be satisfied, such as opportunities for learners to interact and negotiate meaning, interact in the target language, be involved in authentic tasks, work in a friendly environment without stress or anxiety, and teachers have to provide feedback to learners on their success and achievements (Egbert, Chao, and Hanson-Smith 1999). By applying these principles to online communication activities, the new technologies have become optimal tools for enhancing students' second language learning and acquisition.

There are a number of advantages to online and computer-based learning when compared to traditional face-to-face courses and lectures, but there are some disadvantages as well (e-Learner, online reference). Some important advantages include such possibilities for students: 1) select learning materials according to their level of knowledge and interest; 2) study anywhere with access to a computer and Internet connection; 3) work at their own pace; also 4) e-Learning fosters more interaction among students and instructors than in large classes and 5) it develops knowledge of the Internet and computers skills that is useful for lifelong learning. The major disadvantages are: 1) learners with low motivation or bad study habits may fall behind; 2) without the routine structures of a traditional class, students may get lost or confused about activities; 3) students may feel isolated from the instructor and classmates: 4) managing computer files and online learning software can sometimes seem complex for students with underdeveloped computer skills.

However, the application of e-learning or blended learning enables learners to develop their lifelong learning skills and could be viewed as a factor encouraging informal learning (Hinton 2009; Serrat *et al.* 2010). Beyond the limits of formal curricula informal learning is generated in unstructured situations and leads to students exchanges which might become material for further informal learning (Eraut 2004). The knowledge gained during e-learning sessions students apply in their further learning experience and it is useful in fostering students' personal and professional development.

According to Means *et al.* (2009), a systematic search of the research literature from 1996 through July 2008 identified more than a thousand empirical studies of online learning. Analysts screened these studies to find those that (a) contrasted an online to a face-to-face

condition, (b) measured student learning outcomes. As a result of this screening, it was found that, on average, students in e- learning conditions performed better than those receiving face-to-face instruction. The study of the factors (Manca et al. 2003) that had lead most course participants to opt for face-to-face rather than online activities has revealed that resistance towards the online mode is mainly due to cultural and logistic factors. Reasons to choose online, instead, mainly lie in personal interest and motivation. I. Drennan with coauthors (2005) examined the factors affecting student satisfaction with flexible online learning and identified 2 key attributes of student satisfaction: (a) positive perception of technology in terms of ease of access and use of online flexible learning material and (b) autonomous and innovative learning styles. Results suggest that student satisfaction is influenced by positive perceptions toward technology and an autonomous learning mode.

The number of publications related to online language teaching and learning has been growing, but most of them lacking in providing good examples of practical online activities (Meskill and Anthony 2010). In spite of the numerous publications on learning online, the aspect of learners' perceptions of its benefits or drawbacks has not been adequately examined. Recently we have studied blended learning in listening (Kavaliauskienė 2011). The practice of blended listening has proved to be beneficial in the English for Psychology classes with two streams of the 1st and 2nd year students, who found it equally useful for improving their listening skills. The statistical processing of the students' responses in this article has shown that the data are reliable and not likely to be due to chance in spite of the limited number of respondents.

Methods and respondents

The method of research includes part of a specially designed questionnaire on students' attitudes to e-learning. The questionnaire was

designed in accordance with accepted standards of constructing surveys (Dornyei 2003). The way of gathering data employed administration of the questionnaire to different groups of respondents who study English for Specific Purposes on a tertiary level. The relevant part of the questionnaire consists of 5 statements (Appendix), to which students responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Statistical processing of the findings by a means of Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) included the following computations: frequencies of responses, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which defines the reliability, and Pearson's correlation coefficients. The participants in this project were 117 full-time 1st year students, who studied English for Law (2 groups, 27 students), English for Law & Management (4 groups, 48 students) and English for Social Work (3 groups, 42 students), at Mykolas Romeris University. The design of the ESP course reflected the students' needs in professional language, and the course was adjusted to the requirements for a Bachelor of Social Science degree. The level of proficiency was B2 or C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Results and discussion

For the sake of clarity in presenting the findings, the negative responses (strongly disagree and disagree) and positive responses (agree and strongly agree) have been added up.

The frequencies of positive and negative responses in percentage are shown in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, respectively. The 1st bars represent the data expressed by students who study Law, the 2^{nd} bars – by students who study Social Work (SW), and the 3^{rd} bars – by students who study Law & Management (L & M). The numbers of the questions from 1 to 5 are displayed on X axis in accordance with the descriptions in Appendix. In order to make the examination of both Charts easier, the questions of the survey are reproduced below:

Question 1

Individual learning online saves you embarrassment that you might feel in class for fear of being stupid.

