

THE ATTITUDES OF ELT STUDENTS TOWARDS THE INTERNET IN DOING THEIR HOMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

Educational technology has been gaining importance in English language teaching since with the help of technological tools teaching and learning became more effective. This study which is descriptive in nature, is designed to investigate the present attitudes of ELT students towards the Internet in doing homework, their technological literacy and the level their instructors use technological tools in their classes. The participants of this study are prospective teachers who are studying in ELT department at the Near East University. Investigation shows that they resort to the Internet mostly whilst doing homework, they have good computer skills and they have positive attitudes towards technology.

Keywords : homework, internet, ELT, technology

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Numerous developments in technology have been affecting our lives so much so that we are in a constant change in every way. These developments have been affecting education as well and as a result of this, the traditional ways of teaching and learning are changing. The traditional ways of teaching are lecture based only, and this type of teaching appeals to a small minority of learners as acknowledged by Petterson (1993). Research indicates that learning takes place best when there is visual, auditory and written information. Experts and instructors have attempted to integrate some technological tools in implementation to offer students better educational possibilities and in this respect, the Internet is becoming an increasingly important part of the educational process. The findings of the Pew Internet & American Life Project indicate that over 98% of American public schools have Internet access for students, and 77 % of instructional classrooms have Internet connections (Lenhart, Simon, Graziano, 2001). For this reason, technology has become an increasingly important feature of the learning environment, especially at universities. İşman (2002) lists the advantages of using educational technologies as follows:

1. To transfer knowledge that is developing and changing fast.
2. To offer students individual learning and teaching.
3. To manage long lasting benefits of learning.
4. To enable students to improve effectiveness in communication skills.
5. To provide global education opportunities (İşman, 2002).

The reasons mentioned above foster the importance of educational technologies in education, and it could be suggested that computer assisted teaching and learning will gain more importance in the future. In order to be able to carry out effective techniques for computer assisted teaching and learning, teachers and prospective teachers must also have positive attitudes towards technology, and schools must provide teachers with appropriate environment, and easy access to the Internet must also be provided at all times. Research results on this subject indicate that students perceive teachers who use technology in their classes as creative and unique (Forman,1997).

Technology was integrated into education in the beginning of the 20th century as it was realized that the use of technology can significantly foster students' critical thinking which includes understanding problems, building knowledge, solving problems and produce appropriate solutions (Laney,1990:31). In support of this issue, Jonassen (1995:61) suggests that technology consists of techniques that engage students in cognitive learning strategies and critical thinking. Furthermore, Rice and Wilson (1999) put forward that the technologies that offer elaborate visual formats enable students to construct intellectual models and provide them with scenarios that enhance critical thinking. As they are used in various fields of education, computers have a great role and improve success in English language teaching (Young and Bush, 2004). Students can use the Internet whilst doing homework, giving presentations and carrying out research. As most of the articles and sources are in English on the web, language should not be an obstacle to the respondents since all of them are ELT students.

Aim

The purpose of the study was to investigate the approaches of the prospective English teachers towards using the Internet whilst doing homework and carrying out research. The study attempts to investigate the following points:

1. The level the ELT students resort to the books they have and to the Internert in doing homework.
2. The level of the computer skills they have in order to use the resources provided on the web.

3. The level of access to the net at school.
4. The level of their positive attitudes towards using educational technologies.
5. The level their instructors set a good example by using technology for improving the achievement to the educational objectives.

Limitations

The survey does not include all students in ELT department. This survey does not include or test every detail. The objective of this survey is to draw attention to some specific points only.

METHOD

Subjects

The participants of this research were prospective teachers who were studying in ELT department at the Near East University. This study was conducted with 320 students and students were chosen randomly as sample.

Materials

The research was based on the outcomes of a questionnaire containing 10 items and 5 closed questions which are related to the level of using computers. In this closed questions part they are asked to tick the computer programmes (MS Windows, MS Word, MS Excell, Power Point and Access) they know how to use. A 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree) was used.

Method of Evaluation

The results were evaluated by using SPSS and percentages were calculated and presented for each response. The reliability of the students' questionnaire was found to be Alpha= .755.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part focuses on the outcomes of the study.

The following Likert-type scale was used to obtain the responses: 5= Strongly agree

4= Agree

3= Not sure

2= Disagree

1= Strongly disagree

The outcomes of the survey are presented in Table 1 as follows:

	5	4	3	2	1
1.The library in the campus is good enough for me to do my homework	12.2%	10.7%	41.4%	26%	9.4%
N	39	34	132	83	30
2.To do my homework I only resort to the books I have	3.2%	7.8%	32%	44.5%	11.9%
N	12	25	30	142	38
3. I have good computer skills to do my homework.	23.2%	18.8%	30.7%	18.2%	9.1%
N	74	60	30	58	29
4. To do my homework the computer lab of the faculty is adequate.	2.8%	3.4%	11%	26%	56.7%
N	9	11	30	83	181

