The Use of Learning Strategies in Distance Learning: Comparing Between Public Institutions

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article was to examine the use of learning strategies used by students of distance learning, enrolled in courses from two public institutions. A total of 821 students took part in the research, 532 of them from the South Institution and 289 from the Midwest Institution of Brazil. Data was composed from the factors: emotion control, search for interpersonal help, repetition and organization, motivation control, elaboration, search for help in the teaching material, and monitoring comprehension. Results evidenced that students from the South are more strategic in all of the analyzed factors. The analysis regarding age range evidenced differences only in factor monitoring comprehension by participants of the South, who were in the higher age range showed more strategic skills. Results presented suggest the need for training tutors focused in teaching learning strategies, which could bring satisfactory results in the sense of promoting the success of DL.

KEYWORDS

Cognitive Psychology, Distance Learning (DL), Information Processing, Learning Strategies, Public Institutions

INTRODUCTION

This work is based on the theoretical reference of the Cognitive Psychology/Information Processing. According to Sternberg (2008), cognitive psychology is recognized as a study aiming to investigate how people learn, structure and use knowledge. Thus, the theoretical contribution of the cognitive psychology points to several possibilities for teaching and learning and has, as starting point, how individuals learn and what they think about some subject. Using the assumptions of the cognitive psychology in classroom, education must be contextualized and the teacher must seek to understand how the student learns and how it is developing the cognitive structure in face of its hits and misses (Carraher, 1990). Considering this theoretical contribution, this research presents an analysis about behavioral, cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies used by Distance Learning (DL) students. Initially, DL in Brazil will be briefly contextualized, some studies about learning strategies and its educational implications and about the actors (tutor and student) involved in the context of DL. By considering that Distance Learning (DL) in Brazil is an expanding teaching modality, reaching all educational spheres in the country, having been, in its initial project, presented as a possibility

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of democratizing the teaching (Bohadana & Valle, 2009), making necessary to investigate about the teaching/learning process in this teaching modality.

As presented by Ageel (2012), currently the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have a large potential for improving the quality of the transmission and assimilation process of the knowledge in the school scope, because the ICTs permeate the different segments of life, thus they end up influencing the school also, thus expanding the virtual learning environments (VLEs), normally regarding education systems accessible by means of the world wide web (WEB), allowing the integration of learning tools (such as tests, academic resources, guidelines of the course, task platforms, contributions from others, etc.).

Also, according to Ageel (2012), the use of VLEs bring benefits, by decreasing the time and by the flexibility regarding the place where the “learning” must happen, promoting the interaction between teachers and students, and developing in them the skills needed to use the ICTs. Briefly, it is indispensable to create the conditions so that the teachers may have access, contact and success using the ICTs, so that they became used as a contribution to the transmission-assimilation of knowledge, overcoming the negative attitudes that only hinder and that contribute nothing for the educational process.

In this educational context, it is worth to highlight that the tutor is characterized as the key piece in the teaching and learning process in DL, because it is it that keeps a closer contact with the student. However, the role of tutor, as well as the definition of the expression tutor still lacks a deeper analysis. In the researched literature, several definitions were observed for the tutor and its function (Sarmet & Abrahão, 2007).

Silveira (2005) defines the tutor as the one motivating the participation of students in all phases of the course, preventing dropout, instigating the students to use the technological resources available in the platform so that the learning happens collectively, and stimulating new views about the real, because there is no place for a methodological trajectory market by ready recipes. In the same line, Oliveira (2010), Degásperi and Degásperi (2013) and Santos (2013) argue that the tutor is the main responsible by the orientation, motivation, instruction and follow-up of DL students. It must keep the student interested in the material developed by the teacher and establish constant contact with the students and, under this bias, the tutor also acts controlling the educational process.

Thus, the tutor must have tools for motivating and encouraging the students to take part in activities of the course, exposing their opinions and questions and using the resources available in the platform, being needed to ensure a motivational and safe environment between the parts (Barni & Rodrigues, 2009).

Therefore, if in one hand DL may be considered as a more flexible system, on the other hand, this characteristic requires different attitudes and behaviors from the agents being part of it. From the students, it is expected that they may act independently, reflecting about their learning and controlling it (Faria, 2010), in other words, it requires autonomous, competent and critical individuals.

Coll and Monereo (2010) state that Educational Psychology, as the area studying the psychological changes happening in people as a consequence of their participation in situations and educational activities, must put in a privileged place the study of changes caused by the total or partial use of ICTs. In face of this reality, from the Information Processing Theory, proposed by cognitivist theorists, researchers are investigating about the use of learning strategies, betting in the decrease of learning difficulties, when those tools are taught and adequate to the several situations that the individual may face (Boruchovitch, 1999; Costa & Burochovitch, 2009; Lins, Araujo, & Minervino, 2011; Busnello, Jou, & Sperb, 2012). However, these studies are restricted to the classroom teaching. When the search is made focused on DL, few works dealing with this theme are found (Zerbini & Abbad, 2005, 2008; Abbad, Corrêa, & Meneses, 2010; Abbad et al., 2012).

According to Warr and Allan (1998 as cited in Zerbini & Pilati, 2012), the learning strategies are learned throughout life, by means of training or naturally and comprehend complex procedures and cognitive capacities.
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