Question 2

Online learning gives you practical skills like web browsing and ability to search for information.

Question 3

Online learning is useful for promoting lifelong learning skills.

Question 4

Your success depends on your self-discipline – doing things on time.

Question 5

Online learning in class is more enjoyable than on your own: you do not feel isolated.



Fig. 1. Frequencies of the positive responses. 1^{st} bar – the responses of LAW students, 2^{nd} bar – of Social Work students, 3^{rd} bar – of Law & Management students



Fig. 2. Frequencies of the negative responses. 1^{st} bar – the responses of LAW students, 2^{nd} bar – of Social Work students, 3^{rd} bar – of Law & Management students

It can be seen that on the whole there is a scatter of responses in both Charts. Therefore, a qualitative analysis of the findings is not productive, and it is essential to assess the data by using statistical processing by a means of SPSS, which can shed light on the significance of findings. Statistical processing allows evaluation how comparable and reliable the data are. Internal consistency reliability is usually estimated by computing Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Results are reliable if the value of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is at least .70 or higher, which is considered acceptable in most Social Science research situations (Bachman, Kunnan 2005). The second step in correlational analysis is to compute correlation coefficients, which are useful for understanding the degree of relationship between the data. Generally a correlation coefficient can range between negative one (-1.00) and positive one (+1.00). Positive coefficients indicate direct relationships, while negative coefficients indicate inverse relationships. The larger the coefficient, whether positive or negative, the stronger the relationship is, thus a correlation that is close to one, either positive or negative, indicates a very strong relationship, while coefficients that fall near zero indicate very weak relationships. In order to check whether a correlation coefficient shows a real relationship, it is necessary to determine the probability of its significance, i.e. the value of sig *p*. Statistical significance with *p* values of .01 or .05 indicates that there is either 99% or 95% probability that correlation coefficients are meaningful.

In our case, there are 3 variables, i.e. 3 samples of different specializations, and the computed value of Cronbach's Alpha is equal to .814 for positive and .984 for negative responses. Therefore, the obtained results are reliable as a minimal value is .700. The normality of responses has been checked by computing Kolmogorov-Smirnov Tests for all samples. In all cases, test distributions have been normal. Thus, computation of Pearson's correlation coefficients (rho) makes sense. The computation results in Table 1 and in Table 2 demonstrate Pearson's correlations for positive and negative responses, respectively, comparing different samples of respondents. The names of respondents' samples are shown in the 1st vertical column and the values of the Pearson's coefficients and levels of significance are reproduced in the 2nd column.

Table 1. Pearson's rho and Sig. p (positive responses).* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Law vs. L&M	
Pearson's rho	.812(*)
Sig. p (2-tailed)	.026
Law vs. SW	
Pearson's rho	.971(**)
Sig. p (2-tailed)	.000
L&M vs. SW	
Pearson's rho	.790(*)
Sig. p (2-tailed)	.035

Table 2. Pearson's rho and Sig. p (negative responses).

 ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Respondents	Data
Law vs. L&M	
Pearson's rho	.982(**)
Sig. p (2-tailed)	.000
Law vs. SW	
Pearson's rho	.972(**)
Sig. p (2-tailed)	.000
L&M vs. SW	
Pearson's rho	.790(*)
Sig. p (2-tailed)	.000

According to Table 1, the Pearson's correlation coefficient is equal to .812 and its level of significance is 0.026 for the positive responses of the groups of Law versus the groups of Law & Management (L & M). It means that there is a direct relationship between these two samples with the probability of 95%. Similarly, there is a direct relationship between the positive responses of the groups of Law versus Social Work (SW) with the Pearson's rho of .971 and Sig p of .000, i.e. the probability is 99% that the relationship is meaningful. The sample L&M versus SW shows slightly weaker relationship: rho is equal to .790 and Sig p is .035, which means that the probability is 95%. Therefore, there are reliable relationships between the positive responses of the respondents.

According to Table 2, the Pearson's correlation coefficient is equal to .982 and its level of significance is .000 for the negative responses of the Law groups versus the groups of Law & Management (L & M). It means that there is a good direct relationship between these two samples with the probability of 99%. Similarly, there is a direct relationship between the negative responses of the groups of Law versus Social Work (SW) with the Pearson's rho of .972 and Sig p of .000, i.e. the probability is 99% that the relationship is meaningful. The sample L&M versus SW shows a weaker direct relationship: rho is equal to .790 and Sig p is .035, which means that the probability is 95%. Therefore, there are reliable relationships between the negative responses of the respondents.