5. While doing homework I use the on-line library of the university.	4.4%	4.1%	21%	28.8%	41.7%
N	14	13	30	92	133
6. The physical conditions of internet cafes are good for me to do homework there.	3.8%	4.4%	12.9%	23.5%	55.5%
N	12	14	30	75	177
7. I gain time when I use the internet to do homework.	23.8%	15.7%	32%	16%	12.5%
N	76	50	30	51	40
8. The internet is useful.	44.8%	17.9%	29.2%	5%	3.1%

According to the results obtained from Q1, 22.9 % of respondents indicated that they agreed with the idea of question one whereas 35.4 % of them disagreed. 11 % of them put forward that they use the coursebooks only to do homework whereas the rate of the respondents who did not resort to the books they had was 56.4 %. 42 % of respondents believed they had computer skills good enough to do their homework while 27.3 % of them stated that they did not have good computer skills to carry out their studies more effectively. A small minority of respondents (6.2 %) reported that the computer lab of the faculty was adequate but a great majority of them (82.7 %) claimed that the computer lab of the faculty was inadequate. Similarly, 8.5 % of respondents pointed out that they used the on-line library of the university. However, a great majority (70.5%) did not. Whereas 8.2 % of respondents agreed with the idea of Q6, 79 % of them disagreed. The percentage of respondents who agreed with the idea of Q7 was 39.5 while 28.5 % of them disagreed. A great majority of them (62.7 %) believed the internet was useful but a small minority (8.1 %) disagreed. A great majority of them (67.7 %) agreed with the idea of Q9 while 8.4 % of them reported otherwise. Although 25.7 % of respondents indicated that the instructors made use of technology whilst teaching 41 % of them stated that they did not. The data gathered from the closed questions revealed that a majority of respondents indicated that they had good computer skills: 58 % of them knew how to use MS Windows, 86.2 % of them MS Word, 48.3 % of them MS Excell, 54.5 % of them Power Point and 13.8 % of them Access.

The details of the respondents who use computer programmes are shown in Table 2 as follows:

Table 2

	N	%
MS Windows	188	58.9
MS Word	275	86.2
MS Excell	154	48.3
Power Point	174	54.5
Access	44	13.8

Examination of the questionnaire results suggests that for many students the Internet has replaced the library as the primary tool for doing homework. To find out the reasons 90 randomly students were interviewed. They reported that the Internet was faster and that it was really time consuming to look for a book in the library. They found the system of the library too complicated and they complained that books were not on their right shelves and that when they asked for help the librarians did not help them. The data gathered from the closed questions revealed that a majority of respondents were able to use MS Word and MS Windows. A great majority of them had good computer skills. However, the students interviewed stated that the computer course offered in the department did not improve their computer skills and that they had to learn how to use MS Word by themselves since the instructors in the department insisted on typed homework. The percentage of the respondents who could use Power Point was rather low, and most of them were not good at Excell or Access. To add, the interviewed students acknowledged that they were not told about the on-line library, so a great majority did not know how to use it. The results of the questionnaire revealed that they found the physical conditions of the internet cafes very poor and they did not or they could not use the computer lab of the faculty. The students interviewed about the reasons reported that the computer

lab of the faculty was used for COM 101 course only and that it was always booked. They also complained about the internet cafe in the library as there were only 12 available computers and the other internet cafe was always locked. They added that most of them had laptops but the wireless connection was poor quality and that there were not enough sockets in the library. In this respect, they do not have easy access to the Internet at school. Investigation showed that nearly all respondents developed a positive attitude towards technology, and it is likely that they will use it in their classes in the future. Even though not many of them claimed that the instructors in the department made use of technology in their classes, the interviewed students reported that it was a must to use technology in education.

CONCLUSION

To integrate technology into education and more precisely into language classes is one of the most important objectives of educational reform. As technological literacy is expected to improve the learning capacity of students, the outcomes of the survey indicate that the present attitudes of prospective teachers towards technology is gaining importance, and their responses also indicate that the prospective teachers, if possible, will attempt to use technology in their classes in the future. This outcome falls apart with the findings of İnal (2006) who conducted a similar study within which 405 ELT students were included at Buca Faculty of Education. İnal points out that 216 respondents reported that computers had a great impact on language learning and she found the result unsatisfactory since the overall mean value was 60.85 % (İnal, 2006). In her study, she compared the results of her survey with the one that was conducted in Taiwan by Al-Jarf in 2005. Al-Jarf reports that the respondents utilized positive attitudes towards using computers in language teaching (İnal, 2006). She assumed that these contradictory results were because of the different cultural and social structures of the countries or they might have resulted from the different systems of education, or from the personal differences of the respondents. The interesting point is that the results of this survey support the results of the research conducted in Taiwan and contradicted with the one undertaken by İnal. A similar study was carried out by Ktoridou in Cyprus and it was found that English teachers had negative attitudes towards technology. It is quite pleasing that the ELT students of NEU are likely to use educational technology in their classes in the future, and their estimated computer literacy is good enough.

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