Influence of Cultural Conditions on the Use of ICT for Learning: Differences among Erasmus and National Students at Spanish University

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ABSTRACT

The use of technology is widespread in all areas of life, particularly among young people and particularly in learning environments. In this sense, college students have incorporated these technologies in different media and used them for many years. The use of ICT among students taking the same subjects is very different because of the sociological diversity thereof and, in particular, their different cultures and countries. This is the case of Erasmus students, who must take the same subjects and with the same instruments than the national ones. Although both groups must show the same academic performance, their conditions are very diverse, including difficulties related to language. This article analyzes the relationship between learning styles (active, reflexive, theoretical and pragmatic) and the use of ICT in training university students, comparing between Erasmus and domestic ones. The REATIC survey was conducted among 37 third-year students from the Faculty of Economics and Business of the University of A Coruña (Spain), distinguished four different modules: knowledge of ICT, use of ICT, assessment of ICT and ICT as learning style. Results showed differences in all modules and especially in the last module that analyzes the use of ICT for learning.

Keywords: e-Learning, Erasmus, ICT, Intercultural Communicative Competence, Learning Styles, University

1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, the ICT learning is dominated by technology available in households or elsewhere and used it in an uncritical and unthinking manner. Therefore, individuals must be educated “in” and “with” technology because, otherwise, the information comes in the form of a tree with a disordered structure rather than in a sequential, gradual and linear way. The so-called knowledge society requires the creative application of knowledge and look at the role of technology in the teaching and learning. In particular, the needs of college students in the XXI century involve

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the generation of a critical community capable of leading change and create, implement and evaluate knowledge (Hinojo y López, 2004).

Pedró (2006) indicates that the attitude and expectations of the “New Millennium Learners” regarding ICT for teaching and learning, considered as digital native, have evolved radically two decades ago. As ICT penetrate in households and family life, youth ICT skills surpass even their teachers. Therefore, one can expect a greater demand for variety and quality of ICT use in schools (and teacher training). OECD (2009) recommended that students achieve high ICT literacy. In order to achieve this goal, they must have practical experience with ICT. However, some workshops and seminars during their training are not enough. Recent research has found that although students efficiently manage mobile devices, social media and digital games, this fact does not entail automatically have the ability to use educational software efficiently (RELPE, 2011).

To achieve this purpose, ICT should be a fundamental and indispensable tool not only to create a community where students can interact and share knowledge but for its potential to transform educational practices (Kozma and Anderson, 2002). Thus, it is important that students have a set of models of ICT in the classroom, adjusted to the nature of different subjects, links to relevant sites for such courses, educational software and guidelines of use for training and for the subsequent profession in the labor market.

On the other hand, there is a clear ICT diffusion lag among European countries. In addition, several investigations reveal that the use of ICT generally depends on two explanatory factors: 1) a negative impact of ICT relative price and of market rigidities and 2) a positive impact of the education level of the working-age population on ICT diffusion (Cette and López, 2012). Moreover, ICT requires labor with a higher degree of skills than other production technologies (Aghion et al., 2008). These considerations could lead to different level of development and implantation of ICT along the European countries.

According to this phenomenon, this article describes the experience analyzing the relationship between learning styles and the use of ICT in training university students to encourage the development of intercultural skills of two groups of students (Erasmus and Spanish national students) from different language and culture. Through the implementation of the REATIC questionnaire, students showed a development of these skills differentiated by groups, especially in those related to ICT for learning.

The term “learning style” refers to the preferences or tendencies that each person (in our case, students) has to learn using specific methods or set of cognitive strategies. This concept is defined differently in the literature and it can change as students mature and discover better ways of learning, varying in style. The majority definition is the one related to how the mind processes information or how it is influenced by perceptions of each individual. Besides, this term is influenced by personal circumstances, age, level of self and the contexts and learning time (Gil et al., 2007). Therefore, it would be desirable that teachers knew the learning styles of each student and the class group in general to develop more effective learning. At university level, if the student learns to find out what the features are outlined his own style and, in turn, identifies which of these should be used in each learning situation, they can get better academic and personal enrichment results (De Moya Martínez et al, 2011).

In this paper, our aim is to identify the learning styles differentiated by nationality through the comparison of two groups, the Erasmus and the national (Spanish) ones to evaluate to what extent nationality is a key factor to determine differentiated learning styles in relation with the use and knowledge of ICT for learning.

This work is organized as follows. Section 2 is a review of the main effects of intercultural competence in the use of ICT, focusing on the case of the Erasmus program. Section 3 presents the methodology of this work, including the objectives of the experience, the description of the participants and the survey of students. Section 4 discusses the results of the survey,
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