Conclusions

The research into e-learning has been conducted. It includes administering the carefully designed survey. The questionnaire is designed in accordance with accepted standards of constructing surveys. The questionnaire is based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The following conclusions can be drawn. First, students' attitudes to online learning seem to differ for different specializations and in addition, a scatter of the results makes the application of qualitative analysis hardly possible. However the statistical analysis reveals the similarity and proximity of the obtained data. The computed value of Cronbach's Alpha equal to .814 for positive and .984 for negative responses demonstrates that the obtained findings are reliable as a minimal acceptable value of Cronbach's Alpha is .700. Second, correlations between the responses of students' of different specializations have been computed. The computation data demostrate that there are direct relationships between the

samples of different specializations with the probabilities either 95% or 99%, which are acceptable in the research of Social Sciences. Most respondents expressed positive attitudes towards e-learning. Students believe that online learning is useful for promoting lifelong learning skills and it improves practical digital competence. Third, negative responses of students seem to depend on their individual approaches to online activities and personal perceptions, i.e. resistance towards online learning is due to individual likes and dislikes. Finally, it may be concluded that e-learning helps learners to activate language usage and serves as a tool to improve all language skills.

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Appendix Questionnaire on Learners' Attitudes to Advantages of e-Learning.

Question 1

Individual learning online saves you embarrassment that you might feel in class for fear of being stupid. 1) completely disagree 2) disagree 3) not sure 4) agree 5) completely agree Question 2

Online learning gives you practical skills like web browsing and ability to search for information. 1) completely disagree 2) disagree 3) not sure 4) agree 5) completely agree Question 3 Online learning is useful for promoting lifelong learning skills. 1) completely disagree 2) disagree 3) not sure 4) agree 5) completely agree Question 4

Your success depends on your self-discipline – doing things on time. 1) completely disagree 2) disagree 3) not sure 4) agree 5) completely agree Question 5

Online learning in class is more enjoyable than on your own: you do not feel isolated. 1) completely disagree 2) disagree 3) not sure 4) agree 5) completely agree

E. MOKYMASIS IŠ BESIMOKANČIŲJŲ PERSPEKTYVOS

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E. mokymosi savoka yra dvilypė. Iš vienos pusės, ji naudojama apibūdinti nuotolini mokymasi, iš kitos pusės, ji taip pat apima ir mišruji, vadinamaji hibridini mokyma (-si). Šiame straipsnyje analizuojamas klasikinis mišrusis mokymasis, leidžiantis derinti internetinį ir klasikinį mokymą (-si) auditorijoje. Straipsnyje aprašomas tyrimas analizuoja studentų požiūrį į internetinių užduočių integravimą į anglų kalbos mokymo seminarus auditorijoje. Tyrimui parengtas specialus klausimynas pagal mokslinių anketų sudarymo metodiką, smulkiai aprašytą literatūroje (Dornyei 2003). Tyrime dalyvavę respondentai yra trijų skirtingų specialybių universiteto studentai, kurie mokosi specialybės anglų kalbos. Darbe pateikiami respondentų teigiamų ir neigiamų atsakymų dažniai, kurie analizuojami taikant statistinius metodus. Reikia pažymėti, kad ne visi studentai pozityviai vertina e. mokyma (-si). Toki respondentu požiūri galėjo lemti asmeniniai polinkiai ir pomėgiai. Statistinis tyrimo duomenų apdorojimas, panaudojant socialinių mokslų statistinės analizės ir duomenų apdorojimo programinę įrangą (SPSS), leidžia nustatyti rezultatų patikimumą. Cronbach Alpha koeficientų reikšmės lygios 0,814 teigiamų atsakymų atveju ir lygios 0,984 neigiamų atsakymų atveju. Tai rodo, kad gauti duomenys yra patikimi. Spearmano koreliacijos koeficientų skaičiavimai parodė, kad egzistuoja tiesioginiai ryšiai tarp skirtingų specializacijų studentų atsakymų, jų tikimybės sudaro 95 % arba 99 %, esant reikšmingumo koeficientų vertėms 0,05 arba 0,001. Tokie rezultatai yra priimtini, atliekant tyrimus socialinių mokslų srityje, nes pagal statistikos dėsnius aiškiai parodo, kad, nepaisant esamų palyginti nedidelių imčių dydžių, rezultatus galima taikyti ir didelės imties dydžiui.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: požiūriai į e. mokymąsi, skirtingų specialybių respondentai, statistinis tyrimo duomenų apdorojimas, naudojant SPSS.

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